

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
Ke Ke'ena O Ka Hope Kia'āina

The 33rd Legislature, State of Hawaii
House Committee on Finance
February 19, 2025

Testimony on
H.B. 429 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of H.B. 429, H.D. 1** which appropriates funds to hire teachers and teacher assistants and for equipment and services for public preschools.

H.B. 429 aligns with our *Ready Keiki* initiative, the Administration's multi-faceted plan to ensure universal access to high-quality childcare and preschool. The Executive Office on Early Learning and School Facilities Authority built and refurbished over 50 classrooms to date and anticipate adding an additional 50 classrooms in the next two years. In 2024, the National Institute for Early Education Research's annual *State of Preschool* report found that Hawai'i is only one of five states in the country to meet 10 of 10 research-based quality benchmarks for its public pre-kindergarten programs. We must ensure that we have qualified teachers and teacher assistants to ensure keiki success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 429, H.D. 1.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 18, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 429 HD1 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.**

Hearing: February 20, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services supports this measure and defers to the Department of Education and the Executive Office on Early Learning. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation align with the amount requested in the executive budget and not reduce or replace a priority identified in the executive budget.

PURPOSE: This bill appropriates funds to hire teachers and teacher assistants and for equipment and services for public preschools. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1).

The Committee on Education amended this measure by:

- (1) Changing the amounts appropriated and amount of positions to be funded to unspecified amounts;
- (2) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000; and
- (3) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

There continues to be a statewide shortage of qualified caregivers and staff for early learning programs due to low wages and lack of benefits. Additionally, operating costs for child care programs continue to rise.

February 18, 2025

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This measure aims to increase the number of public pre-k teachers and teacher assistants, assist in covering additional services and equipment costs needed for children and staff, and expand the existing child care capacity.

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

**HB 429 - Pre-K Expansion
Testimony Letter Template**

February 18, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB No. 429, H.D. 1 – Relating To Early Learning

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

My name is Glen Miyasato, and I am the Principal of Fern Elementary School. We have hosted an Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) public prekindergarten classroom at our school since August 2023. I am writing to express my strong support for HB No. 429, H.D. 1 which funds the expansion of EOEL public pre kindergarten classrooms on HIDOE campuses.

Hosting an EOEL pre kindergarten class on campus has been very positive for our school. It allows us to provide additional learning opportunities for prekindergarten students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) who might benefit from an inclusion setting. Our IDEA students do productive play at recess alongside our EOEL PreK students, creating a daily setting for invaluable learning.

The families in our community eagerly embrace this high quality PreK opportunity resulting in higher readiness when their children move on to their home school Kindergarten classes.

The program is very well supported, with Preschool teachers, Educational Assistants, and Administrators engaged in professional development throughout the year. We also receive coaching, mentoring, and curriculum development support tailored to the unique needs of our classroom.

As a Principal, I see firsthand the profound impact that quality early learning has on a child's development. Every year, we welcome kindergarteners into our classrooms, and it is evident which students have attended prekindergarten programs. Those with quality early learning experience arrive ready to engage, with stronger language, social, and self-regulation skills.

Expanding access to prekindergarten in Hawai'i is essential to ensuring that *all* keiki, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to high-quality early learning experiences that set the foundation for lifelong success. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass HB429, H.D. 1, and fund the expansion of EOEL public Pre-K.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership on this issue and your commitment to our community.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Glen Miyasato". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "G" and a long, sweeping underline.

Glen Miyasato, Principal

Fern Elementary School



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WAHIAWA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
1402 GLEN AVENUE
WAHIAWA, HI 96786-2499
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO

HB 429 - Pre-K Expansion

Testimony Letter Template

February 18, 2025

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

My name is Sean Takashima, and I am the Principal of **Wahiawa Elementary School**. We have hosted an Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) public pre-kindergarten classroom at our school since the 2023-2024 school year. I am writing to **express support** for HB No. 429, H.D.1 which funds the expansion of EOEL public kindergarten classrooms on HIDOE campuses.

