



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 0861 RELATING TO TRANSPORTATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Designates student transportation as critical infrastructure and a critical service for Hawaii's public education system. Requires all school bus contracts between the State and the contractor to include certain standards, performance metrics, and accountability requirements to prevent service disruptions.

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on HB 861. While the Department acknowledges the intent of HB 861 to address the current transportation challenges, it is important to clarify that the underlying cause of the shortage is the availability of qualified drivers, which is fundamentally a workforce issue, rather than a matter related to contracting.

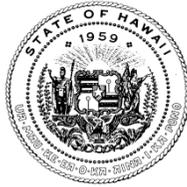
The nationwide shortage of qualified commercial drivers, including school bus drivers, is a well-documented issue that continues to escalate and is expected to worsen in the coming years. The Department does not directly operate a school bus fleet, nor does it have the necessary resources to do so. Introducing provisions that penalize workforce shortfalls could result in further exacerbating the driver shortage, leaving the Department with an even more limited pool of drivers and face compliance issues regarding services for students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs).

Instead, the Department is open to a more collaborative approach towards the next term of RFP contracts. Including input from various stakeholders could offer a better perspective that would make any future transitions less impactful.

The Department thanks the Committee for the opportunity to comment on HB861 and remains committed to working collaboratively to find effective solutions to the ongoing transportation challenges.

LATE \*Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



EDWIN H. SNIFFEN  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

Deputy Directors  
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DREANALEE K. KALILI  
TAMMY L. LEE  
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STATE OF HAWAI'I | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | KA 'OIHANA ALAKAU  
869 PUNCHBOWL STREET  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-5097

**LATE**

February 11, 2025  
2:01 P.M.  
State Capitol, Room 309

**H.B. 861  
RELATING TO TRANSPORTATION**

House Committee on Education

The Department of Transportation (DOT) supports HB861, recognizing its critical role in ensuring reliable and equitable school bus service for Hawaii's students. By designating student transportation as essential infrastructure and implementing stronger performance standards and accountability measures in school bus contracts, this bill will help prevent service disruptions and improve access to education for all students.

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



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President

**Logan Okita**  
Vice President

**Cheney Kaku**  
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**Ann Mahi**  
Executive Director

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## TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Item: HB 861 – Relating to Transportation**

**Position: Support**

**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) **supports** HB 861 which address the critical need for reliable student transportation in our public education system. A consistent and dependable school bus service is fundamental to ensuring equitable access to education for all students, enabling them to arrive at school on time and ready to learn. This is especially vital for students from low-income families, those with disabilities, and those in rural areas who often face additional barriers to accessing education.

HB 861 would require proactive measures such as contingency planning, stricter accountability, and clear performance standards to prevent service disruptions. Last year's suspension of 147 bus routes, impacting around 3,720 students, underscores the urgent need for this legislation. Ensuring reliable transportation is an investment in our students' futures and a critical step towards fulfilling our promise of quality public education for all.

Mahalo.



