

Submitter: Sarah Evans
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1098
Subject: A book can save a young person's life - please vote yes on SB 1098

Dear Members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Sarah Evans, and I live in Salem with my husband and two middle-school-aged sons. I am writing to urge you to please support SB 1098, which defends against censorship in schools and libraries, addresses harassment and threats against libraries and the profession, and applies parameters for book challenges.

I grew up in a small town in Texas, a place where racism was common and people who identified as LGBTQ+ were seemingly non-existent -- not because they didn't exist, but because they were too afraid to announce their identity publicly. Two of my personal friends, after moving to other places where they thought they would feel safer, ultimately came out as transgender. Unfortunately, one died by suicide a little over a year ago, despite having moved to Portland, Oregon, where she hoped to be more accepted.

What does this have to do with books? Well, young people who are still trying to understand their identities often turn to people and resources around them to help them know what's possible. Representation of different identities in the schools they attend, the people in their community, and the books they are able to read can go a long way toward helping them understand their feelings so that they know they are not alone or strange. Instead of feeling fear or shame, they can feel hope and acceptance. Have you ever read a book where you identified strongly with a character? Or a book where you felt more understanding of another point of view when you were finished?

People who challenge books in schools or libraries often claim it's for reasons related to religion, sexual content, or "appropriateness." The fact of the matter is that most challenged books highlight people of color, women, or LGBTQ+ characters. These challenges are really about people not wanting to believe that certain identities exist or should be known about. In actuality, LGBTQ+ people and those of intersecting identities DO exist, and it's time that we stop contributing to their erasure by allowing books about them to be banned.

When book challenges arise, librarians also suffer. They are often the front-line people who are attacked, harassed, and intimidated, simply for doing their jobs. We must support these librarians as well.

It's more important than ever that Oregon stop these challenges given the current state of the federal government, which is working hard and quickly to erase anyone of an identity that differs from white, cisgender, and able-bodied.

You never know when one book might mean the difference for a young person between feeling acceptance or wanting to end their life. My friend who died struggled for years while growing up because she never felt safe being herself. Additionally, I want my own children to have access to books about as many topics and identities as possible, so that they know that differences are normal and not something to be ashamed of.

Thank you for reading, and please support SB 1098.

Sarah Evans
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