



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

Date: 02/12/2025

Time: 10:01 AM

Location: CR 211 & Videoconference

Committee: Senate Ways and Means

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 0529, SD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for its Hoakea Program.
Effective 7/1/2050. (SD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) strongly supports SB 529, SD1.

In collaboration with many of our community partners, the Department started a statewide education initiative called "Ho'ākea: Mauka to Makai Navigating our Future." Grounded in the rich history and traditions of Hawaiian voyaging, Ho'ākea began as an outdoor learning lab to showcase 'āina and wa'a and powerful learning platforms that support classroom learning objectives.

Over the past two years, Ho'ākea has now expanded beyond just the culminating Ho'ākea event and now includes professional learning opportunities for teachers. As part of Nā Hopena A'o, these teachings are being integrated into our 'āina-based education curriculum by creating teacher-focused learning opportunities to develop 'āina-based units and workshops to teach mo'olelo and history. The program has reached over 3,200 students, over 1,500 families, nearly 1,300 teachers, and engaged more than 50 organizations across the state.

The \$4,000,000 will allow the Department to pay for Ho'ākea events for students in our seven districts (Central, Hawaii Island (East Hawaii and West Hawaii), Honolulu, Kauai, Leeward, Maui Nui, and Windward), along with professional development for teachers. The activities provided in the culminating event not only give context for teachings that students learn through our 'āina-based curriculum, but also help with engagement of our students when they return back to the classroom. The community partners help to co-teach, as non-traditional educators, and support our teachers as they continue to develop 'āina-based units and workshops.

Additionally, part of the funding is used for student focused learning experiences that are grounded in aloha 'āina and HĀ, that occur in spaces outside the formal classroom setting and time (e.g., summer, spring and winter breaks, after school) and continue to engage students in learning and aloha 'āina.

These funds are critical to support the larger mission of igniting 10 million “planetary navigators” to pursue critical and inspiring voyages to ensure a better future for the earth, while ensuring teachers feel safe, included, and capable in strengthening the link between the classroom and these experiences, and by extension, a deeper relationship with 'āina.

Experiences like Ho'ākea shows our students how to care for our 'āina, our home; and when we do this through our communities, we help our students see how important they are to the future of this place. We want to foster the commitment to care for place early, so they return home to lead the effort. As students increasingly connect these knowledges (of aloha, 'āina, and aloha 'āina), we fulfill our mission of nurturing students who are globally competitive, locally committed.

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



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 529 SD1
RELATING TO EDUCATION

Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Hawai'i State Capitol

February 12, 2025

10:00AM

Conference Room 211

Dear Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim and members of the Senate Committee on Education:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) strongly **SUPPORTS SB529 SD1**, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to expand its Ho‘ākea Mauka to Makai program. This initiative integrates Hawaiian cultural practices, such as ho‘okele wa‘a (traditional navigation), with ‘āina-based learning, reinforcing pilina (connectedness) and kuleana (stewardship).

As the ‘ōlelo no‘eau (Hawaiian proverb) states, "Ma ka hana ka ‘ike"—"in the doing, one learns." This traditional Hawaiian approach to education emphasizes experiential learning, which has been central to Native Hawaiian culture for generations. By actively engaging in hands-on learning, students develop a deep connection to their environment and community, fostering a strong sense of identity and responsibility.

Ho‘ākea aligns with this philosophy by emphasizing environmental stewardship, mālama ‘āina (care for the land), and Hawaiian cultural practices. Through the practice of wa‘a navigation, students apply traditional knowledge in real-world settings, strengthening their understanding of leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork. These culturally immersive experiences not only support academic growth but also prepare students for meaningful engagement with their communities and Hawai‘i’s unique cultural heritage.

This initiative directly supports OHA’s **Mana i Maui Ola (MiMO) Educational Pathways goals**, particularly **MiMO 2.2 (‘Āina-Based Education)**, which fosters cultural identity, academic success, and workforce readiness. It also aligns with **MiMO 3.1 (Economic Self-Sufficiency)** by equipping students with career pathways that contribute to Hawai‘i’s economic sustainability.

Furthermore, Hawai‘i’s marine economy—valued at \$1.5 billion and employing over 20,000 individuals—presents significant opportunities for local students. The Marine Workforce Analysis highlights workforce shortages in key sectors such as marine

transportation, ship and boat building, tourism, and marine research. However, many students lack awareness of these career opportunities. Integrating marine-based education through programs like Ho‘ākea provides early exposure to these industries, bridging the gap between cultural learning and workforce development.