One of the major reasons I requested to have an EOEL program on campus is to create **academic readiness** for our students when they enter kindergarten. Since private pre-school is **unaffordable** for many of our families (65% qualify for free and/or reduced lunch), this program has already made a **huge impact**. Our **data** shows 75% of our preschool students who enter kindergarten can identify their letter names (lowercase and capital), identify letter sounds, and form simple blending of consonants and vowels. In addition, 85% of the kindergarten students have developed self-regulation skills that enable them to attend to task, socialize in a respectful manner, and express their thoughts orally. Pre-school has become a **game changer** for the Wahiawa community. It is my **desire** for other communities to benefit from the EOEL program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my thoughts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sean Takashima".

Sean Takashima, Principal

HB-429-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 3:06:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malaea Wetzel	Haleʻiwa Elementary / HIDOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Malaea Wetzel, and I am the proud principal of Haleʻiwa Elementary School. Since the 2019-2020 school year, we have been fortunate to host an Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) public prekindergarten classroom on our campus. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 429, H.D. 1, which provides funding to expand EOEL public prekindergarten classrooms on HIDOE campuses.

Having an EOEL prekindergarten class at our school has been incredibly beneficial for our students, families, and the broader school community. Each year, our program reaches capacity quickly, with a waitlist of eager families hoping for a spot. With the recent inclusion of three-year-olds, the demand has only grown, further highlighting the urgent need for expanded access to quality early learning.

The EOEL program is exceptionally well-supported. Our preschool teachers, educational assistants, and administrators engage in continuous professional development, benefiting from high-quality coaching, mentoring, and curriculum guidance that is tailored to the needs of our young learners.

As a principal, I see firsthand how early learning shapes a child’s future. Every year, when new kindergarteners join our school, it is clear which students have had access to high-quality early learning opportunities. These students enter with stronger language skills, better social-emotional regulation, and a greater readiness to learn—setting them up for success not only in kindergarten but throughout their educational journey.

Expanding access to EOEL public prekindergarten is a crucial step in ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to build a solid foundation for lifelong learning. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass HB 429, H.D. 1, and invest in the expansion of EOEL public Pre-K.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership in advancing early childhood education and your dedication to the future of Hawai‘i’s children.

Sincerely,
Malaea Wetzel
Principal, Hale'iwa Elementary School

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



ELAINE YAMASHITA
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
Early Learning Board
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

Feb. 18, 2025

To: Representative Yamashita, Chair
Representative Takenouchi, Vice-chair
House Finance Committee

From: Elaine Yamashita, Chair
Early Learning Board

Re: HB 429 HD1 support

Aloha, Honorable Chair Yamashita, Vice-chair Takenouchi, and members of the House Finance committee:

The Early Learning Board (ELB) formulates statewide policy relating to early learning, as well as directing the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL).

The Early Learning Board (ELB) supports HB 429 HD1 that requests the funding of 50 additional public preschool classrooms across the state in the next biennium, to be established and run by the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL).

EOEL continues to refine policies and procedures, using lessons learned from the previous expansion of classrooms. The new classrooms provide another option for families during the school day and school year.

Mahalo for your consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,

Elaine Yamashita
Early Learning Board Chair
elb@eoel.hawaii.gov



STATE OF HAWAII

Executive Office on Early Learning

Ke'ena Ho'okele Ho'ona'auao Pae Kamali'i o Hawai'i Moku'aina
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

TO: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

SUBJECT: Testimony on H.B. No. 429, H.D. 1 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.

Committee: FIN
Date: Thursday, February 20, 2025
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Location: Conference Room 308

Executive Office on Early Learning's Position: **SUPPORT**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments in strong support of H.B. No. 429, H.D. 1.

This House Majority Package bill appropriates funds and authorizes positions to support the expansion of EOEL Prekindergarten (Pre-K) classrooms over the next biennium. The dollar amounts and position counts in the original version of the bill align with the funding requested in the Governor's proposed executive budget. This funding has also been identified as a priority of the Lieutenant Governor's Ready Keiki initiative. We are grateful to the House Majority Caucus for introducing this bill and appreciate the opportunity to highlight this funding request.

EOEL works in partnership with the Hawai'i State Department of Education (HIDOE) to administer 92 Public Pre-K classrooms in 74 HIDOE campuses across the State. The funding and positions in this bill would allow EOEL to add an additional 50 classrooms over the next two years.

In 2020, the Hawai'i State Legislature passed Act 46 which established a framework and benchmarks for achieving universal access to early learning for 3- and 4-year-olds. The requested expansion of EOEL Pre-K classrooms helps advance our progress toward these goals and supports educational equity through priority enrollment for at-risk children.

