

Submitter: Intellectual Freedom Committee IFC  
On Behalf Of: OLA Intellectual Freedom Committee  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure: SB1583

The OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee strongly urges the passage of SB1583.

The US is experiencing an explosion of attempts to censor library and curriculum materials in our public schools, and Oregon is no exception. Many of these attempts are blatant in their opposition to LGBTQ+ materials. Many couch their discriminatory intent in seemingly innocuous catchphrases such as “parental rights” or “sexually explicit materials.” These coordinated censorship attempts clearly intend to limit the materials available to Oregon students based solely on the constitutionally protected viewpoints of those materials. SB1583 brings needed clarity to help schools and school boards comply with the prohibition on discrimination required by ORS 659.850.

Opponents of SB1583 would have you believe it takes local control away from local school boards. In fact, it protects schools and school boards from making unconstitutional decisions that will erode public trust and could result in costly lawsuits or other legal action. Schools and school boards across Oregon are spending excessive amounts of time and resources responding to challenges to library or curricular materials – time and resources that could be better spent on more pressing educational matters. SB1583 does not preclude parents, guardians, or others from requesting reconsideration of library or curricular materials for valid reasons. It does, however, prevent a vocal minority from hijacking the time and energy of school and district staff.

Opponents of SB1583 would have you believe they represent a majority of support for restricting materials in school libraries and classrooms. The truth is that national surveys show most voters do not approve of book bans, and “...will consider book banning when voting for legislators.” A study of the 2020-2021 school year, in fact, found that just 11 people were responsible for the majority of the hundreds of book challenges in public schools that year. Many of the challenges we have seen in Oregon schools are simply printouts of lists provided by nationally organized extremist groups, often admitting to never have read the material in full. SB1583 will provide needed safeguards against these sorts of attempts by vocal minorities to control what kids have access to in our schools.

Opponents of SB1593 would have you believe that a library collection purged of diverse literature that may include mature themes is a benefit to student development. But a study in the journal Reading Research Quarterly (2014) found that students who read diverse literature were more likely to show increased empathy

and perspective-taking abilities compared to a control group. In addition, the ALA report, "Why Diversity Matters," highlights the positive impact of varied literature on youth's cognitive and affective development and how it fosters empathy, understanding, and critical thinking. SB1593 helps protect students' right to choose diverse literature, which increases their opportunity to develop the invaluable character traits and soft skills that are essential for leadership roles and success in one's future.

Opponents of SB1583 would have you believe it takes away parents' rights to control what their kids have access to. In truth, SB1583 prevents a vocal minority, school administrator, or school board from making unconstitutional decisions to restrict constitutionally protected material. Parents and guardians should be involved in their child's education. They have every right to request alternative reading or viewing assignments. SB1583 simply reminds schools and school boards that those parents and guardians do not have the right to restrict what the children of other parents or guardians can read or view. To do so is viewpoint discrimination. SB1583 helps schools and school boards ensure the appropriate rights of ALL are safeguarded from discrimination.

Discrimination based on protected classes of persons is already illegal. SB1583 clarifies this.