By expanding Ho‘ākea, students gain hands-on, work-based learning experiences that align with the needs of Hawai‘i’s marine workforce. These programs cultivate transferable skills in technical fields such as marine transportation, aquaculture, and conservation, preparing students for high-growth, high-wage careers that support Hawai‘i’s long-term economic resilience.

For these reasons, OHA respectfully urges the Committee to **SUPPORT SB529 SD1**, which will enhance educational opportunities for all students by integrating ‘āina-based education and Native Hawaiian cultural practices into the curriculum while preparing them for success in Hawai‘i’s vibrant marine economy.



Testimony Before The
Senate Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)
IN SUPPORT OF SB529 SD1
February 12, 2025, 10:01 a.m., Room 415 & Videoconference

We are Olan Leimomi Fisher and Kevin Chang, Kua'āina Advocate and Executive Director, respectively, testifying on behalf of [Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo \(or KUA\)](#). "Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo" stands for "grassroots growing through shared responsibility," and our acronym "KUA" means "backbone." **Our mission is to connect and empower communities to improve their quality of life through the collective care for their biocultural (natural and cultural) heritage, serving as a "backbone organization" that supports creative, community-driven solutions to problems stemming from environmental degradation.** Hawai'i's biocultural resources continue to be negatively impacted by political, economic, and social changes, and the increasing dangers of climate change make fostering and empowering resilient communities acutely critical.

Currently KUA supports three major networks of: (1) over 40 mālama 'āina (caring for our 'āina or "that which feeds") community groups collectively referred to as E Alu Pū (moving forward together); (2) over 60 loko i'a (fishpond aquaculture systems unique to Hawai'i) and wai 'ōpae (anchialine pool systems) sites in varying stages of restoration and development, with numerous caretakers, stakeholders, and volunteers known as the Hui Mālama Loko I'a ("caretakers of fishponds"); and (3) the Limu Hui made up of over 50 loea (traditional experts) and practitioners in all things "limu" or locally-grown "seaweed." **Our shared vision is to once again experience what our kūpuna (ancestors) referred to as 'ĀINA MOMONA – abundant and healthy ecological systems that sustain our community resilience and well-being.**

KUA supports SB529 SD1 as an incremental step towards 'āina momona.

This bill would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for its "Ho'ākea: Mauka to Makai Navigating Our Future" programming, designed to educate students by integrating core educational concepts in math, science, social studies, civics, leadership, language, and literacy with cultural practices and traditions in 'āina and community settings. Several of our KUA community members participate with the Polynesian Voyaging Society, which partners with this program to integrate lessons on environmental stewardship, climate change, Native Hawaiian practices, responsibility to care for community, total well-being, and a sense of place. This is exactly the kind of work that we strongly believe in and advocate for at KUA, and we urge you to please advance this measure.

A primary function of KUA includes support for the development of an 'auwai, or a system of resources, tools, bridges, relationships, and networks that cultivate and elevate our communities' efforts to greater levels of collective impact in the care of our biocultural resources. **Looking to the future, our communities are raising more and more keiki and 'ōpio who want to study and focus their lives on mālama 'āina efforts.** Young people want to be able to stay home, care for their home, and raise their own keiki in the same place they have loved

and cared for their whole lives. The popularity of the Ho‘ākea Program speaks for itself, starting as an outdoor learning lab for haumāna (students), and now offering professional development for kumu (teachers) as well. Since its inception it has reached over 3,200 haumāna and nearly 1,300 kumu, engaging over fifty organizations statewide. **We appreciate the necessary, creative, and collaborative approaches our state supports that build the capacity and skills of the next generation with intention, and in a way that benefits ongoing community efforts to support caring for our shared biocultural resources.**

The communities we work with are committed to ensuring the long-term health of our biocultural resources. They have depended on them for generations. **Our environment, the foundation of our very existence, is about long-term investment and a vision of ‘āina momona.** To get there it requires greater self-sufficiency including development of innovative and sustainable career pathways, mindsets, relationships, and resource flows for mālama ‘āina. Passing this bill out of your committee will open an essential ‘auwai system toward reaching this vision.

Mahalo nui loa for considering our testimony. Please **PASS** SB529 SD1.

Aloha ‘Āina Momona no nā kau ā kau.

SB-529-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 9:35:11 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/12/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Bates	Testifying for Clever Keiki Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Clever Keiki Hawai‘i LLC

Jessica Bates

‘Āina-Based STEAM Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Jessica Bates

Owner & Curriculum Developer, Clever Keiki Hawai‘i

Regarding: H.B. No. 529

Report Title: Department of Education; Ho‘ākea Program; Appropriation

Purpose: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for the Ho‘ākea Program

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Aloha, my name is Jessica Bates, and I am the owner and curriculum developer of Clever Keiki Hawai'i. As a Hawaiian owned business, I am writing to express my strong support for HB 625, which would allocate funds to the Hawai'i Department of Education's (HIDOE) Ho'ākea program. These funds are essential to ensuring that HIDOE students and teachers continue to have access to 'āina-based experiences that connect them to the land, community, and culture of Hawai'i.

