

# OREGON ATTORNEY GENERAL'S SEXUAL ASSAULT TASK FORCE



## SUPPORT SB 1583

FEBRUARY 14TH, 2024

SUBMITTED BY: OREGON ATTORNEY GENERAL'S SEXUAL ASSAULT TASK FORCE

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the Committee on Education,

Thank you for your time and consideration. On behalf of the Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force (Oregon SATF), along with our colleagues, **we urge you to support SB 1583 and ensure that youth have access to books that feature, uplift, and affirm varied and diverse perspectives in school libraries.**

*As our mission at Oregon SATF is to facilitate and support a collaborative, survivor-centered approach to the prevention of and response to violence and abuse across the lifespan, our goal is to prevent this violence from happening in the first place, while simultaneously improving our statewide response efforts to mitigate trauma and ensure the safety and security of all victims.*

**SB 1583 prevents school boards and district personnel from banning textbooks or library books simply because they include stories about BIPOC, queer people, people with disabilities, or any other group protected from discrimination.** Marginalized youth already experience higher rates of violence and abuse as a result of systemic forms of oppression that have been built into our communities. The targeted book bans led by a small minority of people nationwide have utilized fear and hate as vehicles to create smokescreens that obscure strategies and practices that actually work to prevent violence and abuse. Book bans contribute to a vitriolic environment where young people are targeted and discriminated against based on their identities, rather than supporting communities where young people are safe and supported to be their truest selves.

**Access to books provides an opportunity for understanding, compassion, and empathy when readers are able to connect with characters whose identities or experiences may be different from their own.** This serves as a protective factor against harmful messaging that often has been embedded in our communities and cultures and shapes world views that promote sexism, racism, ableism, and other forms of violence. When individuals value others, and recognize that difference does not make someone less than or less credible, it decreases rates of violence and abuse.

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Most importantly, all youth have the right to read about and connect with characters in books that represent and affirm their own identities and experiences. For some youth, books are lifesaving, and the ability to access and connect with them on the shelves without stigma or shame, is vital for their wellbeing. Violence and abuse thrives in isolation and erasure.

Presence and affirmation that all youth are main characters not just in stories, but in life itself, can increase connection, health, and safety.

**For these reasons and many more, we once again urge your support of SB 1583.**