## **HOUSE BILL 861, RELATING TO TRANSPORTATION**

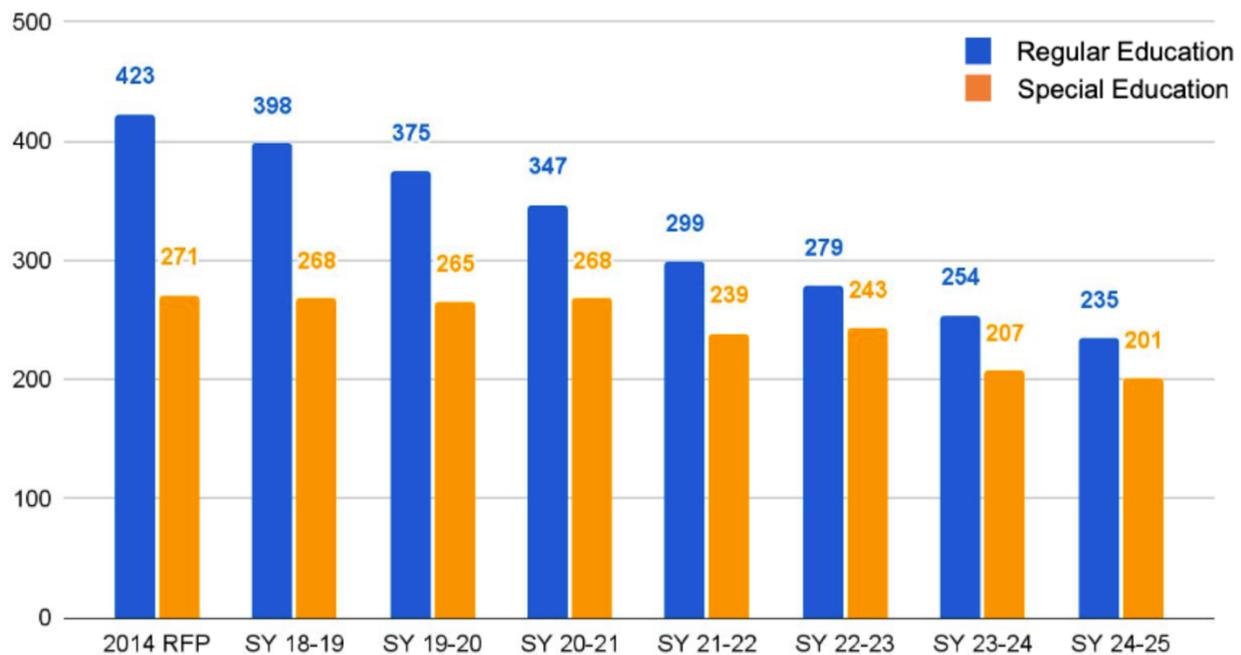
FEBRUARY 11, 2025 · EDN HEARING

**POSITION:** Support.

**RATIONALE:** The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 861, relating to transportation, which designates student transportation as critical infrastructure and a critical service for Hawai'i's public education system; and requires all school bus contracts between the state and the contractor to include certain standards, performance metrics, and accountability requirements to prevent service disruptions.

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](mailto:educationcaucusdph@gmail.com)**

TESTIMONY OF  
**LARRY S VERAY**

TO THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

***IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB861***

**RELATED TO TRANSPORTATION**

February 9, 2025

Aloha, Chair Woodson and Vice Chair La Chica and committee members. I am Larry Veray, Chairman for the Pearl City Neighborhood Board No. 21. I am submitting this testimony representing our board as a whole. Our neighborhood board passed resolutions and outgoing letters to the Department of Education stating our requirement for Pearl City to prevent bus service disruptions for our students. **I am in STRONG SUPPORT OF HB861.**

Our student bus service for Pearl City requires a strong infrastructure and uninterrupted service. All bus contracts should meet high standards and accountability. We should not leave any students behind as we have experienced over the past years of disrupted service and many students having to find their own personal transportation to get to their schools.

**Please approve HB861.** Mahalo!

*Larry S. Veray*



**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 Education

Testimony by  
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 11, 2025

H.B. 861 – Relating to Transportation

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO supports the intent of H.B. 861, which designates student transportation as critical infrastructure and a critical service for Hawaii's public education system. It also requires all school bus contracts between the State and the contractor to include certain standards, performance metrics, and accountability requirements to prevent service disruptions.

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. We hope this will also expand to the bus contracts for athletic programs which are currently handled separately. It is not unusual for high school athletics to use up their transportation budget before the winter sports season even begins because the contracts are negotiated separately for each school and not under the same management and oversight as the larger contracts are.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 861.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira  
Executive Director



## **Testimony of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization**

### **Committee Name Education**

**February 11, 2025, at 2:01PM**  
**Location: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**  
**Conference Room 309**  
**State Capitol**  
**415 South Beretania Street**

### **Measure HB861** **Measure Title Relating to Transportation**

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Committee Members,

The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OahuMPO) **supports Measure HB861**, which designates student transportation as critical infrastructure and a critical service for Hawai'i's public education system and requires all school bus contracts between the State and the contractor to include certain standards, performance metrics, and accountability requirements to prevent service disruptions.

This legislation will ensure that student transportation is recognized as a critical infrastructure component, essential for Hawaii's public education system. By establishing clear standards, performance metrics, and accountability requirements for school bus contracts, this legislation will minimize disruptions and ensure reliable, safe transportation for students. This is particularly important as the state transitions toward more sustainable transportation solutions, such as zero-emission buses and improving active transportation options. With clear expectations in place, contractors will be incentivized to prioritize timely, dependable service while exploring innovative, low-carbon alternatives to traditional diesel buses.

This bill will strengthen the resilience of the student transportation system and align with Hawaii's climate goals by ensuring that the services are part of the state's broader efforts to reduce emissions and promote sustainable mobility.

HB861 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.

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair  
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Education

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

Subject: Measure H.B. No. 861 – Relating to Transportation

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

**POSITION: STRONG SUPPORT**

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT of H.B. No. 861**, which designates student transportation as critical infrastructure and a critical service for Hawai'i's public education system. This bill also ensures that all school bus contracts include necessary standards, performance metrics, and accountability requirements to prevent service disruptions.

**Reliable Transportation is Essential for Educational Equity**

Access to safe and consistent student transportation is fundamental to ensuring every child in Hawai'i receives an equitable education. Many students, particularly those in rural areas and on the neighboring islands, rely on school buses as their primary means of getting to and from school. Without a dependable transportation system, students risk missing valuable instructional time, contributing to chronic absenteeism and widening achievement gaps. By formally recognizing student transportation as critical infrastructure, this bill prioritizes the needs of our keiki and reaffirms the state's commitment to educational equity.

