

My name is Jaden Parker. I am a concerned resident of Eugene, OR. I passionately urge you to vote “YES” on SB1098. My own life outcomes were tremendously harmed by censorship in my childhood community. In the interest of brevity, I will not tell my personal story. I will instead present you with just a few of the myriad legal and moral justifications for a ‘yes’ vote:

In last year’s session, most of those opposed to a similar bill introduction, SB1583, stated worries over sexually-explicit content being present in schools, claiming the bill would prevent appropriate content monitoring. In fact, SB1098 retains the right of any entity to challenge individual materials which they find inappropriate. This has been allowed since before the time of SB1583. It would continue to be allowed after the passing of SB1098. Any individually challenged content is reviewed through a formal process by the OIFC, and removed if it is indeed inappropriate. Thus, passing SB1098 would continue to uphold the rights of concerned parents and educators who seek to remove ‘porn’ or other such content from schools, should it indeed be found to exist. Meanwhile, it would add much needed legislative counter-protections for marginalized students and parents whose identities are being repressed within largely homogenous and discriminatory localities.

SB1098 makes it clear that mere expressions of sexual and gender orientations are not, in and of themselves, sexually explicit content. It makes it clear to librarians, teachers, school administrators, and watchdog agencies that anti-DEI values, even if consistent with the values of a specific local majority, are not a constitutionally allowable justification for banning content in public schools. It prevents the discriminatory banning of materials that center the experiences of minority populations, when that content is no more explicit than many other materials which go unchallenged. Considering that 66% of challenges presented to the OIFC last year were about queer materials, it is clear that those initiating the challenges are attempting to use censorship in schools as a weapon to repress queer identities and to shame some of our most vulnerable kids. We must prevent this from happening.

Many national surveys completed over the past decade reveal that the majority of 2sLGBTQIA+ k-12 students already feel unwelcome or unsafe at school. National studies also illustrate how kids with non-dominant identities are disadvantaged as regards learning outcomes, particularly literacy. These trends continue, despite false claims from extremists that a DEI agenda is negatively influencing children with socially dominant identities while favoring minority children. Meanwhile, the 2020 LGBTQ2SIA+ Student Success Plan, a report published by the Oregon

Department of Education, found a key takeaway from their survey of Oregon students to be that “[c]urriculum, coursework, and afterschool activities are engaging when they are relevant to students’ interests and lived experiences.” Thus, limiting access to representative materials in schools directly harms educational outcomes for already disadvantaged students.

Moreover, by equating queerness or other protected identities with supposed “explicit sexuality,” it sends a harmful message to minority youth – many of whom are in no way sexually active yet anyway – that their very existence is ‘vulgar’ and taboo. SB1098 ensures that when books and instructional materials are challenged, they are only removed when actual inappropriate content can be identified. It ensures that they are not removed simply because they tell the stories of human beings whose realities are misunderstood or uncomfortable for certain groups of people with more power. It allows our most vulnerable children to continue to see themselves in, and share themselves through, books and instructional materials that validate and humanize their realities.

But this issue is about more than just self-esteem, social equity, and free speech rights. It’s also about safety. SB1098 ensures that more normative children have the opportunity to gain the invaluable social tools of critical thinking and empathy that can only come from being exposed to new, and sometimes challenging, ideas. There is no age at which a child is too young to respect another person’s existence. There is no age at which it should be deemed “age-inappropriate” to hear stories about other human beings, even if those stories feature people who differ from oneself. Perhaps the right book, or the right inspirational poster, could change the perspective of a would-be bully or school shooter, and be one small step towards mitigating the twin crises of bullying and mass violence that continue to increase in schools across the country. Without bills like SB1098, mass repression of critical populations remains viable in our state. And, repression inevitably leads to extremism. I think we can all agree, no matter what side we are on regarding personal values or lifestyle, that more extremism is the last thing we need.

Please help protect the rights and safety of Oregon kids and families by voting “yes” on SB1098.