

Committee on Education

Subject: Opposition to SB 1098 – Concerns Regarding the Impact on Parents' Rights and the Inclusion of Sexual Content in Schools

Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 1098. While I fully support the goal of inclusivity and providing diverse perspectives to students, I am deeply concerned that this bill, as currently written, disregards the important role that parents must play in determining what is appropriate for their children's education, particularly when it comes to sexually explicit material.

In recent years, many parents have raised concerns about the increasing presence of overtly sexual content in school libraries and curricula. Material that would be illegal for minors to see in any other context has made its way into the school libraries. I would encourage you to open the pages of "Let's talk about it" and "Gender Queer" (which its own author said was not intended for children under 18) and see for yourselves the pornographic nature of these books. These materials, often justified under the umbrella of equity and inclusion, are not appropriate for all age groups and do not align with the values and parental rights that many families hold dear. Even more concerning is the misrepresentation that because these books include protected classes, it is these protected classes that are the target of the challenges. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the overtly pornographic content regardless of who is pictured in it that is the issue.

SB 1098, the proposed changes to school libraries could result in more books and resources being made available to students without adequate safeguards or parental involvement, and that is simply unacceptable.

Concern 1: The Overreach of State Control and the Exclusion of Parental Input

The bill eliminates the ability for parents and guardians to directly influence the selection of materials that may be deemed inappropriate for their children. While SB 1098 allows parents to make formal requests for the removal of certain materials, the requirement for these requests to go through a committee approval process at the district level severely limits the immediate input of families. This committee approach, particularly when it involves district school boards or administrators, creates a one-size-fits-all solution that is not representative of the unique needs and values of individual communities. Further it could exacerbate the "us vs. them" environment that has grown in these discussions over the past decade.

Parents and guardians, not the state or local boards, should have the authority to make decisions about what their children are exposed to, especially when it comes to sensitive subjects like sexuality. The bill's provisions could force parents to accept materials that contradict their family's values, under the guise of promoting inclusivity, without a clear mechanism for those concerns to be heard.

Concern 2: Dangers of Over-Promoting Sexual Content in the Name of Equity

Equity is an essential principle that should ensure all students feel represented and respected, but it should not come at the cost of exposing children to content they are not ready for. SB 1098 inadvertently permits the inclusion of materials that may explore sensitive topics such as gender identity, sexual orientation, and relationships in graphic detail. While it is important for students to learn about diverse perspectives, there is a stark difference between promoting understanding and introducing explicit material that is not age-appropriate.

There is a real concern among parents that this bill could lead to the promotion of sexualized content under the guise of inclusivity. Sexuality is a deeply personal matter, and the decision of when and how children are exposed to such content should remain a matter for parents, not educators or policymakers. Schools should be a place where children can learn and grow without being exposed to materials that may cause confusion or distress at an age when they are still forming their own understanding of the world.

Concern 3: Potential Harm of a One-Size-Fits-All Approach

Every community in Oregon has its own values, cultural norms, and beliefs about what is appropriate for children at different stages of development. By pushing forward a state-mandated standard that promotes a broad, one-size-fits-all approach to what students can access in their school libraries, SB 1098 undermines the local control that is essential for reflecting the unique needs of each district. Parents are the first and most important educators of their children, and local school districts should have the autonomy to select educational materials that align with the cultural and moral beliefs of their communities.

In conclusion, while I support efforts to promote diversity and equity in education, I urge you to reconsider SB 1098 in its current form. The bill as it stands threatens to undermine parental rights, introduce inappropriate materials into the classroom, and override the values of local communities.

To be blunt, I do not believe legislators nor most who support this bill have taken the time to understand what parents are objecting to. I do not believe you have opened the pages of the books in question. If you had I am convinced you would take a strikingly different position.

I encourage you to find a more balanced approach that respects both the importance of inclusivity and the right of parents to be active participants in the educational journey of their children.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. I look forward to seeing how this bill evolves to better serve the needs of students, parents, and communities throughout Oregon.

Chris Chenoweth – McMinnville, Oregon