

# Communications & Testimony: Freedom To Read

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

My name is Caleah James, I am a librarian from Reed College Library 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 college librarian I know how important it is to have accessible representative stories that reflect the community and world we live in. Even at the college level students struggle to find reading that supports their lifestyles and that represents them physically and emotionally. I started a collection of books, many of them on the “banned” list in order to foster fun reading and enjoyment of reading. Reading is so important to developing children and young adults and often the only source they can turn to when questions arise. Reading inclusive work fosters self-esteem, self-worth and often emotional support. I support this bill so that my students can have access to all histories and cultures and so librarians all over the state have the freedom to do their job without scrutiny.

[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, Caleah James

## Values Statements:

- Book bans and censorship are deeply undemocratic and harmful because our democracy contains people of different beliefs, perspectives and backgrounds.
- The right to free speech – which is set out as the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution – is recognized as foundational to our democracy:

- Freedom of speech guarantees us the right to hear all sides of every issue and to make our own judgments without government interference or limitations.
  - By creating safeguards around government censorship of books, magazines and newspapers, as well as art, film, music and materials on the internet, the right to free speech protects us from government attempts to suppress ideas and information.
  - Courts have said that the First Amendment protects not just the right to speak but the right to receive information. In other words, all of us, including young people, have a right to access a diverse range of stories and perspectives.
  - The Supreme Court ruled in 1969 that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." This is true for other fundamental rights, as well.
  - Furthermore, those of us with non-dominant identities have the right to hear stories and perspectives that reflect our experiences and communities. Representation matters.
- Democracy is undermined when oppressive minority groups force their own preferences and judgments on communities by pressuring government entities to take books off library shelves and ideas out of public classrooms because the minority doesn't approve of its content.
  - It also undermines our democracy when these groups pressure the government to censor the stories of people and communities who have been historically disenfranchised and marginalized.
  - When books about historically-disenfranchised groups – including Black, Indigenous, and people of color and LGBTQ+ people – are banned in libraries and schools, this signals that discrimination, exclusion, and othering of youth and students with these identities is acceptable.

## Key Talking Points:

- SB 1098 is a commonsense, values-based bill that will protect students in our state from discriminatory book bans and censorship in our public schools. This bill prohibits discriminatory censorship based on race, national origin, color, sex, gender identity, sexual

orientation, age, religion, physical or mental disability, military status, or marital or family status.

- All students deserve to see themselves represented in the books, materials and classrooms they learn from and to learn about diverse communities and people.
- Book bans are tactics used by small groups of extremists to erase and silence the voices, lived experiences, and histories of our most marginalized communities.
- SB 1098 does not change any individual parent's or guardian's right to monitor or oversee what their own children read or view. It does protect the rights of ALL parents and guardians for their children to have access to diverse representation in materials and history taught in the school setting.

#### Librarian Support Specialist Position Talking Points

- With school book bans increasing, schools need support navigating these challenges in their communities. The position will create a direct support position at ODE for licensed school librarians, classified library staff, teachers, and administrators on intellectual freedom.
- Since the 1980s, the number of schools with licensed school librarians has dropped from over 850 to just over 150. Many schools without full-time licensed librarians rely on administrators, who often need additional support to effectively manage book challenges in a timely manner.
- Currently, many other subjects have designated staff at ODE to support the work of educators in their respective areas. This position would provide this support at ODE to licensed school librarians, classified library staff, teachers, and administrators who before this have been navigating challenges and evolving regulations without state-level support.