

Submitter: Gabi Snyder
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1098

Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Weber, and members of the committee,
My name is Gabi Snyder, and I am writing to you from Corvallis to urge you to support SB1098, 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+ individuals, Black people, Indigenous people and other people of color. When books are banned or access is restricted, students lose the opportunity to understand the positive contributions of individuals from marginalized identities. 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.

When my kids were in elementary school here in Corvallis, they participated in the Oregon Battle of the Books (OBOB). In 2019, they read MELISSA (at that time still titled George) by Alex Gino. It was one of my favorite selections that year. Here's the book's synopsis: "When people look at Melissa, they think they see a boy named George. But she knows she's not a boy. She knows she's a girl. Melissa thinks she'll have to keep this a secret forever. Then her teacher announces that their class play is going to be Charlotte's Web. Melissa really, really, REALLY wants to play Charlotte. But the teacher says she can't even try out for the part... because she's a boy. With the help of her best friend, Kelly, Melissa comes up with a plan. Not just so she can be Charlotte — but so everyone can know who she is, once and for all." The story is funny and heartwarming, and it inspires empathy for Melissa. The book does a beautiful job of fostering acceptance for trans kids. And I can imagine how important the story has been for the trans kids who read and see themselves reflected in this beautiful book. However, not every Oregon school participating in OBOB read MELISSA. Because of objections to the book, I know some elementary schools didn't include MELISSA and so the kids at those schools did not read and discuss MELISSA along with the other OBOB selections. What a missed opportunity! And imagine how it felt if you were a trans kid at one of those schools, getting the message that your identity is somehow "wrong" or taboo.

SB1098 protects students' 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. I urge you to vote YES to support and advance SB1098.

Thank you,

Gabi Snyder, Authors Against Book Bans (AABB) member