Since the passage of Act 46, the number of EOEL prekindergarten classrooms has grown. However, demand remains high, with the number of applications far exceeding the number of available classroom seats for the 2024-25 school year.

As the program continues to grow, EOEL also works closely with HIDOE to ensure children enrolled in our classrooms receive high-quality early childhood development and early learning experiences that promote Kindergarten readiness. We are happy to report that the program is consistently recognized by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for meeting benchmarks for quality standards, and as of their 2023 report, Hawai'i is one of only five states that met all 10 benchmarks for state preschool programs.

EOEL strongly supports H.B. No. 429, H.D. 1, as it will expand access to high-quality early learning, advance educational equity, and help fulfill the state's commitment to universal access to early learning for 3 and 4-year-olds. We appreciate the Legislature's continued investment in our youngest keiki and their families and respectfully request your support of this funding.

HB-429-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:50:48 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leighton Nakamoto	Ka'ala Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

HB 429 - Pre-K Expansion

Testimony Letter

February 18, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

House Committee on Finance

Hawai'i State Capitol

415 S. Beretania St.

Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB No. 429, H.D. 1 – Relating To Early Learning

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

My name is Leighton Nakamoto, and I am the Principal of Ka'ala Elementary School. We have hosted an Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) public pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) classroom at our school since the 2024 - 2025 school year. I am writing to express my strong support for HB No. 429, H.D. 1 that funds the expansion of EOEL public Pre-K classrooms on HIDOE campuses.

Hosting an EOEL Pre-K class on campus provides significant benefits to the school and community by fostering growth in both academic and social skills through an engaging and supportive environment. In addition, EOEL allows Ka'ala to provide additional learning

opportunities for Pre-K students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) who benefit from an inclusion setting. Having an inclusion option for students with IEPs allows us to better service our students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) where they can develop the necessary skills to prepare them for kindergarten.

Ka'ala Elementary School, with a student body of 365 in the 2024-2025 school year, serves a community where 65% of students are identified as economically disadvantaged. Of our 55 incoming kindergarten students this year, only six had the benefit of preschool experience because many families lack the financial resources to provide crucial early learning opportunities. However, the EOEL program addresses this critical need by offering a free Pre-K program that equips students with foundational skills and fosters their social, emotional, and physical development for future success. Consequently, EOEL will have a significant and positive impact on our students and the broader community.

Furthermore, 11 students, who without EOEL would not have attended preschool, will be transitioning to kindergarten at the end of this school year. These students will enter kindergarten with a distinct advantage, possessing familiarity with school routines and procedures. This experience will position them as positive role models for their peers.

The program is very well supported, with Preschool teachers, Educational Assistants, and Administrators engaged in professional development throughout the year. We also receive coaching, mentoring, and curriculum development support tailored to the unique needs of our classroom.

As a Principal, I see firsthand the profound impact that quality early learning has on a child's development. Every year, we welcome kindergarteners into our classrooms, and it is evident which students have attended prekindergarten programs. Those with quality early learning experience arrive ready to engage, with stronger language, social, and self-regulation skills.

Expanding access to prekindergarten in Hawai'i is essential to ensuring that all keiki, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to high-quality early learning experiences that set the foundation for lifelong success. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass HB429, H.D. 1, and fund the expansion of EOEL public Pre-K.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership on this issue and your commitment to our community.

Mahalo,

Leighton Nakamoto

Ka'ala Elementary School



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LINAPUNI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
1434 Linapuni Street
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96819
Phone: (808) 305-2150 Fax: (808) 832-3305

February 18, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB No. 429, H.D. 1 – Relating To Early Learning

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

Aloha. My name is Kimberly Fuller, and I am privileged to serve as the Principal of Linapuni Elementary School, located in the heart of Kalihi Valley within one of Hawaii's largest public housing communities—Kuhio Homes and the Towers of Kuhio Park. Our school is privileged to serve a vibrant yet vulnerable student population, many of whom come from low-income and immigrant backgrounds. These children represent the future of our community, and it is crucial that we provide them with every opportunity to succeed.

The EOEL pre-kindergarten program at Linapuni is an essential part of the strong foundation we strive to provide our students. The two classrooms we currently have offer enriching learning experiences that support physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development, as well as language and literacy skills. For many of our children, these early educational experiences are the cornerstone of their success, preparing them for a successful transition to kindergarten and beyond.

