

Submitter: Crystal Bridges
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

I am writing in support of SB 1583 that will prevent discrimination when selecting textbooks, instructional materials, program materials, or library books in public schools. ORS 659.850 prohibits discrimination in educational settings and SB 1583 brings clarity to help schools and school boards comply.

There are people of many backgrounds, cultures, and histories throughout Oregon. It is important for all students to see themselves reflected in their curriculum and instructional materials in schools. As someone who didn't see myself reflected in educational materials as a child and teenager, I personally know the importance of representation. Even having a book to read where the main character is LGBTQ+ where that is not the focus of the book would have reflected someone like me and let me know that other LGBTQ+ people are part of everyday life. It is critical to carefully select books, magazines, educational videos and experiences that reflect our student populations in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. We want to make sure that educational texts and materials are available to those students who need it.

The United States is experiencing an explosion of attempts to censor library and curriculum materials in our public schools, and Oregon is no exception. Many of these attempts are blatant in their opposition to LGBTQ+ materials. These censorship attempts intend to limit the materials available to Oregon students based solely on the constitutionally protected viewpoints of those materials and limit the constitutionally protected viewpoints of others. Stories or educational materials don't need to be focused on LGBTQ+ issues or inappropriate topics for a given age. It is as simple as a story about families that have two moms or two dads (or that are multigenerational or that are of a different race or that come from different cultural backgrounds), just as there are stories that include households and families are comprised of a mother and father. Educators and child professionals know that it is important for students to see themselves reflected in their community and educational materials is one way that children see and learn that they belong in diverse communities. I believe SB 1583 will help prevent these book bans and removal attempts in our public education settings.

It is also important for my white child to be exposed to many different people, cultures, races, and backgrounds that exist in our communities throughout life, including in his education. The more that marginalized groups are included, the more our society destigmatizes differences and accepts that our diversity is an asset to our education system and country.

We need to trust our educators and educational professionals (such as librarians) to select appropriate educational materials free from discrimination and that represent our diverse communities and SB 1583 brings clarity to our education system. This legislation is incredibly important to LGBTQ+ and BIPOC educators and students. Please pass SB 1583 with the proposed amendment from the Oregon Library Association.