



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 02/13/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 1234 RELATING TO WATER SAFETY.

Purpose of Bill: Requires, and appropriates funds for, the Department of Education to establish a standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of HB 1234, and respectfully offers comments.

In recognition of the importance of water safety, the Department has required for three years, all elementary schools to provide water safety education for at least one grade level of students in any of grades K-5. Schools may select the grade level and program most suitable for implementation based on their students and community.

Nā Kama Kai, a non-profit partner that supports ocean activities for Hawai'i's youth, has developed ocean safety videos, activity books, coloring books, and an animated video series teaching ocean safety and stewardship principles. These resources describe how students can be safe in the ocean and provide information about Hawaiian cultural values related to the sea and stewardship. The Department has provided and distributed sufficient printed color copies of the Nā Kama Kai Activity Book to all Department elementary schools based on Department fourth-grade student enrollment numbers to ease implementation at schools and support water safety efforts.

Additionally, The Department is currently partnering with a community organization to implement a pilot with elementary schools within walking distance to a pool, very similar to the model described in this bill. Upon completion of this pilot in the spring, the Department is expecting a report to assess benefits and challenges to inform any future actions.

The Department respectfully recommends not starting another pilot which may be duplicative at this time but instead to wait for the report from the current pilot.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D
Mayor



Clayton Honma
Director

Melissa Samura
Deputy Director

County of Hawai'i

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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Testimony in support of SB 1223 and HB 1234

DOE Standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program

Aloha Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am submitting testimony in strong support of establishing a DOE standards-based Water Safety Education program and offering the County of Hawai'i as a location to pilot this initiative.

Drownings are preventable, and it is critical that we take action to equip our keiki with essential water safety and swimming skills. Currently, drowning is the leading cause of death for Hawai'i's keiki under 15, and less than 2% of second graders possess the basic skills necessary to avoid or recover from drowning. These statistics are unacceptable, and we must act now to implement meaningful change. With a coordinated effort, we can proactively save lives across our state.

As a water safety professional, I see firsthand the urgent need for expanded swim instruction. Our County of Hawai'i has been actively collaborating with schools to provide swim lessons during school hours. Through these partnerships, our lifeguards have been engaging students both in the classroom and in the pool- without impacting our budget or existing programming.

This initiative has the full support of our County of Hawai'i administration, and our lifeguards are eager to continue expanding access to water safety education. The positive impact is already evident: more children are becoming water competent, and our community is safer as a result.

Preventing drownings requires a collective commitment. Our County of Hawai'i Aquatic Section has made water competency a top priority because we firmly believe that public safety is a true public service. I urge you to support this critical program and help us build a safer future for Hawai'i's keiki.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,
Alejandra Flores-Morikami
Aquatic Recreation Specialist

County of Hawai'i
Department of Parks and Recreation
Recreation Division Aquatics Section
Contact Information: 808.961.8694 Aquatics@hawaiicounty.gov



Written Testimony in Support of HB1234 Relating to Water Safety

Lisa Dau, RN, MBA, BSN, CPSTI

Injury Prevention Coordinator, Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition

February 13, 2025

Chair Rep. Justin Woodson, Vice Chair Rep. Trish La Chica, and members of the Committee on Education

Chair Rep. Greggor Ilagan, Vice Chair Rep. Ikaika Hussey, and members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology

My name is Lisa Dau, and I represent the Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition (KIPC) submitting testimony in strong support of HB1234, which mandates and funds the Department of Education to establish a standards-based water safety education pilot program. This initiative is essential to ensuring the safety and well-being of our students by equipping them with essential water safety knowledge and skills.

Drowning continues to be one of the leading causes of unintentional injury-related deaths among children, especially in Hawaii (2nd in the Nation behind Alaska). Many young students do not receive formal instruction in water safety, which makes them vulnerable to drowning. A structured educational approach can greatly reduce drowning risks by teaching key safety principles, raising awareness of potential hazards, and developing essential swimming skills.

A comprehensive, standards-based curriculum ensures that all students receive consistent and age-appropriate water safety education.

Investing in water safety education can lead to long-term cost savings by reducing emergency medical expenses and resources associated with drowning incidents. The appropriation of funds will support curriculum development, teacher training, and facility access, ensuring equitable implementation across participating schools.

I urge the committee to pass HB1234 to protect our students and foster a culture of water safety awareness. By implementing this pilot program, we take a significant step toward preventing tragedies and empowering future generations with lifesaving skills.