Our school's vision, "**Lifelong Learning Begins Here,**" and our mission, to "**empower all students through an early learning environment that honors the uniqueness of our community in Hawai'i,**" are both closely aligned with the goals of the EOEL pre-kindergarten program. The program offers a solid foundation that will carry our students through their entire educational journey, helping them build the skills they need for future success.

The impact of the EOEL program extends far beyond the classroom. It provides invaluable professional development, coaching, and resources for our teachers and educational assistants. This support enables our educators to meet the diverse needs of every student, including those with disabilities, and fosters an inclusive learning environment where every child can thrive.

Having witnessed the positive impact of early education firsthand, I can confidently say that students who participate in EOEL pre-kindergarten programs are far better prepared for the academic and social challenges of kindergarten and beyond. The EOEL program is instrumental in ensuring our students have the skills and confidence they need to succeed both academically and in life.

As demand for early learning opportunities continues to rise in our community, Linapuni Elementary is requesting the addition of a third EOEL pre-kindergarten classroom for the 2025-2026 school year. This expansion is critical to ensuring that we can continue providing high-quality early education to all who need it within our growing community.

I respectfully ask for your continued support in expanding EOEL pre-kindergarten programs statewide. Investing in early childhood education is investing in the future of Hawai'i. By providing equitable access to early learning, we ensure that every child—regardless of their background—has the opportunity to succeed.

Thank you for your time, your dedication to early childhood education, and your commitment to the bright futures of our keiki. Your support makes an immeasurable difference in the lives of our students and the future of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Fuller

Kimberly Fuller

Principal, Linapuni Elementary School

HB 429 - Pre-K Expansion

February 19, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB No. 429, H.D. 1 – Relating To Early Learning

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

My name is Stacy Kawamura and I am the Principal of Honowai Elementary School. We opened our first Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) public pre-kindergarten classroom last school year and was fortunate to open a second classroom this year. I am writing to express my strong support for HB No. 429, H.D. 1 which funds the expansion of EOEL public pre-kindergarten classrooms on HIDOE campuses.

As a principal, I see firsthand the profound impact that quality early learning has on a child's development. Every year, we welcome kindergarteners into our classrooms, and it is evident which students have attended pre-kindergarten programs. Those with quality early learning experience arrive ready to engage, with stronger language, social, and self-regulation skills. Prior to opening our EOEL pre-k classrooms, very few, if any, of our kindergarteners attended any kind of pre-k program. This is primarily due to, 1) the lack of programs in our area, and 2) the costs for these programs being out of reach for many of our families. In just one year of opening our EOEL program, our kindergarten readiness assessment (KRA) showed a 20% increase in our students demonstrating or approaching readiness for kindergarten.

In addition, the EOEL pre-kindergarten program has allowed us an inclusion setting option for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), creating a broader scope of services and support for the young children in our community. We are able to better identify and support students who might be experiencing some kind of hardship or learning barrier.

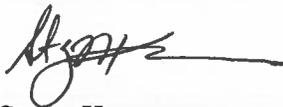
The EOEL program is very well supported, with Preschool teachers, Educational Assistants, and Administrators engaged in professional development throughout the

year. We also receive coaching, mentoring, and curriculum development support tailored to the unique needs of our classroom.

Expanding access to pre-kindergarten in Hawai'i is essential to ensuring that *all* keiki, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to high-quality early learning experiences that set the foundation for lifelong success. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass HB429, H.D. 1, and fund the expansion of EOEL public pre-k.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership on this issue and your commitment to our community.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stacy Kawamura', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Stacy Kawamura
Principal, Honowai Elementary

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 429 HD1 Relating to Early Learning
DATE: February 20, 2025
TIME: 10:00 AM
COMMITTEE: Committee on Finance
ROOM: Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in **SUPPORT of HB 429 HD1** which establishes appropriations for the expansion of 50 additional EOEL public pre-K classrooms over the next two years.

Expanding the Executive Office on Early Learning’s public pre-K program is critical to meeting the targets established in the legislatively supported Ready Keiki Initiative’s mixed delivery approach. This expansion will ensure Hawai’i’s three- and four-year-old keiki will have the opportunity to attend a high-quality preschool by 2032.

