

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 3:49:00 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chopper Cubacub Jr	Testifying for Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a J-1 teacher from the Philippines currently teaching at Lahaina Intermediate School for two years. As a licensed teacher in the Philippines, I have dedicated myself to providing quality education to my students in Hawaii. However, the current licensure process presents significant financial challenges, as the required exams are costly.

The International Visiting Teacher License would be a great opportunity for educators like me, allowing us to continue contributing to Hawaii's schools for up to five years. This license would help address teacher shortages while recognizing the qualifications and experience of international teachers. By implementing this program, Hawaii can retain skilled educators who are already integrated into the community and committed to student success.

Beyond the classroom, my role extends to supporting students and the community, especially in the aftermath of the devastating wildfire in Lahaina in August 2023. Teaching here has allowed me to provide stability, encouragement, and a sense of normalcy for students who have faced immense challenges. By continuing to serve in Hawaii, I can further support these students' recovery, both academically and emotionally.

I strongly support the establishment of this license, as it would ease financial burdens, promote educational continuity, and allow dedicated educators like me to continue making a positive impact on Hawaii's students and communities.

RE: SB819

Chair Senate-Kidani and Members of the Committee,

My name is PINKY GRACE FRANCISCO. I am the EL Coordinator and EL Teacher at Keaau Middle School in Hawaii County and the Professional Support Chair of the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators. I am submitting testimony in strong support of **SB819**, which seeks to create an international teacher license.

In 2016, I immigrated to Hawai'i from the Philippines carrying my educational credentials and teaching experience. As part of the licensure process, I had my credentials evaluated by a recognized credentialing entity to determine their U.S. equivalency, which I then submitted to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB). Based on my qualifications and years of teaching experience, I was granted an HTSB Standard License.

I am currently in my 6th year of teaching in Hawaii Department of Education but is in my 14th year as a teacher, providing professional development to educators statewide, advocating and empowering multilingual students and their families and was even recognized as the 2024 Kau-Keaau-Paho Complex Teacher of the Year and the 2024 Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators' (HAFE) Educator of the Year.

In the Philippines, earning a Bachelor's Degree in Education is a rigorous four-year process, which includes 12 credits of intensive practice teaching or clinical placement. Additionally, Master's Degrees which are earned within four years are only pursued after earning a Bachelor's Degree. Then a Doctor's Degree can be earned after. Furthermore, the J-1 visa program ensures that only highly qualified educators—many holding advanced degrees—are selected to teach in the U.S. Some of whom are even serving as educational specialists, Master Teachers, Head Teachers and school heads in the Philippines before transitioning to J1-teachers. These educators also passed the [Licensure Examination for Teachers](#), the Philippines' equivalent of the Praxis exam, and may hold additional [civil service license](#).

With regards to English proficiency, students in the Philippines start being exposed to English as soon as they enter preschool, and most are polyglots (one Philippine provincial language, Filipino/Tagalog-the national language, and English). According to the 2024 [EF English Proficiency index](#), the Philippines rank 22nd out of 116 countries in the [High English Proficiency category](#) and rank second in Asia.

The educator preparation and training of J-1 teachers ensure their teaching pedagogy meets high standards. Furthermore, the existence of [Philippines Republic Act No. 10912](#), also known as the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Act of 2016 mandates continuous professional growth for all licensed teachers in the Philippines, reinforcing their commitment to lifelong learning.

Currently, J-1 teachers are actively engaged in community service/events. Those employed in schools across Hawaii County actively participate in local events such as the Barrio Fiesta-Filipino and American Celebration (October 2024), Sakada Day (December 15, 2024), and the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators Christmas Party and Induction of Officers (December 14, 2025). Like myself, who has contributed significantly to students, families, schools, and the broader community during my first three years with the Hawaii Department of Education, these international educators bring valuable skills and perspectives. By recognizing their expertise and providing greater opportunities, we can unlock even more impactful initiatives and projects.

This legislation is crucial for addressing Hawai'i's chronic teacher shortage and high-turnover rate while ensuring equitable recognition of international educators' qualifications and experience. By requiring the HTSB to establish a provisional pathway for visiting international teachers, this bill promotes diversity and representation in our schools—essential factors linked to improved student outcomes. Furthermore, it alleviates the mental burden on J-1 teachers, allowing them to focus more on their teaching and strengthening their teaching pedagogy rather than allocating time preparing for the Praxis exams. It will also be the key for them to access the differentials currently available to licensed teachers in Hawaii. Moreover, the bill will further empower these teachers and the ethnicity they represent, granting them a meaningful and enriching experience—one they will deeply value as a true expression of humanity—throughout their five-year stay, given the opportunity.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Legislature to pass **SB819**. Doing so will help ensure that Hawai'i's students continue to receive high-quality education from well-prepared and highly qualified teachers while reinforcing the state's commitment to equity and equal opportunity for all.

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

Respectfully,

PINKY GRACE FRANCISCO

English Learner Program Coordinator and EL Teacher (Keaau Middle School)
Professional Support Chair (Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators)

My name is Richel Taduran, and I am a 6th Grade Social Studies Teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School in Kauai, Hawaii. Before coming to Hawaii, I dedicated 10 years to teaching English in the Philippines, where I developed strong skills in classroom management, student-centered learning, and cross-cultural education. Now, as a Social Studies teacher, I am passionate about helping students understand history, cultures, and perspectives that shape the world around them.

In my classroom, I strive to create an engaging learning environment where students connect past events to present realities. Using inquiry-based instruction and interactive discussions, I encourage critical thinking and meaningful conversations. I am grateful to be part of a school that values collaboration among students, teachers, administration, and families, fostering a supportive community for learning.

I hold a Professional Teaching License from the Philippines, and my credentials have been evaluated for international teaching. Beyond academics, I am eager to embrace Hawaii's rich cultural diversity, sharing my Filipino heritage while learning from the local traditions and values of the islands. I believe that education is not just about knowledge but also about building connections and understanding between cultures.

Hawaii is currently experiencing a teacher shortage, and HB439 presents a vital opportunity by establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders. This initiative would enable teachers like me to continue making a meaningful impact in schools across the state.

However, to remain in my position, I must pass the Praxis exam—a costly requirement that also demands travel from Kauai to Oahu. Despite these challenges, I am determined to obtain my teaching license and continue serving my students and school community.

I strongly support HB439, as it would not only provide relief for international teachers but also help address the urgent need for educators in Hawaii. Teaching is my passion, and I am committed to growing as an educator and cultural bridge for my students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Richel Taduran
6th Grade Social Studies Teacher
Waimea Canyon Middle School, Kauai, Hawaii

My name is Lara Escoto, and I am a J-1 teacher at Kahakai Elementary. I have had the privilege of experiencing firsthand the profound impact that dedicated teachers can have not only on their students but on the entire school community. The support and collaboration from my fellow educators have been invaluable, and together we've cultivated a warm, inclusive, and engaging campus climate. Our shared commitment to student success has created an environment where both students and staff feel empowered to grow, learn, and contribute meaningfully.

One of the most significant benefits of the current system is the opportunity for J-1 teachers like myself to stay in Hawaii for up to five years if we are able to obtain licensure. This stability enables us to form deep, long-lasting relationships with our students and their families, which is essential for creating an effective and supportive learning environment.

However, the process of obtaining a full teaching license can be particularly challenging for teachers with internationally recognized credentials. I am proud of my qualifications and the experience I bring from abroad, yet the additional requirement of passing multiple Praxis exams is a significant burden. While I am deeply committed to my role as a teacher, preparing for and taking eight Praxis exams takes up an immense amount of time and effort. This is especially difficult when I am already dedicating my full focus to lesson planning and ensuring that I am providing the best possible education to my students.

The time and energy spent on preparing for these exams could be better used to enhance classroom instruction and build stronger connections with students. As a teacher, my ultimate goal is to be as effective and efficient as possible in my role. Unfortunately, the demands of the Praxis exams take away from this focus, as I find myself dividing my time between test preparation and lesson planning.

Moreover, ensuring equal pay for equal work is essential to retaining highly qualified teachers. Providing access to differentials for those who are licensed would show a true commitment to the value educators bring to the classroom—particularly those like myself, who bring diverse international perspectives and expertise.

Ultimately, recognizing internationally accredited credentials and simplifying the licensure process would allow teachers like me to dedicate more of our time and energy to supporting our schools, students, and communities—without the added stress of navigating a complex and burdensome exam process.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I am deeply committed to providing the best possible education to my students and look forward to continuing to make a positive impact in our school and community.

Mahalo.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:19:38 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Princes Joy Calingangan	Testifying for Hawaii Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Princes Joy V. Calingangan, a Special Education Teacher at August Ahrens Elementary School. I strongly support SB819, which would establish an international visiting teacher license for Filipino teachers. This legislation is crucial in addressing the critical teacher shortage, particularly in special education, and offers mutual benefits for both Filipino teachers and American students.

Teaching in Waipahu, with its strong Filipino community, has been a truly heartwarming experience. The predominantly Filipino student population has created a sense of belonging, making it feel like a home away from home, especially for special education teachers like myself. We've been deeply touched by the appreciation from parents, who often commend our patience and dedication to their children with disabilities. The strong rapport we've built with families here is incredibly rewarding and reinforces the positive impact we're able to make.

This positive experience underscores the eagerness of many qualified Filipino teachers, like myself, to contribute to addressing the critical teacher shortage and ensuring all students have access to a quality education. The establishment of the proposed international visiting teacher license, as outlined in SB819, would streamline the process for us to share our expertise and fill these vital roles.

My time teaching in the US has been invaluable, providing me with the opportunity to immerse myself in a different educational system, explore diverse teaching methodologies, and adapt to new classroom environments. This professional growth has significantly enhanced my skills and broadened my teaching repertoire, ultimately benefiting my students.

In turn, Filipino teachers bring unique skills, knowledge, and perspectives to American classrooms. We offer specialized expertise in various subjects and teaching approaches, enriching the learning experience for all students. Moreover, we foster cross-cultural understanding by sharing our cultural heritage and perspectives, promoting global citizenship and broadening students' worldviews. The interaction between Filipino teachers and American students creates a rich learning environment that benefits everyone involved. SB819 would facilitate this vital exchange and ensure a more equitable and enriching educational experience for all students.

Princes Joy V. Calingangan

SPED-FSC Teacher

August Ahrens Elementary School

Waipahu, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 3:50:20 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eloisa Micah Guabes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is **Eloisa Micah Guabes**, and I am an **English Language Arts teacher and the Journalism Club adviser at Waimea Canyon Middle School** on Kaua‘i. I am submitting this testimony in **strong support** of SB819, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As an educator, I have dedicated my career to shaping young minds and ensuring that my students receive high-quality education. Since joining **Waimea Canyon Middle School**, I have worked tirelessly to provide engaging and effective instruction, contribute to the school community, and support my students in their academic and personal growth.

