

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

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 people of color. These efforts could prohibit students from understanding and acknowledging the positive contributions that these individuals have made in our society. To counter these attacks, this bill creates a statewide standard for ensuring freedom of information, both to users and providers of that information. It also gives students accurate and representative information about their histories, communities, and selves. As I know you are aware, this bill does not dictate what must be taught in schools, nor does it prevent parents from having agency over their child's reading list - it simply provides clear standards for book challenges and bans.

To quote the Supreme Court ruling of *Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L.*, *"America's public schools are the nurseries of democracy. Our representative democracy only works if we protect the 'marketplace of ideas.' This free exchange facilitates an informed public opinion[.]"* The banning of books and censorship is undemocratic and a violation of students' rights to freedom of speech and expression. Students deserve access to the same educational materials regardless of where they live and the school board that dictates them. Furthermore, as the daughter of an educator from an area where book bans are skyrocketing, I know book challenges create hardship for teachers and librarians as they undermine educators' expertise, as well as take away their autonomy and decision-making abilities. Book challenging creates a plethora of confusion and hardship for our educators and statewide mandates are needed to support and provide clear guidance.

Lastly, I wanted to share that I had the privilege of a high school English teacher who assigned my Advanced Placement (AP) Literature class works by Toni Morrison, Chinua Achebe, and Zora Neale Hurston 13 years ago in a blue-collar, 85% caucasian small town in Wisconsin. As I can recall, there were no controversies when I read these books. Now, books by these authors are banned nationwide and even in the same district where I read them. Students have been reading these books for decades without challenges, so we must ask ourselves what has changed. As for myself, I am incredibly grateful that my teacher encouraged these books and I was able to see differing perspectives outside of my hometown.

Senate Bill 1098 protects students' right to see themselves represented in the books, materials, and classrooms they learn from and to learn about diverse communities and people. **I urge you to vote YES on this bill.**

Thank you,

Esther Baas