

March 6, 2024

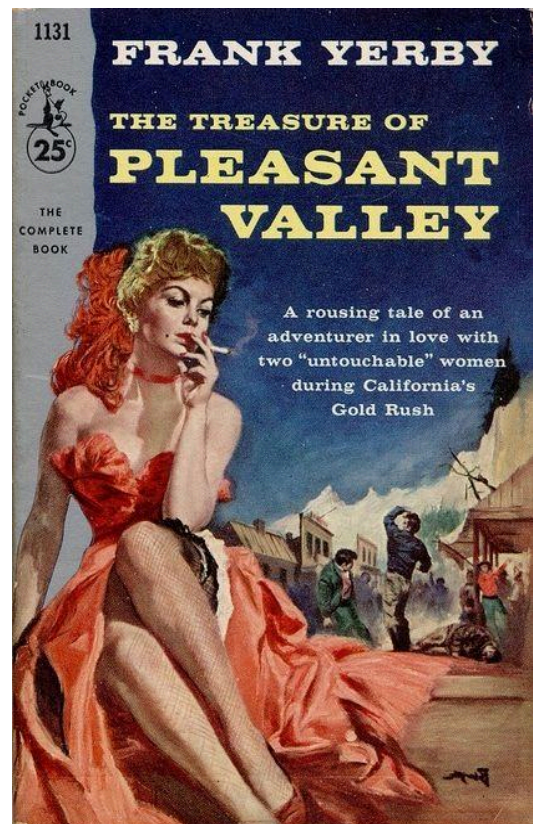
House Committee on Rules  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill SB 1583**

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Helfrich and Kropf and members of the committee,

My name is Jackie Yerby. I use she/her pronouns. I am the Director of Community Engagement for the ACLU of Oregon.

I want to expand on the story that I shared in my oral testimony about the power of books and the power of representation. If you listen to [StoryCorps](#)<sup>1</sup> you may be familiar with this story. In the 1950s, Olly Neal who by his own account was a troubled high school senior, wandered into the library of his segregated high school. On the shelf he found a book with a racy cover that intrigued him. It was “The Treasure of Pleasant Valley” by [Frank Yerby](#)<sup>2</sup>, my grandfather, and a famous Black author in the 1940s and 50s. Olly had a reputation to protect - he wasn’t a reader - so he stole the book rather than borrow it. Mrs. Grady, the librarian, noticed so she made sure that when Olly came back to return the book there was another Frank Yerby book waiting for him. And another. And another. Many years later he learned that Mrs. Grady and another teacher, Mrs. Saunders drove all the way to Memphis from their rural town in Arkansas to find more Frank Yerby books for Olly - in the segregated South.



<sup>1</sup> <https://storycorps.org/stories/judge-olly-neal-and-his-daughter-karama/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/frank-yerby-1916-1991>

"You've got to understand that this was not an easy matter then — because this is 1957 and '58," Neal said. "And black authors were not especially available, No. 1. And No. 2, Frank Yerby was not such a widely known author. And No. 3, they had to drive all the way to Memphis to find it."<sup>3</sup>

Olly Neal who later became a judge of the Arkansas Court of Appeals, credits reading these admittedly racy books with transforming him into an avid reader and setting him on a different path.

"I credit Mrs. Grady for getting me in the habit of enjoying reading, so that I was able to go to law school and survive," Neal said.<sup>4</sup>

For a young Black man growing up in the segregated south, reading books written by a Black author opened up the world for him. That's what we should all want for each other and especially for Oregonian youth; the opportunity to stumble across something interesting that sparks their curiosity and makes them eager to learn. That's how you make a reader and lifelong learner.

Let's lean into sparking curiosity. Let's lean into our youth seeing themselves represented in these stories. Let's lean into ensuring that youth have opportunities to learn about people who are different from them.

Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113357239>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.