

Senate Committee on Education
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill SB 1583

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber and members of the committee,

My name is Seth Johnstone and I am the Transgender Justice Program Manager for Basic Rights Oregon. Basic Rights Oregon supports SB1583 with the -4 amendments to prohibit a district, school board or committee from banning books based on race, gender identity, country of origin, disability, immigrant status, and sexual orientation.

We've seen the necessity of SB1583 because of the countless calls from concerned parents, librarians, and educators reporting efforts in their school districts to ban books that feature LGBTQIA2S+ topics or individuals. Concerted and targeted efforts at school board meetings to restrict access for students to understand the positive contributions of marginalized identities have been underway for years in our state. If you look at the 2023 report from the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse from the State Library of Oregon, you'll see that the titles that were tracked were challenged for containing LGBTQIA2S+ parents, a book that tells Black youth they deserve to be treated with respect, or a book on the history of important moments for the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

Educators and library staff who play a role in supporting student academic growth have informed Basic Rights Oregon that book banning undermines their expertise and increases their stress when trying to maintain an inclusive classroom. The effort to restrict access to books has overtly targeted diverse books, which we know are vital in engaging kids, improving student reading development, and developing a strong sense of self and empathy for others. These books empower students to develop a love of reading.

Book bans are on the rise across our nation. According to the 2022 national report, the American Librarian Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked 2,571 titles targeted for censorship, a 38% increase from 2021 and the largest number since the association began compiling data about library censorship in 1982. We have a chance to make sure Oregon protects its students from this censorship.

All students have a First Amendment right to read and learn about the history and viewpoints of all communities — including their own identity — inside and outside of the classroom. All youth deserve the opportunity to see themselves, their families, and members of their community represented in the classroom. Book bans and classroom censorship efforts work to effectively erase the history and lived experiences of people of color, and LGBTQIA2S+ people and censor discussions around race, gender, and sexuality that impact people's daily lives.

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.

Basic Rights Oregon strongly supports SB1583 for making a step in addressing the growing efforts to censor and erase the contributions of the diverse people who make up this state.

Thank you and please support SB1583.