



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

Date: 01/28/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0323 RELATING TO TEACHER HOUSING.

Purpose of Bill: Establishes the Teacher Housing Assistance Program to provide housing vouchers to certain eligible teachers. Appropriates funds out of the Teachers' Housing Revolving Fund.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding HB 323, relating to teacher housing assistance.

The Department supports efforts to address Hawai'i's teacher recruitment and retention challenges. Our state's high cost of living and a shortage of affordable housing impact our ability to attract and retain qualified educators throughout our school system.

We respectfully request several clarifications to strengthen the bill's implementation. First, the term "school" should be clearly defined to specify whether the housing assistance program applies to Hawai'i public schools, private schools, public charter schools, or some combination thereof. Additionally, the requirement of "one year of teaching prior to the application date" needs clarification regarding whether this refers to the year immediately preceding the application or could include any prior year of teaching experience.

While the Department supports the intent of this measure, successful implementation would require dedicated staff resources to verify eligibility, process applications, and administer the housing voucher program. The Department appreciates the inclusion of funding in this proposal but asks that any additional funding or positions does not affect the Department's requests in its Governor-approved budget.

The Department remains committed to working with the Legislature to develop comprehensive

solutions to our educator workforce challenges.



**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. 323, RELATING TO TEACHER HOUSING.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Tuesday, January 28, 2025

TIME: 2:00 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 stated purpose of the bill is to alleviate the financial burden on teachers and improve teacher recruitment and retention by establishing a Teacher Housing Assistance Program to provide housing vouchers to qualified full-time teachers who are employed by the Department of Education (DOE) and teach at a hard-to-staff school, as determined by the DOE, including public charter schools. The bill appropriates funds out of the Teachers' Housing Revolving Fund.

As drafted, the bill may violate section 4 of article VII of the State Constitution ("No tax shall be levied or appropriation of public money or property made, nor shall the public credit be used, directly or indirectly, except for a public purpose. . . . No grant of public money or property shall be made except pursuant to standards provided by law.") *See also Spears v. Honda*, 51 Haw. 1, 9 (1968) (having determined that the use of public funds to provide bus transportation subsidies to sectarian and private school students was unconstitutional, the Court acknowledged the possible overlap between section 1 of article X of the State Constitution and what is now section 4 of article VII of the State Constitution).

Therefore, we recommend that this bill be amended to insert appropriate standards. Examples of existing statutes that provide standards for agencies to issue

grants are part II of chapter 9 and sections 10-17, 210D-11, and 383-128, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

We have attached draft standards to this testimony as a sample to work from. These standards can be inserted on page 3, line 18 as a new subsection (f), with existing subsection (f) re-alphabetized as new subsection (g). Additionally, we are happy to work with you on developing more specific standards.

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

POSSIBLE STANDARDS FOR THE VOUCHERS IN THIS BILL

(f) Applications for vouchers shall be made to the department and contain the information as shall be required by rules adopted thereunder. At a minimum, the applicant shall:

- (1) Be an eligible teacher as defined in subsection (g);
- (2) Agree to use state funds exclusively for the purposes of this program;
- (3) Indicate capability to properly use the voucher for the purpose of this program;
- (4) Comply with other requirements as the department may prescribe;
- (5) Comply with all applicable federal, state, and county statutes, rules, and ordinances;
- (6) Agree to indemnify and save harmless the State of Hawaii and its officers, agents, and employees from and against any and all claims arising out of or resulting from the use of vouchers for this program, and procure sufficient insurance to provide this indemnification if requested to do so by the department.
- (7) Agree to make available to the department all records the applicant may have relating to the voucher, to allow state agencies to monitor the applicant's compliance with this section.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



MAKALAPUA ALENCASTRE, ED. D.
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1100, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

FOR:	HB 323 Relating to Teacher Housing
DATE:	January 28, 2025
TIME:	2:00 P.M.
COMMITTEE:	Committee on Education
ROOM:	Conference Room 309 & Videoconference
FROM:	Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director State Public Charter School Commission

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

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in **SUPPORT of HB 323 with Amendments** which alleviates the financial burden on teachers and improves teacher recruitment and retention by establishing a teacher housing assistance program to provide housing vouchers to qualified full-time teachers who are employed by the Department of Education and teach at a hard-to-staff school, as determined by the department, including public charter schools.

The Commission appreciates the inclusion of public charter schools in this measure as charter schools and charter school teachers are a part of the public education system. The Commission offers the following amendment in Section F of this measure (in blue font) as it clarifies the inclusion of charter school teachers (who are employed by the charter school that the teacher works at):

- (f) For the purposes of this section, an “eligible teacher” means a person who:
- (1) Is a full-time teacher;
 - (2) Has taught at a school in the State for at least one year prior to the application date;
 - (3) Is employed by the department of education or by a public charter school;
 - (4) Commits to teach at a hard-to-staff school, as determined by the department of education, or a public charter school for no less than five consecutive years;
 - (5) Resides in the State;

- (6) Does not own, operate, rent, or control any residential real property in addition to the eligible teacher's primary residence for which the housing voucher is sought; and
- (7) Has a household income below per cent of the area median income."

