

Submitter: Buzzy Nielsen
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

I agree with the detractors of SB 1583 on one thing: this bill is fundamentally about freedom of speech. Unlike them, however, I believe that SB 1583 enhances that freedom, not limits it.

The US and Oregon have never lived up to their promises to let everyone speak. The US Constitution had racism, sexism, and classism built in from the start. Oregon was born as a Black exclusion state. Indigenous people have been disregarded regularly by both the US and Oregon. Throughout our history, the voices of people who are not white men have been systematically silenced by people in power. Speech has never truly been free for everyone.

Now, those groups are working to ensure that their voices are heard, too. That scares the opponents of SB 1583. And so the silencing continues to this day. As the statistics from the State Library of Oregon make clear, the materials that are challenged and banned are disproportionately by or center the experiences of BIPOC, LGBTQ+ folks, people with disabilities, women, and other groups whom society has historically shunned.

SB 1583 doesn't limit free speech, as some have argued. Quite the contrary, it helps advance the promises made by the First Amendment and Article I, Section 8 of our state constitution by making sure that schools can't silence those voices, that a vocal but ultimately small minority can't silence them. The bill helps ensure that every student can hear voices of people like themselves in their schools.

The opponents of SB 1583 are the same people who try to silence unheard voices by banning or restricting access to them. Book banners are always on the wrong side of history. The State of Oregon shouldn't be. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 1583.