Thank you,
Lisa Dau, RN, MBA, BSN, CPSTI

The Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition's (KIPC) mission is to prevent and reduce injuries to children in Hawaii. <https://kipchawaii.org/>



January 11, 2025
Hawai'i State House of Representatives
Committee on Education

Dear Chair Woodson and committee members,

I am writing on behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association (HLA) to express our support for House Bill 1234 relating to water safety education. We believe that this bill is a significant step towards enhancing water safety education and drowning prevention in our community. However, we would like to propose three amendments to further strengthen the bill.

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Firstly, we suggest that the scope of the bill be expanded to include in-classroom instruction, similar to the very successful program currently being conducted on Hawai'i Island by the Alex and Duke Dereggo Foundation. This program has proven that classroom education can be effective when pool or beach access is not available. This addition would complement the water-based swim lessons already included in the bill and provide a more comprehensive approach to water safety education. It is time to stop letting the lack of pool/beach access limit keiki water safety education.

Secondly, we recommend that the schedule and reporting dates mentioned in the bill be reviewed. As it stands, there is a requirement to report back to the legislature prior to the beginning of the 2026 session. This timeline would require the Department of Education (DOE) to develop and activate a program between September 2025 and December 2025. We believe that a more extended period is necessary to effectively implement a high-quality program.

Finally, we recommend that the bill incorporate provisions for both pre- and post-instruction skills assessments. This would yield valuable proof-of-concept data.

We appreciate your consideration of these amendments and look forward to the positive impact that House Bill 1234 will have on our community. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Hermstad
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

Hawaiian Lifeguard Association
P.O. Box 844
Kapa'a, Hawaii 96746
Tax Id 99-0308213
hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org

The mission of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association (HLA) is to contribute to and advocate for the professional advancement of lifeguards in the State of Hawaii by supporting their efforts to reduce the incidence of drownings and aquatic injuries.

It accomplishes this by: Establishing and maintaining the highest standards of professional surf and open water lifesaving to maximize public safety in Hawaiian aquatic environments. Developing, supporting, and participating in programs that address drowning and aquatic injury prevention strategies. **Serving as a primary resource for aquatic safety education in the State of Hawaii.** Raising funds for water safety programs through available grants and sponsorship agreements. Continuing to actively support the Statewide Junior Lifeguard Program by providing funding for standardized curriculum development, instructor recruitment and training, uniforms and equipment, awards, and travel expenses. Actively supporting the improvement of lifesaving and humanitarian causes, locally, nationally (USLA), and internationally (ILS).

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 8:58:30 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessamy Town Hornor	Hawaii Water Safety Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and members of the Committee,

As co-founder of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition and a longtime bereaved family advocate for water safety I am writing in strong support of HB 1234 to establish a DOE Standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program. I am also currently a public health educator in drowning and aquatic injury prevention at DOH EMSIPSB but am not testifying on behalf of DOH.

This bill is a critical step towards making generational, statewide change in teaching our keiki the lifesaving, lifetime skills of water safety competencies. As outlined in the newly published Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan and in the US National Water Safety Action Plan, in-school water safety lessons are most equitable way to reach the most students. In-school lessons are also the most effective way to reach Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students who have a higher rate of drowning. While after school lessons and clinics are important, this solution has proven to be ineffective as a scalable solution. Most families cannot afford lessons and the logistics are a barrier to many families. Less than 2% of our second graders have the skills to avoid or recover from drowning, and drowning is the leading cause of death for our keiki ages 1-15. This data is not inevitable, in fact it is a result of not prioritizing drowning prevention in our state for many, many years. However, the tide is turning. State leadership and the community stepped forward to support water safety with the establishment of Hawai‘i Water Safety Awareness Day in 2024 and with the publication of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan this year. HB1234 to establish a DOE Standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program is a reasonable and critical step towards developing a long-term, scalable solution by creating a mechanism for working out any challenges. We have local and national experts and successful models in other states that we can resource from. And as an island-state with an education system that embraces Native Hawaiian values in the Ha Framework, Hawai‘i can and should also be a leader in supporting water safety education. This bill supports a pathway forward for our keiki to grow up with the skills needed to safely access wai and kai.

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 10:32:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ROBERT J FINLEY	Waikiki Neighborhood Board	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha and thank you for the opportunity to support this very worthy bill.

At the February 11th meeting of the Waikiki Neighborhood Board the vote was unanimous in favor of the concept of this bill that could save the lives of our residents and children in particular. Statistics show that Hawaii rates a terrible #2 in the nation for child drowning death and this bill could reduce the number of children loss to drowning.

