

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

As a librarian and the mother of a teenager, I urge you to pass SB 1583. While the book-banning that is happening across the country is premised on the notion of protecting children, its real goal is the erasure of certain identities from the consciousness of young people.

Research has shown that children benefit from reading about the experiences of people who are different from them; that it helps them to build empathy and cultural competence. I remember when my own son in third grade read *George* (now called *Melissa*), by Alex Gino as part of the Oregon Battle of the Books (OBOB) competition. He learned about the experience of a young girl born into the body of a boy. It didn't make him think he was a girl. It didn't traumatize him in any way. It helped him become the kind, empathetic, and academically successful high schooler he is now. Our country could erase so much bias and hate in this country simply by having children read books like that.

Children also deserve to see their identities reflected in the books they find in libraries. For some, this can be lifesaving. I remember as a teenager questioning my own sexual identity and finding a lot of validation and comfort in books by queer authors. Everyone deserves that mirror. Public libraries are one of the few places where everyone can feel safe from judgment about their reading choices. Removing books about Black, Latino, Asian-American, Muslim, and Queer or Trans people sends a message that these identities and their life experiences are somehow bad and wrong.

As a parent, it has been my responsibility to help my son select books that are appropriate for his age. I remember not letting him read the *Hunger Games* when another friend was reading it because I knew it would give him nightmares. Every parent should have that right. But when parents get books banned, they make that choice for everyone, not just their child.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Meredith Farkas  
Faculty Librarian  
Portland Community College