

Submitter: Rachael Hyde
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1583

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 1583, which aims to prohibit discrimination when selecting textbooks, instructional materials, program materials, or library books in Oregon public schools.

In particular, SB 1583 seeks to be inclusive of contributions to the economic, political, and social development of Oregon and the United States by men and women who: are Native American; are of European, African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latino, Middle Eastern, or Jewish descent; have disabilities; are immigrants or refugees; or are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. In an effort to be inclusive of all genders, please consider changing the language to convey that contributions from nonbinary individuals will be protected from discrimination, as well.

As a librarian, I believe this legislation is crucial in the face of an alarming surge in censorship attempts in Oregon and around the country. The vast majority of these challenges continue to target books written by and about people of color and the LGBTQ+ community.

Though we are all affected by censorship, its impacts on us are not uniform. Censorship often disproportionately affects and harms communities that have been marginalized or underrepresented, further perpetuating misunderstanding and discrimination, and exacerbating social inequities. These issues can be further compounded for youth, who may lack access to other resources and communities of support.

Censoring books by and about underrepresented communities results in the loss of diverse representation. Reading representative literature allows members of these communities to explore their own identities, understand different perspectives, and find solace, connection, and strength. When access to these materials is questioned, censored, or banned, it deprives these communities of essential resources for self-acceptance, connection, understanding, and pride. It also deprives other students from being able to gain a more complete, accurate, and nuanced understanding of our society's history, culture, and diversity.

When books by and about these communities are challenged, restricted, or banned, it can send a harmful message to students belonging to those groups that their stories and identities are considered undesirable or unacceptable. This can cause feelings of isolation, self-doubt, and shame; impose limiting beliefs about their purpose and potential; and lead to or exacerbate existing mental health challenges.

Book challenges and bans that target these groups can also communicate to the rest of society that stories by or about these communities are somehow shameful or inappropriate, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and discrimination, and compounding impacts on group members' mental health.

In short, discriminatory book challenges and bans negatively affect us all, but can be particularly harmful to marginalized and underrepresented students. Censorship exacerbates existing inequities and systemic injustices that these students already face, further underscoring the need for the protection of diverse voices and experiences in literature. In addition to the value these materials offer to underrepresented individuals, the value of diverse literature in general is well-documented. Representation in literature promotes diversity and inclusivity, fosters empathy and understanding, provides a sense of belonging, offers educational value, validates readers' identities and experiences, helps readers to challenge harmful stereotypes and engage in critical thinking, can have a profound impact on mental health, and has the power to drive social change by illuminating social injustices and inspiring increased civic engagement.

I urge you, for the sake of all students, to pass SB 1583.