Beyond my role as an **ELA teacher**, I am also the **adviser for the school’s first-ever Journalism Club**—a new and exciting opportunity for our students. Through this initiative, I have discovered that our students possess incredible talents in **writing, photojournalism, and crafting a student-led magazine**. This platform has given them the **confidence and voice to share their perspectives, tell meaningful stories, and develop essential skills in communication and media literacy**. If allowed, I would be happy to **present pictures showcasing their work** as part of my testimony.

Despite my extensive experience and contributions, obtaining full licensure in Hawai‘i remains a challenge due to the **financial and logistical burdens of the Praxis exams**. These exams are **expensive and not readily available across the islands**, often requiring travel to **O‘ahu**, which further increases costs. These obstacles do not reflect the expertise, years of training, and foreign credentials that international teachers like myself have already earned. This bill **acknowledges the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience** we bring from our home countries and provides a fair and reasonable pathway for us to continue making a meaningful impact in Hawai‘i’s schools.

Hawai‘i, like many states, faces an ongoing **teacher shortage**, particularly in rural and underserved communities. The establishment of an international teacher license would **help address this shortage by recognizing the qualifications of dedicated, highly skilled educators** who are already contributing to the state’s education system. By passing this bill, Hawai‘i will be honoring **diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent**, ensuring that our keiki continue to receive the best possible education. If this bill is not passed, I, together with my co Filipino teachers will need to go back to our home country after 3 years of serving. If this is passed, on the other hand, it will allow us to stay for an additional two years.

I urge you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Eloisa Micah Guabes

English Language Arts Teacher & Journalism Club Adviser
Waimea Canyon Middle School, Kaua'i

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 3:50:31 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexis Navarro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

I am Alexis C. Navarro, a Science teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School, and I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Teacher Visiting License. As a teacher originally from the Philippines, I am deeply invested in the future of education in Hawaii, and I believe this bill will greatly benefit not only international teachers like myself but also the students and communities we serve here in Hawaii.

I would like to share my personal experience and perspective as a J1 teacher in Hawaii:

1. I have worked tirelessly to earn my degrees, including a master's and doctorate, in the Philippines. With many years of teaching experience, I've had the honor of leading a school as a school head. My educational background and professional journey have prepared me to contribute positively to the school communities I serve.
2. As a J1 teacher here in Hawaii, I am proud to share my knowledge and expertise with students, staff, and parents. The administration has expressed their appreciation for my talents, and I truly value being able to contribute to the educational environment. This kind of mutual respect and recognition motivates me to continue improving and supporting the success of all students.
3. I am dedicated to continually improving as an educator. I actively attend training sessions, conferences, and workshops to learn the most effective teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and other skills to better serve my students. This ongoing commitment to growth is a testament to my passion for teaching and my desire to be an effective educator here in Hawaii.
4. The proposed five-year stay under this bill would provide my family and me the stability we need to establish a strong foundation. The current three-year contract length is insufficient to cover the loans we took out in the Philippines before coming here. A five-year period would offer us the time needed to pay off these financial obligations and build a more secure future.
5. As international teachers, we already face the financial burden of paying for the Praxis exam, which is costly and time-consuming. Additionally, the preparation required for this exam takes away valuable time that could otherwise be spent planning lessons, creating educational innovations, and focusing on our students' needs. The proposed changes in this bill would reduce this burden and allow us to devote more energy to our teaching and professional development.
6. I firmly believe that the educational qualifications I hold, as well as my professional experience, are on par with the standards of teaching here in Hawaii. The reciprocity of our licenses from the Philippines, combined with the real-world experience we bring, ensures that we are equipped to contribute effectively to the local education system. We are fully capable of

meeting Hawaii's teaching standards, and this bill will help validate and streamline our contributions.

I strongly urge the committee to pass HB 439, as it will not only support international teachers but also improve the quality of education in Hawaii. It will foster a more stable, dedicated teaching force and ensure that educators can focus on what truly matters: the success and well-being of our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

ALEXIS C. NAVARRO
Science Teacher
Lahaina Intermediate School
Maui, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 3:54:56 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherrie Lou Mendoza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to wholeheartedly support Senate Bill 819, which proposes the International Visiting Teacher License. As a second-grade teacher at Kahului Elementary School, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges of staffing shortages in our schools.

Having previously taught in Florida, I have seen the benefits of providing international teachers with the same benefits as certified and tenured teachers. This not only helps to attract and retain top talent but also enriches our schools with diverse perspectives and experiences.

However, I strongly believe that requiring international teachers like myself to take the Praxis exam creates an undue burden. Preparing for the exam takes away valuable time that I could be using to prepare engaging lessons for my students. Furthermore, the cost of taking the exam is prohibitively expensive.

As international teachers, our visas are only valid for 3 to 5 years. This creates uncertainty and stress, making it difficult for us to plan for our future. Despite this, I have fallen in love with Hawaii and its people. I want to continue serving this beautiful state and its students for as long as I am needed.

By supporting SB 819, you can help international teachers like myself make a long-term commitment to Hawaii's schools. You can provide us with the recognition and support we deserve, and help address the staffing shortages that plague our schools.

I urge you to consider the benefits that international teachers can bring to our schools and communities. By supporting SB 819, you can help promote diversity and inclusion, and provide international teachers with a clearer path to continuing our important work in Hawaii's schools.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cherrie Lou Mendoza
Second-Grade Teacher, Kahului Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 3:59:25 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennelyn Cornelio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

February 2, 2025

Honorable members of the committee, I am Jennelyn G. Cornelio, a High School teacher at HP Baldwin in Maui, Hawaii, representing international teachers, and I am here today to express my strong support for exempting J-1 visa teachers from state-mandated standardized testing (Praxis) requirements to continue serving the students in Hawaii Department of Education for 5 consecutive years. Before being a qualified international teacher, we have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines and did an equivalent evaluation of our Transcript of Records (TOR) to identify if we are qualified to teach in the United States of America.

I would say that the state of Hawaii benefits immensely from the presence of J-1 teachers in our classrooms. We bring diverse cultural perspectives, enrich our students' understanding of the world, and often fill critical teaching shortages, particularly in STEM fields, foreign languages, and special education. We, as dedicated educators, invest our time, energy, and passion in shaping the minds of our future generations.

However, requiring us, J-1 teachers, to undergo state standardized testing within our initial years of service places an unnecessary burden on and, ultimately, on our schools and students. The following are the key factors that contribute to this:

1. Cultural and linguistic differences: Many of us are J-1 teachers coming from different educational backgrounds, with different pedagogical approaches. While we do possess strong English proficiency to qualify for the program, nuances in standardized testing often focused on specific state curriculum frameworks can be hard to navigate in our initial years. Not to mention the added pressures brought on by adjusting to a new culture, a different school system, and often an unfamiliar language environment.

2. Center Everything on Classroom Instructions: As a J-1 teacher, I want to give my very best of my ability, concentrate on instructing and building relationships with students in a personal relationship. Those time consumed in preparing for and administering standardized tests could better be used in focusing on our core duties in planning

classroom lessons and helping the students-and even professional development that benefits our student populations.

3. Recruitment and Retention Issues: This will create a strong deterrent for qualified international teachers to teach in the state of Hawaii. It adds another layer of complexity and cost to an already hard and costly process, thus making it even more difficult for the schools to recruit and retain valuable, experienced, and most importantly, adjusted teachers. This further exasperates the shortages that already exist in the teaching profession and limits the possibilities for our students to learn from diverse perspectives.

4. The Program Alignment: Standardized testing that is focused on specific state curricular standards also does not fit the broader goal of the program, which focuses on cultural exchange and enhanced mutual understanding. By requiring it, an unnecessary barrier is being established that ultimately has a negative effect on the J-1 Visa Program.

5. Five-Year Exemption as a Reasonable Timeframe: A five-year exemption would provide us, J-1 teachers, with sufficient time to get acquainted with the state's curriculum framework, to adjust our teaching methods, and to settle into the school community. We can have our energies concentrated on what is most important - teaching our children.

After this period of time, we would be expected to take the testing like everyone else.

This exemption will indeed not affect the educational quality in Hawaii State. We, J-1 visa holders, in this country are thoroughly screened during the visa processing for English competency and qualifications that make us good fits for hiring in different teaching areas. We, J-1 visa holders, are similarly obligated for evaluation through regular activities set by school and district authority for accountability to standards.

Quite frankly, exempting J-1 teachers from state testing for the first five years of service in Hawaii sends a clear message that you value our contributions, are supportive of our professional growth, and believe that we should focus on what is important: educating our students. I urge the committee to view this proposal favorably.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 5:56:26 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ROSELYN B. DELA CRUZ	Testifying for DOE J1 Teacher	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Roselyn Dela Cruz**, and I am a **4th-grade teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School**. I am writing today to express *my strong support for SB819*, which seeks to establish an *International Visiting Teacher License*.

I hold a *professional teaching license in the Philippines* and have earned a *four-year bachelor’s degree with master’s units*. However, *I am requesting that the State of Hawaii recognize and reciprocate our credentials by granting us a Hawaii teaching license. The Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) in the Philippines is comparable to the Praxis Test mandated in Hawaii, as both assessments evaluate core subjects such as Reading, Math, Writing, and Pedagogy. Additionally, our transcripts and master's units have undergone Foreign Credential Evaluation, confirming that our academic qualifications meet U.S. standards.*

Notably, the first batch of J-1 teachers who came to Hawaii previously had their international teaching licenses recognized. However, that is no longer the case, placing new international teachers like myself at a disadvantage. The financial burden of obtaining a license here has been overwhelming, especially given Hawaii’s high cost of living. As an emergency hire teacher, I earn a lower salary than fully licensed teachers, making it even more difficult to manage my finances.

On Lanai, a hard-to-staff area, these financial challenges are even more pronounced due to limited resources and the need to travel to other islands for essential supplies. Housing costs alone consume a significant portion of my income, and I also have family in the Philippines who rely on my support. The additional expenses associated with licensing requirements create an unnecessary burden on international teachers who are already contributing to addressing Hawaii’s teacher shortage.

SB819 has the potential to transform Hawaii’s education system by ensuring that qualified international teachers receive the recognition and support they deserve. This bill would help alleviate the teacher shortage while ensuring that students continue to receive a high-quality education from dedicated and experienced educators.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB819 to support international teachers, allowing them to continue their valuable work with Hawaii's students without facing unnecessary obstacles. **By**

*passing this legislation, you will help ensure that educators can focus on what truly matters—
providing quality education and making a lasting impact on students' lives.*

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,
Roselyn Dela Cruz
4th Grade Teacher
Lanai High and Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 7:20:52 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annie Baltazar	Testifying for DOE - Lanai High and Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819-International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: Feb. 07, 2025 3:08pm

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Annie Canlas Baltazar, and it's my second year proudly teaching second graders in Lanai High and Elementary School. I am writing today to express my strong support for SB819, which would create an International Visiting Teacher License.

