

Submitter: Pam Kessinger

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 Pam Kessinger from Portland Community College 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 Reference and Teaching Librarian at a community college, I frequently see students-- including recent high school graduates-- struggle to read critically, and totally avoid reading for pleasure. The number of K-12 teaching librarians in Oregon has been reduced to the point that few students have any guidance in using libraries or practice towards information literacy.

The implications here are twofold. First, K-12 libraries without certified, teaching librarians are often run by classified staff, who may be wholly unprepared to handle the request with principles of intellectual freedom and access to information. Or, the work lands to a school administrator. Second, students who cannot identify and locate books or texts which in some way support their life experience will be even more discouraged and less likely to see themselves as readers.

To gain informed citizens, we need to support the development of lifelong readers. Libraries should be strengthened, not hindered; librarians deserve respect for their professional expertise in building engaging-- and more important-- age appropriate book collections.

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. I urge you to vote YES to support and advance Senate Bill 1098.

Thank you,
--Pam Kessinger.