

TO: Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Your Name, Affiliation if Applicable

RE: Support for SB1583

Date: 2/9/2024

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber & and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

My name is Eliot Feenstra and I am writing to urge you to support SB1583, which will prohibit discrimination based on the race, religion, ability, country of origin, sexuality, or gender of the individuals featured in the content of educational and library materials in public elementary and secondary schools in Oregon.

In Oregon, we have seen countless efforts to ban books that feature LGBTQIA2S+ topics or individuals and restrict access for students to understand the positive contributions of individuals of marginalized identities who have contributed to our society. This bill creates a statewide standard ensuring freedom of information both to users of that information, as well as providers of that information, for example librarians and educators. It also ensures people have access to accurate and representative information about their histories, communities and selves, and creates more room for understanding over prejudice in Oregon.

I have lived in rural Josephine County since 2012. As a transgender and queer person, I have struggled to feel a sense of belonging in this community. Our public libraries and educational institutions play a pivotal role in creating spaces of belonging for the diversity of people who live in this community. I have worked with queer youth in residential mental health facilities, peer support groups, and as a classroom teacher and seen the struggle that our young people have to experience belonging and acceptance. These past few years, people were stealing LGBTQ+ books or turning them around on the shelves. We need statewide protections to support our local institutions in saying no to discrimination. We need our libraries and schools to be places that provide a range of stories and are free of discrimination. This bill has huge public health impacts for our communities and I urge you to support it.

SB1583 does not change any individual parent's or guardian's right to monitor or oversee what their own children read or view. It does protect the rights of ALL parents and guardians for their children to have access to diverse representation in materials and history taught in the school setting.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my story today. We hope you will vote YES to support and advance SB1583.

Thank you,

Eliot Feenstra