Teaching for the past two years in Lanai City, Hawaii, has been an incredibly fulfilling journey, shaping young minds and making a lasting impact on my second-grade students. My passion for education has always been to nurture and inspire my students, and I have witnessed firsthand how my dedication has helped them grow academically, socially, and emotionally. Seeing my students develop confidence in their abilities, learn new concepts, and become active participants in the learning process has been my greatest reward.

Beyond the classroom, my colleagues and I have worked together to create a positive impact within our school and the greater community. We have fostered an environment where students feel safe, valued, and empowered to learn. Through school activities, events, and community outreach programs, we continue to instill values of responsibility, respect, and kindness in our students. Our combined efforts have strengthened the bond between the school and the Lanai City community, creating a collaborative network that supports student success.

In addition to my contributions within the school, I have been actively engaged in community service and church activities. My role as an educator extends beyond the classroom, as I take part in programs that benefit families, provide educational support, and contribute to church initiatives that uplift and support those in need. These experiences have allowed me to grow as an individual while reinforcing the values I aim to instill in my students.

My teaching journey has been significantly shaped by my training and experiences in the Philippines. The rigorous education and hands-on experiences I received there have equipped me with strong pedagogical skills, classroom management strategies, and a deep understanding of diverse student needs. These foundations have been instrumental in my ability to adapt and

thrive in a different educational setting here in Hawaii. My Philippine teaching license is a testament to my qualifications, and it continues to serve as a strong foundation for my current and future teaching endeavors in the United States.

One of the challenges I have faced in my teaching career here in Hawaii is the need to travel by boat or plane to take my Praxis exams. The journey is not only physically demanding but also financially burdensome. Despite these obstacles, I remain committed to meeting the requirements necessary to continue my profession as an educator. The high cost and logistical challenges of taking these exams highlight the dedication and sacrifices required to pursue a teaching career away from home.

Through all the challenges and triumphs, my passion for teaching remains unwavering. The impact I make in my students' lives, the contributions I bring to my school and community, and the lessons I have learned from my journey are all part of my commitment to shaping the future generation. I am grateful for the opportunity to teach in Lanai City, Hawaii, and I look forward to continuing my mission of inspiring and educating young minds.

Respectfully,

Annie Canlas Baltazar

LHES, 2nd Grade Teacher

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:29:09 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amira Rae R. Bonifacio	Testifying for Princess Nahienaena Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Amira Rae R. Bonifacio, and I am a special education teacher at Princess Nahienaena Elementary School in Lahaina, Maui. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders through the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board.

As an educator, I provide individualized instruction to students with learning challenges, equipping them with the skills they need to succeed in reading, writing, and mathematics. My professional training and teaching experience in the Philippines have prepared me to meet diverse student needs, and I am honored to bring my expertise to Hawaii's classrooms. Filipino teachers are highly skilled, dedicated, and well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to the state's education system.

Beyond my role in the classroom, teaching in Hawaii enables me to support my family in the Philippines, reinforcing the broader impact of this opportunity. However, the current licensure process presents significant financial and logistical challenges. The required exams are costly and, in many cases, only available on Oahu, requiring inter-island travel that further increases expenses. These barriers make it difficult for qualified international teachers to obtain the necessary credentials to continue serving Hawaii's students.

Passing SB819 would provide a more equitable and accessible pathway for dedicated international educators. I am especially committed to continuing my service to the students of Lahaina, many of whom have faced immense hardship following the devastating August 2023 wildfire. These children need stability, guidance, and compassionate educators who are committed to their growth and recovery.

I respectfully urge you to support SB819 to ensure that passionate and qualified international teachers can continue making a lasting difference in the lives of Hawaii's keiki. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

Amira Rae R. Bonifacio

Special Education Teacher

Princess Nahienaena Elementary School, Lahaina, Maui

SB819– International Visiting Teacher License

The committee chair Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Donna Mercado Kim, and committee members.

Aloha!

My name is Daisy Fabalina, a newly hired Preschool Teacher at Eleele Elementary School, District of Kauai. I am a seasoned teacher in the Philippines, board passer in the Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers, with a 5-year private Preschool teaching experience and have been in public school for more than 16 years, backed up with two Completed Academic requirements in a graduate studies and have various training and seminar-workshops primarily related to pedagogies of teaching and learning in elementary classrooms settings with full of compassion and dedication to helping young generations in my country to be globally equipped and be ready for the work force of every government department and to be productive citizens. I am bringing that passion here in the United States to exercise the same vision in my heart. With my three months of teaching experience as a pre-k teacher, I found myself easily adapted to the teaching strategies and environment considering the capacity, ability and behavior of my learners. In connection with this, I and all the other qualified and licensed Filipino J1 teachers here in Hawaii are fully supporting this Bill. We believe and are fully convinced that we can also do what the American teachers can do when it comes to the pedagogies and the spectrum of teaching styles. Furthermore, taking Praxis is another burden on our parts, it is not that we can not pass the test, but because we have limited time to review. In addition, the cost of examination fee is high, and lastly, we are only given a period of time indicated in our visa to exercise our profession here. But in spite of these, we continue to heed and support other rules and policies set before us by the Department of education of Hawaii and promise to excel in our call.

Thank you for your consideration and approval.

Sincerely,



DAISY FABALINA

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 3:59:44 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aljhon Tamondong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Aljhon King Tamondong, a third grade teacher at Wailuku Elementary School. Today, I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As an educator, I have demonstrated unwavering dedication to my students' academic success and personal growth. Teaching in a diverse and multicultural environment has strengthened my passion for inclusive education, cultural exchange, and student-centered learning.

I am committed to nurturing a supportive classroom environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to achieve their full potential. By integrating innovative teaching strategies, technology, and culturally relevant materials, I ensure that learning is both engaging and meaningful.

Beyond the classroom, I actively participate in school events, mentorship programs, and cultural activities that foster cross-cultural understanding between my home country, the Philippines, and my Hawaiian community. I take pride in sharing my Filipino heritage while embracing the rich traditions of Hawaii, strengthening the bond between our cultures.

Despite challenges such as financial adjustments and being away from family, my dedication to my students keeps me motivated. I believe that education is a powerful tool for transforming lives, and I am grateful for the opportunity to make a lasting impact on my students and school community.

It is essential to recognize educators like myself to promote quality education and acknowledge the Invaluable contributions of dedicated J1 teachers. I respectfully encourage you to support HB 439, allowing us to persist in our crucial roles of teaching, mentoring, and inspiring learners throughout Hawaii. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Aljhon King Tamondong
3rd Grade Teacher
Wailuku Elementary School, Maui

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 3:59:54 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alvin Monteaalto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is **Alvin Monteaalto**, and I am writing in strong support of **HB 439** that seeks to honor the credentials and experience of Filipino teachers by establishing criteria for obtaining an international teacher license. As a dedicated educator who has been teaching in Hawai‘i, I have firsthand experience with the challenges foreign teacher face when trying to continue our careers here. This is a significant step forward for countless talented educators who have dedicated their lives to nurturing and shaping the minds of young students in the Philippines.

Many of us have completed extensive training, obtained advanced degrees and earned teaching license in our home countries, all of which have been evaluated and recognized by the foreign credential evaluation agencies. Despite this, we are still required to take additional certification exams, which present unnecessary financial and logistical barriers.

Since arriving in Kauai, I have had privilege of teaching Middle School Mathematics at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School. My own journey as a Filipino educator in Hawai‘i has been incredibly rewarding. I decided to continue my career here in this beautiful state with a passion for teaching, bringing with me not only my credentials but also a wealth of cultural knowledge and experiences that enrich the classroom environment. I have worked tirelessly to support my students, many of whom face unique challenges. In my school, I have sought to create an inclusive and dynamic learning atmosphere where students feel validated in their backgrounds while being challenged academically. My students not only acquire knowledge but also develop an appreciation for cultural diversity, which ultimately prepares them for success in a global society. My colleagues and administrators have recognized my commitment and effectiveness, yet I, like many other foreign teachers, still face barriers that prevent us from continuing our careers seamlessly.

The unique perspectives and methodologies that Filipino teachers bring have contributed to a more comprehensive educational approach. Our diverse pedagogical strategies encourage students to think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively—skills they will carry with them long after they leave the classroom.

The exclusionary test requirements currently in place serve as a barrier for many capable Filipino teachers who desire to contribute to Hawai‘i's educational system. Exempting them from unnecessary testing will lead to greater workforce diversity and improved educational outcomes.

By recognizing the credentials, we have already earned and eliminating redundant testing requirements, Hawai'i will create a more inclusive, efficient and fair process for dedicated teachers who want to continue serving students.

In conclusion, my testimony serves as a passionate plea for the passing of the bill to honor and recognize Philippine teaching licenses in Hawai'i. By valuing and validating the contributions of Filipino teachers, we underpin a commitment to diversity and excellence in education. Together, we can forge a brighter future, nurturing the hearts and minds of students across Hawai'i, and equipping them for a world ever in need of compassionate, capable, and innovative leaders.

Alvin Montealto

Chiefess Kamakahahei Middle School - Math teacher

February 04, 2025

To: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Graciela Esguerra

Position: Science Teacher

Institution: Henry Perrine Baldwin High School

Subject: Testimony in Support of SB819

To the Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education and the Hawaii State Legislature:

I am writing this testimony in strong support of SB819. This bill will significantly benefit Hawaii's educators and students.

As a J-1 teacher on Maui, I am committed to fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment. I am passionate about providing a high-quality education for our keiki.

While I hold a Professional Teacher License from the Philippines, I am required to take the Praxis exams for Hawaii licensure. These costly tests are often only offered on Oahu, requiring expensive inter-island travel and leave time, as they are not available on weekends. Aside from that, as an "Emergency Hire" teacher, my salary is lower than fully licensed teachers. I am also responsible for my own housing, which consumes a significant portion of my income.

Hawaii urgently needs qualified teachers, and J-1 teachers are dedicated to serving our students and the community of these beautiful islands. However, we need stability to continue this service.

I urge you to support this bill, SB819, to ensure Hawaii's students and educators receive the necessary support. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo for all that you do!

Respectfully,

Graciela Esguerra

Science Teacher (Grade 9)

H.P. Baldwin High School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 6:50:28 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mahina Anguay	Testifying for Waimea High School Principal, HIDOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am submitting written testimony in support of SB819, which would create an international visiting teacher license.

As the principal of Waimea High School on Kauai, I struggle to find highly qualified teachers who are willing to relocate to a rural neighbor island community. I actually struggle to find teachers, period.

For the last two years, having the ability to select highly qualified science teachers from the Philippines has been a game changer for our school. We now have three J-1 teachers on our campus and they have been an outstanding addition to our faculty. In one year, the Biology teacher doubled our end of course exam scores with our 9th graders. All three have volunteered to mentor students and assist student clubs. All three have jumped into school and district professional development and support. All three either have or are scheduled to travel with my other teachers to off island training to learn skills that align to school and HIDOE initiatives. They have excellent attitudes with strong work ethics and are almost always the first to arrive and one of the last to leave campus each day.

