

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

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 0424 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

Purpose of Bill: Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements. Appropriates funds.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of HB 424.

The school meal program operates in each of the Department's non-charter schools and offers meals to its students in elementary through high school. The Department understands the importance of child nutrition and its role in improving overall student health and agrees that children should have adequate meals provided to them, including breakfast and lunch. It supports free meals if the State can subsidize what is not received through Federal claim reimbursements.

Additionally, the Department supports maximizing opportunities for student access to school meals by examining appropriate meal service models, such as breakfast in the classroom or Grab and Go. Second-chance breakfast is presently implemented in the school meal program.

Currently, the Department is working to calculate what the potential cost might be of providing free school meals for those students that qualify for a reduced price breakfast and lunch.

The Department appreciates this proposal and the inclusion of funding but asks that any additional funding does not affect the Governor's approved budget requests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



HAWAI`I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

Honolulu, Hawai`i 96813

Phone: (808) 489-9549

Web site: <http://www.hysn.org> E-mail: info@hysn.org

Vonnell Ramos, President
Cyd Hoffeld, Vice President
Sione Ford Naeata, Treasurer
Greg Tjapkes, Secretary

Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

Access to Independence
Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai`i
Bobby Benson Center
Child and Family Service
Coalition for a Drug-Free Hawai`i
Domestic Violence Action Center
EPIC `Ohana, Inc.
Friends of the Children's Justice
Center of Maui
Get Ready Hawai`i
Hale Kipa, Inc.
Hale `Opio Kaua`i, Inc.
Hawai`i Children's Action
Network
Hawai`i Health & Harm
Reduction Center
Hawaii Island Community`
Health Center
Ho`ola Na Pua
Ho`okele Coalition of Kaua`i
Ka Hale Pomaika`i
Kokua Kalihi Valley
Kaua`i Planning and Action
Alliance
Lines for Life Youth Line
Maui Youth and Family Services
Na Pu`uwai Molokai Native
Hawaiian Health Care
Systems
P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.
Parents and Children Together
PHOCUSED
Piha Wellness and Healing
Planned Parenthood of the
Great Northwest, Hawaii
Alaska, Kentucky, Indiana
Residential Youth Services
& Empowerment (RYSE)
Salvation Army Family
Intervention Services
Sex Abuse Treatment Center
Susannah Wesley Community
Center
The Catalyst Group

February 7, 2024

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Education

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 424 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports HB 424 Relating to School Meals.

Across the islands, tens of thousands of local households make too much money to qualify for free or reduced-cost school meals, but are still struggling financially. Those households are considered asset-limited, income-constrained, and employed — also known as ALICE households.

One in three families in Hawai`i are experiencing hunger or food insecurity,

In 2023, one in ten Hawai`i households were going without food for a whole day, some or most months out of the year.

37% of all households felt anxious about running out of food.

Universal free school meals will ensure that all public school students will have access to healthy food.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96819
Tel: (808) 833-2711 • Fax: (808) 839-7106 • Web: www.hsta.org

Osa Tui, Jr.
President

Logan Okita
Vice President

Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Ann Mahi
Executive Director

1

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: HB 424 – Relating to School Meals

Position: Comments

Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 2:01 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) offers the following comments on HB 424, which aims to expand access to free school meals for Hawai'i's keiki. While we appreciate the intent of this bill, we believe that universal free school meals would be a more effective solution to address childhood hunger in our state.

Limiting free meals to students who qualify based on specific guidelines creates unnecessary barriers and may stigmatize those who rely on this essential program. A universal approach ensures that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to the nutrition they need to focus on learning.

We urge you to consider amending HB 424 to provide universal free school meals. This investment in our keiki will pay dividends in improved health, academic achievement, and overall well-being.

Mahalo.



HOUSE BILL 424, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

FEBRUARY 11, 2025 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 424, relating to school meals, which, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements.

Hungry children can't learn.