The Commission is available to work with this committee, the DOE, and our public charter schools in moving this legislation forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



HOUSE BILL 323, RELATING TO TEACHER HOUSING

JANUARY 28, 2025 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports HB 323, relating to teacher housing, which establishes the Teacher Housing Assistance Program to provide housing vouchers to certain eligible teachers.

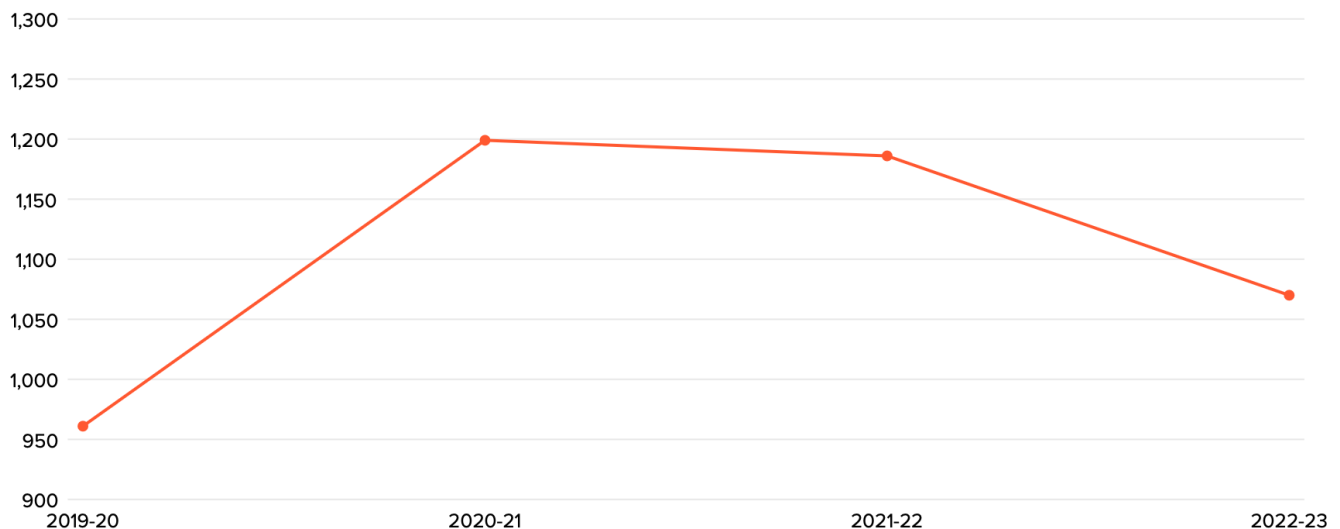
Teachers are the most important professionals in increasing student achievement. According to numerous studies, however, Hawai'i's average teacher salaries are the lowest in the nation when adjusted for cost of living. A 2020 study conducted by APA Consulting on behalf of the Hawai'i Department of Education found that when compared with other high-cost geographic locations, Hawai'i teachers are paid \$7,700 to \$26,000 less than their peers in school districts with similar costs of living, depending on length of service.

While that pay gap is decreasing because of the State Legislature's effort to fund differential pay increases and resolve salary compression in recent years, teachers are still underpaid compared to other professions that require a similar level of education. Establishing programs to make housing affordable for teachers and other members of the education workforce would help offset the low wages experienced by Hawai'i's educators.

A 2022 survey by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University placed Hawai'i among the 10 states with the lowest teacher-to-population ratio. Moreover, as *Honolulu Civil Beat* reported in August of last year, voluntary teacher separations remain high, at over 1,000 per year (see chart below).

Voluntary teacher separations, 2019 to 2023

The number of teachers annually leaving the DOE remains high but has started to decline following the pandemic.



DOE has not released data for the 2023-24 school year.

Chart: Megan Tagami/Civil Beat • Source: [Hawaii DOE](#)

These trends are further exacerbated by the aging teacher workforce. The Hawai'i State Teachers Association has repeatedly cautioned against being overly optimistic about positive teacher retention data, **with a wave of experienced educators expected to retire in the next few years.**

We need to find permanent solutions to address our state's ongoing teacher shortage.

Hawai'i residents face some of the highest housing costs in the nation, at more than twice the national average. Researchers who authored the National Low Income Housing Coalition's *Out of Reach 2024* report found that a full-time worker would need to earn \$44.60/hour—or \$92,768 per year—to afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market value in our state, with Honolulu experiencing a 67 percent increase in fair market rent between 2005 and 2015. Average rent for a two-bedroom unit surpassed \$2,000 well before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

One out of every four households in Hawai'i report that they are “doubling up” or are three paychecks or less away from being homeless, per the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and

Economic Justice. Additionally, over 60 percent of households are severely cost-burdened, meaning that they pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing, a number that rises to over 80 percent of extremely low-income households.