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 1:19:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Fairchild	Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I'm writing in support of HB 1234 to establish a DOE Standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program leading to a system-wide program to teach water safety and competency in our public schools

According to Department of Health data, drowning is the leading cause of death for Hawaii's keiki ages 1-15. Drownings are preventable with knowledge and skills. With Hawaii's prominent waterman culture and history, we have the communal knowledge to master the ocean, but we clearly aren't passing this down to all of our keiki. At the least, all kids in our island state should have the opportunity to learn the 15 cognitive and physical skills to save themselves if they should fall into a body of water. This will take a partnership between the Department of Education, qualified non-profits, and the County Department of Parks who operate most of our public pools, but it can be done.

LATE



February 12, 2025

Hawaii State House of Representatives
Committee on Education

Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill 1234 with Amendments – Relating to Water Safety Education

Dear Chair Woodson and Committee Members,

My name is Shirley De Rego and I am the President of the **Alex & Duke De Rego Foundation**. I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 1234, which aims to enhance water safety education and drowning prevention across our state. As an organization dedicated to preventing water-related tragedies through education, we believe this bill is a crucial step toward equipping Hawai'i's keiki with essential water safety skills. However, we respectfully propose three amendments to further strengthen its impact.

1. **Expand the Scope to Include In-Classroom Instruction** – While the bill currently emphasizes water-based swim lessons, we urge the committee to include **in-classroom water safety instruction** as a key component. Our foundation has successfully implemented such a program on Hawai'i Island, demonstrating that classroom-based education can be highly effective, especially when access to pools or beaches is limited. This addition would ensure that all keiki, regardless of location, receive fundamental water safety knowledge.
2. **Adjust Implementation Timeline for Program Development** – The bill's current requirement to report back to the legislature before the 2026 session would necessitate program development between September and December 2025. We believe that extending this timeline would allow the Department of Education (DOE) to **properly design and implement a high-quality, sustainable program**. Adjusting the timeline would ensure thorough planning, training, and execution.
3. **Include Pre- and Post-Instruction Skills Assessments** – To measure the effectiveness of the program and provide valuable data for future improvements, we recommend incorporating **standardized pre- and post-instruction skills assessments**. This would allow for measurable proof of concept and ensure that students are gaining tangible water safety skills.

The Alex & Duke De Rego Foundation is committed to ensuring that no family endures the heartbreak of losing a child to drowning. Expanding water safety education in schools is an



essential step toward that goal. We deeply appreciate your time and consideration of these proposed amendments and look forward to supporting this effort in any way we can.

Mahalo for your leadership and commitment to keeping Hawai'i's keiki safe.

Sincerely,



Shirley De Rego
Alex & Duke De Rego Foundation

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 12:45:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allison Schaefer	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and members:

I am writing in strong support of HB1234 which relates to establishing a standards-based water safety education pilot program within the Department of Education to include a survey to get data on the results so that there is a mechanism to scale-up in-school swimming lessons.

The Hawaii Water Safety Coalition on Thursday released the first Hawaii Water Safety Plan countering Hawai'i's drowning crisis by ensuring that everyone is safe on, in, and around the water. The coalition, under the umbrella of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, called on water safety stakeholders across the state, including bereaved parents, to help HWSC identify the state's most urgent drowning prevention recommendations.

Key drowning statistics from the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan, include:

1. Drowning is the number one cause of death for children in Hawai'i, ages 1–15.
2. Hawai'i's resident drowning rate is the second highest in the nation behind Alaska.
3. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are about 27% of Hawai'i's population yet make up 36% of resident drowning deaths.
4. Less than 2% of Hawai'i's second graders have the basic skills to avoid or recover from drowning.
5. Drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death for our visitors.

While the plan includes big recommendations, one of the most important to countering our shortcomings when it comes to water safety is making sure that swimming lessons are available to all of our children. Up until 1987, the DOE had legislative funding and offered a fairly robust program. That is no longer the case, and our dismal drowning numbers likely reflect our children's lack of access to swimming lessons.

Hawaii has some of the best watermen and waterwomen in the world, but these skills are not getting passed down in the current climate where many parents are working two and three jobs and have neither the time nor the money to get their children to lessons, which are often expensive. Drowning across the world is increasingly an equity issue and it is in Hawaii as well. For instance, there is not a single public swimming pool on Oahu's West Side, where many of our Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander families live.

My five-year-old daughter Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer drowned on Feb. 28, 2004 saving a childhood friend, who could not swim who was struggling in an improperly flooded detention pond. While Sharkey had taken swimming classes, her friend did not know how to swim. While the poorly maintained detention pond was not a normal water environment, her friend's lack of swimming skills and his struggles made the environment even more dangerous for my daughter.