A recent study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research focused on the federal National School Lunch Program's Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools where many students qualified for free or reduced-price meals to provide a free meal to all students. The study examined whether the provision of schoolwide free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision impacted school suspension rates and **estimated that the chances of being suspended multiple times fell in both elementary school and in middle school.**

Moreover, a 2021 study by the Brookings Institute found that schoolwide free meals improve math performance. This is further bolstered by research conducted by the Food Research and Action Center, which has noted that **students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and achievement.** Studies have

clearly demonstrated the link between school meals and student success, which is especially important as schools and educators continue to strategize how to combat the lingering loss of opportunity to learn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, improving access to school meals will boost overall health outcomes, both now and in the future. Thirty million students rely on schools to provide them with breakfast and lunch every day in the United States. Those who participate in the school meal program consume breakfasts and lunches of higher nutritional quality than nonparticipants and are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables. Participation in the school breakfast program is associated with lower body mass index (BMI), lower probability of being overweight, and a lower likelihood of obesity. More Americans are sick than they are healthy: half of adults have diabetes or prediabetes; more than half of adults have cardiovascular disease; and 3 in 4 adults are overweight or obese. Healthcare costs account for 29 percent of state budgets and 28 percent of the federal budget.

As the National Education Association has stated, through universal free school meals programs, “We can grow generations of healthy eaters and save our country billions.” School meals cost less per student when more students participate in a free meal program. An article in *Nutrients* entitled “Universal Free Meals Associated with Lower Meal Costs While Maintaining Nutritional Quality” found that **schools that participated in a universal meal program spent 67 and 58 cents less per lunch and breakfast**, respectively, while maintaining the same nutritional quality.

Nutrition is essential to academic success. This bill will help to ensure that Hawai'i's keiki are healthy and ready to reach their full potential.

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com



1050 Bishop St. PMB 235 |
Honolulu, HI 96813
P: 808-533-1292 | e:
info@hawaiiifood.com

Executive Officers

Maile Miyashiro, C&S Wholesale Grocer, *Chair*
Kit Okimoto, Okimoto Corp., *Vice Chair*
Jayson Watts, Mahi Pono, *Secretary/Treasurer*
Lauren Zirbel, HFIA, *Executive Director*
Paul Kosasa, ABC Stores, *Advisor*
Derek Kurisu, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*
Toby Taniguchi, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*
Joe Carter, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, *Advisor*
Eddie Asato, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*
Gary Okimoto, Safeway, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Education
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 11, 2025

TIME: 1:01pm

RE: HB424 Relating to School Meals
Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of this measure. Students' access to healthy meals is critical to academic success and achievement. Access to nutritious meals also promotes students' short term and long-term health, improves behavioral outcomes, and improves overall wellbeing.

Ensuring that all keiki have access to enough food should be a top priority of the State.

For some students, school meals may be their only consistent source of food.

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) provides reimbursement to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools. These programs draw Federal funds into our state to help ensure Hawaii's children have access to healthy nutritious meals.

We urge the Committee to pass this measure and we thank you for the opportunity to testify.



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB424, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 11, 2025

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

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS** HB424, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS. Pursuant to the State Convention Resolution 2024-26 of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, the Party supports providing free school meals to all public school students in Hawai'i to ensure equal opportunities for academic success and to reduce food insecurity. HB424 makes an effort towards free school meals to all public school students by providing free meals to those who qualify for reduced price meals based on the student's household eligibility under the federal program for free and reduced price school meals.

One out of five children in Hawai'i are food insecure. Adequate nutrition is essential for the cognitive and physical development of children and those who are hungry or malnourished are likely to face difficulties in concentration and academic performance. Food insecure students face significantly higher risks of depression, stress and lifelong chronic disease. With the cost of living continuing to escalate, many families face financial hardships, making it difficult to provide nutritious meals for their children and it is especially true that many low-income families earn too much to qualify for free school meals but not enough to afford the cost of living. The availability of free school meals can reduce the stigma associated with receiving food assistance and promote an inclusive school environment.

