



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

Date: 02/07/2025

Time: 09:30 AM

Location: 325 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Agriculture & Food Systems

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0497, HD1 RELATING TO THE HAWAII CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS.

Purpose of Bill: Transfers the Hawaii Child Nutrition Programs Agency from the Department of Education to the Department of Agriculture and codifies its establishment. Establishes a grant program to be administered by the Agency to support the funding of certain initiatives for the State's public schools. Appropriates funds for grants. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) provides comments on HB 497 HD 1.

The Department has concerns with the suggestion that the current placement of the Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs (HCNP) within the Department, results in the School Food Services Branch impeding HCNP's ability to operate with independence, efficiency, and flexibility in conducting compliance audits and fiscal reviews. The Department would note that action was taken years ago to address a perceived conflict of oversight by reorganizing HCNP to move it from within the Office of Business Services, which oversaw the School Food Services program, to the Office of the Superintendent, and then later to the Office of Fiscal Services. It should be noted that neither the Office of the Superintendent nor the Office of Fiscal Services falls under the control of the School Food Services Branch.

Despite this, if concerns exist with the current location of the HCNP, an alternative option is to reorganize the Department to place HCNP within the Department's compliance area, which would fall under the purview of Deputy Superintendent of Strategy and Administration, Tammi Oyadomari-Chun.

In addition, it is unclear why additional resources to advance the State's farm to school initiative would be provided to the HCNP, which is an agent of the United States Department of Agriculture that

takes its direction from the federal government and relies on federal funds for its operations except for an annual maintenance of effort general fund appropriation of approximately \$185,000. As noted in Section 1 of this measure, Act 175, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2021 established a target for the Department of thirty percent of the food products served in public schools, as measured by the total cost of food, shall be locally sourced. Work by the Department is already underway with planning for centralized kitchens to meet this target. Assigning responsibility to advance farm-to-school objectives in Hawai'i to an agent of the United States Department of Agriculture, who is now currently under a new administration, that may or may not share the same strategic and operational plans as the Department has the potential to undermine the work necessary to meet the thirty percent target.

Furthermore, given the fact that the HCNP monitors the Department's School Food Service program for federal compliance and approves the payment of federal reimbursements, this measure may inadvertently formalize in state law a conflict should there be a difference of opinion in strategic and operational plans to meet the State's thirty percent target.

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

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



State of Hawai'i
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SHARON HURD
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2025
9:30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325

HOUSE BILL NO. 497 HD1
RELATING TO THE HAWAII CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 497 HD1. This bill proposes to transfer the Hawaii Child Nutrition Programs Agency from the Department of Education to the Department of Agriculture (Department) and codifying its establishment. It further seeks to establish a grant program, administered by the Agency, to support initiatives for the State's public schools and to appropriate funding for these grants. The Department respectfully offers the following comments.

While the Department supports the Legislature's intent behind this measure, it acknowledges a lack of familiarity with the operational functions and specific responsibilities of the various entities involved in the proposed transfer. Furthermore, there may be logistical challenges that could lead to unintended consequences.

Accordingly, the Department expresses its appreciation for all efforts to support child nutrition programs in Hawai'i but respectfully defers to the Department of Education regarding the proposed transfer of the Hawaii Child Nutrition Programs Agency.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.





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Aloha Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the House Agriculture & Food Systems Committee,

The Hawai'i Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFU supports HB497.**

By transferring the Hawaii Child Nutrition Programs (HCNP) to the Department of Agriculture, this legislation not only bolsters our children's health by ensuring greater access to fresh, locally-sourced food, but also strengthens Hawaii's agricultural community by creating increased demand for our local farmers' produce. Housing HCNP within the Department of Agriculture underscores a commitment to fostering sustainable agricultural practices and ensuring a robust and reliable supply chain that benefits Hawaii's economy and ecosystem simultaneously.

This move enables the HCNP to operate with greater independence and efficiency, enhancing its ability to conduct necessary compliance audits and fiscal reviews without interference. Furthermore, the establishment of a grant program, as detailed in the bill, will provide much-needed funding to schools, enabling expanded infrastructure for the preparation and use of minimally processed local foods. These grants will also support educational initiatives that make farm-to-school connections more tangible for students, involve community stakeholders, and promote a deeper understanding of nutrition and the benefits of locally-sourced diets. In doing so, we not only nourish our children with nutritious meals but also cultivate a generation that values and supports local agriculture.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



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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 5, 2025

To: Representative Kirstin Kahaloa, Chair
Representative Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

RE: Support for HB 497, Relating to the Hawaii Child Nutrition Programs

Hrg: Friday, February 7, 2025, at 9:30 am, Conference Room 325

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹, the Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) coalition² and the Hawai'i Farm to School Network,³ are in Support of HB 497, which moves the Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs (HCNP), currently located in the Department of Education (DOE), to the Department of Agriculture (DOA) and establishes a grant program to strengthen farm-to-school initiatives.

This bill ensures that federal child nutrition programs are managed with independent oversight, expands local food procurement, and strengthens ties to farm-to-school coordination under the DOA.

