



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 288, RELATING TO SCHOOL BUS SERVICES.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Tuesday, February 11, 2025 **TIME:** 2:01 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 309

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi or Randall M. Wat, Deputy Attorneys General

Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

The bill authorizes the Department of Education (DOE) to use alternative vehicles for student transportation under certain conditions; appropriates funds for the purchase of alternative vehicles and to incentivize individuals to obtain commercial drivers licenses; and authorizes the DOE to create a staggered school start time program (Program) to mitigate the school bus driver shortage.

The Program is described in section 4 of the bill (page 8, line 19, through page 9, line 5). The Department is concerned that, as written, inclusion of the Program in the bill may violate the Hawai'i Constitution. Section 14 of article III of the Hawai'i Constitution provides, in relevant part, that "[n]o law shall be passed except by bill. Each law shall embrace but one subject, which shall be expressed in its title." The one subject expressed in the bill's title is "School Bus Services." However, the Program is set forth in a new statutory section entitled, "Staggered school start time program." Page 9, line 1. The Department further notes that, unless the school attendance period is shortened, the end time for the school day should be staggered, as well. To make clear that the Program is related to the bill's subject, "School Bus Services," and to provide the DOE with the ability to stagger end times appropriately, the Department

suggests replacing new section 302A-___, Hawaii Revised Statutes, on page 9, lines 1-5, with the following:

**"§302A- ~~[Staggered]~~ School bus services; staggered school
[start time] hours program. The department ~~[of education]~~ may
institute a staggered school [start time] hours program in the [state]
public ~~[school system]~~ schools to ~~[mitigate the school bus driver~~
~~shortage to accommodate the 2025-2026 school year]~~ obtain
available school bus services."**

(Suggested changes Ramseyered against the wording in the bill and in bold.)

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



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

Date: 02/11/2025

Time: 02:01 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0288 RELATING TO SCHOOL BUS SERVICES.

Purpose of Bill: Authorizes the Department of Education to use alternative vehicles for student transportation under certain conditions and appropriates funds for the purchase of alternative vehicles and individuals to obtain CDL licensure. Allows Department schools to initiate staggered start times. Appropriates funds.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on HB 288.

While the school bus remains one of the safest transportation options for students, the Department recognizes that alternative vehicles, such as motorcoaches and small vans, offer flexibility for home-to-school transportation. These alternatives are being considered nationally, with state oversight to ensure safety requirements and proper implementation.

With regard to the proposal for staggered school start times, the Department acknowledges that this initiative could help maximize the efficient use of available resources. However, for this approach to be fully successful, it would require the collaborative effort and support of various stakeholders, including unions and neighborhood boards.

Alternatives, such as staggered school start times, represent promising potential solutions. The Department remains dedicated to exploring a wide range of strategies to improve access to education and will continue working closely with all stakeholders to develop sustainable, effective solutions.

The Department is grateful for the opportunity to comment on HB 288.



