

Submitter: Cat Winters
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

I am an author of children's historical fiction and nonfiction books, as well as a parent who raised her two children in Oregon public schools.

When I reached adulthood, I realized how much my own history education in the 1970s and 1980s had been lacking. I discovered that all too often the books available to me at the time had buried, ignored, and whitewashed history, prohibiting me and multiple generations from learning about the lives and accomplishments of countless individuals, especially marginalized individuals.

I keep hearing people say that white children today will feel bad if they learn the full story of our shared history. I will tell you, as a white child who grew up without the full story, that what I actually felt was robbed. It angered me to see how much knowledge I was missing by receiving a sanitized, often mythological version of history. That is why I write about history. I learned to go to primary sources—oral histories, letters, diaries, etc.—and discovered how many crucial voices and perspectives from the past had been silenced.

The past offers vital lessons to the present. To close our eyes to the people and events that make us uncomfortable is to doom ourselves to remain perpetrators of pain and ignorance.

Thankfully, publishers have been publishing more books written by and about marginalized people. Publishers still have a long way to go, but there has been progress, which also means that people wary of progress will react with a backlash. When that backlash takes the form of mass hysteria and dangerous discrimination, mimicking historical events such as the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism, that is a sign that we need more books, more education, and not less.

Again, the past offers vital lessons to the present.

I support SB 1583, which states that it “prohibits discrimination when selecting textbooks, instructional materials, program materials or library books that are used in the public schools of this state.” Librarians, teachers, and other educators have been certified and trained to select age-appropriate reading material for our students. Please let them do their jobs.

If you truly want to protect children, let them read. Let them read widely. Prepare them for the world—a place filled with beauty, pain, struggles, love, hate, and yes,

diversity. Books are a safe place to learn about life. Allowing kids to read freely is an act of love.

Sincerely,
Cat Winters
Oregon author and parent