

March 5, 2024

House Committee on Rules  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 1583A

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

My name is Amanda Elmer. I am the Communications Coordinator at the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon. The ACLU of Oregon's main organizational testimony is set out in the written testimony submitted by Mariana Garcia Medina, Senior Policy Associate, and Sandy Chung, Executive Director. Today, I am submitting this testimony because this issue is critical to me as an educator, and I urge you to support SB 1583A.

Before my time at the ACLU of Oregon, I was a fourth and fifth grade teacher in the Beaverton School District. I loved teaching youth of this age because you could use such a variety of texts to teach from, both picture books and chapter books or novels. The books we read in my classroom facilitated deep and critical conversations that reinforced the social-emotional skills of tolerance, empathy, curiosity, and kindness as we were developing academic reading skills.

I was very intentional about the books I chose to highlight in my classroom — books that featured young people or families with neurodivergence like Autism or ADHD, Indigenous people, Black people and other people of color, white people, Muslim students, Christian students, students with learning disabilities and physical disabilities, gay and trans students or families and multigenerational households. (To name a few.)

These are the books we stand to lose when books are challenged — books that open windows to new worlds and lived experiences, and books that act as mirrors, reflecting back representation of identities. Books that build community and books that make students of all backgrounds feel welcomed and safe in their schools.

We've seen an uprise in violence against marginalized students in schools across the country. Most recently, Nex Benedict, an Indigenous trans student in Oklahoma died after being attacked in their school bathroom. Violence of this type is a direct result of intolerance, which is fostered through hateful legislation and speech, and limiting access to books about marginalized communities in schools and libraries. Oregon is not immune to this violence.

**As an educator, I urge you to pass this common-sense bill for Oregon students. Not only do they deserve the rights to read, learn and share ideas without fear of censorship, but they also need to see their leaders do everything in their power to protect them in the face of intolerance and hate.**

Thank you,

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