

February 9, 2026

Greetings,

I submit this testimony in strong support of SB 1572 (2026).

Although my career was in the law, my volunteer work has centered on tutoring high-school students and adults in reading, writing, math, ESOL, and other subjects. Time and time again, I have worked with students who have made it to high school or beyond, but who still struggle with reading comprehension, writing a coherent paragraph or essay, and basic math (e.g., not knowing what a fraction, say 1/3, represents in real life). It is apparent to me that these students have been passed from one grade to another without having absorbed the foundational lessons they need to really *learn* what comes next. Instead, these students have figured out how to pass classes by echoing what their teachers say (without understanding it), copying-and-pasting from the internet (often without comprehending what they're copying), and doing the minimum amount of rote memorization that allows them to get by.

We do these students a huge disservice by allowing them to graduate from high school without the skills they will need to flourish in the workplace and to be informed members of society.

One important step in educating our children better and giving them the tools they will need to succeed is making sure that they can read at a young age. That is what Section 16 of this bill does. Although I support the entire bill, I believe that Section 16 is critically important. I urge you to read today's piece in the New York Times by Oregon's own Nicholas Kristof, titled "These Three Red States Are the Best Hope in Schooling," which I have tried to link here:

https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/09/opinion/red-states-good-schools.html?unlocked_article_code=1.K1A.7EzA.G_9bBHRr2Fl8&smid=url-share

As Mr. Kristof writes, other states have engaged in strategies – which include insisting that children be able to read by the end of third grade – that have significantly improved outcomes:

"[H]ope [in education] emerges in the most unlikely of places: three states here in the Deep South that long represented America's educational basement. These states — Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi — have histories of child poverty, racism and dismal educational outcomes, and they continue to spend less than most other states on public schools.

"Yet, consider:

- Louisiana ranks No. 1 in the country in recovery from pandemic losses in reading, while Alabama ranks No. 1 in math recovery.
- The state with the lowest chronic absenteeism in schools is Alabama, according to a tracker with data from 40 states.
- Once an educational laughingstock, Mississippi now ranks ninth in the country in fourth-grade reading levels — and after adjusting for demographics such as poverty and race, Mississippi ranks No. 1, while Louisiana ranks No. 2, according

to calculations by the Urban Institute. Using the same demographic adjustment, Mississippi also ranks No. 1 in America in both fourth-grade and eighth-grade math.

- Black fourth graders in Mississippi are on average better readers than those in Massachusetts, which is often thought to have the best public school system in the country (and one that spends twice as much per pupil)."

We have much to learn from those states, and we should adopt similar strategies – particularly emphasizing the need for students to master reading by the end of third grade – here.

Mr. Kristof concludes:

"We liberals need to wake up to the reality that we are being outperformed on education, opportunity and racial equity – supposedly our issues. As recently as 2019, blue states had better average test scores than red states, after adjusting for demographics; now, red states are mostly ahead. We used to say that education was the civil rights issue of the 21st century, and if so, we should be ashamed that by that metric, Mississippi Republicans are ahead of California Democrats. If we care about kids, we must be relentlessly empirical, and that must mean a willingness to learn from red states."

I agree with that sentiment, and I ask you to read the entirety of Mr. Kristof's compelling opinion piece.

I strongly support the bill.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments.

Respectfully,

Erika Hadlock