



**OFFICE of EQUITY
and HUMAN RIGHTS**
CITY OF PORTLAND

City Administrator:
Michael Jordan

Interim Director:
Jeff Selby



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

The City of Portland's LGBTQIA2S+ Program at the Office of Equity and Human Rights is writing today to urge this committee to support SB 1098- the Freedom to Read Act. SB 1098 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.

The Office of Equity and Human Rights directly serve the people of Portland by providing accountability and leadership to build equitable foundations for systemically excluded and institutionally oppressed Portland communities. Importantly, this includes serving our youth and ensuring that the youth of the City of Portland have access to books and other educational materials that reflect the vibrant diversity of the city.

The Oregonian reported in July of 2024, "According to the American Library Association, the number of unique book ban requests has increased nationally by more than 128% in the last three years, jumping from more than 1,800 in 2021 to about 4,200 in 2023". In recent years, Oregon too, has faced the most challenges to school and library books in state history, and the number of reported challenges are likely undercounts. Notably, the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse's (OIFC) 2024 reports that, "challenged materials are disproportionately about, by, or center the stories of individuals who belong to a protected class under Oregon Law". These challenges and bans have disproportionate negative impacts on our communities of color, our LGBTQIA2S+ community, our immigrant community, and other underrepresented groups.

While the number of book ban requests is rising in Oregon, our school libraries are not always well equipped to navigate them. In the 2023-24 school year, there were 178 FTE licensed school librarians in Oregon's approximately 1,272 public schools that serve a total of 547,424 students. That is a drop from 818 FTE licensed school librarians during the 1980-81 school year, when the State Library started tracking the information. The 2024 OIFC report outlines that bans and challenges – and the increase of challenges rooted in discriminatory censorship – exert an organizational and financial burden on schools and libraries as staff are redirected to address the increase of reviews.

While Oregon has laws requiring an inclusive selection of instructional materials, and generally prohibit discrimination in education, SB 1098 is necessary to make it clear that in school libraries discriminatory censorship based on race, national origin, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion,

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physical or mental disability, military status, or marital or family status is prohibited. SB 1098 is also needed to support schools, especially those without licensed school librarians, who would benefit from the Oregon Department of Education technical support contemplated in this bill.

As public servants, we know how important it is that public institutions contain and share stories featuring the diverse histories of the people who have contributed to our community. Today, we are grateful for the opportunity to share the Office of Equity's support for SB 1098 to ensure that all children in Oregon can explore literature that reflects their communities, inspires them, challenges them, and helps them see the world in new ways.

Sincerely,

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