I understand that the DOE is working on setting up a \$100,000 contract with Palama Settlement for swimming school and safety education, which will cover one school quarter and reach approximately 200 students. It’s a great one-time effort for 200 students, but it barely scratches the surface of the need of the thousands of second grade students in Hawaii. The biggest difference between this program and the pilot proposed in the bill is that the bill requires feedback that would go to legislators rather than just the DOE so that together we can find a scalable, equitable solution that reaches far more than just 200 students. Our kids deserve more. Let’s give them the tools that they need to be safe in, on and around the water in our island state.

Sincerely,

Allison Schaefer

Hawaii Water Safety Coalition, bereaved parent volunteer

allisonschaefer@gmail.com

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 12:58:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Coel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As a concerned parent of 2 children, a surfer and swimmer, a pediatric physician, and a founding member and physician champion of the Hawaii Water Safety Coalition, I am asking you to vote in favor of funding for water safety programs in our state via HB 1234. Less than 2% of Hawaii's second graders have the basic aquatic skills necessary to keep them safe in and around water. Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii's keiki ages 1-15 years. It is imperative that we pass HB1234 to start the education early and for all keiki in Hawaii, no matter their school, city, or financial status.

Please vote to support Hawaii's Water Safety Education Pilot Program by voting yes to HB1234.

[Hawaii HB1234 requires and appropriates funds for the Department of Education to establish a standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program. The program aims to expand access to swimming lessons and water safety education to protect Hawaii's youth and reduce drowning incidents statewide.](#)

Mahalo,

Rachel Coel, MD, PhD

Kailua, Hawaii

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 8:43:04 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Xiao	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I suport this bill.

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 8:05:28 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Denise Boisvert	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY SUPPORT this bill. Please pass it.

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 8:14:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kim Jorgensen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this bill.

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 8:36:34 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah McKay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

For the safety of all children, water safety should be part of the school curriculum. Our job as stewards of this island is to know and take appropriate and safe water precautions. This will help the children, our Ocean Safety team, and our community.

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 10:42:12 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dan Worden	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Dan Worden, and I am writing in full support of HB1234, and creating a Standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program.

Drowning is a leading cause of death among children, and the best way to reach the broadest number of children is to provide quality aquatic safety education during school hours. Various factors limit the effectiveness of current extracurricular options, such as a focus on learn-to-swim vs safety skills, the cost of enrollment in such programs, the ability for parents to have the time and transportation to take their children to programs, and an unwillingness to opt for such safety education due to either an overconfidence in the protective nature of swim skill ability, or due to a desire to avoid/fear of aquatic environments. A program that is delivered during scholarly hours must align with health education and physical education standards and current school wellness objectives in order to ensure effective use of school time.

Injury prevention researchers studied thousands of drowning incidents and have identified 15 aquatic safety competencies. These competencies can be generally thought of as simply the reasons people drown, but more accurately they are areas of skill development that play a role in avoiding or recovering from hazardous aquatic situations. Importantly, these competencies are more than just physical skills. Quality aquatic safety education needs to address each of these competencies in order to best provide the knowledge, skills, and experiences that will help individuals stay safe in, on, and around aquatic environments.

The goal of reducing drownings in the State of Hawaii is no small undertaking, and it will not happen overnight. When deciding how to proceed with this bill, please consider both the short term impacts, an immediate opportunity to teach children skills that can save a life, as well as the long term impacts; funding for a pilot program is the necessary first step to address barriers associated with equitably providing vital safety education to the children of Hawaii.

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 1:00:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Myriam Saboui	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Dear Chair Woodson , Vice Chair La Chica and members of the committee

I support HB1234. As a parent who proactively tries to register their child into swimming lessons offered by the city of Honolulu, I would like to share my experience. On registration day, I am logged into my Honolulu online portal account fifteen minutes prior to the start of the 5pm registration. I even take time off work to make sure I don't miss my chance at a spot for my child. I say chance because the spots fill up within seconds, with the online platform often crashing quickly after the start of registration. I am often rewarded for my efforts by receiving a spot on the waitlist. I have seen the waitlist as long as 30 people waiting for a 1 in 5 spot to get their child into a given swimming lesson class. I started to wonder how big the gap might be between the offer and the demand. Based on the latest census data for Hawai'i the population for kids aged 5-14 years is 167 895 people. In contrast, the Spring 2025 learn to swim program through the city of Honolulu is offering a total of approximately 19 classes with approximately 5 spots each (total of 95 spots) for children aged 5-12 years. This represents less than 1% of the population for that age group. Swimming is the only sport that saves lives. Swimming is a life skill. I urge you to consider supporting this bill which will not only save lives but make water safety education accessible in an equitable way to all children in Hawai'i.

HB-1234

Submitted on: 2/12/2025 1:02:06 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/13/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charlie Field	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

A water safety and swim curriculum would be a major benefit for the children of Hawaii. Providing access to such programs through the DOE would make it accessible to all.