Providing free school meals can help ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed academically regardless of their socioeconomic status. Schools that have adopted free school meals have seen 15% increases in test scores.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in support of HB424, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

PO Box 2041 • Honolulu, HI 96805 • www.hawaiidemocrats.org



HIPHI Board

May Okiihiro, MD, MS
Chair

John A. Burns School of Medicine,
Department of Pediatrics

Titiimaea Ta'ase, JD

Secretary

State of Hawai'i, Deputy Public Defender

Carissa Holley, MEd

Treasurer

Hale Makua Health Services

Debbie Erskine

ARCH-MEPS Consulting LLC, Owner

Camonia Graham - Tutt, PhD

University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu

Jennifer José Lo, MD

Hawai'i Health Partners

Misty Pacheco, DrPH

University of Hawai'i at Hilo

Justin Puckett, CPA, MBA

Humana

Kathleen Roche, MS, RN, CENP

Kaiser Permanente

Dina Shek, JD

Medical-Legal Partnership

For Children in Hawai'i

Garret Sugai

HMSA

JoAnn Tsark, MPH

John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native

Hawaiian Research Office

HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &
Evaluation

Community Health
Worker Initiatives

COVID-19 Response

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: February 10, 2025

To: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Education

RE: Support for HB 424, Relating to School Meals

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

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ **supports HB 424**, which beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students who are eligible for reduced priced meals.

One in three families in Hawai'i face food insecurity, leaving many students to go hungry throughout the school day. One in ten keiki in Hawai'i skip meals due to food insecurity. Hawai'i can ensure all students are able to eat by providing free school meals for all students.

Half of Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.²

This large assistance gap leaves behind many ALICE families who are struggling to make ends meet. As a result, countless students go hungry throughout the school day, impacting their health, well-being, and ability to learn.

Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.³ By failing to ensure they have access to

¹ Hawai'i Public Health Institute's mission is to advance health and wellness for the people and islands of Hawai'i. We do this through expanding our understanding of what creates health of people and place, fostering partnerships, and cultivating programs to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

² "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census.

<https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702&g=040XX00US15>

³"Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7282962/>



meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success.

Improved Academic Achievement

Hungry students can't learn. Providing healthy nutrition to our students will ensure they have the resources they need to thrive. Studies have shown that free school meal programs lead to improved student performance.⁴ This program is only estimated to cost around 1-2% of the Department of Education's total budget and provide a 15% increase in test scores, a 15:1 return on investment.⁵

Federal Funding Increases

Eight other states—California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont—have implemented free school meal programs, with data showing increases in their federal reimbursement funding. In California, free and reduced-price lunch enrollment rates have risen alongside the implementation of their program, further maximizing federal support for students.⁶ Hawai'i can follow the lead of these other states by implementing free school meals for all students while also increasing the federal funding we receive to support the program.

Thank you for considering increasing access to school meals for our keiki. Please support HB 424 to deliver free school meals for all students.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nate Hix'.

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

⁴ "Universal free lunch is linked to better test scores in New York City, new report finds"
<https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2019/10/15/21121847/universal-free-lunch-is-linked-to-better-test-scores-in-new-york-city-new-report-finds/>

⁵ "Equity on the Menu". Hawai'i Applesed.
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601374ae84e51e430a1829d8/t/65f390f60a673a7bf3cf89/1710461187562/Equity+on+the+Menu_FINAL.pdf

⁶ "Free or Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data". California Department of Education.
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesasp>



February 11, 2025

RE: Support for HB 424 Relating to School Meals

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for HB 424 Relating to School Meals. This bill, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements and appropriates funds.

Food insecurity is a growing crisis in Hawai'i. The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i report, released by Hawai'i Foodbank in May 2024, found that in 2023, 29% of households with children had one or multiple children facing food insecurity. Among these households with children, 9% had children skipping meals because there was not enough food. At the most extreme, 6% of these households had a child or children go a whole day without food because of a lack of money. Further, in households with children, food insecurity among adults was especially high at 38%, and those with young children found themselves most susceptible — indicative that parents and caregivers will sacrifice their own food security before letting their children go without food.

As the state's largest hunger-relief organization, Hawai'i Foodbank has been committed to ensuring no one in Hawai'i goes hungry since 1983. Last year, we worked with over 225 agency partners on O'ahu and Kaua'i to provide food for 17.7 million meals and serve an average of more than 150,000 people each month. As part of that work, we provide food to school pantries in every school on Kaua'i and Ni'ihau, as well as 38 schools on O'ahu, giving us a firsthand view of the challenges many families are facing to feed their children.

There are well-documented links between food insecurity and poor child health and behavioral outcomes, including physical, developmental, and cognitive impairments. Providing school meals to children is an important step in our collective effort to address food insecurity and care for our most vulnerable keiki. We urge you to consider this important measure.

