

February 13, 2024

Re: Senate Bill 1583

To: Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the Committee:

As a parent and citizen of Oregon I urge your support of SB 1583 in order to protect students' right to read, learn, and share ideas free from discriminatory censorship. Last year the number of book challenges in schools rose by 33% over the previous year, according to a PEN America survey. Book bans overwhelmingly target books that feature issues involving race and gender, turning schools into political battlefields that prevent educators from doing their jobs and stifling the educational progress of our children.

SB 1583 provides clarity to two aspects already implicit in ORS 659.850. First, the bill makes clear that textbooks and other materials may not be prohibited merely because they include references or information regarding people against whom discrimination is prohibited. The second aspect of the bill clarifies that ORS 659.850 implicitly prohibits the banning of books in public school libraries on the basis that a book's subject matter concerns people against whom discrimination is prohibited.

The true goal of book bans is to limit information and to discourage freedom of thought, both of which undermine one of the primary functions of education: to teach students how to think for themselves. Censorship of this nature deprives students of the opportunity to see themselves depicted in literature, to engage in thoughtful discussion about the differences between us, and to develop empathy. Without literary works addressing diversity, students are left without context and understanding of the world that we expect them to navigate.

The Supreme Court held that "(i)t can hardly be argued that...students shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."¹ Freedom of speech includes the right to receive information and ideas, including those that may be controversial or unpopular. Restricting or removing textbooks and library books because of ideological opposition violates this holding and is contrary to the intent of the First Amendment.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this issue, and thank you for your consideration of the vital matter.

Sincerely,



Rosemary W. Brewer

¹ *Tinker v Des Moines Independent Community School Dist.* 393 U.S. 503 (1969),