While my J-1 teachers have begun the expensive process of taking PRAXIS exams in order to be eligible to be rehired for next year, I would like to point out and recognize that they come to us with extensive experience and education from the Philippines. My J-1 teachers are doing the same work and are being held to the same standards as my Hawaii highly qualified teachers and I believe strongly that they should be compensated similarly.

I firmly believe supporting HB439 is the pono thing to do for our school communities and for our J-1 teachers.

Mahalo... Mahina Anguay

February 1, 2025

Aloha,

I am submitting my strong testimony in support of SB819, which would establish an international visiting teacher license. This legislation is necessary to address the ongoing teacher shortage in our state, particularly in rural areas and underserved communities.

As an educator working at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, a former president and current secretary of the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators (HAFE), and former Vice President of the Fil-Am Community of East Hawaii (FACEH), I have had the privilege of working closely with J-1 teachers and witnessing their invaluable contributions to our schools and communities. Through the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators (HAFE), we have been actively assisting J-1 teachers in navigating the challenges they face, and I can personally attest to the transformative impact they have on our educational system and beyond.

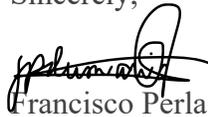
Hiring highly qualified teachers from the Philippines through the J-1 visa program has been a game changer for many schools in Hawaii. These teachers bring not only their expertise and dedication but also a deep commitment to their students and communities.

I can attest that the J-1 teachers have made significant contributions to community events and activities. They have been instrumental in organizing and participating in celebrations such as Filipino American History Month, HAFE events, and the Sakada Day Celebration. Their involvement enriches these cultural events, fosters community connections, and highlights the importance of diversity and inclusion in Hawaii.

Supporting SB819 is not only the right thing to do rather it is the pono thing to do. This legislation will benefit our schools, our students, and the dedicated J-1 teachers who have become integral members of our educational and community life. It will also streamline the process of hiring and retaining these highly qualified professionals, ensuring that Hawaii's keiki receive the education they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, University of Hawaii at Hilo

Former President and Current Secretary, Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators (HAFE)

Former Vice President, Fil-Am Community of East Hawaii (FACEH)

January 31, 2025

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I Arnel Dayame a Math Teacher in Kulanihako'i High School, formally writing a request the recognition of my teaching credentials as a license educator in the Philippines for the purpose of applying for a teaching license within the State of Hawaii.

I am a licensed professional teacher in the Philippines, holding the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Mathematics and Master of Arts in Education major in Mathematics from University of the Visayas, main campus, Colon Street, Cebu City, Philippines and have successfully passed the Philippine Licensure Examination for Teachers(LET). I have been teaching at University of the Visayas, College students for 4 years, specializing in Research and Mathematics and also in Ocana National High School, senior high school level for 3 years specializing research and Mathematics.

Throughout my career, I have demonstrated a commitment to fostering student growth and achieving academic success. I have continually adhered to professional standards, participated in ongoing professional development, and maintained strong connections with students, parents, and colleagues. Furthermore, I have been involved in research presentations and coach for different Math competitions. I have two international Research publications about enhancing students academic performances in Mathematics. I have been also dedicated to creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment that encourage students to embrace diversity and explore global perspectives. I have successfully implemented the Interactive Math Garden: Outdoor Classroom to Enhance Student's Math Academic Performance (IMG:OCTESMAP) project that promote cultural awareness and appreciation among students.

My enthusiastic interest in participating the cross-cultural exchange program as international teacher as an educator is deeply committed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and enriching educational experiences. I am excited about the opportunity to contribute to this esteemed program. Currently I am teaching Algebra 1 and Statistics and Probability in Kulanihako'i High School, 9th, 10th and 11th grade students. I am eager to immerse myself in a new cultural environment. I firmly believe that engaging with diverse community not only enhances my teaching abilities but also broaden my perspective, enriching the learning experiences of both myself and my students. I also proposed the same project in my current school which is the Interactive Math Garden: Outdoor Classroom to Enhance Student's Math Academic Performance (IMG:OCTESMAP) to successfully helps students math academic performance here in Hawaii.

The prospect of collaborating with educators from different cultural backgrounds excites me as it aligns with my belief in the transformative power of cultural exchange in education. I am confident that my experiences, combine with my adaptability and eagerness to learn will enable me to contribute meaningfully to the Hawaii state educational program. I am committed to leveraging this opportunity to not only

enhance my teaching skills but also to foster meaningful connections with students, educators, and the community in Hawaii.

As a Filipino teacher in Hawaii, I believe in the power of community and the importance of giving back. Outside of the classroom, I am honored to volunteer as a Liturgical Master of Ceremony at our local Catholic church. This role allows me to serve the community by assisting in the smooth flow of religious services, fostering a sense of reverence, and helping parishioners connect spiritually.

Through this volunteer work, I've been able to deepen my own faith while also bringing a sense of cultural richness to the church, especially as a Filipino. The values of service, compassion, and community are central to both my heritage and the teaching of the church, guide my approach to teaching and involvement in the community. Being engaged in this way allows me to connect with my students and their families on a deeper level, offering them a space where faith, culture, and education can intersect. It's an experience that has enriched my life and has strengthened the bonds between myself, my students, and the wider Hawaii community.

Being a Filipino teacher in Hawaii has been a deeply rewarding experience, especially because of the strong sense of community here. As an educator, I believe that teaching extends beyond the classroom, it is about making meaningful connections and supporting the diverse cultural fabric that shapes Hawaii.

Ultimately, being a Filipino teacher here in Hawaii has reinforced the idea that education is not just about imparting knowledge, it is about connecting, building relationships, and making a positive impact within the community.

As above mentioned experiences and involvement in Hawaii Educational System and community, as a dedicated Filipino teacher who has earned my teaching license in the Philippines, I would like to share some of my struggles we face when attempting to gain certification in Hawaii, particularly with the Praxis exam.

While I understand the importance of standardized assessments like the Praxis, many Filipino teachers, including myself, face significant challenges when trying to meet the requirements set by Hawaii. Our professional training, teaching experience, and licensure from the Philippines are not always fully acknowledged, which often places us at a disadvantage compared to other local teachers.

The process of preparing for and taking the Praxis exam can be financially and emotionally burdensome especially for teachers who have already spent years in the classroom. It is particularly disheartening when our qualifications and experiences, which are recognized in the Philippines, are not immediately accepted in Hawaii, despite the fact that we are trained in the same core principles of effective learning.

I respectfully urge you to consider the possibility of recognizing our Philippines teaching license as equivalent to Hawaii teaching license. Many of us are passionate about continuing our careers in education and contributing to Hawaii's diverse and vibrant community, but we are hindered by these regulatory challenges.

By recognizing the value of our teaching experiences and credentials, we can more effectively serve Hawaii's students and bring unique cultural perspective to the classroom.

Respectfully yours,

Arnel Dayame
Grade 9 Adviser
Math, Teacher
Kulanihako'i High School
Kihie, Maui, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 5:25:55 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shayne Greenland	Testifying for Ilima Intermediate School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Chair, Michelle Kidani; Vice Chair, Donna Mercado Kim, and Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed legislation SB819 to license all J-1 teachers based on their existing foreign credentials. As a dedicated educator and community member in Ewa Beach, I believe this measure is essential for addressing our ongoing teacher shortage and enriching the educational experiences of our students.

J-1 teachers have had a profoundly positive impact on my students, our school community, and the overall campus climate. At Ilima Intermediate, where we serve a diverse student population, these educators bring a wealth of knowledge, cultural diversity, and global perspectives that deeply enrich our classrooms. Their ability to share international best practices fosters cross-cultural understanding and prepares students for success in an increasingly interconnected world. Their presence not only enhances academic outcomes but also strengthens our students' social-emotional growth by exposing them to different viewpoints and experiences.

This legislation is critical because it allows J-1 teachers to remain in Hawai‘i for up to five years if licensed, providing much-needed stability for our schools and students. Additionally, it ensures equal pay for equal work—granting them access to differentials that come with being licensed educators. These teachers are highly qualified professionals with internationally recognized credentials, extensive teaching experience, and advanced degrees. They should not be subjected to burdensome and expensive Praxis exams when they have already proven their expertise through their foreign licensure and qualifications.

By removing unnecessary barriers, we enable J-1 teachers to focus on what truly matters: supporting their schools, students, and communities. Their dedication and contributions help fill critical gaps in our education system, ensuring that all students receive high-quality instruction despite ongoing staffing shortages.

I urge you to advocate for the passage of this measure. Recognizing and valuing the skills of J-1 teachers is not only fair but also essential to strengthening education in Hawai‘i. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter, and for your continued commitment to improving our schools.

Sincerely,
Shayne Greenland

Principal
Ilima Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 4:17:32 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JERIC SABADO GALDICAN	Testifying for J1 Teachers	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Jeric S. Galdican, a science teacher at Henry Perrine Baldwin High School.

I'm submitting my written testimony in strong support of SB819, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders. J1 teachers like myself are incredibly passionate about teaching the children of Hawai'i, bringing diverse perspectives and a deep commitment to enriching their educational experience. However, the current licensing requirements, specifically the Praxis exam, create significant obstacles, hindering our contributions and exacerbating the teacher shortage. I believe SB819 offers a vital solution, and here are six key reasons why:

1. The Praxis exam is prohibitively expensive: As J1 visa holders, we face financial constraints. The Praxis, study materials, and retake fees create a substantial burden, stretching limited resources and discouraging qualified international teachers.
2. The Praxis exam negatively impacts teacher mental health: The pressure to pass adds stress to demanding jobs. Studying while managing a classroom is overwhelming, and the fear of failure takes a toll on our well-being.
3. The Praxis exam contributes to Hawai'i's teacher shortage: Hawai'i already faces a critical shortage. Requiring the Praxis limits the pool of available educators, forcing some J1 teachers to leave and depriving children of dedicated professionals.
4. Licensure without the Praxis exam would lead to better compensation: Licensure qualifies us for higher salaries. The high cost of living makes it difficult for J1 teachers to make ends meet, and increased compensation would ease burdens.
5. Licensure without the Praxis exam would provide job security: J1 teachers face uncertainty about future employment. An international license would offer security, allowing us to invest long-term in our schools and communities.
6. The Praxis requirement forces us to consider leaving Hawai'i: We love Hawai'i, but the Praxis pushes us to consider other states. Other states offer easier licensure pathways, allowing us to stay longer and contribute to their schools.

These challenges posed by the Praxis exam not only affect individual teachers but also have a direct impact on the quality of education our children receive. SB819 offers a pathway to address these issues, allowing Hawai'i to tap into a valuable pool of qualified educators eager to contribute their skills and passion. By supporting this bill, you are not only supporting international teachers; you are investing in the future of Hawai'i's children. I urge you to vote in favor of SB819 and help ensure that every child has access to a dedicated and qualified teacher. Mahalo.

