

Submitter: Taylor Harwood  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure: SB1583

I strongly support SB1583.

I was educated in Oregon schools, K-12, and I didn't have access to the histories this bill clarifies and protects. I then spent my 20s seeking out information to fill in the gaps in my education for myself. I didn't learn about queer history in the classroom until I was earning an advanced degree in history. I want something better for current and future students in this state. It's important that we provide Oregon students access to information, to their history and ours, without teachers and other professionals having to worry about a backlash to uncomfortable facts. How educated can we truly say our Oregon youth are, if we prevent them from learning how complex and multifaceted our state and world are? By censoring the history, the reality, that we allow them to access, we are setting them up for failure, not intellectual curiosity or empathy, not self-confidence or leadership— and not for success.

Everyone deserves to see themselves reflected in the world around them, including in the classroom and in books. I work in a public library, and I know that so many people, especially young people, don't have easy access to books outside of libraries and schools. What we are able to find on the shelves matters. Diverse reading creates empathy; exposure to many different types of American stories will instill compassion in students and hopefully prompt them to ask questions about the things they learn and experience. Critical thinking is one of the surest ways to ensure democracy flourishes. We know that the identities explicitly protected in SB1583 are being targeted in Oregon and across the country, with some folks trying to prevent access to their stories and experiences. I want those kids to be able to see themselves, their families, and their peers in their classes and their reading, to find inspiration and hope in knowing they are not alone.

LGBTQIA+ students deserve to learn about their history, as do Jewish students, BIPOC and indigenous students, students with disabilities, and every other student. Every one of us deserves to learn accurate, representative history. We can all look up to the incredible people who paved the way for us today, but for some kids, learning about a role model who shares their identity, maybe for the first time they've ever seen it reflected back as a possibility that someone like them flourished and made the world a better or more beautiful and interesting place— those are the kids whom SB1583 is protecting. If people are concerned about difficult conversations around some of the devastating events in our shared history, let's remember that 1.) they happened, and pretending otherwise doesn't make the past go away; 2.)

understanding the past and our predecessors' mistakes can help us make better decisions in building the world we want to live in today.

To those considering opposition to this bill: I urge you to remember what the bill actually says: "Prohibits discrimination when selecting textbooks, instructional materials, program materials or library books that are used in the public schools of this state." It clarifies existing law and prevents the massive waste of resources that book challenges constitute. The books that make it into classrooms and libraries have already been reviewed and vetted by experts for their literary or educational value and age appropriateness. Parents have the right and responsibility to weigh in on what their kids read, and to impart their values as a family; parents do not have the right to stop other people's kids from learning.

I want well-informed, educated, caring Oregonians who will work together to keep our communities thriving, and that starts with giving kids the tools they need to learn and grow. It means giving them access to textbooks that have people like them and their classmates inside, and books that allow them to consider other peoples' experiences and reflect their own.

Thank you.