

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

My name is Seth Johnstone, I work at Basic Rights Oregon, a long standing LGBTQIA2S+ policy and rights organization. I am here in support of SB1098 which defends against discriminatory censorship in schools and libraries, addresses harassment and threats against libraries and the profession, and applies parameters for book challenges increasing in our state.

In 2024, we saw 151 challenges to books in our state and 36 of the books reasons for the challenge were “includes LGBTQ content” which in the report is a separate and distinct category from “sex/nudity”, “unsuited for age group”, “substance use” etc. Please read the report:

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/140613>

Those opposing this bill have claimed to conflate those two categories together and I recommend looking at the actual challenges that have been reported. I also recommend considering how many of those challenges were never reported, actions like taking books off shelves or folks unaware of the requirement to report a book removal so that data is missing a large amount of actions taking place in the state. Book banning efforts are going to continue to isolate youth, rid them of their sense of belonging that Oregon has worked so hard to establish, and push them out of schools contributing to their economic hardships and reliance on the state for monetary support later in life. This law does not change the ability to challenge a book, but it creates parameters and makes sure the bans are not discriminatory against a protected class.

The voices of the LGBTQ+ community are diverse as we are not a monolith, and if our history and stories are never told, the consequences are real and damaging. LGBTQ+ youth without access to one affirming adult<sup>1</sup>, without inclusive curriculum experience while experiencing higher instances of

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<sup>1</sup> "Accepting Adults Reduce Suicide Attempts Among LGBTQ Youth" (2019) Trevor Project

bullying report higher percentages of feeling unsafe, which translates to more missed days and lower GPAs.

SB1098 is necessary because book challenges, bans, and harassment of librarians has been happening across our state in an unregulated manner per district for the last few years at an alarmingly increasing rate, targeting specifically books featuring LGBTQ+ and content or texts authors and about folks of color. In 2024, the most common complaints against books stated that they “included the presence of stories of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit, intersex, asexual, or other identities related to sexual orientation or gender identity” Or that they were books exploring themes of race and racism.” We must differentiate between the existence of LGBTQ+ people and negative or solely sexual associations. LGBTQ+ individuals are valid, exist at all ages, have always existed and will continue to exist and this is an actionable message to stop this discrimination. It is time to address these book bans, and the process statewide to clearly prohibit discrimination that has been taking place.

In the hearing, we heard from incredible parents trying to keep their LGBTQ+ children alive and safe, parents filled with the ferocity of love for their family who want their children to feel less alone, growing up in the current hostile climate. I worked at an LGBTQ youth center for 7 years and while I don't know what's it's like to lose a child of my own, I took care of so many youth who were rejected by their families for their sexual orientation or gender identity who were bullied causing low attendance at school, and some of whom I lost to suicide trying to cope with such a hostile social climate towards them who still drive the intention of my work today.

The bill also provides much-needed support for library professionals who have increasingly found themselves targets of harassment and defamation. In recent years, there has been a disturbing rise in attempts to intimidate and vilify librarians for simply doing their jobs. Librarians are being harassed for not pulling books from the shelf immediately, while are simply waiting for due

process to occur and a book review to take place by a reviewing committee. We've also seen little support from our state for schools without a librarian when book challenges happen.

This bill affirms and protects students' access to materials in school libraries, guarding against attempts to restrict access to books and information based on subjective personal beliefs. This bill emphasizes that anti-discrimination must be a core value in Oregon schools. It enhances this vision by protecting the rights of all individuals to access diverse materials. Parents still have the right to make decisions about what their individual child reads. Many other states have already passed bills that prohibit book bans in the state and I encourage Oregon to join.

I urge the committee to vote yes on SB1098 to move this bill forward as it will strengthen the rights of our students and support our librarians and those overseeing educational books and materials in our state.