

Submitter: Michelle Cottrell  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1098

My name is Michelle Cottrell from Newport, Oregon 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 as well as 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. 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. 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.

As a District Media Specialist I have seen firsthand the positive impacts that providing inclusive books gives to our students, staff, and community. Every child in our schools should see their family in books that are in the school library collection. To allow discrimination goes against their fundamental rights as Americans and the rights which this country has held dear since its foundation. This issue should not be one that divides us but rather one that unites us. One thing most people in this country can agree on is that we must be allowed to keep our freedoms. This includes a freedom to read books. Book bans and censorship are deeply undemocratic and harmful because our democracy contains people of different beliefs, perspectives and backgrounds.

I am also writing as a Mom. My children have had access to diverse books their entire lives and this has enriched their lives far beyond what even I imagined. Being able to leave our small town through books has helped them to understand the world and that our problems which feel so big at times can be quite small compared to what other children the same age live with every day. This has helped them become better citizens and I believe that it has helped them to appreciate the opportunities and freedom they have. Reading has brought our family together and reading books that make us think and discuss together has helped me to connect with my own two

children even through their teenage years. Kids don't come with a manual, but protecting their right to read and then discussing topics with them as their parent has helped guide me in raising critical thinkers who ask questions and think for themselves in a way I admire.

Reading inclusive books opens eyes and hearts and creates the community we should all strive for, regardless of political affiliation. 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. 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. I truly hope you consider this bill not in alignment with one political party or another but as a way to protect the rights of all Oregonians, children and adults, as well as future generations.

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, Michelle Cottrell