HOUSE BILL 288, RELATING TO SCHOOL BUS SERVICES

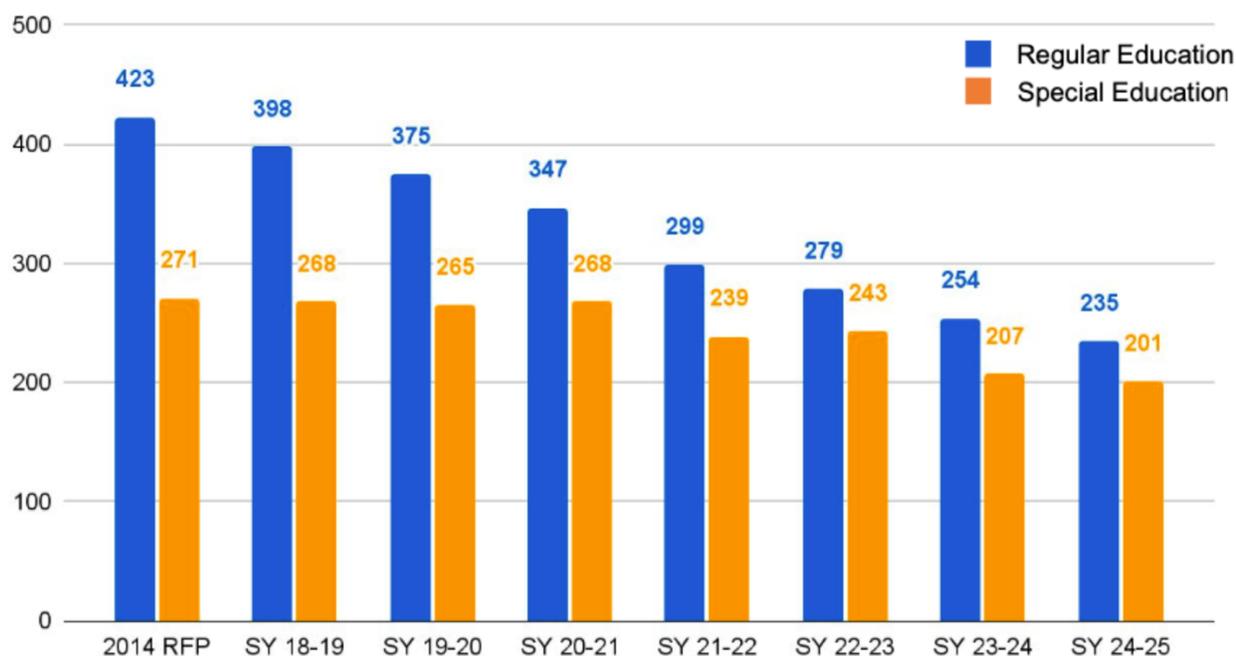
FEBRUARY 11, 2025 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 288, relating to school bus services, which authorizes the Department of Education to use alternative vehicles for student transportation under certain conditions and appropriates funds for the purchase of alternative vehicles and individuals to obtain CDL licensure; and allows department schools to initiate staggered start times.

School bus service is essential for getting students to and from school, particularly for students who lack other transportation options or face hardship in obtaining school transportation services due to economic difficulty. Yet, chronic bus driver shortages have led to the cancellation or consolidation of many school bus routes, especially in West O'ahu and in rural and remote areas of the neighbor islands, reducing transportation options for local families.

Over the last ten years, the number of bus drivers serving DOE students has fallen from 423 serving general education students and 271 drivers serving special education students in 2014 to just 235 drivers serving general education students and 201 serving special education students for the 2024-2025 school year.



This decline has led to dramatic service disruptions, the most recent of which occurred in August of last year when department officials unexpectedly announced that they were temporarily suspending 108 bus routes serving middle and high school students in central O’ahu and students of nearly all grade levels on the southern and eastern portions of Hawai’i Island.

Similarly, in July of 2023, the department cancelled or suspended school bus service for fourteen schools statewide, which impacted nearly 1,400 students across O’ahu and Kaua’i. The bus driver shortage has severely impacted Hawai’i Island school communities, where county bus services do not operate as frequently as on O’ahu and where many students face commutes that can exceed one and a half hours each way.

A lack of adequate school bus transportation service exacerbates chronic absenteeism. Rates of chronic absenteeism are highest in rural, remote, and socioeconomically disadvantaged school communities. In the 2022-2023 school year, 30 percent of Hawai’i students were chronically absent from school, meaning they missed fifteen or more days of class. That was a significant jump from two years before, when only 18 percent of students were counted as

chronically absent, and far exceeds the national average of only 10 percent. Numerous studies show that chronic absenteeism hampers student achievement and lowers graduation rates.

Governor Josh Green announced an emergency proclamation related to the school bus shortage on August 17, 2023, which allows the department of transportation to grant exemptions for the use of vehicles other than school buses to transport students and allows commercial driver's license holders with a "P" endorsement for driving passenger vehicles to operate student transportation vehicles. The order allows for alternative vehicles—such as vans and minibuses—to transport students in impacted communities.

