

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: 02/20/2025

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0683, HD1 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

Purpose of Bill: Establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinators positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the State. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on HB 683, which seeks to establish four (4) additional full-time permanent student transportation coordinator positions.

Currently, eight (8) district transportation officers manage and coordinate services across Hawaii's diverse districts - Kauai, West Hawaii, East Hawaii, Maui, Central Oahu, Leeward Oahu, Windward Oahu, and Honolulu. These officers are tasked with ensuring safe, efficient transportation, particularly with the rising number of curb-to-curb requests.

Adding four (4) positions will provide essential support for larger districts, like Maui and East Hawaii, and alleviate the pressure on current staff. This expansion will help manage growing demands, particularly for federal and state-mandated transportation, ensuring students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) receive timely services.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for this measure.



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 FINANCE

Item: HB 683, HD1 – Relating to Student Transportation

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 (HSTA) **supports** HB 683, HD1 which addresses the urgent need to strengthen Hawai'i's student transportation system. HB 683, HD1 proposes establishing student transportation coordinator positions for each county to improve oversight and efficiency in providing these essential services.

These coordinators would play a vital role in addressing the chronic bus driver shortages and service disruptions that have plagued our schools in recent years. By improving coordination and communication among schools, transportation providers, and families, we can ensure that all students have reliable access to education.

Mahalo.



HOUSE BILL 683, HD1, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

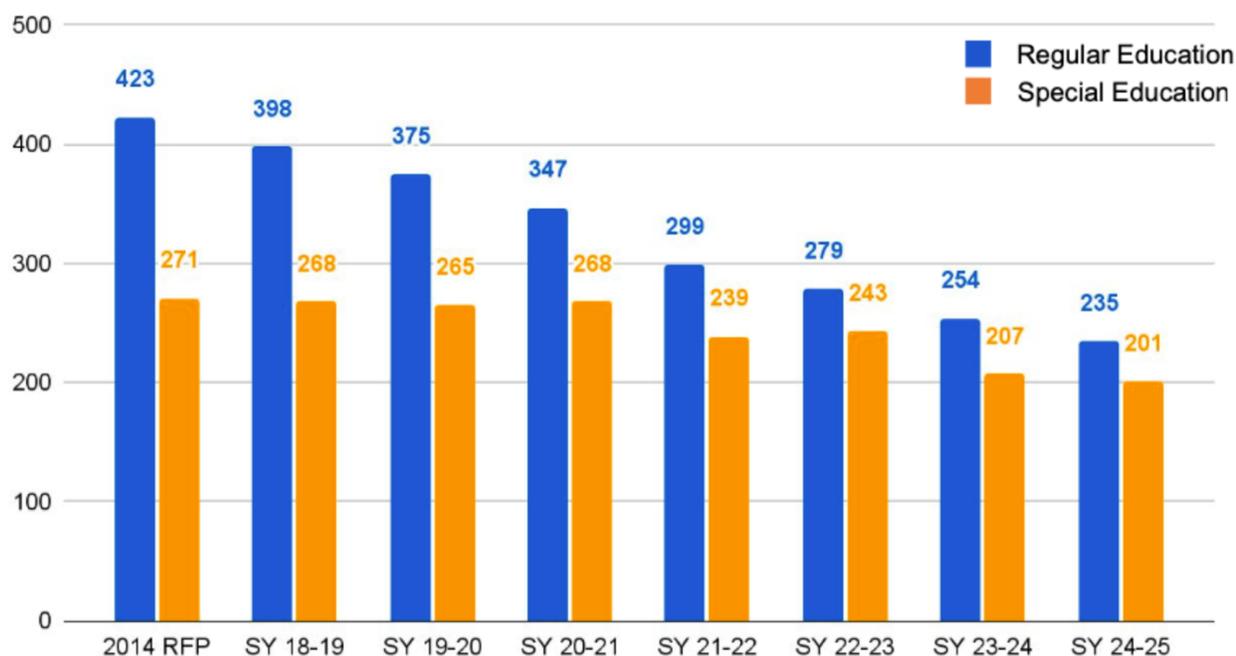
FEBRUARY 20, 2025 · FIN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 683, HD1, relating to student transportation, which establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinator positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the State.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com



Testimony of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

Committee on Finance

Date & Time February 20, 2025, at 10:00AM

Location VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Conference Room 308

State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

Measure HB683

Measure Title: Relating to Student Transportation

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

The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OahuMPO) **supports Measure HB683**, which establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinators positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the State.