**HB 429 - Pre-K Expansion
Testimony Letter**

February 19, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB No. 429, H.D. 1 – Relating to Early Learning

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

My name is Daniel Espaniola, and I am the Principal of **Kaunakakai Elementary School** on Molokai. We have hosted an Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) public prekindergarten classroom at our school since I became Principal in 2017 and several years prior. I strongly support **HB No. 429, H.D. 1** which will fund the expansion of EOEL public prekindergarten classrooms on HIDOE campuses.

Hosting an EOEL prekindergarten class on our campus has been positive for our students, staff, and school. The program has provided additional learning opportunities for prekindergarten students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) who might benefit from an inclusion setting, leading to increased academic achievement, access to general curriculum, social and emotional growth, and improved communication skills. Many parents share that, because of the EOEL program, they notice their child's growth in social- emotional and cognitive development. They share that the program has effectively help to prepare their child for Kindergarten.

The EOEL program is well-supported, with Preschool teachers, Educational Assistants, and Administrators who engage in professional development throughout the school year. We have received coaching, mentoring, and curriculum development support tailored to the unique needs of our students and school.

The EOEL program has improved the quality of early learning of our students and their overall development. There is a significant difference in Kindergarten readiness between students who attend the program and those who not.

Those who complete the EOEL program are readier to engage, have social and self-regulation skills, and demonstrate improved language and communication skills.

Expanding access to prekindergarten in Hawai'i is vital to ensure that *all* of our keiki have access to high-quality early learning experiences, setting the foundation for lifelong success. Therefore, I urge you to pass **HB429, H.D. 1**, and fund the expansion of EOEL public pre-K.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership on this issue and your commitment to our schools and communities in Hawaii.

Mahalo,

Daniel Espaniola

Kaunakakai Elementary School

February 19, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB No. 429, H.D. 1 – Relating To Early Learning

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Allyson Doherty, and I am the Principal of Kailua Elementary School. Since 2018, our school has hosted an Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) public prekindergarten classroom, and I am writing to express my strong support for HB No. 429, H.D. 1, which funds the expansion of EOEL public prekindergarten classrooms on HIDOE campuses.

Hosting an EOEL prekindergarten classroom has been a transformative experience for our school community, particularly in increasing inclusion and setting students up for success as they transition into kindergarten. The program has allowed us to provide high-quality early learning experiences to a diverse range of students, including those with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), by fostering an inclusive environment where children of varying abilities learn and grow together.

This inclusion has enhanced the campus culture, as students build peer relationships early, develop self-regulation skills, and enter kindergarten with the foundational language and social-emotional abilities they need to thrive. Our teachers consistently note the difference in readiness between students who have attended EOEL prekindergarten programs and those who have not. The structured yet nurturing learning environment of EOEL classrooms ensures that students are exposed to literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills in a developmentally appropriate way.

Beyond student success, the EOEL program provides essential professional development and support for teachers and educational assistants. With ongoing coaching, mentoring, and curriculum guidance tailored to the unique needs of early learners, our educators are equipped with the best tools to foster strong learning outcomes.

Expanding access to EOEL public pre-kindergarten is critical for ensuring equitable early learning opportunities for all keiki, regardless of their background or learning needs. By investing in these programs, we are investing in Hawai'i's future—ensuring that all children enter kindergarten ready to engage, succeed, and contribute to their communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass HB 429, H.D. 1, and fund the expansion of EOEL public prekindergarten classrooms. Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to early childhood education in our state.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allyson Doherty". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping tail.

Allyson Doherty
Kailua Elementary School

**Testimony Letter for
HB 429 - Pre-K Expansion**

February 21, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB No. 429, H.D. 1 – Relating To Early Learning

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

My name is Lisa Ann Higa and I am the Principal of Nānākuli Elementary School. We have hosted an Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) public Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) classroom at our school since 2014. I am writing to express my strong support for HB No. 429, H.D. 1 which funds the expansion of EOEL public Pre-Kindergarten classrooms on HIDOE campuses.