The emergency proclamation also allows for the temporary use of tour buses to transport regular education students, a solution that has enabled school bus contractor Ground Transport Inc. to subcontract with such providers as Polynesian Adventure Tours for student transportation. Furthermore, the proclamation provides critical flexibility with procurement rules, allowing the department to contract directly with additional providers, like Roberts Hawai'i, to supply buses and drivers in shortage areas throughout the islands.

More needs to be done, however, to sustain critical bus service programs for Hawai'i's public school students and their 'ohana.

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
House Committee on Education

From: Chevelle Davis, MPH - Director of Early Childhood & Health Policy
Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!

Subject: Measure H.B. No. 288 – Relating to School Bus Services

Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 2:01 PM, Conference Room 309

POSITION: STRONG SUPPORT

Aloha e Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the committee:

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT of H.B. No. 288**, which authorizes the Department of Education (DOE) to utilize alternative vehicles for student transportation under certain conditions, appropriates funds for the purchase of alternative vehicles and CDL licensure, and allows Department schools to implement staggered start times.

Access to safe and reliable transportation is critical for ensuring students can attend school consistently and on time. However, Hawai'i's current student transportation system faces significant challenges, including a shortage of certified bus drivers, limited availability of buses, and rising costs. These barriers disproportionately affect students in rural and underserved communities, limiting their access to education and extracurricular activities.

Supporting Alternative Vehicles for Student Transportation

Allowing the DOE to utilize alternative vehicles, such as vans and smaller shuttle buses, provides a flexible and cost-effective solution to the transportation crisis. Alternative vehicles can help bridge transportation gaps, particularly for students in geographically isolated areas where traditional bus routes are not feasible. Ensuring compliance with safety regulations and best practices will be crucial in maintaining student safety while expanding transportation options.

Investing in CDL Licensure and Workforce Development

The ongoing shortage of licensed school bus drivers has exacerbated transportation difficulties across the state. By appropriating funds to support individuals in obtaining Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDLs), this bill will help recruit and retain qualified drivers, reducing disruptions in student transportation services. Investing in workforce development not only addresses the immediate driver shortage but also creates job opportunities and economic benefits for local communities.

Implementing Staggered Start Times

Allowing schools to adopt staggered start times is a practical strategy to optimize transportation resources and improve student well-being. Research indicates that staggered school start times can reduce morning congestion, improve efficiency in bus scheduling, and align better with adolescent sleep patterns, thereby enhancing student health and academic performance.

H.B. No. 288 is a forward-thinking measure that addresses critical transportation challenges in Hawai'i's public school system. By authorizing alternative vehicles, funding CDL licensure, and permitting staggered start times, this bill will help ensure that all students—regardless of geographic location—have equitable access to safe, timely, and efficient transportation.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to pass **H.B. No. 288**. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this critical measure.



Testimony in Support for HB288 - Relating to School Bus Services
House Committee on Education (EDN)
February 11, 2025 at 2PM

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to express **SUPPORT for HB288** which authorizes usage of certain types of vehicles, like motorcoaches, small buses, and vans, to transport students when there are not enough school buses available, provided that safety standards and other criteria are met. The measure would authorize the Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) to create a staggered school start time program to mitigate the school bus driver shortage.

The DOE has been grappling with a critical shortage of school bus drivers since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to significant disruptions in transportation services across the state. Despite efforts such as offering signing bonuses, hosting job fairs, and introducing more flexible schedules, the shortage has persisted. By August 2024, nearly 3,720 public school students were left without transportation due to the suspension of 108 bus routes in Central O'ahu and East Hawai'i Island.¹

In response, the Governor of Hawai'i issued his first Emergency Proclamation on School Bus Services in August 2024, allowing the use of other vehicles (such as motorcoaches, small buses, and vans) with commercial drivers to fill the gap in school bus services. Six days after the Governor's first Emergency Proclamation, the DOE announced their partnership with Ground Transportation Inc. and Roberts Hawai'i, securing additional drivers. These efforts resumed bus services for approximately 1,200 student riders and 23 schools.² Nevertheless, there is still a significant gap in meeting the transportation needs of students across the state.

