



ASSOCIATION OF OREGON
COMMUNITY MENTAL
HEALTH PROGRAMS

To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Annette Marcus, MSW, Suicide Prevention Policy Manager
Re: Support for SB1583
Date: Feb. 13, 2024

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

I am writing on behalf of the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide (Alliance) to express our support for SB1583 which will prohibit discrimination based on race, religion, ability, country of origin, sexuality or gender of the individuals featured in the content of the educational and library materials in Oregon Schools.



The Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide is a statewide advisory group to the Oregon Health Authority. We are subject matter experts, state leaders, young adults, and suicide attempt and loss survivors from around the state. We work closely with local suicide prevention coalitions across the state. The role of the Alliance is to advise OHA on all matters related to youth and young adult suicide.

The U.S. Surgeon General’s urgent 2021 advisory [Protecting Youth Mental Health](#) notes that “supporting the mental health of children and youth will require a whole-of-society effort” and that part of this effort must include creating “positive, safe and affirming” environments for students.

Efforts across the nation to remove positive references to LGBTQ+ people and African American and exclude information about our country’s complex history regarding race, gender and sexuality do the exact opposite of creating a positive, safe and affirming environment. In Oregon we must do better than that.

According to the Centers for Disease Controls and Prevention (CDC) Oregon saw a three-year decrease in youth suicides (24 and younger) between 2019 and 2021. While we don’t have final data, it appears that the rate has remained steady since then. However, there are racial disparities in the data. That is while overall there was a decrease in youth suicides, suicide rates in black and brown communities did not decrease and in some cases increased. Likewise, Oregon’s Student Health Survey tells the shocking story that nearly half of Oregon’s LGBTQ youth seriously consider suicide.

Suicide is a complex issue and it’s often difficult to draw a direct line between a policy and preventing youth suicide; however, there is ample evidence that one direct linkage that can be made is that affirming young people’s identities and providing opportunities for them to see how others from their community have navigated the world through both good and difficult times can save lives. For Black and LGBTQ+ students, as well as those carrying two or more of these identities, exposure to discrimination contributes to suicide risk. Black and LGBTQ+ students often have their lives politicized. Research has shown that banning items (such as Pride flags or Black Lives Matter signs) that affirm the lives of these students will increase the risk of both

internalized distress and victimization. Lack of representation and acceptance has been found to cause a number of health disparities, including suicidality. Based on decades long research on acceptance among LGBT youth, Ryan et al. (2014)ⁱ, identified and measured common behaviors that are not thought of as rejection, such as *not talking about or discouraging an adolescent from talking about their LGBT identity or denying and minimizing an adolescent's LGBT identity*. As such, these reactions are often experienced as rejection by LGBT adolescents, contributing to a host of physical and mental health issues, including depression, illegal drug use, and suicide.

By contrast, when youth see themselves reflected in all their complexity in the curriculum and have access to stories of people like them in books, they feel validated. Sharing our history and stories is protective from the despair and isolation that can lead young people to suicide.

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.

Suicide is preventable. We know with coordinated, cross-sector efforts we can provide lifesaving education and connect students with needed resources. Please support SB1583.

On Behalf of the Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide,

Annette Marcus, MSW
Suicide Prevention Policy Manager

For further information, contact: amarcus@aocmhp.org

ⁱ C Ryan - Temp. Pol. & Civ. Rts. L. Rev., 2013