

Submitter: Elisabeth Hartner
On Behalf Of: The Oregon Public Health Association
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1098

Dear Legislators,

The Oregon Public Health Association (OPHA) strongly supports S.B. 1098, the Freedom to Read Act, to protect students' access to diverse and inclusive literature in our public schools. Censorship and discriminatory book bans not only limit educational opportunities but also harm students' mental and emotional well-being by erasing important perspectives and experiences.

Research shows that representation in literature improves student engagement, fosters critical thinking, and supports positive youth development. Conversely, restricting access to books - particularly those addressing race, gender, LGBTQ+ identities, and historical injustices - can contribute to stigma, isolation, and challenges to mental health among students impacted by inequities.

As a public health organization, OPHA is committed to equity, inclusion, and the well-being of all Oregon students. We urge lawmakers to pass S.B. 1098 to ensure every child has the freedom to read, learn, and grow in an environment that reflects and respects the diversity of our communities.

Thank you for your leadership in protecting intellectual freedom and student well-being in Oregon.

Sincerely,

The Oregon Public Health Association