Limited transportation for students has far reaching impacts, including:

- **Hindered Education Outcomes:** The absence of reliable transportation options for some DOE students has placed an undue burden on families, hindering access to education and exacerbating disparities in academic achievement.
- **Increased Private Vehicle Usage:** Increasingly, students are no longer relying on school buses or public transportation, but private vehicles to travel to/from school (for families who have access to a vehicle). According to the National Household Travel Survey, in 2023, 53 percent of U.S.

¹ Green, J., "Proclamation, Relating to School Bus Services," Office of the Governor, Hawai'i, August 2, 2024.

² HNN Staff, "DOE announces 34 previously suspended school bus routes to be restored starting Monday," Hawaii News Now, August 8, 2024.

students got dropped off at school or drove themselves to school, which poses both environmental and safety concerns.³

- **Caregiving Transportation Burdens:** The growing reliance on personal vehicles to transport children to school also places a burden on caregivers. Women often bear the primary responsibility for childcare and household duties. Additional transportation duties can be particularly challenging for single-parent households where time and resources are limited.

To address these issues, it is critical that the DOE permanently authorize the usage of certain types of alternative vehicles, such as motorcoaches, small buses, and vans, to transport students when there are not enough school buses available. Throughout the country jurisdictions are adapting their school transportation systems to better serve diverse student populations by allowing alternative vehicles for student transport. For example, Arizona permits the use of 11-15 passenger vehicles for regular routes, with increased route mileage eligibility for state funding,⁴ while Georgia allows local boards to use smaller vehicles (8 passengers or fewer).⁵ Maryland amended previous rigid regulation for school transportation by allowing alternative vehicles, such as taxicabs and commercial coaches.⁶ These flexible policies aim to meet the needs of rural or under-resourced areas, where students are less likely to have alternative transportation options.

In summary, diversifying school transportation with vehicles like motorcoaches, small buses, and vans will allow the Hawai'i DOE to better address the mobility needs of students throughout Hawai'i, particularly those who do not have access to consistent or reliable transportation options. Temporary measures have alleviated the school bus shortage but a permanent solution is needed.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.

Abbey Seitz

Abbey Seitz

Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice

Director of Transportation Equity

³ Federal Highway Administration, "National Household Travel Survey," 2023.

⁴ Arizona Revised Statutes, "15-925. School transportation; allowable vehicles," February 4, 2025.

⁵ Georgia General Assembly, "20-2-1076. Alternative vehicles for school buses; limitations on use; requirements; insurance," February 4, 2025.

⁶ Code of Maryland Regulations, "Sec. 13a.06.07.11. General Standards," February 4, 2025.



Testimony of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

Committee on Education

Date Time: February 11, 2025, 2:01PM

**Location: Conference Room 309 & via Videoconference
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street**

Measure HB288

RELATING TO TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Committee Members,

The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OahuMPO) **supports HB288**, which authorizes the Department of Education to initiate staggered start times, use alternative vehicles for student transportation under certain conditions and appropriates funds for the purchase of alternative vehicles and for individuals to obtain CDL licensure.

There is a nationwide school bus driver shortage affecting Hawaii. While the department of education contracts school bus services to various contractors on multiple islands, driver shortages have resulted in the cancellation, temporary suspension, and consolidation of bus routes. The school bus driver shortage negatively impacts student attendance and causes difficulties for working parents who juggle jobs and school drop-offs, and the State's severe bus driver shortage is felt disproportionately by families living in rural, underserved areas. The department of education has been forced to implement a series of unconventional programs to provide basic transportation for keiki attending public schools in rural, underserved areas. Allowing the transport of students using vehicles other than school vehicles by drivers possessing a commercial driver's license with an endorsement authorizing the driving of vehicles carrying passengers may help alleviate the lack of school bus drivers.

The purpose of this Act is to authorize the use and funding of alternative vehicles for student transportation provided certain conditions are met. The OahuMPO recommends the addition of active modes of transportation to be added to this list including bike buses, walking school buses, crossing guard programs, and free access for all students to use the public bus. This is consistent with the goal for transportation on Oahu to be carbon net negative by 2045.

