

Submitter: Jen DiFrances
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 Jen D from David Douglas SD 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 high school librarian and queer person, I know how important it is for our youth to see their stories reflected in the books they read, and to know that they are not alone and there is nothing wrong with them. I support this bill so that my students can have access to all histories and cultures, and so that I as an educator am not limited by political madness.

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,
Jen DiFrances

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.