

Testimony of Bert Krages
on Behalf of the Authors Guild

I am a longstanding member of the Authors Guild and serve as its ambassador for the Portland Chapter. The Authors Guild is the nation's oldest and largest professional organization for published writers and supports the passage of SB 1589.

Books have been a meaningful part of my life and I have been a voracious reader ever since learning to read. My father was career military and during the 60s and early 70s I attended seven different schools between first and eighth grade. It was from books that I learned about people such as George Washington Carver (a personal hero), Helen Keller, Jim Thorpe, and Harriet Tubman. These books taught me that people from all backgrounds can overcome obstacles and contribute in meaningful ways to society. I don't recall reading any books about people who were LGBTQ, probably because none were available to me. Unfortunately, the information I did obtain came during high school from classmates and other uninformed people. Depictions about LGBTQ in those days were usually inaccurate, demeaning, and insensitive, and I regret not being able to learn about such persons in a more truthful and respectful manner. Thoughtfully written books would have been beneficial to someone who was already learning from books about tolerance, respect, and appreciation for people from all segments of society.

SB 1583 would hardly be a sea change in Oregon law—it merely clarifies two aspects implicit in ORS 659.850. The first aspect is that Oregon law already encompasses the principle that text books and other materials may not be prohibited merely because they include a study of the roles and contributions of persons against whom discrimination is prohibited. The second aspect is that ORS 659.850 implicitly prohibits the banning of books in public school libraries on the basis that a book includes a study or story of persons against whom discrimination is prohibited. SB 1583 will not mandate that schools adopt materials that are inappropriate for students for reasons other than the depiction of certain kinds of persons or groups.

Some of the fondest memories I have of elementary and middle school are of the school librarians who helped me understand the breadth of knowledge contained in their collections and how books in the library are organized. Some of these librarians were especially meaningful because they made the effort to reach out to the “new kid” and show that he was appreciated. Librarians are educated to manage libraries and in my experience they tend to be adverse to conflict and are rarely trained in dispute resolution. There is a shortage of qualified librarians in Oregon schools and a bill that would help remove a disincentive to serving as a school librarian should be supported. This bill would help protect important school professionals, who too often are targeted in the culture wars.

In summary, SB 1583 would make important clarifications to existing law and ensure that schools not refrain from using materials merely because they depict persons belonging to particular demographic groups. It would also take pressure off school librarians and thus help ensure that libraries at public schools are managed competently and professionally.

Thank for the opportunity to submit this testimony.