HB862 aligns with the Vision and Goals of the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), by promoting an equitable and resilient transportation system.

The OahuMPO is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on the island of Oahu responsible for carrying out a multimodal transportation planning process, including the development of a long-range (25-year horizon) metropolitan transportation plan, referred to as the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), which encourages and promotes a safe, efficient, and resilient transportation system that serves the mobility needs of all people and freight (including

walkways, bicycles, and transit), fosters economic growth and development, while minimizing fuel consumption and air pollution ([23 CFR 450.300](#)).

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

HB-288

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:27:37 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrew Crossland	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY SUPPORT this Bill to give more flexibility for transporting children to our schools. I urge all members of the Committee to **VOTE YES** on this Bill.

HB-288

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:47:13 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brett Kulbis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Woodson and Committee Members,

My name is Brett Kulbis, I'm a 26yr Navy Veteran and Retired Civil Servant. I live in Ewa Beach.

I STRONGLY SUPPORT HB-288.

HB-288 authorizes the Department of Education to use alternative vehicles for student transportation under certain conditions, appropriates funds for the purchase of these vehicles, and supports individuals in obtaining Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDLs). Additionally, the bill allows Department schools to initiate staggered start times, further enhancing the flexibility and efficiency of student transportation. This is a great idea, as it allows for creativity and cost-effectiveness.

The Hawaii Department of Education has failed for over three years to provide reliable and sufficient bus services to students across the state. This failure has left many families without a reliable means of getting their keiki to school. This bill offers multifaceted common sense solutions to these problems by expanding the types of vehicles that can be used for student transportation, investing in the training of more drivers, and exploring staggered school start times. These are common sense solutions I would have expected the DOE to have implemented already if they really cared about our keiki's education.

HB-288 presents a comprehensive common sense strategy to address the long-standing challenges in student transportation in Hawai'i. By embracing alternative vehicles, supporting driver training, and exploring staggered start times, we can create a more resilient, efficient, and student-centered transportation system. Passage of this bill will ensure that all Hawai'i students have reliable access to education, without having to worry about getting there.

Respectfully, I STRONGLY encourage you to vote YES on HB-288.

LATE

HB-288

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 2:31:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cindy R Ajimine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I SUPPORT this bill that innovatively supports and provides for the needs of our children.

LATE

HB-288

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 2:48:08 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chanara Casey Richmond	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. It is greatly needed. Chanara Richmond HD42

LATE

HB-288

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 4:15:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alyssa Alcos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alyssa Alcos, and I am a teacher within the Hawai'i Department of Education. I strongly support HB 288, which seeks to allow the DOE to use alternative vehicles for student transportation under certain conditions and provides funding for vehicle purchases and CDL licensure.

As an educator and parent, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges caused by the ongoing school bus driver shortages across our state. Routes have been cut, forcing current drivers to run multiple shifts. Just today, I received a text from my child's school stating:

"Due to bus driver shortages, Routes ER03 and ER04 are being combined. Please expect delays."

These shortages disrupt families, requiring parents to rearrange their schedules to accommodate transportation needs. In many cases, students are left waiting at school with limited adult supervision until a bus arrives. This is not an isolated incident—it is a widespread issue affecting our keiki and haumana daily.

HB 288 provides a practical solution by allowing the DOE to use alternative vehicles, which would help ensure that students have reliable transportation to and from school. Additionally, I urge consideration of staggered school start times, a system I experienced firsthand while living on the mainland. High schools began at 7:15 AM, elementary schools at 8:15 AM, and middle schools at 9:15 AM, allowing bus routes to operate more efficiently while giving older students an opportunity to assist younger siblings at home.

Beyond daily transportation, this bill would also benefit school field trips and work-based learning opportunities. Currently, we are forced to deny students access to valuable educational excursions because buses are unavailable, too expensive, or lack sufficient staffing. Many high schools are already planning to purchase 14-passenger buses to address these challenges, and HB 288 would significantly aid these efforts, reducing liability concerns related to personal vehicle transport.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 288 to provide our students with the transportation they need and deserve. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Alcos