

Submitter:

Niyyah Ruscher-Haqq

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB1098

My name is Niyyah Ruscher-Haqq, and I am an author from Authors Against Book Bans, and I write to you in support of SB 1098. I am a hijabi mom of a multiracial, multigenerational, multilingual family, who has often not seen herself represented in books as a child. Now, as a parent of two children in Oregon public schools, I'm grateful they and their peers have more access to stories with kids that look like them, and more importantly, kids who do not look like them.

I reject the idea that my child reading a story outside of my values and belief system will fundamentally change who they are, and our attempts to raise critical thinkers will only be supplemented by our children having access to material from a variety of viewpoints.

Storytellers often reference the philosophy that stories are Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding glass doors - this is a metaphor for the ability of stories to do a number of things for us as readers. I can read a story where the main character has had similar struggles and successes as myself - *Amina's Voice* by Hena Khan was a book that spoke to me, as a young girl who was struggling with issues very similar to what I have as someone whose religious and cultural beliefs sometimes can be a struggle when in certain communities. An attack on our main character's masjid(mosque) hit very hard, especially because at the time I read that book, there was an attack on mine. Reading about her experience was a balm when I was having a hard time with feelings that a non-muslim might find hard to match. However, we would consider this story a window for a non-muslim reader. Perhaps that reader may be able to find empathy with Amina, and understand the impact that their Muslim community members might be experiencing.

If the reader cannot relate at all, they may have an experience like mine, which is more of a Sliding Glass door - *Heartstopper* by Alice Oseman is an example of a story where I walked through a Sliding Glass door into a world that was not mine, as I was never a gay male teen. But I can use my own empathy to understand what this character might have gone through when it is a well represented experience.

I am a strong believer that parents and caregivers are the ones who need to determine what their children should and should not read. There are absolutely books that are not on my shelves for my avid readers, and we have run into books where there were situations we had to have discussions about. Ultimately, it is my hope that this is helping them grow into Oregonians that will do the same.

We have data that reveals the disproportionate impact of book bans on communities of color, LGBTQ+ authors, and other minorities. We have the ability to prove that we value diversity of thought, a true melting pot where children can empathize and advocate for all storytellers.