In 2014, Nānākuli Elementary piloted the first EOEL Pre-K class in the Leeward District. I had students attending the program from Pearl City to Makaha. After ten years of advocating the importance of early learning in our community we received our second EOEL Pre-K class. To date, both classrooms are filled to capacity. Hosting two EOEL Pre-K classes on our campus has been very positive for our school. It allows us to provide additional learning opportunities for prekindergarten students which they may not have experienced due to financial circumstances. Students who attended our EOEL Pre-K classes have transitioned to Kindergarten smoothly. Teachers observed and shared how prepared our students were with academics, rituals and routines, conversational literacy and social-emotional regulation. Families of these students have shared how much they see a growth of learning when the child comes home daily. The children are often excited to share what they bring home from school. I am hoping to receive a third EOEL Pre-K class in the near future.

To me, a young child's brain is like a sponge - soaking in new experiences and learning at a fast rate of speed. Furthermore, this learning paves the pathway for greater opportunities and exposure as they grow older into their elementary years.

The program is very well supported, with Preschool teachers, Educational Assistants, and Administrators who engaged in professional development throughout the year. We also receive coaching, mentoring, and curriculum development support tailored to the unique needs of our school and classroom.

As a Principal, I see firsthand the profound impact that quality early learning has on a child's development. Every year, we welcome kindergarteners into our classrooms, and it is evident which students have attended prekindergarten programs. Those with quality early learning experience arrive ready to engage, with stronger language, social, and self-regulation skills.

Expanding access to prekindergarten in Hawai'i is essential to ensuring that *all* keiki, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to high-quality early learning experiences that set the foundation for lifelong success. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass HB429, H.D. 1, and fund the expansion of EOEL public Pre-K.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership on this issue and your commitment to our community.

Mahalo,


Lisa Ann Higa
Principal
Nānākuli Elementary School



**Testimony to the House Committee on Finance
Thursday, February 20, 2025
10:00 A.M.
Conference Room 308**

HB 429 HD1: RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

My name is Gary Kai, and I am the Executive Director of the Hawai'i Business Roundtable. The Hawai'i Business Roundtable strongly supports House Bill 429 HD1, which appropriates funds to hire teachers and teacher assistants and provides funding for equipment and services for public preschools. This bill is a critical step forward in expanding the Prekindergarten (Pre-K) program by ensuring the necessary resources for qualified educators, classroom infrastructure, and student support services.

We encourage the committee to consider the funding and position amounts contained in the original version of HB429, which aligns with the budget request of the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL). This funding is essential to the expansion of public PreK options for Hawaii families and delivering on the promise of Act 46 to provide access to PreK for all of our Keiki."

The Hawai'i Business Roundtable (HBR) is a statewide organization composed of Chief Executive Officers of many of the largest companies in Hawai'i. While it is a business leadership organization, HBR is deeply committed to strengthening our community by fostering public-private partnerships that support education, workforce development, and economic resilience. We believe that investing in early learning is an investment in Hawai'i's future, as it lays the foundation for academic success, workforce readiness, and lifelong contributions to our local economy.

HBR strongly supports this House Majority Package Bill and looks forward to working with the Legislature, the Executive Office of Early Learning, and the Hawai'i State Department of Education to ensure that every keiki in Hawai'i has access to Pre-K programs. We urge the Committee to pass HB 429 HD1 and continue to prioritize investments in early childhood education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Gary K. Kai
Executive Director
Hawai'i Business Roundtable



Kamehameha Schools®

House Committee on Finance

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Date: February 20, 2025

Where: Conference Room 308

TESTIMONY

By Dr. Wai‘ale‘ale Arroyo
Kamehameha Schools

RE: **HB 429, HD1, Relating to Early Learning**

E ka Luna Ho‘omalua Yamashita, ka Hope Luna Ho‘omalua Takenouchi, a me nā lālā o ke Kōmike Waiwai o ka Hale o nā Lunamaka‘āinana, aloha nui kākou. My name is Dr. Wai‘ale‘ale Arroyo, Vice President of Hi‘ialo at Kamehameha Schools.

Kamehameha Schools **supports** HB 429, HD1, which supports the continued implementation of EOEL public preschool for Hawai‘i’s keiki.

According to recent figures, only 41.4% of Native Hawaiian children attend preschool and 1 in 2 are living below the ALICE threshold. The continued expansion ensures that all keiki including Native Hawaiians have access to early learning in their community. Such access is important to ensure the readiness of keiki to enter kindergarten while lessening the financial burden on families.

