



**Testimony of Tobias Read, Oregon Secretary of State
In Support of SB 1581
Senate Committee on Education
February 3rd, 2026**

Chair Frederick and Members of the Committee,

I'm submitting testimony in support of SB 1581, which moves Oregon toward a straightforward promise for students and families: if a child shows up ready to learn, we will make sure hunger is not the barrier that holds them back.

Even when families are working hard, hunger remains a daily reality for too many households with children. Nationally, USDA estimates 17.9% of households with children experienced food insecurity in 2023.¹ In Oregon, Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap estimated that 14.2%². Hunger presents not just a hardship at home; it's a direct challenge to classroom success.

The evidence is clear that when students don't have reliable access to nutritious food, academic outcomes suffer. Food insecurity is linked to lower attendance rates and chronic absenteeism, which then compound learning loss over time. Food insecurity also reduces a child's classroom attention, persistence, and engagement. Importantly, a child who is provided a healthy breakfast is more likely to experience academic achievement.

SB 1581 takes a proven practical step – it helps make both breakfast and lunch a consistent part of the school day for all students. It reduces stigma, simplifies access to health food options for all families, and gives educators one less classroom barrier to overcome. Furthermore, when meals are predictable and available to everyone, schools are required to spend less time determining who qualifies and more time serving kids.

From the perspective of the Secretary of State's Office, student success is not a secondary issue. In fact, Secretary Read serves as an Ex Officio Board Member on the Oregon Board of Education. Student success is foundational to Oregon's long-term civic and economic health. Students who are supported are more likely to meet graduation requirements, pursue post-secondary education, and become engaged community members. Oregon's largest general fund expenditure is K12 instruction, which means that this legislation represents a common-sense way to achieve greater returns for Oregon's families, students, and taxpayers. We cannot build a strong democracy if our future leaders are not set up for success early on.

SB 1581 is a sound investment for the future of our state and those that will lead it. I urge your support.

¹ Food Security in the U.S. - Key Statistics & Graphics from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/>

² <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/oregon>