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State Senator Kayse Jama

Senate District 24 (D-East Portland, Damascus, Boring)

Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee,

I write to you today in strong support of SB 1098, which would prohibit discrimination in selecting books for public school libraries and classrooms. This bill is a crucial step toward preserving the integrity of our public education and ensuring that our schools remain inclusive, safe, and welcoming spaces for all students.

Public schools across the nation have experienced a troubling rise in censorship attempts. According to the American Library Association, there were attempts to remove over 1,100 unique titles from school and public libraries between January and September of 2024.¹ Censorship in our schools is a direct attack on the values of a pluralistic, just society. Removing the contributions of marginalized communities from our lesson plans and libraries simplifies and sterilizes our country's complex, multicultural history. Worse, it sends a harmful message to students from these communities: that their identities and stories are unworthy of recognition.

In Oregon, we pride ourselves on being a beacon of inclusivity and progress. Book bans stand in stark opposition to this, undermining our commitment to intellectual freedom and diversity. Education is not about avoiding discomfort but about fostering growth, empathy, and critical thinking. By banning books, we ban ideas, stifle curiosity, and send a dangerous message. As a parent of public school students, I have witnessed the profound impact of literature in shaping empathy, broadening horizons, and inspiring action. Books amplify voices and perspectives that challenge us to see the world and each other more clearly. Oregon has an opportunity to lead the nation by standing up for intellectual freedom and the right to read.

I urge you to pass SB 1098 and affirm that in Oregon, we don't ban books, stories, or difficult conversations; we embrace and celebrate them. Let's make it clear that our schools are places where students can engage freely with diverse ideas, critically explore their world, and imagine a better future.

I strongly urge your yes vote on SB 1098.

¹ <https://www.ala.org/bbooks>