Mahalo for your consideration.

With aloha,

Amy Miller
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank



To: The Honorable Justin H. Woodson, Chair
The Honorable Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
House Committee on Education

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager
Sarielyn Curtis, External Affairs Specialist

Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 2:01 p.m., Conference Room 309

RE: **HB424 Relating to School Meals**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support with comments on HB424**. This measure requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year; appropriates funds.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 70,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 37 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

Proper nutrition is vital for keiki growth and development and may reduce the risk of health conditions like anemia, asthma, hyperactivity and anxiety.¹ According to the Hawai'i Foodbank, 1 in 4 keiki in Hawai'i may not know where they will get their next meal, and for more than 81,000 keiki, getting the energy they need to learn and grow can be a daily challenge.²

AlohaCare supports the intent of HB424, but we are aligned with our Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) Coalition partner in our **preference for HB757** which is also before this committee. Under HB424, many students may be denied meals due to inability to pay and their household's income being even slightly over the income requirements to participate in the free or reduced school meal program. Providing breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of household income, ensures they

¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>

² <https://hawaiifoodbank.org/keiki/>



have a consistent source of nutritious food and can focus on learning, while also removing stigma for students accessing free or reduced meals.

By ensuring all students have access to free school meals, we are addressing immediate and basic nutritional needs, combating the numerous health risks that are associated with hunger, and giving kids the energy they need to learn and grow.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support with comments** on **HB424**.



HAWAII APPLESEED
CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

LATE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for HB 424 – Relating to School Meals
House Committee on Education
Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 2:01 PM

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 424. This bill would require the Department of Education (DOE) to eliminate the reduced-price meal copay, allowing students that qualify for and receive reduced-price meals to eat for free.

Eliminating the reduced-price meal copay is a tested strategy that some states have used on their journey to achieving a universal free school meals program. While we wholeheartedly support any measure that would expand access to free school meals, we are hopeful that this is seen as an incremental step toward the ultimate goal of providing free meals to all students, as proposed by another bill before the committee today, HB 757.

To be eligible for reduced-price meals, a family of four must make between \$46,644 and \$66,378.¹ However, Hawai‘i’s costs of living require that same family to make over \$107,000 to simply survive.² While eliminating the reduced-price copay is a start, there are still many families over this threshold who are still struggling.

In addition, income thresholds are not the only barrier to participation in the free or reduced-price lunch program. Challenges like language barriers, difficulty providing paperwork, and fear of disclosing information result in many children who are eligible simply falling through the cracks. One study found that 34 percent of students who were denied free or reduced price meals were actually eligible to receive them.³

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter. We are pleased that the Hawai‘i legislature is paying attention to this important issue, and hope that you will weigh the potential impact of this bill alongside HB 757, which we strongly support. Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Hawai‘i State Department of Education, “Free and Reduced Price Meals Program,” 2025.
<https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

² United for ALICE, “ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship in Hawai‘i,” 2024.
<https://www.unitedforalice.org/Attachments/AllReports/2024-ALICE-Update-HI-FINAL-v2.pdf>

³ United States Department of Agriculture, Third Access, Participation, Eligibility, and Certification Study, September 2021.

HB-424

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 12:53:00 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB424. I believe there should be free breakfast & lunch for all public school children.
Please pass this bill.
Mike Golojuch, Sr

HB-424

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 3:30:59 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcia Kemble	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Greetings Committee Chair and Committee members,

I support HB 424, which would provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements, if the Legislature deems it too expensive to provide all students with free breakfast and lunch. Hungry kids can't learn well!

Mahalo,
Marcia Kemble
Makiki

HB-424

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 11:28:26 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Isis Usborne	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e,

Please support this vital bill!

Mahalo,

Isis Usborne (96815)

HB-424

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:38:05 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Ball	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice-Chair La Chica and members of the Committee,

I write in strong support of HB424, which provides one of the foundations of a strong education to Hawaii's keiki: healthy meals. As an K-16 educator with a 25-year career, I have seen how nutrition can improve or stunt a young person's mind. The public schools are an essential bulwark to the future of our society, and this investment in future generations will be repaid manyfold in the educational attainment and success of future generations. Please lend your support to this necessary legislation.

Sincerely yours,

David Ball, Waialae-Kahala