

Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, members of the committee,

My name is Cat Winters. I'm from Hillsboro, I represent Authors Against Book Bans, and I'm here to support Senate Bill 1098.

We authors of books for children and teens are not just faceless names on covers. We are flesh-and-blood human beings who often write the books we needed as young people, and it is our stories, our experiences, our carefully crafted and professionally vetted work that people are pulling from classrooms and libraries.

When I was a teen, I was confused about my sexual orientation. The word "bisexual" wasn't discussed. I didn't have access to books about bi people. I thought we could only be straight or gay, and in the 80s, adults told us teens that God created AIDS to punish gay people. I felt depressed and weird and often experienced suicidal ideation when I was in middle school.

I didn't come out as bi until I was forty-nine years old, but I started writing some of my queerness into my novels to help young people who might also be feeling depressed and weird and suicidal. I once received an email about a teen who considered taking their own life but found the ability to keep going because of my books. That type of email is common for authors of books for young people.

A 2023 *Washington Post* analysis of nationwide book challenges found that 42% of the books were challenged for having LGBTQ characters or themes and 28% of the books were challenged for having BIPOC characters or for dealing with racism (source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/23/lgbtq-book-ban-challengers/>).

We authors now have to think about book bans every time we sit down to write. We have to wonder if publishers will even publish our stories if they're concerned about challenges to books based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race, or any other discrimination-based reason that results in the loss of the freedom to read and the freedom to write. The freedom of speech.

I urge you to support Senate Bill 1098. It will literally save lives.

Thank you.