A recent survey conducted by the Holomua Collective found that 60 percent of residents face worries about not being able to pay a monthly bill and 63 percent face difficulties in saving money from their paychecks for future emergencies, retirement, or other expenses. A staggering 70 percent of middle-class respondents to Holomua's survey say they will—or are unsure if they will have to—relocate in the coming years. As Holomua Collective states in its report on the findings, “These are the very workers powering Hawai‘i’s economy, now on the brink of leaving their homes behind.” That population includes the teachers who are tasked with educating our keiki.

To deliver the schools our keiki deserve, we must recruit and retain qualified educators. Our children’s future depends on our ability to meet that challenge.

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com



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TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: HB 323 – Relating to Teacher Housing

Position: Support

Hearing: Tuesday, January 28, 2025, 2:00 pm, Room 309

Submitter: Osa Tui, Jr., President - Hawai'i State Teachers Association

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

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) strongly supports HB 323, which aims to alleviate the financial burden on teachers by establishing a Teacher Housing Assistance Program. This program will help to address the teacher shortage plaguing our schools and will help ensure our keiki have access to quality education.

HB 323 offers a direct solution by providing housing vouchers to eligible teachers, helping them with rent, mortgage payments, or down payments on their primary residence. Our high cost of living in Hawai'i, particularly the exorbitant housing costs, is a major factor driving qualified teachers away from our state and discouraging prospective educators from joining our workforce. This financial assistance will make it more feasible for teachers to live and work in Hawai'i and will help reduce the turnover rate and attract new teachers.

By addressing the financial challenges faced by teachers, we can improve recruitment and retention efforts, especially in hard-to-staff schools and underserved communities. This program will not only benefit individual teachers but also strengthen our schools and communities by ensuring that classrooms are staffed with dedicated and qualified professionals.

The HSTA urges the passage of HB 323 and invest in the well-being of our teachers, who play a vital role in shaping the lives of Hawai'i's future generations. By providing housing assistance, we can attract and retain the best and brightest educators, ultimately benefiting our students and strengthening our public schools.

Mahalo.



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB323, RELATING TO TEACHER HOUSING

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION JANUARY 28, 2025

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Education Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS** HB323, RELATING TO TEACHER HOUSING. Pursuant to the Platform of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, the Party supports quality public education and library services to every student, regardless of learning capacity or ability to pay. We also advocate for the importance of supporting and fairly compensating our educators

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i believes that the future of our state and country depends on an educated and knowledgeable citizenry. To achieve this, we must ensure that our teachers, who are the backbone of our education system, are provided with the necessary resources and support to thrive. The high cost of living in Hawai'i has made it increasingly difficult for teachers to afford housing, leading to high turnover rates and a reliance on emergency hires and substitute teachers. This bill addresses this critical issue by providing housing vouchers to teachers at hard-to-staff schools, thereby alleviating their financial burden and improving teacher recruitment and retention. By establishing a dedicated funding source to deliver quality public education and library services to every student, regardless of their ability to pay, this bill ensures that teachers can focus on delivering quality education without the added stress of housing insecurity. Additionally, the bill's emphasis on supporting teachers at hard-to-staff schools aligns with our commitment to equity and ensuring that all students, regardless of their location, have access to qualified and dedicated educators.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in support of HB323, RELATING TO TEACHER HOUSING. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.



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The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii
The House of Representatives
Committee on Education

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

January 28, 2025

H.B. 323 – RELATING TO TEACHER HOUSING

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO wishes to provide comments on H.B. 323 which proposes to establish a Teacher Housing Assistance Program to provide housing vouchers to certain eligible teachers and appropriates funds out of the Teachers' Housing Revolving Fund.

Under Act 172, SLH 2023, the legislature identified affordable housing as a key strategy for recruiting and retaining the education workforce; not just teachers. Similarly, the legislature should consider providing a "workforce home assistance program" to make other government employees eligible since they face the same low salaries and high cost of living.

The HGEA represents thousands of employees who work for the DOE and public charter schools who make less than a starting Hawaii teacher's salary. Some of these employees also work in hard-to-staff locations with high turnover. They, too, should benefit from a housing assistance program being administered by the department for which they work. They, too, deserve to be eligible for a housing voucher to assist with rent, mortgage, or a down payment for their primary residence.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on H.B. 323.

Respectfully submitted,

Kauanui Sabas
Legislative Manager

Chair Justin Woodson
Vice Chair Trish La Chica

House Committee on Education

Tuesday, January 28, 2025
2:00 PM

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB323 RELATING TO EDUCATION

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, Members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Jun Shin and I am testifying as an individual in **SUPPORT** of **HB323**, Relating to Education. In order to have an educated and knowledgeable citizenry, we must have experienced teachers. Unfortunately, teachers are struggling with Hawai‘i’s high cost of living, which forces teachers to either move to another school, exit the teaching profession, or even leave Hawai‘i completely.

This measure would address this by providing housing vouchers for teachers and soon-to-be teachers in schools where their skills are especially needed. Making it affordable for our educators to live and teach will allow them to dedicate more of their time and effort to do what they do best, making a difference in the lives of our keiki. Please **PASS** House Bill 323 out of your committee.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Jun Shin,
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