

10 February 2023

To the Oregon legislature,

As a parent of public school students — one still in high school, and one recently graduated, a librarian, and a believer in the power of the written word, I am writing in support of SB 1583 that will prevent discrimination when selecting textbooks, instructional materials, program materials or library books in public schools. I could not be more proud that my two state legislators, Senator Frederick and Representative Sanchez, are two of the sponsors of this legislation.

I grew up in rural New Hampshire, and moved to Oregon when my children were very small. In my youth, learning history in New England focused so deeply on the founding of our country, and, as became clear to me as I grew and did my own reading, the myths and stories so rooted in the history textbooks chose to tell. We learned little about the indigenous people that lived in New England — or even that they still lived there. We donned our pilgrim hats for school plays, learned about “the first Thanksgiving,” and were presented with a very sanitized version of the impact colonization had on this land. What a difference between that experience and the one my children had in Portland Public Schools; what robust conversations we have had around the dining room table on the role race played in American history and the discrimination that still exists in the stories we tell about it. How could we even consider going backwards, when there is still so much to learn and, for many of us, to acknowledge?

The US is experiencing an explosion of attempts to censor library and curriculum materials in our public schools, and Oregon is no exception. These censorship attempts intend to limit the materials available to Oregon students based solely on the constitutionally protected viewpoints of those materials. I believe SB 1583 will help prevent these book bans and removal attempts.

As a librarian, I know it is important for our students and community members to see themselves reflected in library materials and in the curriculum. I know it is critical to carefully select books, magazines, educational videos and experiences that reflect our student populations in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner, and that important educational texts and materials are available to those students who need it. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop talks about the power of books to act as “windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors” — that a book can give each of us the opportunity to independently choose to look out and learn something new, or to see ourselves reflected, or to step through the door to engage. That personal, individual power is one that cannot be taken for granted and which should not be restricted.

Thank you to Senator Frederick and Representative Sanchez for their action in this area, and thank you for passing SB 1583 with the proposed amendment from the Oregon Library Association.

Stephanie Chase

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