

March 4, 2025

Chair Lew Frederick, Vice-Chair Suzanne Weber, and member of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is Isabel Johnson, and I am the parent of a 6th grader in Portland Public Schools. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 1098.

For the past four years, I have been very involved in the Oregon Battle of the Books (OBOB) - three years at my child's elementary school and this year at their middle school. OBOB is a voluntary statewide reading program, sponsored by the Oregon Association of School Libraries, and run by volunteers—primarily school librarians and parents.

Each year, OBOB's title committees carefully select high-quality, age-appropriate books from a diverse range of genres. Students form teams and compete in trivia-style battles, answering questions about the books they've read. OBOB encourages kids to discover books they might not have chosen on their own. One of my favorite questions to ask students is, "*Which OBOB book did you think you wouldn't like, but ended up loving?*"

Last year, one of the most beloved books among students at my child's elementary school was *The List of Things That Will Not Change* by Rebecca Stead. It's a beautifully written novel about a young girl navigating the complexities of a changing family, friendships, and self-discovery. The book resonated deeply with students. And yet, it was challenged in Oregon and has been banned in other states.

Why? My guess is because the main character's father is marrying another man. I can't think of another reason—it's written by a Newbery Medal-winning author, acclaimed by critics and the public.

This hits home for me. Growing up, I always knew my father was gay. But in those days, it wasn't talked about. And because it wasn't talked about, it felt like something to be ashamed of. As an 11-year-old girl, I would have loved to read a story about a character with a dad who was happily engaged to be married to a man. I would have loved to read a joyful book that simply treated this reality as normal—because it is.

Book bans and censorship have no place in Oregon. Every child deserves the freedom to read books that reflect the diverse world they live in. Every child deserves access to stories that expand their understanding, deepen their empathy, and make them feel seen.

I urge you to support SB 1098. Thank you for your time and consideration,

Isabel Johnson
Portland, Oregon