

House Committee on Rules

In support of SB1583

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Helfrich and Kropf, 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.

We've seen the necessity of SB1583 because of the countless calls to our organization 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 due to being:

- a book containing set of LGBTQIA2S+ parents
- a book that tells Black youth they deserve to be treated with respect
- 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
- developing a strong sense of self and empathy for others.
- These books empower students to develop a love of reading.

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 that we are seeing active attempts to erode. This bill is important to clarify this point.

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.