My name is **SARAH JEAN E. ALEGADO**, and I am honored to serve as a **J-1 teacher in the United States, fulfilling a crucial role as an English Language Development (ELD) Coordinator and Teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School**. I am here today to strongly support SB 819, a bill that acknowledges the invaluable contributions of international visiting teachers and addresses the barriers we face in continuing to serve students effectively.

The United States is facing a critical teacher shortage, particularly in areas such as English as a Second Language (ESL), Special Education, and STEM. J-1 teachers have become an essential part of bridging this gap, ensuring that students—especially multilingual learners—receive the quality education they deserve.

As an educator from the Philippines with 24 years of teaching experience, I have dedicated my career to ESL instruction and public school education. I hold a Master's Degree in Education, have attended numerous professional development trainings and seminars, and have successfully passed the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) and Career Executive Service Written Exam (CESWE)—qualifications that demonstrate my deep expertise in educational leadership and instruction.

Furthermore, I have taken and passed the Philippine Licensure Examinations for Teachers, which rigorously assess content knowledge, pedagogy, professional education, general education, and specialization—all components that align closely with the PRAXIS exam required in the U.S.

Despite my credentials, my qualifications are not fully recognized due to the PRAXIS testing requirement, which places an additional burden on international teachers like me. In my case, I am required to take five PRAXIS exams, diverting my time, energy, and financial resources away from what truly matters—serving my multilingual students and fulfilling my responsibilities as an ELD Coordinator.

Instead of focusing on instructional planning, language development strategies, and student support, I am forced to prepare for tests that essentially replicate the licensure exams I have already passed in my home country. This redundancy does not measure my effectiveness as a teacher but instead creates unnecessary obstacles that hinder my ability to fully contribute to my students' success.

This bill is a necessary step toward recognizing the qualifications of highly experienced international educators and removing barriers that prevent us from fully integrating into the U.S. education system. By supporting SB 819, you are:

- ✓ Acknowledging the expertise and training of J-1 teachers, ensuring that we can focus on delivering quality instruction rather than taking redundant exams.
- ✓ Helping schools retain experienced educators who are dedicated to addressing teacher shortages, particularly in high-need areas.
- ✓ Enhancing the learning experience of multilingual students, who benefit from teachers with extensive experience in language instruction and culturally responsive teaching.
- ✓ Providing equitable opportunities for international teachers to thrive in the profession without unnecessary financial and logistical burdens.

J-1 teachers are not just temporary educators—we are essential contributors to the success of the U.S. education system. With our diverse backgrounds, extensive experience, and commitment to student achievement, we play a vital role in shaping the future of multilingual learners and supporting schools facing critical staffing shortages.

I urge you to support SB 819 and remove the barriers that prevent dedicated, highly qualified international teachers from fully serving their students and communities. Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 4:13:33 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bryan Thiel De Leon	Testifying for J1 Teachers	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Bryan Thiel De Leon, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB819, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As an educator with qualifications from the Philippines, I would like to present the following reasons for why J1 teachers from the Philippines should be exempted from taking the Praxis Examination here in Hawaii, and have an international Visiting Teacher License instead:

***Internationally Recognized Credentials - Our teaching credentials from the Philippines are recognized internationally. We have been obtained from accredited institutions, ensuring that we are well-prepared to teach in diverse educational settings. This recognition should suffice as evidence of our qualifications.**

***Comprehensive Training - The teacher education program we've completed in the Philippines provides a rigorous curriculum that covers essential pedagogical skills and content knowledge, closely aligning with the teaching standards established in Hawaii.**

***Significant Teaching Experience - With several years of teaching experience in the Philippine educational system, we have developed effective teaching strategies and classroom management skills that demonstrate our competence and readiness to teach in Hawaii.**

***Alignment with Hawaii Standards - The curriculum and teaching approaches in the Philippines incorporate many of the same principles and practices that are utilized in Hawaii. This alignment indicates that we are already equipped with the necessary skills to succeed as an educator in this state.**

***Advanced Degree Qualifications - We hold the required degree in education, which reflects my commitment to professional growth and a deep understanding of educational theories and practices. This level of education should exempt us from additional testing requirements.**

***Local Agency Discretion - The discretion of local education agencies to evaluate the qualifications of J1 teachers can play a crucial role in determining the necessity of the Praxis exam. A holistic review of our qualifications should suffice for an exemption.**

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the relevant authorities in Hawaii to consider these reasons granting international teachers (like us) a full teaching license and eliminating unnecessary exams. The said qualifications and experiences reflect our readiness to contribute positively to the educational community in Hawaii.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

**Bryan Thiel De
Leon
Teacher
County, Hawaii**

J1

Maui

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 9:10:05 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ANNALIZA PIGAO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee,

My name is Annaliza Pigao and I am a Science teacher at Aliamanu Middle School. I am writing in strong support of HB439, a bill that would create an international visiting teacher license in Hawai‘i. I have witnessed firsthand the incredibly positive impact that international teachers, particularly those on J-1 visas, have had on our students, our school community, and our campus climate.

Our school has benefited greatly from the presence of a J-1 teacher. I brought a wealth of diverse experiences, perspectives, and teaching methodologies that enrich the learning environment for all students. As an international teacher, I don't just teach; I also inspire, broaden horizons, and create a more globally aware and accepting school culture.

Currently, the short-term nature of the J-1 visa program creates instability for our schools and our students. HB439 addresses this critical issue by allowing these highly valued educators to remain in Hawai‘i for up to five years if we obtain the international visiting teacher license. This extended stay will provide much-needed continuity for our students, allowing them to build strong, lasting relationships with their teachers. It will also allow our schools to invest in teachers like us, knowing that our expertise and dedication will benefit our community for a longer period.

The provisions within HB439 are essential for ensuring fairness and respect for educators. Equal pay for equal work is a fundamental principle, and I applaud the bill's commitment to this. Granting access to differentials for licensed teachers further acknowledges the value and qualification we bring. Recognizing our internationally recognized credentials as equivalent to "highly qualified" status would be a great help. We have already demonstrated our expertise and experience in our home countries, and we should not impose unnecessary burdens, such as expensive and time-consuming Praxis exams, when we already hold international licenses and degrees.

By streamlining the licensing process and removing unnecessary obstacles, HB439 allows us, as international teachers, to focus on what truly matters: supporting our students, enriching our schools, and contributing to our community. It allows us to do what we are best qualified to do and what we came here to do.

I urge the committee to support HB439. It is a win-win for our students, our schools, and our community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:17:09 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gretchen Cacao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Gretchen Cacao, and I am a Science Teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB189, which would allow international visiting teachers to be licensed in Hawaii.

As a dedicated educator, I strive to provide quality science education, drawing on years of experience from my home country. My goal is to inspire curiosity, critical thinking, and a love for

learning, ensuring my students gain a strong foundation in science to prepare them for the future.

Despite my qualifications and dedication, licensing requirements pose challenges. The costly Praxis exams are not easily accessible on my island, requiring travel to Oahu and additional expenses. This creates a financial burden for international teachers already committed to supporting Hawaii's schools.

Without a Hawaii teaching license, I earn a lower salary than my licensed colleagues, creating financial challenges for my family of four despite both my husband and me working. Licensure would recognize my education and experience, ensure fair compensation, and allow me to better support my family while serving my students effectively.

HB 439 is a step in the right direction. It recognizes the qualifications and contributions of international teachers and ensures that we are given a fair opportunity to thrive in Hawaii's education system. Its passage would not only support educators like myself but also strengthen Hawaii's education system by ensuring that highly qualified and committed teachers can continue making a meaningful impact in the classroom.

I sincerely encourage your support for the passage of SB189. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Cacao

Science Teacher, Waimea Canyon Middle School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 9:17:56 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
amy agbayani	Testifying for hawai'i friends of civil rights	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

estimony in support submitted by

Amy Agbayani and Pat McManaman, co-chairs Hawa'i Friends of Civil Rights.

We strongly support sb819 requiring the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teachers license for J-1 visa holders and establishes criteria for obtaining international teachers license. The bill will help Hawai'i address teacher shortages by providing competent teachers particularly in geographic and disciplines. In addition, J-1 visa holders with cultural and linguistic skills can work with students from these backgrounds. The Department of Education currently has over 200 J-1 visa teachers from the Philippines and my personal contact with some of the individual teachers and comments from my community contacts makes me confident that these teachers and the students are well-served.

These J-1 visa teachers can serve at any of the public schools, including schools with high proportion of local and immigrant Filipino students. As noted, Filipino students are the largest ethnic group in the public schools and immigrants from the Philippines represent the largest country of origin group, making up nearly half—or 45.8 percent—of all immigrants in Hawai'i. Currently there are 32,044 (10%) English language students in the public schools. These students are native speakers of languages other than English and need assistance to learn English.

We support this bill as it will benefit our schools and teachers by having international licenses for these teachers.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 9:44:57 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
CHRISTOPHER M KANYI	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of a Bill to Establish an International Teacher License in Hawai‘i

Aloha Chair , Vice-Chair , and members of the committee,

My name is Christopher Kanyi, and I am a 6th-grade Special Education teacher at Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School. I am writing in strong support of the proposed legislation that seeks to address the licensing requirements for international teachers in Hawai‘i. I believe that scrapping the current requirement for international teachers to take the Praxis exams and instead establishing an international teacher license for certain visa holders is a crucial step towards addressing our teacher shortage and enriching our classrooms.

Currently, the financial burden of the Praxis exams places a significant hardship on international teachers seeking to contribute their skills and expertise to our keiki. These dedicated educators often face considerable expenses related to visa applications, relocation, and other necessities. Requiring them to pay for and pass these exams creates an unnecessary barrier that discourages qualified individuals from pursuing teaching careers in Hawai‘i. This financial hurdle disproportionately affects teachers from lower-income backgrounds and further limits the diversity of our teaching force.

The establishment of an international teacher license, tied to specific visa categories, offers a sensible and practical solution. It acknowledges the qualifications and experience that international teachers bring, while still ensuring that they meet the necessary standards to teach in our state. This approach would streamline the licensing process, making it more accessible and affordable for international educators. It would also allow our schools to tap into a wider pool of talented and qualified teachers, bringing diverse perspectives and enriching the learning experience for our students.

As a 6th-grade SPED teacher, I see firsthand the challenges we face in recruiting and retaining qualified educators. The current licensing requirements create an additional obstacle for international teachers who are eager to serve our students. By creating a more welcoming and supportive environment for these teachers, we can attract and retain the best and brightest, ensuring that all our keiki have access to a high-quality education.

I urge the committee to support this important legislation. It is a common-sense measure that will benefit our students, our schools, and our entire community. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christopher Kanyi 6th Grade SPED Teacher Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:51:08 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arnie Calamaya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am writing in support of SB819, which seeks to provide fairness and opportunity to us J-1 teachers in Hawaii. As a first-year J1 teacher in Hawaii, I understand the challenges of navigating a new education system and the uncertainty that comes with it. However, despite these challenges, I am deeply committed to staying and growing as an educator here. I have seen how we J-1 teachers navigate similar transitions, bring invaluable experience, cultural diversity, and global perspectives that enrich the community both inside and outside the schools. One of the greatest challenges for me as a J-1 teacher is the requirement to take the Praxis exam, despite already holding internationally recognized teaching license and undergraduate or graduate degree. Taking this test is an undue burden, as it either requires me to travel from Kauai to Oahu for an in-person exam, an expensive and time-consuming trip for me and those on other islands, or dealing with the difficulties of the online version , which demands a setup with strict technological and environmental conditions. These obstacles for me not only create unnecessary stress but also divert time and energy away from what truly matters--teaching and supporting students.