Removing the Conflict of Interest

The Hawai'i Child Nutrition Program's intent is to ensure that the DOE is complying with federal school food nutrition guidelines. HCNP is unable to do its job effectively due to being housed within the agency it is tasked to regulate, the DOE. This move will enhance compliance with federal child nutrition standards while eliminating conflicts of interest in school meal audits and management. Schools will benefit from a direct link to local farmers, increasing purchasing opportunities and improving food quality for Hawai'i's keiki.

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 The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.

³ Founded in 2010, the **Hawai'i Farm to School Hui** is a statewide network comprising five island-level networks, community organizations, schools, state agencies, and other food systems stakeholders with a collective mission to strengthen Hawai'i's farm to school movement. The three pillars of successful farm to school programs are 1) school gardens and on-campus farms, 2) education, and 3) school food improvements through local procurement.



Support for 30% Local by 2030

Supporting Hawai'i's "30 by 30" school food goal requires a structural shift to integrate locally grown foods into school meals successfully. Act 175 (2021) mandates that 30% of food served in public schools be locally sourced by 2030, yet DOE reports that only 5.43% of its food currently comes from local producers.⁴ Transferring HCNP to the DOA strengthens farm-to-school coordination by placing oversight within the agency best equipped to support agricultural procurement and regional food systems.

Farm to School Grant

HB 497 establishes a grant program to expand farm-to-school efforts, funding initiatives that support fresh food procurement, kitchen equipment upgrades, and nutrition education. By investing in school food infrastructure and technical assistance for farmers, this bill helps create a sustainable, transparent, and farmer-focused school meal system. Increased access to local, minimally processed foods will improve student health outcomes and drive economic growth for Hawai'i's agricultural sector. The passage of HB 497 is a crucial step toward reducing the state's reliance on imported food, strengthening food security, and ensuring that future generations benefit from a more resilient and community-driven food system.

Mahalo for considering this measure and the opportunity to testify in support of HB 497.

Mahalo nui loa,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kawika Kahiapo".

Kawika Kahiapo
Hawai'i Farm to School Network Program Coordinator
Hawaii Public Health Institute

⁴ Heaton, T., & Heaton, T. (2025, January 10). DOE gets an F: Hawai'i schools miss their first local food target. *Honolulu Civil Beat*. <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/01/doe-gets-an-f-hawai%CA%BBi-schools-miss-their-first-local-food-target/>

HB-497-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 5:51:20 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/7/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Faun Skyles	Farm Link Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Farm Link Hawai'i strongly supports **HB497**, which strengthens farm-to-school efforts by transferring the Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs Agency to the Department of Agriculture and establishing a grant program to increase the use of locally grown foods in public schools.

This bill provides essential resources to help schools procure fresh, minimally processed local foods while also funding equipment, professional development, and technical assistance. By aligning child nutrition programs with the Department of Agriculture, this measure enhances coordination between local farmers and school meal programs, making it easier to achieve the state's "30 by 30" goal.

Investing in this initiative supports Hawai'i's agricultural economy, strengthens food security, supports food hubs, and ensures our keiki have access to nutritious, locally sourced meals. **We urge your support for this critical legislation.**

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Faun A. Skyles
Culinary Director
Farm Link Hawai'i



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Rep. Kirstin Kahaloe, Chair
Rep. Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair

HB497 HD1

RELATING TO THE HAWAII CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Friday, February 7, 2025, 9:30 AM
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

Chair Kahaloe, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports HB497 HD1** which transfers the Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs Agency from the Department of Education to the Department of Agriculture and codifies its establishment. Establishes a grant program to be administered by the Agency to support the funding of certain initiatives for the State's public schools and appropriates funds for grants.

The health and nutrition of our keiki is paramount to a successful future. This bill will allow for grants to purchase local food, educate children about good nutrition, and increase our access to federal child nutrition programs. This helps both our keiki as well as our farmers and ranchers.

The American Heart Association recognizes beef as a heart healthy protein and even provides recipes that include lean beef. Research by Roussell et al (2012) shows eating lean beef as part of a heart-healthy dietary pattern can help maintain normal cholesterol levels. Hawaii's locally grown beef provides 10 essential nutrients in a single 3 oz. serving. This includes high-quality protein, iron, zinc and B vitamins. The iron in beef is heme iron, which is more easily absorbed than nonheme iron, which is the main form of iron found in plant proteins. Iron is vital as it helps red blood cells carry oxygen to body tissue, but even further, it also plays an important role in cognitive health such as memory, learning, and reasoning.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this measure. The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council (HCC) is the Statewide umbrella organization comprised of the four county-level Cattlemen's Associations. Our member ranchers represent over 60,000 head of beef cows; more than 75% of all the beef cows in the State. Ranchers are the stewards of over 750 thousand acres of land in Hawaii, or 20% of the State's total land mass. We represent the interests of Hawaii's cattle producers.