**Accountability and Performance Standards Improve Service Reliability**

Past disruptions in school bus services have disproportionately impacted low-income and rural communities, leaving families scrambling for alternative transportation options. By requiring specific performance metrics and accountability measures in all school bus contracts, this legislation ensures that transportation providers meet the highest safety, reliability, and efficiency standards. Clear expectations will help prevent sudden service cancellations and ensure that students can get to school on time and ready to learn.

**Investing in the Future of Hawai'i's Students**

Designating student transportation as critical infrastructure also allows for long-term planning and investment in a system that directly affects our student's well-being and academic success. This bill creates a framework for sustainable and resilient transportation services, reducing the risk of future service disruptions and fostering a more reliable public education system.

For these reasons, HCAN Speaks strongly urges the Committee to pass **H.B. No. 861**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this critical measure.

**HB-861**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 10:47:22 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mark Lindstrom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill would help add a layer of communication which has been understood but not enforced as to the contractor's requirement to keep the DOE informed and up to date so that they can keep parents, students and school staff informed as to driver availability. There is indeed a huge driver shortage not only in the State of Hawaii but throughout the mainland. There are three ways to help alleviate the shortage: allow the use of non-conforming school buses addressed in HB862 while also allowing the use of companies such as Hop, Skip and Drive, to supplement transportation routing especially with the Special Needs population which is 15% of the student ridership but requires 40% of the buses and drivers; provide additional supplement funding for bonuses for school bus drivers to supplement their hourly wage where the typical driver commutes twice daily to work 4 hours a day, 180 days annually on average: and, stagger the bell times at schools so that transportation bus routes can be tiered and therefore, more efficient, and require LESS more drivers. Currently, principals set the bell and school schedules without the school system coordinating transportation. The largest school systems in the country stagger their bell times often decided by the transportation department itself with school board approval so that transportation can run efficiently and coordinated between all schools. Hawaii has long passed this stage and is one of the Top 100 school bus fleets in the country but is inefficient based on the restraints it has imposed on bus routing.

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808-462-8356, [dancsmith@rocketmail.com](mailto:dancsmith@rocketmail.com)

February 10, 2025

House Committee on Education  
Hawaii State Legislature  
Honolulu

Aloha e Committee Members:

I write in strong support of HB861 concerning school busing standards. The DOE does need to hold bus contractors to higher standards. We have experienced too many bus driver shortages announced just before the starts of recent school years. I urge that problems be resolved and announced well before 30 days before the school year starts. Please so amend the legislation with a recommended number of days such as 60 or 90.

Additionally, I recommend that mandates to coordinate more actively with county bus systems, such as TheBus, be added to the bill. Coordination and adjustment of bus timings and routes will greatly improve service for students. While TheBus has made some adjustments for service to Pearl City High School students, more can be done. Restoration of tailored service to the Nakasone Entertainment Center is one example. Note that bus passes for students are not free to DOE and can be of greater value with better service coordination. Without that coordination, I too often am called upon to pick up my grandchildren from school.

I strongly support HB861 designating school busing as a critical service with or without the changes along the lines recommended above.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel C. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Daniel C. Smith

**HB-861**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 12:38:38 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Katherine Thomas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

For 23/24 school year my then 7th grader was waitlist for the bus from Mililani Town to Mililani Middle. It wasn't until the day before school started, we received notice he was approved. Fast forward to 24/25 school year, I registered both my now 8th and 6th graders the morning the bus portal opened, and I paid their fees in full. My husband and I thought our children were good to go. The THURSDAY NIGHT before school started, we received an email and automated phone call from the school telling us buses were suspended. We were told we had 3 options; get a refund and take our children to school ourselves, take the public bus, or have your kids walk. My children have never ridden the public bus and that was not an option I would entertain. Besides, when I called the school directly, they said they didn't know if or when they would get the bus cards. We live in the Town Center side of Mililani, and I was not comfortable having my children cross over the highway during rush hour by themselves. My husband and I do not have family to assist with taking the boys to school. Because of this, our only solution was to adjust our work schedules. I went in early to be able to leave early to pick them up and he went in late to take them to school. Both of us work at a job that requires us to work a full 8 hrs. causing significant upset within our employment. If the school had given us warning, we could have better prepared ourselves rather than being blindsided to scramble three days before school started. Two years in a row we have had to deal with the uncertainty of reliable transportation for our children without any explanation, only haphazard solutions that are unsatisfactory. It is bad enough we must pay 70 per child round trip per quarter, but to throw on the uncertainty of if or when we will lose this essential function is too much of a burden on parents.

**HB-861**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:55:30 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Rachel Ebert	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many families rely on school buses to get their children safely to school. Please help support families in this matter.