



March 4, 2024

TO: House Committee on Rules
FROM: Our Children Oregon
RE: Support for SB 1583

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Helfrich and Kropf, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is advancing equitable policymaking and whole-child advocacy statewide to ensure our children and youth—regardless of their race, identity, ability, or where they live—have what they need to thrive. We collect, analyze, and elevate data and research that, alongside lived experience, drives conversations in support of Oregon's future.

We support SB 1583 that will prevent discrimination when selecting textbooks, instructional materials, program materials or library books in public schools. The sheer volume of 2,572 book titles earmarked for removal in libraries nationally, which are either written by or about LGBTQIA+ and people of color, underscores the urgency of this issue.

Findings from the 2022 Oregon Student Education Equity Development (SEED) Survey paint a disheartening picture: too many of our young learners feel disconnected and unwelcomed in their educational environments. A staggering 63% of 3rd-5th graders stated they did not feel welcomed at school,¹ and nearly 1 in 3 LGBTQIA+ students missed at least one entire day of school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.² We must ensure schools create more welcoming, supportive school climates, which includes policies and interventions that affirm and support students' identities.

One way we can do that is with books that include diverse characters and stories. Research has found that students taught a culturally responsive and racially inclusive education are more academically engaged, perform better in school, have enhanced self-perception, and higher graduation rates.³ Representation matters for Black, Native,

¹ Student Sense of Belonging in Schools: Connection to Outcomes:

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/GraduationImprovement/Documents/SenseofBelongingOutcomes.pdf>

² Student Sense of Belonging in Schools: Predictive Factors:

<https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/GraduationImprovement/Documents/SenseOfBelonging.pdf>

³ The Legal and Pedagogical Case for Culturally Responsive and Racially Inclusive Public Education for All Students:

<https://www.nea.org/resource-library/legal-and-pedagogical-case-culturally-responsive-and-racially-inclusive-public-education-all>

Latinx, LGBTQIA+ students, and other students with marginalized identities who are often stereotyped. It is both personally validating and academically engaging for them to see their experiences reflected on the page of a book. However, when books about historically marginalized groups are banned from libraries and schools, it communicates that discrimination is tolerated, perpetuating the exclusion of youth and students with these identities.

SB 1583 is a vital safeguard against such exclusionary practices. Specifically, SB 1583 brings needed clarity to help schools and school boards comply with the prohibition on discrimination required by ORS 659.850. At this time when we see a surge in attempts to censor library and curriculum materials in our public schools, we must protect students' right to read, learn, and share ideas free of discriminatory censorship. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve child well-being across the state. We urge your support of SB 1583.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

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Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director