

Submitter: Nathan Seable
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583
To: Senate Committee on Education
Re: Senate Bill 1583
From: School Board Members
Date: February 12, 2024

Dear Senate Education Committee,

As board members in Oregon, we have some reservations about SB 1583. This bill needs time to be looked at more closely and school boards, superintendents, school librarians, parents, and teachers should have more time to review and have dialogue about how this bill could impact education at the local level.

We support the spirit of the proposed legislation and understand the legal responsibility of eliminating discrimination in education as defined in ORS. 659.850 Discrimination in Education Prohibited. We believe eliminating discrimination and providing comprehensive education to our children is extremely important.

However, as the bill is written we see potential unintended consequences to how our students receive instructional material. As we understand the law, a single district employee could purchase material during the summer -have it processed and placed in the library- and depending on the stated justification for the material, the district would have little recourse for removal regardless of its quality.

This may seem like an unlikely scenario but when a district is purchasing thousands of books each summer it is impossible for each book to be reviewed. A book could end up in the library that would not meet educational standards- and have perceived protection based on its subject matter.

In the least, the way this bill is written, it can be perceived that any subject matter concerning an individual or groups protected class is automatically fit for the education environment.

The proposed bill desires to address the issue of "book banning", however, there is very little evidence to support justifying legislation. In fact, there is evidence suggesting the issue is extremely rare or non-existent in most schools districts and communities.

According to an April 28, 2023 Education Week article the state of Oregon had one book banned in the previous 18 months <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/book-bans-over-the-years-in-charts/2023/04> .

We also believe SB 1583 to be redundant. The school districts we work with operate in compliance with existing statute and policy to eliminate discrimination in education.

The main body and content of SB 1583 recites existing law that already guides

District practices and policies. Specifically, these are:

ORS 659.850 Discrimination in Education Prohibited

ORS 337.260 Textbooks on American history and Government.

ORS 336.082 Development of Nondiscriminatory Curriculum.

In summary, the current bill language may create unintended consequences by giving the impression all books with protected class status subject matter meet standards and should be adopted as quality educational material.

The bill creates redundancy because current vetting processes to eliminate discrimination are adequate under existing law. We are also concerned that the bill has not received thorough vetting from education stakeholders.

We believe this bill could be improved by recognizing current district processes that are compliant with existing discrimination laws and hold them harmless.

We strongly encourage the Senate Education Committee to table this bill during the short session. There is no urgency to pass this law at this time and a delay of one year would be prudent.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Seable

Cassie Wilkins

Oregon School Board Members