Ho'ākea began as an outdoor learning lab that highlighted 'āina and wa'a as powerful educational platforms that deepen classroom learning. Due to overwhelming demand, the program has since expanded to include thousands of students state wide. Grounded in the foundational values of wa'a and 'āina, the program engages students in real-world problem-solving on contemporary issues such as coastal erosion, water and food security, emergency preparedness, and community resilience. By integrating place, culture, and history with core subjects like math, science, and social studies, Ho'ākea fosters curiosity, critical thinking, and a deepened sense of responsibility.

These lessons are essential to Hawai'i's economic and environmental future. Teaching them through 'āina and wa'a cultivates a "Navigator's Mindset," preparing our students to be leaders, stewards, and problem-solvers who can guide us toward a more sustainable future. The experiences provided through Ho'ākea ensure that our students are both globally competitive and locally committed.

Our schools recognize the value of these learning opportunities. Our teachers implement best practices when they connect student learning to identity and place. Our families deeply appreciate the chance for their children to learn about Hawai'i while experiencing its unique beauty and cultural significance firsthand.

We fully support HIDOE in its continued innovation in teaching and learning to meet the needs of our students, families, and communities. Investing in the Ho'ākea program is a direct investment in Hawai'i's future. I respectfully urge you to approve this funding to support the continuation and expansion of this invaluable program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Jessica Bates

Owner & Curriculum Developer, Clever Keiki Hawai'i



Mālama Learning Center is a non-profit organization based in West Oahu. Our mission is to inspire communities to care for Hawai'i by perpetuating conservation, culture, and sustainability through education.

The Honorable Representative Dela Cruz, Chair
The Honorable Representative Moriwaki, Vice Chair
The Honorable Members of the Committee of Ways and Means

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 529 SD 1
Committee on Ways and Means

Hearing Date: February 12, 2025 at 10:00 am
Conference Room 211 & Via Videoconference

LATE

Chair, Vice Chair and members of the committee:

Aloha Kākou. My name is Pauline Sato and I serve as the Executive Director of the Mālama Learning Center, a private, non-profit environmental education organization serving schools and communities in West O'ahu. I am testifying in support of the intent of SB 529 SD 1. However, I would like to see the bill put back to its original form with a start date of July 1, 2025 and funding amount of \$4 million for the Hawai'i Department of Education's (HIDOE) Ho'ākea program. These funds will help ensure that HIDOE's students (and teachers) across the state can access 'āina-based experiences that connect our students to the land, community, and culture of Hawai'i.

Ho'ākea started in 2023 in Windward and Leeward O'ahu. Mālama Learning Center was privileged to coordinate the Leeward O'ahu events with Nā Kama Kai, the Polynesian Voyaging Society, and many other partners. Since then, we have been a committed partner, continuing Ho'ākea Leeward O'ahu annually, including the recently conducted three-day events at Pōka'i Bay. We estimate that we reached more than 700 students, all from the Wai'anae Coast just last week alone. With our more than 20 'āina (land) and 6 wa'a (canoe) partners, we demonstrated how 'āina and wa'a enhances classroom learning. Ho'ākea is not a "one-off" experience for students or teachers. It's a continuum of learning during the school year and intersessions, building and reinforcing learning and providing professional development opportunities. Since the inception of the Ho'ākea Leeward Program, Mālama Learning Center has been a committed partner, witnessing firsthand the immense benefits that 'āina-based education brings to our youth and educators on the Leeward Coast.

Using 'āina and wa'a as learning tools is crucial for developing a "Navigator's Mindset" in our students, empowering them to become the future leaders, stewards, and critical thinkers who can guide us toward a brighter future. By connecting place, culture, and history to core subjects like math, science, and social studies, Ho'ākea ignites students' natural curiosity and love of learning. This is supported by research from over 100 studies suggesting this way of learning is a powerful way to teach students, providing transformative learning opportunities and instilling a passion for learning among students of all levels.

