

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.

As a librarian and strong proponent of intellectual freedom, I believe this legislation is crucial in the face of an alarming surge in censorship attempts in Oregon and around the country. According to PEN America, the movement to restrict books is driven by a vocal minority, while the majority of Americans stand against book banning. This vocal minority has enjoyed outsized power in determining what other people's children can and cannot read. This is unacceptable.

The value of diverse perspectives in education is well-documented. To borrow Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's terminology, all students need access to "mirrors" in their libraries and curricula where they can see their own identities and experiences reflected in the content. Being able to find oneself in books and other learning materials is a powerful motivator for students, and can help them to imagine their place in the world from an early age. Students also need "windows" into lives and stories that are different from their own. Windows allow students to discover similarities, build connections, and empathize with others, while also acknowledging differences that can lead to greater understanding and improved cross-cultural communication and collaboration—increasingly necessary skills in our increasingly global world. Windows also help to convey a more accurate sense of the world's complexity, and serve to prepare youth for what the world is really like. Learning materials become "sliding glass doors" when readers feel transported to the story and empathy for the characters. Every student deserves access to mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.

Unfortunately, members of underrepresented and marginalized communities are significantly less likely to encounter books in school libraries and curricula that feature characters that share their identities. The materials they have access to are largely windows into a world of predominantly white, heteronormative, cisnormative characters. White, cishet students, on the other hand, are likely to engage with significantly more mirrors than windows. It is quite possible for these students to go most of their K-12 career reading mostly books about people who share their identities.

It's not just children who have been underrepresented and marginalized who need diverse books. Children who always find their mirrors in books also benefit from

access to a wide range of perspectives and worldviews. Diversity in publishing is already unacceptably low. Attempts to censor or limit materials that represent diverse experiences and identities exacerbate this disparity to all students' detriment.

I urge you, for the sake of all students, to pass SB 1583. Every student deserves access to representative, accurate information in their schools, libraries, and curricula. I believe this legislation will serve as a critical step toward curbing troubling censorship trends here in Oregon, and hopefully serve as an example to other states.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your dedication to promoting a more inclusive and equitable educational system.