

Good morning Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs, and Committee Members, and thank you for your time.

My name is Emily O'Neal and I am the chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee with the Oregon Library Association and we are asking you to support SB1583 as written.

My committee is made up of eleven individuals and we respond to book challenges in libraries across the state of Oregon.

Today, the committee is tracking and supporting roughly a dozen challenges happening across the State of Oregon and of those, about half are in school libraries. All of the current challenges are materials that have themes dealing with race / racism or sexual identities. Some examples include the statement our committee published last Tuesday on the removal and restriction of titles at Canby School District, but there are additional instances at Medford School District, Knappa School District near Astoria, and Helix Charter School near Pendleton. If you don't have a map in front of you right now, I just shared an example from all four corners of our state. These challenges are not occurring in blue vs. red counties, they aren't happening across party lines, or in a realm of conservative vs. liberal, but they are happening in all areas of our state.

To anyone who believes this bill isn't necessary, I would ask the dozens of teachers and media specialists our committee has interacted with regarding book removals in their classroom libraries and school libraries if they could have used additional support in the form of this bill, and I can ensure you, they would all say yes.

These challenges are about control and are being requested by a small group of extremists. The New York Times published a recent study that shared half of the book challenges across our country can be tracked to 11 individuals. As a matter of fact, overwhelmingly, studies show that our communities do not want access

restricted access to information, which we have seen evidence of through the submission of over 1000 letters in support of this bill. I know there is a question of urgency around this bill, and I am here to testify that this is absolutely an emergency. ALA has shared that challenges across our country are rising more than 20% year after year since 2020, and I can tell you, Oregon is no different. As a matter of fact, since testifying at the Senate just a couple weeks ago, the committee has received two additional incidents of schools that need support regarding book removals in their classroom libraries.

We hope that you see that these challenges are coming from a place of discrimination, and are not about the health and well-being of our children. With a committee made up of Masters level librarians, not one of us have ever found any peer reviewed research that can be shared that proves that reading materials is harmful to minors. On the contrary, we can easily provide you with peer reviewed research that shows that access to diverse materials benefits our youth and creates empathy, cultural understanding, and broadens their world views.

We hope that you see that this bill isn't about taking away parental choice in what their own minor children read, and in actuality, this bill supports that choice. Schools across Oregon already have in place policies and procedures to ensure a parent can set parameters in school to align with their family values. Parents can ask for exceptions to reading and classroom materials, and parents can and should be involved in the personal reading choices of their children. But what is not suitable for one family may be exactly right for another, and to allow for the universal removal of materials, specifically materials that support emotional intelligence and empathy development, and materials that bring light to lesser represented voices in our communities would indeed be considered both censorship and discrimination.

Please proceed with scheduling a work session on this bill, please vote to support this bill, please support Oregon communities in our clear request to protect

access to materials in our schools, and in support of the eleven people that have been carrying the weight of these challenges for years.

I'm happy to answer any questions.