Lastly, I strongly urge you to support this bill as it allows me and the other J-1 teachers to stay for five years, ensuring continuity for students and helping the community.

Mahalo nui loa!

Arnie Calamaya

Waimea High School

J-1 Teacher

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 4:09:39 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Fermainne Antonio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 819
International Visiting Teacher License

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

My name is Fermainne Antonio, and I am a J-1 teacher currently teaching 3rd grade at Lāna‘i High & Elementary School. I am writing in strong support of SB 819, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is essential in recognizing the contributions of international teachers like myself and ensuring that we can continue to serve Hawai‘i’s students effectively.

Since arriving in Hawai‘i, I have dedicated myself to my students, helping them grow academically and personally. As a 3rd-grade teacher, I have seen firsthand how my presence has positively impacted my students—not just in their academic progress but also in their understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures. My colleagues and I bring valuable perspectives and teaching strategies that enhance student learning and create a more inclusive and enriched school environment.

SB 819 would allow international teachers like me to stay in Hawai‘i for up to five years if licensed, providing much-needed stability for our students and schools. It also ensures fair treatment by granting equal pay for equal work, including access to differentials that recognize our qualifications. International educators already hold highly respected credentials and extensive teaching experience, and we should not be required to take costly and unnecessary Praxis exams when we have already demonstrated our expertise through our degrees and certifications.

With the support of this bill, we can focus on what truly matters—our students, our schools, and the communities we serve. Passing SB 819 is a step toward valuing and retaining the international educators who play a crucial role in Hawai‘i’s education system. I respectfully urge you to support this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Fermainne Antonio

3rd Grade Teacher
Lāna‘i High & Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 4:17:00 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lanie Masicat	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Lanie Masicat a participant in the J1 Teacher Program in Hawai‘i. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB819

I am incredibly grateful for my experience as a J1 teacher here in Hawai‘i, where I’ve been able to grow professionally and personally while contributing positively to both the students and the broader school community. The unique opportunities that come with this program have allowed me to focus on what truly matters: supporting my students, strengthening our school community, and fostering a positive campus climate.

First and foremost, the school community in Hawai‘i has been incredibly welcoming, and I’ve witnessed firsthand in James Campbell High School how the teachers here positively impact our students. The collaborative spirit of my colleagues has made me a stronger educator. Teachers at Campbell High are passionate, and this energy has inspired me to bring my own best efforts into my classroom every day. By working together, we create an environment where our students feel encouraged and motivated to succeed, regardless of their background or challenges. This positive, inclusive atmosphere is something I believe is vital in shaping our students’ future success.

The ability to stay in Hawai‘i for up to five years with the J1 Teacher program—provided that I become licensed—has been an incredible incentive and a sign of commitment from the state to international educators like myself. The pathway to becoming licensed here will allow me to integrate into the teaching community with stability and long-term growth opportunities. I truly appreciate if Hawai‘i will recognize my international credentials and views them as highly qualified and valuable. This acknowledgment will not only boost my confidence but also reassures me that my expertise is respected, despite coming from abroad.

One of the aspects I will greatly appreciate about working as a J1 teacher here in Hawai‘i is the commitment to equal pay for equal work. I have access to differentials for my licensure status, which ensures that my compensation aligns with the experience and education I bring to the table. This is a testament to the state’s commitment to fairly compensating teachers, no matter where they are from.

Additionally, the absence of burdensome and expensive exams, such as the Praxis, for teachers who already hold international licenses, has been a huge relief. It will allow me to focus on what I do best: teaching and supporting my students. There’s no need to spend time or money on

redundant testing when my credentials are already internationally recognized. This streamlined approach makes the entire process of becoming an educator in Hawai'i much more accessible and less stressful for foreign teachers.

In conclusion, the J1 Teacher Program has provided me with a remarkable opportunity to make a meaningful impact in the classroom and beyond. It has allowed me to build stronger relationships with my students, collaborate with dedicated colleagues, and contribute to a school climate that encourages growth, inclusion, and academic success. I am proud to be part of a community that values and supports its educators, and I look forward to continuing to make a difference in Hawai'i for years to come.

Respectfully,

Lanie Masicat

Math Teacher

James Campbell High School

Testimony in Support of HB 439 Relating to Education

To Whom It May Concern,

I am Maria Glenda Ventura, an 11th-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher and a 9th-grade adviser at King Kekaulike High School. I have been serving within the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) for the past seven months and am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the academic success of my students and the community.

Since my arrival, I have had the privilege to learn and share cultural knowledge, which had a positive impact on the school environment and the surrounding community. My students, in particular, have expressed their respect and appreciation for my participation in the Cultural Exchange Program. The program has allowed me to not only teach but also to actively engage in fostering cultural awareness, promoting diversity, and enhancing the global perspective within the classroom.

Moreover, I am a Professional Licensure for Teachers (PLT) passer from the Philippines, and my credentials have been verified and approved by the Foreign Credential Evaluation. I have attended numerous professional development training sessions, which have further enriched my teaching strategies and have helped me better cater to the needs of a diverse, multi-racial student body in Hawaii. These experiences have underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusion, enabling me to connect with my students on a deeper level and create an environment where all students feel valued and heard.

HB 439, which seeks to provide reciprocity for teacher licensure between the Philippines and Hawaii, is a critical step forward for educators like myself. This bill will not only allow me to strengthen my professional status here in Hawaii but, will also present a unique opportunity to share the rich cultural diversity of my home country with my students, their families, and the broader community.

The benefits of this bill extend beyond the recognition of our credentials—it opens doors for teachers to bring more diverse teaching strategies, cultural knowledge, and global perspectives into Hawaiian classrooms. For students, it broadens their understanding of the world around them and increases their appreciation for cultural differences, fostering a learning environment that truly reflects the diversity of the 21st century. Also, it will enhance the professional growth of international educators and provide significant benefits for the students, parents, and the community.

I fully and strongly support HB 439 and am hopeful for its passage. Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Glenda Ventura

ELA 11th Grade Teacher & 9th Grade Adviser

King Kekaulike High School

Hawaii Department of Education

Testimony of Contribution and Support

As a special education teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School, I am deeply committed to meeting the unique academic and social-emotional needs of my 6th grade students. Through both push-in and pull-out sessions, I provide individualized instruction, creating tailored lessons that address the diverse learning needs of each student. This personalized approach allows my students to make meaningful academic progress, while also building the self-confidence they need to succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

In addition to my direct work with special education students, I collaborate closely with general education teachers, helping to extend support to regular students in the classroom setting. By helping during lessons and providing real-time intervention, I contribute to maximizing learning opportunities for all students. This collaboration ensures that every student, regardless of their learning profile, can engage with the curriculum and receive the support they need to excel.

My contributions are integral to achieving the mission and vision of Lokelani Inter, which seeks to foster an inclusive, nurturing environment where every student can thrive. Through my work, I strive to ensure that all students feel supported and valued as they work toward their educational goals.

Additionally, I would like to express my strong support for HB 439, which proposes the creation of an International Teacher License. This bill would allow teachers from the Philippines, like me, to use our credentials and teaching licenses here in the United States. By recognizing our qualifications as highly experienced and dedicated educators, we would be afforded equal pay for equal work, access to salary differentials, and the opportunity to work without the burden of additional requirements such as the Praxis exam. The Praxis exam poses a significant challenge given the time it demands for preparation, especially when balanced with our already demanding workloads. Moreover, international teachers teaching in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, and few other states enjoy the full benefit of teaching license reciprocity. It is my belief that HB 439 would not only benefit teachers like me but also enhance the overall educational experience for our students by ensuring that highly qualified educators are retained and supported.

Thank you for considering both my contributions to the school community and my support for HB 439, which would help to improve the professional recognition and treatment of international teachers in the U.S.

Sincerely,

MAYLEN M. PATANAO

Special Education Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 4:47:55 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angelie Mae Galario	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Angelie Mae Galario, and I am a Special Education (SPED) teacher in a fully self-contained class at Barbers Point Elementary School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, which aims to establish an international teacher license for specific visa holders.

Teaching is more than just a job; it is a mission that empowers students from all walks of life. As a SPED teacher, I understand the profound impact that quality education can have on individuals with diverse needs. It is essential that we recognize and honor the credentials and training that educators like myself bring from our home countries while also pursuing an international teaching license. In Hawai'i, I have dedicated myself to meeting the needs of my diverse students, despite holding a license not recognized here. My local training and the teaching license I earned in my home country have provided me with invaluable skills in effective teaching strategies and behavioral management. These skills have been pivotal in nurturing an inclusive and supportive learning environment—something every student deserves.

However, the added burden of obtaining an international teaching license by taking the PRAXIS exam continues to weigh heavily on educators like myself. The financial and emotional toll of this process is significant, especially given that we must pay for the exam each time we attempt it. This is a barrier that hinders our ability to fully engage and support our students.

By approving this bill, we can remove this obstacle and allow dedicated educators to focus on what truly matters—the success of our students. Integrating our diverse qualifications and rich experiences will enable us to create dynamic and inclusive classrooms that celebrate the unique backgrounds of every student. I urge you to consider the positive impact this legislation will have on countless educators and, most importantly, the students we serve. Together, we can foster an educational environment that empowers all learners.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Angelie Mae Galario

My name is Rizza Verina, and I am an 8th Grade Math and Algebra teacher at Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School (CKMS) in the Kaua'i District. This is my second-year teaching in the United States – my first year was in Florida, where J1 teachers were exempted from additional licensure exams. At CKMS, I am one of three 8th-grade math teachers, two of whom are J1 teachers. In total, there are nine J-1 teachers at our school. I am writing in strong support of HB439, which create an International Visiting Teacher License and help retain qualified international teachers in Hawaii.

Hawaii, like many states, faces teacher shortages, particularly in specialized subjects such as math and science. International teachers like me help fill this gap, bringing diverse perspectives and global teaching experiences into the classroom. Our teaching licenses have already been evaluated for equivalency, demonstrating that we meet the necessary standards to teach effectively. However, the requirement to take additional Praxis exams creates unnecessary barriers that limit our ability to focus entirely on student learning. The cost, availability, and time commitment of these exams place financial and emotional strain on teachers who are already adjusting to a new education system and culture.

Furthermore, our ability to stay for the full five years of our program is often contingent on meeting these licensure requirements. This uncertainty makes it difficult for international teachers to plan for long-term contributions to Hawai'i education system. Removing these barriers, as other states have done, would not only support international teachers but also ensure continuity and stability for students and schools.