We strongly support the Hawai'i Department of Education's ongoing efforts to innovate teaching and learning to meet the needs of our students, families, community, and the future of our planet and Hawai'i. These funds are essential to support their important work. I urge your respective committees to pass this bill with suggested amendments and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Aloha,

Pauline M. Sato

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Miki K. Tomita Okamoto
Chief Executive Officer, Education Incubator (501c3)

Regarding: S.B. No. 529

Report Title: Department of Education; Ho‘ākea Program; Appropriation

Purpose: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for the Ho‘ākea Program

Chair, Vice Chair and members of the committee:

Aloha, I am Miki Tomita Okamoto, CEO of Education Incubator. I am writing to express my strong support of SB 529, which sets aside funds for the Hawai‘i Department of Education’s (HIDOE) Ho‘ākea program. These funds help ensure that HIDOE’s students and teachers continue to have access to ‘āina-based experiences that connect them to the land, community, and culture of Hawai‘i.

Ho‘ākea began as an outdoor learning lab to demonstrate how ‘āina and wa‘a can be harnessed as powerful learning platforms for academic, SEL, and cultural learning objectives. Due to demand, the program has expanded to include professional learning opportunities for teachers and student programming during non-school hours. Using foundational values and perspectives of wa‘a and ‘āina, students learn about, explore, and contemplate what action looks like facing critical challenges in their communities. Connecting place, culture, and history to core subjects like math, science, and social studies engages their natural curiosity and excitement to learn.

Teaching these issues are critical for the economic and environmental future of our Hawai‘i. Teaching these issues through ‘āina and wa‘a are critical to build the “Navigator’s Mindset” in our students as they become the leaders, stewards, and critical thinkers" that can navigate us into a better future. **Experiences like those provided through the Ho‘ākea program are how we ensure our students are globally competitive and locally committed.**

Our schools want these kinds of experiences. Our teachers exemplify research-based best practices when they connect students’ learning to who they are and where they come from. And our families value these opportunities because there is nowhere else where their child can learn about how special Hawai‘i is, while experiencing how special Hawai‘i is.

We stand behind the HIDOE as they continue to innovate their teaching and learning to meet the needs of our students, families, and community – and our planet’s and Hawai‘i’s future. Appropriating these funds is a critical step towards supporting them in doing so.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Me ke aloha,



Miki K. Tomita Okamoto
CEO, Education Incubator

SB-529-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 9:58:08 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/12/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brittany Kamai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai e Chair and Committee on Ways and Means,

I am writing in strong support of SB529. Mahalo for the opportunity to share why it is so vital to continue to support this important educational opportunity.

As a crew member of Hōkūleʻa, Kānehunamoku and Ohana Wa'a, the founder of the Mana Moana Institute, a non-profit dedicated to protecting our ocean through the lens of Pacific Indigenous wisdom, and faculty at both University of Hawaiʻi, West Oʻahu and University of Washington — I see how transformational Hōʻakea is to serving the educational needs in our community.

I grew up through the public school system yet never found my way to the canoe until I was in my 30s. I never imagined I could ever touch Hōkūleʻa nor did I know about the rest of the fleet of voyaging canoes around the Pacific.

Once I found my way to the canoes, being connected with the waʻa has been critical for my healing and sense of direction in life. The lessons of the canoe provide a foundation to see not only how your unique talents are valued but how you must contribute in harmony to those around you. You become connected with a community of people proving how much better we can be by giving to one another in the most loving way possible.

I've participated in every Ho'akea since inception in March 2023. I've worn different hats to representing the Polynesian Voyaging Society, Kanehunamoku Voyaging Academy, Surfrider Foundation, and the Mana Moana Institute. We have so much knowledge to give to the children about the ocean through the lens of our ancestors. We also have a role to protect the ocean for future generations to have a healthy thriving ocean. I continue to show up because I want to provide immersive learning opportunities that activate the students to understand their connection to the ocean and who they are. Children shout their love for the ocean and connect to the canoe. They see all that it takes to come together from mauka to makai and around the entire Moananuiākea, the Pacific Ocean.

I have a particular fondness for the public school children because I used to be them and know what it's like to miss out on this. Now I get to see the joy on their faces when their wind blown hair and sandy feet getting back on the bus enriched by all that they learned.

Let us continue to support Hō'akea for years to come to reach every child in all of Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui loa for your time,

Brittany Kamai, Ph.D.

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Disa Hauge
Complex Area Superintendent, Nānākuli-Waianae

Regarding: SB 529

Report Title: Department of Education; Ho‘ākea Program; Appropriation

Purpose: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for the Ho‘ākea Program

Chair Donovan Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Sharon Moriwaki, and members of the committee:

Aloha, I am Disa Hauge, Complex Area Superintendent for Nānākuli-Wai‘anae. As a school complex where 60% of our haumāna are Native Hawaiian, we strongly support SB 529, which will provide essential funding for the Hawai‘i Department of Education’s Ho‘ākea program. These funds will ensure that our students and kumu have access to ‘āina-based learning experiences that strengthen their connection to the land, culture, and community of Hawai‘i.

