

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 8, 2024

MEDIA CONTACT:

Christina Nguyen, ACLU of Oregon

media@aclu-or.org

Oregon State's House Leadership Ends Legislative Session Early Without Protecting Students' Right to Read and Learn Free From Discrimination

SALEM, Ore. — Yesterday, the state's House leadership – which was led by then Speaker Dan Rayfield – ended the 2024 legislative session several days early before the constitutionally required deadline of March 10, 2024. They did this **without** getting Senate Bill 1583 across the finish line, even though this bill had been passed by the state Senate, despite Republican tactics to delay the bill, and just needed to be passed by the House so the Governor could sign it into law.

With attempts to ban books by fringe extremist groups on the rise nationwide and in Oregon, SB 1583 would have affirmed the right of students to read and learn in Oregon's public schools free from discriminatory book bans and censorship. The protections in this bill are consistent with students' First Amendment rights recognized by the courts. The failure to pass SB 1583 – a commonsense, simple bill that is aligned with the values of the majority of Oregon's voters and parents – sends a harmful message that state lawmakers tolerate hateful, discriminatory book bans in our public schools and libraries.

- “Oregon's House leadership – which, at its highest level, consisted of then Speaker Dan Rayfield – knowingly failed students, teachers and librarians in Oregon by ending the legislative session early and leaving SB 1583 on the floor before it could be passed by the House. The House fell for the delay tactics of Republican opposition to this bill, ultimately failing to prioritize the needs of students, teachers, and librarians across our state. They sent the message that they were unwilling to do a few more days of work to make our public schools and libraries more inclusive, safe and enriching for students of all backgrounds and identities. The ACLU of Oregon, however, will remain vigilant and continue doing the hard and necessary work of protecting students' right to read and learn free of discriminatory censorship,” says Sandy Chung, Executive Director of the ACLU of Oregon.
- “Our children thrive when they see themselves reflected and celebrated in their books and curriculum. SB 1583 is a vital safeguard against practices of

exclusion, one that demonstrates Oregon's commitment to nurturing a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for our kids. We will continue to work with our partners and allies to protect students' right to read, to learn, and to belong with the freedom to share ideas free of discriminatory censorship," says Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director of Our Children Oregon.

- "We create a better world when young people can learn freely. Ending discriminatory book bans would have validated what we already know to be true: the histories of Black, Indigenous, brown, and LGBTQ2SIA+ communities are not illegal, nor are they extracurricular. They are vibrant, valid, and an important part of our collective knowledge. We are deeply disappointed that this common sense bill to fortify the civil rights of young people was not prioritized before the end of session. Despite this, Next Up Action Fund will continue to fight for young people's right to know and access the richness, depth, and diversity of their communities' past so they can have hope for the future," says Elona Wilson, Executive Director of Next Up Action Fund.
- "Rural Organizing Project is disappointed by lawmakers not recognizing a pattern of attacks on libraries and public schools across rural Oregon. This failure to address anti-democratic efforts to ban books and censor inclusive curriculum is a setback after real improvements in recent years to our school curriculum standards and to the range of resources that our libraries offer, particularly when it comes to the diverse experiences of people of color and queer people. Rural Oregonians across the state will continue to fight to protect our democratic right to be well-informed and well-educated so that all students can have safe and welcoming schools," says Sidra Pierson, Organizer with the Rural Organizing Project.
- "The rejection of SB 1583 casts a shadow on the potential for fostering open-mindedness and understanding within our communities. This missed opportunity not only stifles intellectual curiosity but also poses a threat to the formation of inclusive and empathetic communities. Without the legal safeguards provided by SB 1583, immigrant, refugee, and communities of color face an uphill battle in preserving their stories, traditions, and contributions within the educational landscape. In the face of adversity, the fight continues for a society that not only values the unrestricted pursuit of knowledge but also actively promotes the celebration and preservation of the rich tapestry of cultural experiences within our communities," says Khanh Le, Executive Director of Unite Oregon.