I chose to teach in Hawaii because of its strong sense of community and the warmth of its people. The students here are eager to learn, and the support from colleagues, administrators, and families makes teaching here incredibly rewarding. I want to continue making a positive impact in my students' lives without the burden of unnecessary testing requirements.

HB is a step in the right direction to ensure that qualified international teachers can focus on teaching, mentoring, and contributing to the success of Hawaii's students. I respectfully urge to pass this bill to support both educators and students we serve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Rizza Verina
J1 Teacher
Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:24:08 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janica Mary Pogoy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Janica Mary C. Pogoy, a professional teacher from the Philippines who has almost a decade of experience, currently teaching at Solomon Elementary School. I am writing this testimony to support HB 439 for teachers that recognize the contributions of educators across the world. Stepping off the plane in Hawaii, I was captivated by the breathtaking view of the mountains, cool weather, and very kind people, and that validated my goals as an adventurous teacher. I came here with the dual purpose of teaching and sharing my culture, an opportunity that is important to me, particularly because it allowed me to work with elementary students, my area of expertise.

From the first day of school, I feel welcomed by a warm and supportive community. The faculty's collaborative spirit is evident in terms of helping the structure in the classroom, how to make a subplan, their willingness to share resources, and fostering a truly enriching and positive working environment.

Transitioning into this new environment, I prioritized getting to know my students, recognizing their diverse cultural backgrounds. I focus on fostering independence, kindness, and responsibility in my students. I consistently strive to give my best in the classroom. My prior experience teaching preschoolers, middle schoolers, high school students, and even college students has prepared me to effectively address the diverse needs of my current students, particularly given their varied cultural backgrounds.

While I possess extensive teaching experience and a master's degree earned prior to my arrival, the licensing process in Hawaii has presented a significant challenge. This examination is a barrier, financially and mentally, to us teachers. Prior to our arrival, we completed coursework to support our credentials and successfully passed a licensing examination. We believe this license should be recognized as valid here, as teaching licenses from other countries are typically accepted.

As I am here on a J1 exchange visa under the emergency hire category, which entails average compensation and additional requirements. Other than that, I was given a teaching load, which was not something that I studied for in bachelor's and master's degrees. I believe that we can do more and share knowledge and expertise in the teaching field. I respectfully request that the committee consider the impact of these factors on educators in similar circumstances.

We sincerely hope the committee will consider our testimony.

Sincerely,

Janica Mary C. Pogoy

Kindergarten, Solomon Elementary School

Testimony in Support of HB439 – International Visiting Teachers License

Honorable members of the committee,

I am Heriel Jhon S. Bravo, teaching as 5th Grade Teacher at Konawaena Elementary School. I've been at Konawaena ES for only 6 months, but this is already my 2nd year in the program. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to teach and be part of the Konawaena Elementary School family. Being welcomed into this community has been an incredibly rewarding experience, and I am thankful for the support, collaboration, and encouragement that surround me every day. It's a privilege to contribute to the growth and development of such bright and talented young minds, and I look forward to continuing this amazing journey with the Konawaena family.

That is why I, Heriel Jhon S. Bravo, one of the International Teachers, stand before you today in strong support of HB439, the International Visiting Teachers License. As a visiting teacher, I am deeply committed to providing the best possible education for my students, yet I face a significant challenge when it comes to obtaining the proper licensure to do so.

The process of earning a teaching license in this state is not only time-consuming but also financially burdensome. Many of us international teachers are already highly trained and experienced in our home countries, and we bring valuable perspectives and expertise to the classroom. However, in order to teach here, we must navigate a complex system of exams, fees, and documentation. These requirements often do not consider our unique qualifications, and the cost of taking multiple exams just to qualify is prohibitively expensive. These fees add up quickly, with no guarantee of success, and they place an enormous financial strain on teachers who are already contributing to the community in meaningful ways.

By supporting HB439, you would be providing us with a streamlined process that recognizes our expertise while ensuring that we meet the necessary standards to teach effectively. This license would allow us to focus on our primary goal: educating and inspiring students. The current system creates unnecessary obstacles, and the financial burden on teachers like myself can often outweigh the benefits of continuing to pursue a license. With the passage of this bill, we would be able to focus more on our students and less on the financial and bureaucratic hurdles.

I ask that you please consider the immense value that international teachers bring to our classrooms, and the challenges we face in obtaining licensure. HB439 represents a fair and sensible solution to this issue, and I urge you to support its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 5:28:43 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ryan Taeza Macadangdang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Ryan Taeza Macadangdang, and I am a dedicated 6th-grade teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This legislation is essential in recognizing the contributions of experienced international educators and ensuring they can continue to serve Hawaii’s students effectively.

For nearly a decade, I have been devoted to shaping young minds and fostering a passion for learning. Prior to teaching in Hawaii, I taught in the Philippines and earned an out-of-state teaching license in Illinois. Through years of training and professional experience, I have developed and implemented effective teaching strategies that enhance student learning and achievement.

At Lokelani Intermediate, I strive to create an engaging and inclusive learning environment where all students feel supported and motivated to succeed. Working with a diverse student population, I provide high-quality instruction tailored to their individual needs. As an international educator, I also bring unique cultural perspectives into the classroom, broadening students’ understanding of the world and enriching their educational experience.

Despite my extensive qualifications, obtaining a full teaching license in Hawaii has been a challenge. Although I applied for reciprocity, my credentials were not fully recognized, and I was still required to take multiple PRAXIS exams. This additional testing requirement imposes both financial and logistical burdens, despite my proven experience and prior licensure.

This has had a direct impact on my ability to support myself. As an international teacher classified as an emergency hire, I receive a lower salary than fully licensed educators. The high cost of living in Hawaii, including housing and daily expenses, makes it challenging to make ends meet while dedicating myself to my students.

Hawaii is facing a critical teacher shortage, and international educators are already here, filling these essential roles with dedication and expertise. We are committed to the success of Hawaii's keiki, but we need stability and support to continue making a meaningful impact in our schools and communities.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, removing unnecessary barriers and enabling highly qualified international teachers to contribute fully to Hawaii's education system.

Mahalo for your time and support.

Respectfully,

Ryan Taeza Macadangdang

6th Grade Teacher, Lokelani Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 5:51:21 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Berly Ann G. Cular	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairperson, Vice-Chair, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I am Berly Ann G. Cular, a J-1 Cultural Exchange Teacher currently teaching 7th Grade Math at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. I am honored to testify in strong support of the International Visiting Teacher License Bill, which would provide much-needed recognition and stability for international educators like myself, who are dedicated to serving Hawaii’s students.

I have been teaching for 18 years, with extensive experience in mathematics education in the Philippines. Through rigorous training, professional development, and classroom practice, I have developed effective teaching strategies that not only enhance students’ mathematical skills but also foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and a growth mindset. Since arriving in Hawaii, I have worked hard to bridge learning gaps, build students’ confidence in math, and create an inclusive, culturally responsive learning environment.

While I am fully willing to take the Praxis exam, I firmly believe that my credentials, training, and years of experience should also be valued. International teachers like me have already met high standards in our home countries, and we continue to demonstrate excellence in our teaching practices here in Hawaii. By supporting this bill, you acknowledge the contributions we bring and provide us with the opportunity to continue making a difference in our students' lives.

Additionally, extending the teaching period to a maximum of five years is a crucial step in supporting international educators. The impact we make does not happen overnight—it takes time to build relationships, adapt to the educational system, and contribute meaningfully to student learning. Allowing us to stay for up to five years means we can further strengthen our teaching, mentor students effectively, and contribute to the long-term success of Hawaii’s schools.

Hawaii faces an ongoing teacher shortage, and international educators help fill this gap with dedicated, highly trained professionals who bring valuable perspectives to the classroom. By passing this bill, you are not only recognizing our commitment but also ensuring that students continue to receive high-quality instruction from passionate and experienced educators.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony. I urge you to support this bill, as it will not only benefit international teachers but also strengthen the entire education system in Hawaii. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

BERLY ANN G. CULAR

Math 7 Teacher

Kalama Intermediate School

Maui, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:06:51 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shanika Mae Isagan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Member of the Committee

My name is Shanika Mae Isagan, a 6th grade teacher at Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School. I wholeheartedly support HB 439, which proposes an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is incredibly important to me, and to teachers like me who have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines. We came to Hawaii with a deep passion for education and a desire to share our knowledge and experience with your children. We've poured our hearts into our training and dedicated ourselves to the profession, yet we face significant hurdles, like the Praxis exams, to continue serving students in the Hawaii Department of Education. It feels like an unnecessary obstacle placed in our path when all we want is to nurture and inspire the young minds in our classrooms.

As international teachers, we are deeply committed to providing the best possible education for our students here in Hawaii. We see their potential and are driven to help them succeed. However, the reality of balancing our teaching responsibilities with the intense pressure of preparing for multiple licensure exams is incredibly challenging. It pulls us away from what we love most – lesson planning, engaging with our students, and creating a positive and supportive learning environment. While I understand the need to demonstrate subject knowledge, I truly believe that our existing qualifications, experience, and the dedication we demonstrate in our classrooms every day should be recognized. Requiring us to take numerous standardized tests adds a financial and emotional strain that ultimately takes away from our students.

The limited duration of our visas, ranging from three to five years, adds another layer of uncertainty and anxiety. It's difficult to fully invest in our students and our communities when we're constantly worried about the future. I've also heard that extending our stay to the full five years is contingent upon obtaining licensure, which only compounds the pressure we face. The high cost of the Praxis exams, combined with the limited time we have, makes it incredibly difficult to focus entirely on what truly matters: our students. We are here to share our love of learning and contribute to the vibrant educational landscape of Hawaii, but these bureaucratic hurdles make our mission so much harder.

I urge you to consider the impact of HB 439 on dedicated teachers like myself. We are not just numbers or statistics; we are individuals with a genuine passion for teaching and a deep desire to make a difference in the lives of Hawaii's children. Passing this bill would not only streamline the licensing process but also show international teachers that their skills and experience are

valued and respected. It would allow us to focus on what we do best: inspiring the next generation.

I fell in love with Hawaii the moment I set foot on this beautiful island. I adore the school where I currently teach; it feels like home. I've never felt like I don't belong because the aloha spirit, the 'ohana, is so strong here. Every single day, I wake up before sunrise with one goal in mind: to help my students become the best versions of themselves. That's what drives me, what inspires me, and what makes me excited to face each new day.

My heart is here, with my students, in this community. I wish to continue inspiring and supporting them, nurturing their dreams, and helping them reach their full potential. However, the burden of excessive testing requirements threatens to pull me away from that core mission. It takes time, energy, and focus away from what truly matters: my students.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439. This bill is not just about paperwork and procedures; it's about allowing dedicated teachers like myself to focus on what we do best: teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students. It's about ensuring that the children of Hawaii have access to passionate and qualified educators who are fully present and engaged in their learning. Please, let us focus on our students, on building relationships, and on fostering a love of learning. Please, support HB 439.

