

## Testimony on SB1098

Dear Senate Committee Members,

Thank you for taking time to read my public statement. I served for many years as a public library youth services manager, first at the Jefferson County Library District in Central Oregon and, more recently, at the Chetco Library in Brookings on the southern Oregon coast. I have recently retired.

For the past four years, my library community in Brookings has been the target of a vocal fringe group demanding the removal of certain books from our library shelves, particularly those books with LGBTQ+ representation. The discriminatory removal of books from libraries and schools works against the interests and the wishes of local youths and families. In my experience, young people want to read what they are interested in and will thrive when they are allowed to do so. Likewise, in my experience, parents want their children to have full access to books ... without unrelated intervening adults telling them what their children are not allowed to read.

I recently re-read PEN America's national report on book bannings of the 2023-2024 school year: <https://pen.org/report/beyond-the-shelves/> The number of book bannings per year have gone up alarmingly in the past five years, with a national increase of about 400% in just the past three years. And those of us working in library systems on the local level have seen that it is the same people again and again who show up to launch attacks on the kinds of books that they don't like.

What kind of books are being banned? The books that are being targeted are primarily those that give voice and representation to the most marginalized members of our communities: (1) people of color - their stories and their histories, (2) LGBTQ+ people - their stories and histories, (3) people with disabilities, neurodivergent people, people with mental illnesses.

When those students whose experiences and histories are already underrepresented find their stories being further erased from public school libraries and school curricula through prejudicial book banning, this discrimination is extremely harmful. Erasing students' representation damages their potential for academic success as well as their self-esteem as they struggle to find relevance. Silencing and erasure coupled with the kind of bullying that BIPOC, queer, disabled, and neurodivergent students can and do experience in many schools, can increase their risk of self-harm, suicide, and falling victim to hate crimes. It is a fallacy that banning books serves to keep young people safe.

Having a robust diversity of books representing a diversity of communities is not just beneficial to marginalized groups. It is also good for *everyone* as reading about other people provides a window for us all to better understand the world, to know the history, and to gain empathy for people who are different from ourselves.

By voting yes on Senate Bill 1098, you will be protecting all of the students in our public schools, the whole story of our diverse communities, and every student's freedom to read the books that resonate and that spark their fascination with learning.

Thank you.

Lorene Forman