Supporting this legislation will empower students to become more independently mobile by ensuring transportation coordinators consider the unique needs of all students. Hawaii's school transportation system must go beyond traditional busing to include safe, multimodal options that allow students to walk, bike, or take transit with confidence.

Dedicated coordinators can work with families, schools, and communities to develop transportation plans that support students with disabilities, those in rural areas, and those without access to traditional school buses. By integrating bike buses, walking school buses, and transit education, these positions will help students build lifelong mobility skills while reducing school-related traffic congestion.

Coordinators will also ensure that transportation policies align with equity, climate, and safety goals, creating a system that works for all students. Investing in these roles will foster student independence, improve access to education, and build a more sustainable future.

HB683 aligns with the Vision and Goals of the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), by promoting an equitable and resilient transportation system.

The OahuMPO is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on the island of Oahu responsible for carrying out a multimodal transportation planning

process, including the development of a long-range (25-year horizon) metropolitan transportation plan, referred to as the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), which encourages and promotes a safe, efficient, and resilient transportation system that serves the mobility needs of all people and freight (including walkways, bicycles, and transit), fosters economic growth and development, while minimizing fuel consumption and air pollution ([23 CFR 450.300](#)).

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



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. 683. H.D. 1 – RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO supports the intent of H.B. 683, H.D. 1, which establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinators positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the State.

The disruption of almost 150 bus routes on three islands, affecting about 3,700 students left school principals and their office staff scrambling to assist upset parents, stranded students, and no contingency plan to get them to school consistently for weeks, if not months. Without notice except a copy of a memo to affected families, dozens of schools were bombarded by parents seeking mileage reimbursements for dropping their students to school or requesting HOLO cards for their kids to ride public transportation, which added increase chaos to an already hectic first week of school. We appreciate the intent of this measure as it recognizes the critical issues around student transportation and aims to prevent another disruption for future school years.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 683, H.D. 1.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira
Executive Director



Email: communications@ulupono.com

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Thursday, February 20, 2025 — 10:00 a.m.

Ulupono Initiative supports HB 683 HD 1, Relating to Student Transportation

Dear Chair Yamashita and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mariah Yoshizu, and I am the Government Affairs Associate at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy, clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

Ulupono supports of HB 683 HD 1, which establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinator positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the state.

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Advisory Committee's January 2025 Annual Report¹ outlines several critical findings regarding school transportation and safe routes to school in Hawai'i. National research shows that SRTS programs can significantly increase walking and biking to school, with participation rising 18-37 percent, while simultaneously reducing pedestrian injuries in school zones by 44-75 percent. The need for these programs is widespread, as approximately 77 percent of Hawai'i residents live within one mile of a school. Furthermore, a preliminary analysis has already identified more than \$800 million in SRTS infrastructure needs across the state. One of the key recommendations of this report is to "invest in a strong network of SRTS staff ..." to address these issues and develop these types of programs, of which student transportation coordinators can be an integral part.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Mariah Yoshizu
Government Affairs Associate

¹ <https://hidot.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/HWY-S-25-2.45019-DOT-Report-for-Act-244-SLH-2023-Safe-Routes-to-School.pdf>

HB-683-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 5:08:33 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:

Thank you for hearing this bill. I kindly ask that you pass HB683 HD1 out of the Committee.

Take care,

April

April Kamilah Bagasao Bautista

Kalihi-Pālama