

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: 02/18/2025

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 0789, SD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL CAFETERIA MEAL COSTS.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education to charge not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing a school meal for each school meal. Effective 7/1/2050. (SD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 789, SD 1.

The Department supports reducing the requirement of minimum student meal payments from one half to one quarter. This would also align with language in the Department's administrative package bill, SB 1394.

Reducing the requirement of a minimum payment will allow for the Department to not have to raise the prices it charges families for school meals to meet statutory requirements. However, the rising cost of food and the push towards purchasing more locally-grown produce will increase the cost of preparing school meals and is something the Department will continue to monitor.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



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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 15, 2025

To: Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means

RE: Support for SB 789 SD1, Relating to School Meal Costs

Hrg: Tuesday, February 18, 2025, at 10:02 AM, Conference Room 211

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating, Active Living² (HEAL) Coalition **supports SB 789 SD1**, which repeals the requirement that the Department of Education set school cafeteria meal prices at no less than half the cost of meal preparation.

One in three families in Hawai'i face food insecurity, leaving many students to go hungry throughout the school day. One in ten keiki in Hawai'i skip meals due to food insecurity. Hawai'i can ensure all students are able to eat by removing this provision and providing free school meals for all students.

Meal Revenues Make Up Only a Tiny Fraction of the Education Budget

The Department of Education has an annual budget of over \$2 billion, with meal revenues totaling around \$20 million per year, or just 1% of the overall budget. Collecting meal prices from students is not necessary to keep the Department of Education functioning. Students receive free education regardless of income level and the nutrition they need to learn should be free too.

Half of Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the

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.



FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.³

This large assistance gap leaves behind many ALICE families who are struggling to make ends meet. As a result, countless students go hungry throughout the school day, impacting their health, well-being, and ability to learn.

Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.⁴ By failing to ensure they have access to meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success. Removing the cost provision will expand access to nutritious meals, helping students receive the nourishment they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

Please support SB 789, SD1, and pave the way for free school meals for all keiki.

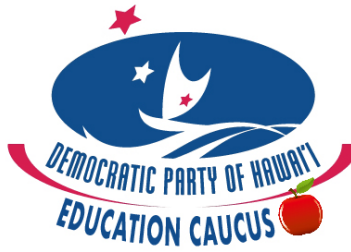
Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nate Hix".

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

³ "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702&g=040XX00US15>

⁴ "Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7282962/>



LATE

SENATE BILL 789, SD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL CAFETERIA MEAL COSTS

FEBRUARY 18, 2025 · WAM HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports SB 789, SD1, relating to school cafeteria meal costs, which repeals requirement that Department of Education set school cafeteria meal price at no less than half the cost of meal preparation.

Hungry children can't learn.

Currently, under HRS §302A-405, the DOE is required to set school meal prices at an amount that covers half of total student meal costs. This led the department to propose significant increases in student meal prices earlier this year (along with proposals to increase a range of other student fees). HIDOE requested approval from the Board of Education to nearly double the cost of school meals over the next four years. School lunches would have increased from \$2.50 for elementary and middle school students and \$2.75 for high school students to \$4.75 and \$5.00 by the 2028-2029 school year. This would be tremendously harmful for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and

housing costs. **As we repeal the statutory provision that compels the DOE to raise student meal prices, we should also support free school meals for all, which would expand access to food security for children who may not otherwise be able to eat.** Two out of three families that are struggling with Hawai'i's cost of living are currently ineligible for free school meals through the federal free lunch program. Studies have shown that schools that implement free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

As the National Education Association has stated, through universal free school meals programs, "We can grow generations of healthy eaters and save our country billions." School meals cost less per student when more students participate in a free meal program. An article in *Nutrients* entitled "Universal Free Meals Associated with Lower Meal Costs While Maintaining Nutritional Quality" found that **schools that participated in a universal meal program spent 67 and 58 cents less per lunch and breakfast**, respectively, while maintaining the same nutritional quality.

Nutrition is essential to academic success. This bill will help to ensure that Hawai'i's keiki are healthy and ready to reach their full potential.

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com

SB-789-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/17/2025 6:25:03 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/18/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lukika Schutte	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am in support to keep at no less than half the cost of meal preparation.

Raising prices would be difficult for families (who may be already struggling to make ends meet) to pay for a nutritious meal for their child(ren).

Studies show that full bellies foster better living experience and academic performance.

Thank you for your consideration.

RE: SB789

LATE

Members of the Committee,

My name is Jacie Miyashiro. I am a teacher at 'Aiea High School in the Central District on O'ahu. I am submitting testimony in support of SB789, which seeks to require the Department of Education to charge not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing a school meal for each school meal.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill to ease the financial burden on parents and caretakers of school children in Hawai'i. I hope that this bill can serve as a first step toward making school meals free for all students, regardless of their financial status. While I would like to see free meals for all of our students, lowering the minimum charge from one-half the preparation cost to one-quarter, as this bill seeks to do, would definitely provide some relief for families. It is unconscionable that, in the pricing of school meals, we would not take into account recent inflation driving the price of goods so high. And while there is currently funding to help provide families with free or reduced school meals, there are many families who do not meet the requirements for free or reduced school meals but who still struggle financially due to the high cost of living. As a teacher at a Title I school, I have seen how financial burdens impact my students. I have taught 9th graders who consistently came to me outside of class time to ask for a snack because they had not eaten during the school day. I have taught 12th graders who came to class exhausted from working a part-time job to help support their families financially. In both situations, having a more affordable (or free) meal option at school would have helped to ease some of this burden. Kids cannot learn when they are hungry. If we are going to legally require that students attend school all day, then we must, at the bare minimum, make sure they are able to eat.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill.

Respectfully,

Jacie Miyashiro, NBCT

English Language Arts Teacher, 'Aiea High School