

Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Weber, and members of the committee.

My name is Deborah Robert from Portland, Oregon (Multnomah County) and I am writing to urge you to support [Senate Bill 1098](#), which will prohibit discrimination based on the race, religion, ability, country of origin, sexuality, or gender of the individuals featured in the content of educational and library materials in K-12 public schools in Oregon.

In Oregon, we have seen countless efforts to ban books that feature LGBTQIA2S+, Black people, Indigenous people and other people of color. topics or individuals and restrict access for students to understand the positive contributions of individuals of marginalized identities who have contributed to our society. This bill creates a statewide standard ensuring freedom of information both to users of that information, as well as providers of that information, for example librarians and educators. It also ensures students have access to accurate and representative information about their histories, communities and selves.

As a mother of a two year old interracial child who is building a love of books, I know how important it is for my daughter to see characters and situations that look like her and that she can relate to. When characters look like her, she is more interested in reading the books. She was born prematurely and has been behind in speech, but her vocabulary has skyrocketed since we started reading books and playing with toys that look like her. She is even starting to tell her own stories now in full sentences! I have seen my own daughter blossom with access to diverse materials that reflect her own culture, religion, and race.

Before becoming a mother, I was a literacy specialist in some of the highest needs public schools in the Bay Area. I learned early on that when children fall behind in reading, the literacy gap only widens over time. For example, I worked with middle school students who were reading below a first grade level. I also experienced firsthand that by disrupting the gap, and giving students access to high quality learning materials, we allow our most vulnerable students to thrive. Because there is a direct relationship between low literacy levels and incarceration rates, the matter of giving students access to high quality, diverse, meaningful books is literally a matter of helping young people maintain their freedom and build prosperous lives. Their futures, and our future as a democratic society, depends on it.

It is essential that we allow young people to learn about their own histories, to see themselves represented in a positive light, and to feel connected to academic learning. The most certain way we can do this is to allow a diverse assortment of reading and learning materials in classrooms and libraries. Our future as a productive, thriving, and just nation depends on it.

[Senate Bill 1098](#) protects student's right to see themselves represented in the books, materials and classrooms they learn from and to learn about diverse communities and people.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my story today. We urge you to vote YES to support and advance [Senate Bill 1098](#).

Thank you,

Deborah Robert