



Beth Chvilicek, Policy Outreach Coordinator
Unite Oregon in support of SB 1583
March 5, 2024

Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Helfrich and Kropf, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Beth Chvilicek, I use they/them pronouns, and I am the Education Policy Coordinator at Unite Oregon. We are a state-wide organization advocating for immigrants, refugees, people of color, people experiencing poverty, and rural communities. I am testifying today on behalf of Unite Oregon and our members, both urban and rural, to share our support for SB 1583.

We know that book bans disproportionately impact rural communities over urban areas. As a queer and non-binary person who grew up in a rural area, I have first-hand knowledge of the impact that access to books can have on a growing individual. I was confused and felt very lost for a very long time - for me as a young, closeted person, books and other forms of media were a way for me to be seen. Without these outlets, I truly don't know where I'd be today. Similarly, in our Rogue Valley Chapter, we know that youth are excited to learn and depend on educational materials in their schools and libraries to explore parts of themselves and their communities. It also allows them to learn beyond their own experiences which creates for safer and more understanding communities.

Overwhelmingly, banned books are written by or about LGBTQ+ folks and/or people of color. This legislation aims to correct that harm and aid libraries by indicating that books cannot be banned based solely on characters or authors being part of a protected class. Parents, libraries, and schools still have full control over banning books if the subject matter is not age-appropriate for kids - but having a trans character or an author writing about their experience as a Black person is not a reason to ban a book. Doing so would rid students of the opportunity to identify their struggles with characters. Often, kids of color and young queer and trans folks are facing very complex problems. Books are a critical way for students to learn about and navigate their issues. Limiting kid's access to information does not make the issue go away, it just isolates them and makes it so that kids have fewer resources to grow and learn from.

I urge you to vote yes on SB 1583.