Founded in 1887 by the legacy of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, Kamehameha Schools (KS) is a private, educational, charitable trust committed to improving the capability and well-being of Native Hawaiian people through education. KS envisions a thriving lāhui where learners, grounded in Christian and Hawaiian values, grow into ‘ōiwi leaders who inspire and contribute to their communities, both locally and globally.

‘A‘ohe ‘ulu e loa‘a i ka pōkole o ka lou. There is no success without preparation.



HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

RANDY PERREIRA, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

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

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 20, 2025

H.B. 429, H.D. 1 — RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO supports H.B. 429, H.D. 1, which appropriates funds to hire teachers and educational assistants and for equipment and services for public preschools.

Elementary school administrators have shared the positive outcomes of early childhood education, especially in offering valuable opportunities for children to build important skills to prepare them for kindergarten. Studies have shown that children from low to middle income households who gain access to preschool are projected to earn more as a result of attending preschool. This measure will support our working families with the high cost of childcare by providing the funding and positions necessary for the expansion of early learning classrooms statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 429, H.D. 1.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira
Executive Director

To: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

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

Subject: Measure H.B. No. 429 H.D. 1 – Relating to Early Learning

Hearing: Tuesday, February 20, 2025, at 10:00 AM, Conference Room 308

POSITION: STRONG SUPPORT

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT of H.B. No. 429 H.D. 1**, which appropriates funds to hire teachers and teacher assistants, as well as for equipment and services for public preschools.

HCAN Speaks! is dedicated to ensuring that all keiki in Hawai'i have access to high-quality early learning opportunities. Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that early learning is a critical factor in a child's academic success, social development, and long-term well-being. Expanding and strengthening our public preschool system is essential to creating equitable opportunities for all children, especially those from underserved communities.

The need for qualified teachers and teacher assistants in our public preschools cannot be overstated. Early learning professionals play a vital role in shaping young minds, and investing in their hiring and retention ensures that Hawai'i's keiki receive the best possible start to their education. Additionally, funding for essential equipment and services will provide our preschools with the resources necessary to create safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate learning environments.

H.B. No. 429 H.D. 1 represents a meaningful step toward addressing the existing gaps in Hawai'i's early learning infrastructure. By supporting this measure, we prioritize our keiki's future, strengthen our workforce, and invest in a more prosperous Hawai'i.

We respectfully urge the committee to pass H.B. No. 429 H.D. 1 and continue the commitment to expanding access to high-quality early learning programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT** of this critical legislation.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.



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Osa Tui, Jr.
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Logan Okita
Vice President

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Secretary-Treasurer

Ann Mahi
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Item: **HB 429 HD 1 - Related to Early Learning**

Position: **SUPPORT**

Hearing: **Thursday, February 20, 2025, 10:00 am, Room 308**

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

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association supports HB 429 HD 1, which appropriates funds to hire teachers and teacher assistants and for equipment and services for public preschools.

Preschool plays a crucial role in a child's development, laying the foundation for their future academic, social, and emotional success. Here's why it's so important:

Cognitive Development

- **Brain Development**: The preschool years are a critical period for brain development. Preschool programs provide stimulating environments and activities that enhance cognitive abilities, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and memory.
- **Early Literacy and Math Skills**: Preschool introduces children to foundational literacy skills like letter recognition, phonics, and vocabulary, as well as basic math concepts like counting, shapes, and patterns. These skills are essential for future academic success.
- **Curiosity and Exploration**: Preschool encourages children to explore their surroundings, fostering curiosity and a love of learning. Through play-based activities, children develop a sense of wonder and a desire to learn more about the world around them.

Social and Emotional Development

- Social Skills: Preschool provides opportunities for children to interact with their peers, learn to share, cooperate, and resolve conflicts. These social skills are crucial for building relationships and navigating social situations throughout life.
- Emotional Regulation: Preschool helps children develop emotional regulation skills, such as recognizing and managing their emotions, and understanding the emotions of others. This emotional intelligence is essential for building resilience and mental well-being
- Self-Confidence: Preschool provides a supportive environment where children can develop a sense of self-confidence and independence. They learn to make choices, take on challenges, and celebrate their accomplishments, which builds their self-esteem and belief in their abilities.

