

March 2, 2025

Re: Testimony in support of Freedom to Read, SB 1098

Dear Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the Senate Committee on Education, Sens. Gelser Blouin, Robinson, and Sollman,

Most Oregonians value the freedom to read which has been the cornerstone of a good education and a free society where there is intellectual and academic freedom, critical thinking, and a diversity of ideas. Unfortunately, we have recently seen too many books banned or censored: classic literature, award winning books, books that relate history that is uncomfortable or even upsetting to think about, books that expose us to new ideas or other people's experiences, books that are just fun to read. SB 1098 is a good bill that would protect our freedom to read and put a stop to these recent efforts by some to control what others can read or what the children of other folks can read.

As Sen. Weber, a long time teacher knows, there was a recent effort in my town of Seaside to ban or control certain books accessed by children and teens at our local library. There are already controls in place to make sure parents can supervise what their children read or check out there. As is often the case, the subject of the targeted (award winning) books involved LGBTQ+ experiences. Typically, the would-be censors disguised their objections to the LGBTQ+ books by claiming the books were "sexual" and "inappropriate" for children. (One book was about 2 penguins and there was nothing sexual in it; the other involved a trans person and again, nothing sexual) Folks filled the city council meeting and library board room to protest an attempt to infringe the freedom to read these books, and the city council and library board rejected the efforts to ban or censor the books. (Parents came forward to say they had read these books to their children and they as parents should decide what their children read.)

The censors, however, returned soon after with 2 other books they claimed were inappropriate for teens to read; in this case one of the books was part of an award winning young teen series. Their efforts to ban these books were stopped once again by folks who turned out to protect the freedom to read. But the city councilor behind the book bans vowed to continue, and a young person in our community then led a successful effort to recall him. He is gone, and our city council has vowed they support the freedom to read and the decisions of our local library.

A bill like SB 1098 would go a long way to prevent what happened in Seaside. It is very difficult for small communities and school districts to be constantly vigilant to protect the constitutionally guaranteed freedom to read. It is clear most of these bans or attempts at censorship target books by or about LGBTQ+, people of color, women, or people with religious or ethnic backgrounds that may be different from the majority. SB 1098 will put an end to this insidious discrimination and efforts to erase folks or their experiences from our culture and history. With SB 1098 we can put a stop to the bans and censorship that infringe our freedoms.

I urge you to vote yes on SB 1098 and assure this next generation is as educated as possible and have the opportunity to read, develop critical thinking skills, and understand and appreciate the diversity of ideas and culture and beliefs in our society.

Thank you.

Laura Allen  
Seaside, Oregon