Nicole Galase
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council
Managing Director

Sources Cited

Roussell, M. A., Hill, A. M., Gaugler, T. L., West, S. G., Heuvel, J. P. V., Alaupovic, P., Gillies, P. J., & Kris-Etherton, P. M. (2012). Beef in an Optimal Lean Diet study: Effects on lipids, lipoproteins, and apolipoproteins. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 95(1), 9-16. <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.111.016261>



HB-497-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 4:23:46 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/7/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Hines	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Mark Hines, and I am writing in strong support of HB497, which would move the Hawai‘i Child Nutrition Program (HCNP) from the Department of Education (DOE) to the Department of Agriculture (DOA). As an educator dedicated to deeper learning, student well-being, and community engagement, I see this transition as a crucial step in ensuring that our school meal programs better serve Hawai‘i’s students and local farmers.

For years, the HCNP has played an essential role in monitoring the quality and compliance of school meals. However, its placement within the DOE creates an inherent conflict of interest—limiting its ability to function independently and advocate effectively for improvements. By relocating HCNP to the Department of Agriculture, we create an opportunity for greater objectivity, accountability, and most importantly, a stronger commitment to sourcing local food for our schools.

This bill also aligns with Hawai‘i’s broader commitment to food security and sustainability. Act 175 (2021) set a goal for 30% of school food to be locally sourced by 2030, yet bureaucratic barriers continue to make it difficult for our schools to prioritize local food purchasing. By placing HCNP within DOA, we empower those who have direct expertise in agricultural systems and food distribution to strengthen farm-to-school partnerships, increase access to fresh and nutritious meals, and support our local economy.

As an advocate for deeper learning, I firmly believe that students should not only learn about sustainability and local agriculture in the classroom, but also experience it firsthand through the meals they eat at school. A stronger farm-to-school system fosters student engagement, improves health outcomes, and reinforces the critical connection between education, community, and ‘āina.

I urge you to support HB497 to help us create a school food system that is transparent, sustainable, and truly committed to the well-being of our keiki and the future of Hawai'i's agriculture.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Mark Hines

HB-497-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 10:22:25 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/7/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniela Spoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, members of the committee,

As an parent and advocate for improving school meals, I support HB497.

Hawaii is unique in that it is the only state in the nation that operates a single school district out of it's state education department. While the placement of the USDA Child Nutrition Programs enforcement agency in the state education department works well in other states, in Hawaii, it has again and again created complications.

Placing this agency within the Hawaii Department of Agriculture would help alleviate some of these complications, and also has the added benefit of placing one of our largest public nutrition programs under the same agency that governs local agriculture. While HCNP does not procure food directly, the hope is that this placement, provided with the farm to school grant funding, will improve the coordination between local growers and school food authorities. This includes both public and charter schools.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB-497-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 11:00:00 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/7/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lydi Morgan Bernal	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Thank you for hearing this bill, which I **support**. This bill is very important to advancing Hawai'i's farm to school program and local school food goals.

For decades, the housing of HCNP within HDOE has been a critical hinderance to meaningful progress on farm to school, due in part to prohibitive beaurocratic layers and processes within HDOE. Establishing HCNP within HDOA for administrative purposes is a very important shift that will allow HCNP to be the effective partner it is fully capable of and equipped to be.

Establishing a funded farm to school grant program through HDOA/HCNP is also an excellent step forward and will move Hawai'i into a 'hui' of other states that are successfully implementing farm to school grants and statewide programming on behalf of all students and communities.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify, and for your support of farm to school!

HB-497-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 12:23:23 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/7/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Debbie Millikan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Chair Kahaloa

Hearing: February 7, 2025 at 9:30 AM

Aloha Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch and House Agriculture Committee Members,

Please support HB497 to move the HCNP from DOE to the Department of Agriculture which will ensure greater objectivity and independence.

The Hawai‘i Child Nutrition Program (HCNP) monitors the quality and compliance of meals provided by school districts through federal nutrition programs. This is a critical watchdog agency that is currently housed in the same agency it is tasked with monitoring.

We need greater accountability and transparency in order to achieve Hawai‘i’s goal to source 30% of school food locally by 2030 (as mandated by Act 175, 2021 / HRS 302A-405.6).

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Debbie Millikan

Honolulu, HI

HB-497-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:49:52 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/7/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeannette Soon-Ludes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kakou,

I am writing in support of HB497 as an individual citizen with experience as Executive Director of Mala'ai, a nonprofit based on Hawai'i Island dedicated to improving our students' access to garden education and connection with our local food system. At present, the Hawaii Child Nutrition Program (HCNP) monitors the quality and compliance of meals provided by school districts through federal nutrition programs, yet is housed within the Department of Education (DOE) for which it is tasked with monitoring. This does not create the degree of accountability and oversight that our youth deserve. For this reason, I am in support of the proposed bill, which would move the HCNP from the DOE to the Department of Agriculture. This change would create greater accountability and support related efforts to provide fresh, locally-sourced foods in our school districts.

Me ka ha'a ha'a,

Dr. Jeannette Soon-Ludes, PhD