



February 13, 2024

TO: Senate Committee on Education  
FROM: Our Children Oregon  
RE: Support for SB 1583

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is advancing equitable policymaking and whole-child advocacy statewide to ensure our children and youth—regardless of their race, identity, ability, or where they live—have what they need to thrive. We collect, analyze, and elevate data and research that, alongside lived experience, drives conversations in support of Oregon's future.

We support SB 1583 that will prevent discrimination when selecting textbooks, instructional materials, program materials or library books in public schools. This year, a record 2,572 book titles targeted for removal in libraries nationally are by or about LGBTQ+ and people of color.

According to Oregon's 2020 Student Health Survey, 16.7% of 6th graders did not feel connected nor feel a sense of belonging in school.<sup>1</sup> According to the Trevor Project, in 2022 only 47% of LGBTQIA+ students felt welcomed at schools in Oregon. Schools create more welcoming, supportive school climates when there is a culture of acceptance, which includes policies and interventions that affirm and support students' identities. Research has found that students taught a culturally responsive and racially inclusive education are more academically engaged, perform better in school, have enhanced self-perception, and higher graduation rates.<sup>2</sup>

Books with diverse characters have positive effects on students' performance. For Black, Native, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ+ students, who are often stereotyped and overlooked in popular culture, it is personally validating and academically engaging to see their experiences reflected on the page. However, when books about historically marginalized groups are banned from libraries and schools, it communicates that discrimination is tolerated, perpetuating the exclusion of youth and students with these identities.

SB 1583 assures the protection of rights of both students and educators. Specifically, SB 1583 brings needed clarity to help schools and school boards comply with the prohibition on discrimination required by ORS 659.850. The US is experiencing an explosion of attempts to censor library and curriculum materials in our public schools, and Oregon is no exception. These censorship attempts intend to limit the materials available to Oregon students based solely on the constitutionally protected viewpoints of those materials. We believe SB 1583 will help prevent these book bans and removal attempts.

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<sup>1</sup> Our Children Oregon's KIDS COUNT Data: <https://ourchildrenoregon.org/publications/oregon-kids-count/>

<sup>2</sup> The Legal and Pedagogical Case for Culturally Responsive and Racially Inclusive Public Education for All Students: <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/legal-and-pedagogical-case-culturally-responsive-and-racially-inclusive-public-education-all>

SB 1583 protects students' right to read, learn, and share ideas free of discriminatory censorship. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve child well-being across the state. We urge your support of SB 1583.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

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