In 2018, Hōkūle‘a returned to Pōka‘i when I was the principal at Wai‘anae High School. In partnership with the Polynesian Voyaging Society and many community members, we brought 2,500 of our students to Pōka‘i and Ku‘ilioloa heiau to learn about our history and the incredible scientific knowledge of our ancestors. Our culinary students fed the docents lunch all week, our Marine Science Learning Center taught students about limu and sealife, and our Hawaiian Studies students shared the history of Kū‘ilioloa and the native canoe plants they maintain there. It was an amazing week for our students, thanks to many volunteers and the Polynesian Voyaging Society who filled out the week with many, many learning opportunities.

Ho‘ākea is an outdoor learning lab that uses ‘āina and wa‘a as powerful teaching platforms to deepen students’ understanding of core classroom subjects. Due to overwhelming demand, the program has expanded to include professional development for educators and student programming beyond school hours. Grounded in Hawaiian values, this initiative helps students engage with real-world challenges—such as coastal erosion, food and water security, emergency preparedness, and community resilience—through the lens of place-based learning.

For our haumāna, these experiences are not just educational—they are essential. Learning through ‘āina and wa‘a cultivates the “Navigator’s Mindset”—a way of thinking that empowers students to become leaders, problem-solvers, and stewards of Hawai‘i’s future. By integrating culture and place into subjects like math, science, and social studies, we inspire curiosity, engagement, and a deep sense of kuleana for Hawai‘i.

Our kumu know that students thrive when learning is connected to who they are and where they come from. Our families cherish these opportunities because they provide something unique to Hawai'i—an education that is both globally competitive and locally rooted.

We stand in full support of HIDOE's continued efforts to innovate teaching and learning to meet the needs of our students, families, and communities. Funding the Ho'ākea program is a critical investment in Hawai'i's future—our keiki, our 'āina, and our lāhui.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Pā'anaakalā Baybayan Tanaka

Non-profit organization

Regarding: S.B. No. 529

LATE

Report Title: Department of Education; Ho'ākea Program; Appropriation

Purpose: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for the Ho'ākea Program

Chair, Vice Chair and members of the committee on Ways and Means,

Ke aloha nui iā kākou, my name is Pā'anaakalā Baybayan Tanaka and I am the Education Director for the Hui O Wa'a Kaulua. We are a Maui based Hawaiian Oceanic voyaging organization. I am writing to express my strong support of S.B. No. 529 which will set aside funds for the Hawai'i Department of Education's (HIDOE) Ho'ākea program. These funds will help ensure that HIDOE's students (and teachers) can access 'āina-based experiences that connect our students to the land, community, and culture of Hawai'i.

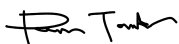
Ho'ākea began as an outdoor learning lab to showcase 'āina and wa'a as powerful learning platforms that deepen understanding of classroom learning objectives. Due to demand, the program has expanded to include professional learning opportunities for teachers and student programming during non-school hours. Using foundational values and perspectives of wa'a and 'āina, students learn about, explore, and troubleshoot contemporary issues they experience daily – like coastal erosion, water and food security, emergency preparedness, community resilience. Connecting place, culture, and history to core subjects like math, science, and social studies engages their natural curiosity and excitement to learn.

Teaching these issues are critical for the economic and environmental future of our Hawai'i. Teaching these issues through 'āina and wa'a are critical to build the "Navigator's Mindset" in our students as they become the leaders, stewards, and critical thinkers" that can navigate us into a better future. **Experiences like those provided through the Ho'ākea program are how we ensure our students are globally competitive and locally committed.**

On Maui, we received overwhelming positive feedback from teachers praising this unprecedented event because it provided the opportunity for students and teachers to engage with and learn from a network of Hawaiian culturally grounded and 'āina based organizations rooted within their community and across the pae 'āina of Hawai'i. Our teachers exemplify research-based best practices when they connect students' learning to who they are and where they come from. And our families value these opportunities because there is nowhere else where their child can learn about how special Hawai'i is, while experiencing how special Hawai'i is.

We stand behind the HIDOE as they continue to innovate their teaching and learning to meet the needs of our students, families, and community – and our planet's and Hawai'i's future. Appropriating these funds is a critical step towards supporting them in doing so.

Na'u nō me ke aloha a me ka oia'i'o,



Pā'anaakalā Tanaka

SB-529-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 8:18:54 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/12/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lei Fisher	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this, please PASS this measure!