School Readiness

- Structure and Routine: Preschool introduces children to the structure and routine of a classroom environment, helping them prepare for the expectations of kindergarten and beyond. They learn to follow directions, listen to teachers, and participate in group activities.
- Academic Skills: Preschool provides a foundation for academic learning by introducing children to basic concepts in literacy, math, science, and other subjects. This gives them a head start when they enter formal schooling.
- Social and Emotional Readiness: Preschool helps children develop the social and emotional skills they need to succeed in school, such as the ability to focus, follow directions, and interact positively with peers and adults.

Long-Term Benefits

- Academic Achievement: Research has shown that children who attend preschool are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and achieve higher levels of education.
- Economic Success: Studies have also linked preschool attendance to higher earning potential and greater economic stability in adulthood.
- Social and Civic Engagement: Preschool graduates are more likely to be involved in their communities, vote, and participate in civic activities.

In conclusion, preschool provides a strong foundation for children's future success in all areas of life. It's an investment in their cognitive, social, emotional, and academic development that pays dividends for years to come. The Hawai'i State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council
1010 Richards Street Honolulu, HI 96813
Phone: (808) 586-8126 Fax: (808) 586-8129
email: spin@doh.hawaii.gov

February 20, 2025

**Special Education
Advisory Council**

Ms. Martha Guinan, *Chair*
Ms. Susan Wood, *Vice Chair*

Ms. Kathie Awaya
Ms. Virginia Beringer
Mr. Will Carlson
Ms. Annette Cooper
Mr. Mark Disher
Ms. Nancy Gorman
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Ms. Dale Matsuura
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Mr. Steven Vannatta
Ms. Lisa Vegas
Ms. Jasmine Williams

Ms. Helen Kaniho, *liaison to
the Superintendent*
Ms. Wendy Nakasone-Kalani,
*liaison to the military
community*

Amanda Kaahanui, Staff
Susan Rocco, Staff

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Committee on Finance
Board of Education
Hawaii State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: HB 429, HD 1 - RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

Dear Chair Yamashita and members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) is in support of HB 429, HD 1 which appropriates funds to hire teachers and teacher assistants and for equipment and services for public preschools.

This legislation advances the State's commitment to provide universal access to high quality early learning for Hawaii's 3- and 4-year-olds. Numerous research studies have shown the long-term benefits of quality early childhood education programs for students with and without disabilities, including increased high school graduation rates, lower grade retention and dropout rates, and greater social and emotional maturity. There is also ample evidence that access to quality preschool programming can lessen referrals for special education services by providing prevention and early intervention strategies to meet students' diverse needs.

HB 429, HD 1 will allow the Executive Office on Early Learning to add another 50 Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) classrooms over the next two years. It provides funding for Pre-K teachers and teacher assistants, and assists in covering equipment and additional services needed for students and staff. It will also create more opportunities for young children with disabilities to have their school readiness needs met in inclusive settings.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue.

Respectfully,


Martha Guinan
Chair



**Testimony to the House Committee on Finance
Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair**

**Thursday, February 20, 2025, at 10:00AM
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference**

RE: HB29 HD1 Relating to Early Learning

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports House Bill 429 House Draft 1 (HB429 HD1)), which appropriates funds to hire teachers and teacher assistants and for equipment and services for public preschools.

HB429 HD1 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Business Services. This bill promotes policies that drive economic growth, enhance workforce opportunities, and improve the quality of life for Hawaii's residents.

The high cost of childcare in Hawaii strains working families, limiting access to early education and hindering kindergarten readiness. Expanding free public preschool would ease this burden, providing children with a strong academic foundation and better future opportunities. However, a shortage of preschool teachers and assistants, along with inadequate classroom resources, challenges the quality of early education. This bill aims to fund staffing and essential resources in public preschools to address these issues.

The proposal appropriates state funds for fiscal years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 to hire preschool teachers, educational assistants, and administrative staff, while also covering costs for substitutes, classroom supplies, transportation, subscriptions, and furnishings. The Department of Education will oversee fund distribution to ensure preschool expansion. The Chamber supports this measure as it strengthens Hawaii's workforce by helping parents stay employed while giving children a solid educational start.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.

We respectfully ask to pass House Bill 429 House Draft 1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

HB-429-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 5:05:23 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April Bautista	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I kindly ask that you pass out of Committee HB429 HD1.

Mahalo,

April

April Kamilah Bagasao Bautista