

Kiara Green  
House Committee on Education  
RE: Support for SB 1098

Hello and thank you Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the committee,

My name is Kiara Green from Multnomah County. I am writing to urge you to support SB 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 other people of color. topics or individuals and restrict access for students to understand the positive contributions of individuals of marginalized identities who have contributed to our society. This bill creates a statewide standard ensuring freedom of information both to users of that information, as well as providers of that information, for example librarians and educators. It also ensures students have access to accurate and representative information about their histories, communities and selves.

As a Black, Indigenous, queer, neurodiverse woman, I cannot stress enough why representation in school matters. As children we learn from exposure, so when we are in an environment where we don't see anyone that looks like us, has beliefs, or families like us, that creates a divide and leads us to question what is "normal". Taking away books or other media so that there's no opportunity for them to see themselves is a cruel injustice. No child, or anyone for that matter, should have to question whether or not their lived experience is as valid as others. To me, those that support censorship and the banning of books do not believe in or support equality or universal representation whatsoever. The elimination of representation will only drive further division among us all.

Book bans and censorship are deeply undemocratic and harmful because our democracy contains people of different beliefs, perspectives and backgrounds. The right to free speech – which is set out as the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution – is recognized as foundational to our democracy. Freedom of speech guarantees us the right to hear all sides of every issue and to make our own judgments without government interference or limitations. By creating safeguards around government censorship of books, magazines and newspapers, as well as art, film, music and materials on the internet, the right to free speech protects us from government attempts to suppress ideas and information.

Courts have said that the First Amendment protects not just the right to speak but the right to receive information. In other words, all of us, including young people, have a right to access a diverse range of stories and perspectives. The Supreme Court ruled in 1969 that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." This is true for other fundamental rights, as well. Furthermore, those of us with non-dominant identities have the right to hear stories and perspectives that reflect our experiences and communities. Representation matters.

Democracy is undermined when oppressive minority groups force their own preferences and judgments on communities by pressuring government entities to take books off library shelves and ideas out of public classrooms because the minority doesn't approve of its content. It also undermines our democracy when these groups pressure the government to censor the stories of people and communities who have been historically disenfranchised and marginalized. When books about historically-disenfranchised groups – including Black, Indigenous, and people of color and LGBTQ+ people – are banned in libraries and schools, this signals that discrimination, exclusion, and othering of youth and students with these identities is acceptable.

SB 1098 is a commonsense, values-based bill that will protect students in our state from discriminatory book bans and censorship in our public schools. This bill prohibits discriminatory censorship based on race, national origin, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, physical or mental disability, military status, or marital or family status.

All students deserve to see themselves represented in the books, materials and classrooms they learn from and to learn about diverse communities and people. Book bans are tactics used by small groups of extremists to erase and silence the voices, lived experiences, and histories of our most marginalized communities.

SB 1098 does not change any individual parent's or guardian's right to monitor or oversee what their own children read or view. It does protect the rights of ALL parents and guardians for their children to have access to diverse representation in materials and history taught in the school setting. SB 1098 protects student's right to see themselves represented in the books, materials and classrooms they learn from and to learn about diverse communities and people.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my story today. We urge you to vote YES to support and advance SB 1098.

Thank you,

Kiara Green