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

Respectfully,

Shanika Mae Isagan
6th Grade Teacher - Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School

Dear members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my fullest support for the Senate Bill 819 that upgrades the State's policies on licensure reciprocity, particularly affecting J1 teachers like myself. As a proud educator from the Philippines, I have dedicated my life to helping students learning and am eager to share my knowledge and skills gained through my educational upbringing.

I attained my teaching license in the Philippines and also possessed a teaching license from State of Florida for J1 teachers. Worked for years cultivating an environment within the classroom to foster students with unique talents and perspectives. Yet, upon arriving in Hawaii, I was faced with various obstacles to overcome in having international qualifications recognized.

Our students deserve to be exposed to educators who bring diverse perspectives, and we, as a J1 teachers, would have so much to offer: knowledge to cultural differences, methodologies, teaching-learning approaches. They are also deserved equal opportunities to interact with educators of diverse backgrounds and who are enthusiastically interested in the growth and development of the youth.

The proposed SB819 will support and establish a more inclusive system for recognizing international qualifications. By supporting this legislation, we can work to create a more equitable educational setting in which all teacher regardless of their country origin- can be afforded complete opportunities toward ensuring students' success. Furthermore, it is also essential to take proactive steps to address the teacher shortages in State of Hawaii.

Much appreciated for taking into consideration and endorsing this significant House Bill.

Sincerely,

EMELYN BARBA
J1 Teacher
Lihikai School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:27:40 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ROXANNE M TANO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is **Roxanne M. Tano**, and I am an 8th Grade Science Teacher at **Waimea Canyon Middle School** in Kauai, Hawai‘i. I have been teaching for **13 years** in the Philippines, where I gained extensive experience in science education. In my current role, I teach using the Open SciEd Curriculum, which fosters hands-on scientific inquiry and critical thinking. I am proud to be part of a school where collaboration between students, colleagues, administration, and parents creates a supportive environment for student success.

I hold a Professional License from the Philippines, and my credentials have been evaluated through foreign transcripts. With my experience and passion for teaching, I am committed to making a meaningful impact on my students here in Hawai‘i.

Beyond teaching, I also have a sincere interest in participating in Hawai‘i’s cultural exchange programs, sharing my Filipino heritage, and learning from the unique culture of the islands. I believe that education goes beyond the classroom, and building cross-cultural understanding will enrich both my personal growth and the students I teach.

Hawai‘i is currently facing a teacher shortage, and **HB439** offers a solution by establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders. This would enable teachers like me to contribute more effectively and help fill critical teaching

positions in schools across the state.

However, to continue teaching here, I need to pass the Praxis exam. This is a costly exam, and living on Kauai requires me to travel to Oahu, adding further financial strain. Despite these challenges, I am determined to obtain my license and continue supporting my students and school community.

I strongly support **HB439**, as it would not only help teachers like myself but also contribute to addressing Hawai'i's teacher shortage. I am deeply committed to the success of my students and eager to continue growing as both an educator and a cultural ambassador. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Roxanne M. Tano

8th Grade Science Teacher

Waimea Canyon Middle School, Kauai, Hawai'i

Testimony in Support of SB819 - International Visiting Teacher License

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jennifer A. Raval, and I am a special education teacher. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB819 that acknowledges the dedication and contributions of educators like myself.

As an educator, I have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to my students' academic and personal growth. I create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where every child feels valued and empowered to succeed. My ability to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students is commendable, ensuring that each learner receives the necessary support and encouragement to reach their full potential. Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom, I actively engage in the school community, collaborating with colleagues, parents, and stakeholders to foster a culture of excellence. I consistently go above and beyond to develop innovative teaching strategies, integrate technology into instruction, and provide meaningful learning experiences tailored to my students' abilities.

Despite the challenges that come with being a special education teacher, I remain dedicated and passionate about my profession. My resilience, adaptability, and genuine care for my students set me apart as an educator. The impact of my work extends beyond academics—I nurture confidence, instill values, and prepare my students for lifelong success.

Recognizing educators like myself is essential in promoting quality education and acknowledging the invaluable contributions of dedicated teachers. I strongly support any initiative that ensures teachers like me receive the recognition, resources, and opportunities we deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jennifer A. Raval

SPED Teacher

Holualoa Elementary School

Big Island, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 10:39:41 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Geraldine Suzuki	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Chairs,

My name is Geraldine Suzuki, and I am a parent of a student at Lāna‘i High and Elementary School. I am writing to strongly support SB819.

Here in Lāna‘i, we have been experiencing a severe teacher shortage for the past four years. At times, only substitute teachers were available to lead classes, and even administrators had to step in to fill vacancies due to the lack of staff. In response, three J-1 teachers arrived four years ago to help alleviate the crisis, yet the shortage remained a significant concern. In 2023, a second group of J-1 teachers arrived, bringing in ten additional educators. The entire Lāna‘i community and our school warmly welcomed them, as their presence provided much-needed relief and ensured the continuity of quality education for our children—especially given the learning gaps they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a parent, I have personally witnessed the dedication, passion, and care that these teachers bring to their classrooms. They are deeply committed to educating our children and helping them succeed. However, it saddens me when the DOE sends letters informing parents that these J-1 teachers are considered "emergency hires" and not fully qualified. In reality, these teachers hold four-year degrees and valid teaching licenses from their home countries. At this moment, the most pressing issue is not whether they possess a Hawai‘i state teaching license, but rather the essential role they play in delivering quality education and addressing the teacher shortage across our state.

I respectfully urge you to support SB819. Passing this bill will directly benefit not only the dedicated educators who have stepped up to support our schools, but also the students of Lāna‘i High and Elementary School and beyond. Let us work together to ensure that every child in Hawai‘i receives the quality education they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Geraldine Suzuki

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:31:23 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dioscoro Visto Narciso	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Board,

My name is Dioscoro Visto Narciso, a J-1 teacher from the Philippines with a decade of rigorous teaching experience. I am a licensed professional teacher in my home country and have had my credentials thoroughly evaluated and recognized here in the United States. However, despite my qualifications and dedication to education, I am faced with the challenge that my Philippine teaching license is not reciprocated or acknowledged here in Hawaii.

I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This initiative would be transformative for international educators like myself, who come to Hawaii with a deep passion for teaching and a wealth of experience, but encounter significant barriers in continuing our service to the students of this state.

One of the major obstacles we face is the requirement to take PRAXIS tests. While I understand the need for quality assurance in education, the financial burden of these examinations is particularly heavy given the high cost of living in Hawaii. For many international teachers, these expenses place an undue strain on our already limited resources.

Passing SB819 would alleviate these financial and procedural challenges, allowing teachers like me to continue contributing positively to the education system in Hawaii. International educators bring diverse perspectives, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and a strong commitment to fostering student success. By creating an International Visiting Teacher License, the Board would not only support these educators but also enhance the learning environment for Hawaii's students.

I respectfully urge the Board to pass SB819. Doing so will break down unnecessary barriers, recognize the valuable contributions of international teachers, and affirm Hawaii's commitment to providing a diverse and globally informed education for its students.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to supporting educators.

Respectfully,

Dioscoro Visto Narciso
J-1 Teacher from the Philippines

January 31, 2025

My name is Monica L. Paragas, and I am a Science/Computer Science teacher at Kohala Middle School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish a clear and accessible path to licensure for international teachers.

As an educator with eight years of teaching experience, a Master's degree in Science Education, and experience mentoring local and international (ASEAN) teaching interns in Science and Math, I have dedicated my career to fostering student success. Since arriving in Hawai'i, I have worked to create engaging, hands-on learning experiences that empower students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

International teachers bring valuable expertise that enriches students, schools, and the broader community. By acknowledging the internationally recognized credentials of highly qualified educators, this bill ensures that J-1 teachers can continue making a meaningful impact. A streamlined licensure process allows them to focus on supporting student learning, collaborating with colleagues, and strengthening school initiatives.

HB439 also allows licensed J-1 teachers to remain in Hawai'i for the full five-year duration of their program, providing students with consistency and stability in their learning environment. This benefits not only the teachers but also the school communities that rely on their dedication and expertise.

By supporting this bill, Hawai'i invests in student success, school growth, and a thriving educational community. I urge you to support HB439 to create a strong and sustainable pathway for international teachers who are committed to serving Hawai'i's keiki. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Monica L. Paragas
Science/Computer Science Teacher
Kohala Middle School

Testimony in Support of SB 819 - International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Chabilita Meneses and I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. As a Social Studies teacher who has earned my teaching certification in the Philippines, I have encountered several barriers to continuing my work in the Hawaii Department of Education, particularly with the requirement to pass the Praxis exams.

While I am fully committed to delivering high-quality education to my students, balancing my teaching responsibilities with the pressure of preparing for multiple licensure exams has proven to be stressful and time-consuming. The time and effort spent preparing for these exams detracts from the time I could be using to engage with my students and plan meaningful lessons. While I understand the need to demonstrate subject mastery, I believe that the experience, skills, and dedication that international teachers bring to the classroom should be recognized without the added burden of additional standardized tests.

Furthermore, the temporary nature of our work visas, typically lasting between three to five years, adds an element of uncertainty. I have learned that extending my stay beyond three years is dependent on obtaining licensure, which creates additional stress, especially considering the financial burden of the Praxis exams.

I have developed a deep appreciation for Hawaii's people, culture, and the school community that has so warmly welcomed me. I am passionate about continuing to inspire and support students, and I believe that HB 439 will help reduce the unnecessary challenges that international teachers face, allowing us to focus on what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and contributing to the growth of Hawaii's students.

I kindly urge you to pass SB 819, so that international teachers can continue to make a positive impact on Hawaii's education system without the added burden of excessive testing requirements.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chabilita Meneses

8th Grade Social Studies Teacher

Lahaina Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:46:43 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennelyn Soriano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Member of the Committee,

My name is Jennelyn Soriano, a J1 teacher who has a strong support for SB819, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is very important for me to push through coz ,I believe that we as a foreign Teacher, is willing to serve and teach the students here in the United States. I am committed to providing the best education for our student. I believe that my 11 years of teaching experience il, qualifications and dedication should be enough to go through the standardized test that add emotional and financial strain.

I really love the people and the community here in Hawaii because I feel.like I'm home. Even it is miles away from the Philippines, away from my family. I work at King Kamehameha III Elementary School located at 100 Akahahele st Lahaina Hawaii and I live in Kahului. I travel almost 2 hour by riding a bus everyday. We all known that they suffer from devastating fire and I want to teach and give them the best education that they need.

I am hoping that the SB819 will pass to ensure that International Teacher can focus on teaching, mentoring and shaping the mind and heart of our student.

Mahalo for your kind consideration regarding this matter.

Respectfully yours,

Jennelyn Soriano

J1 teacher.

Aloha! My name is NORMAN RUELO MARQUEZ, I am a highly motivated with a strong background in teaching science and other related fields and integrating research into my teaching. I finished my master's degree major in science teaching. Furthermore, I've been in the teaching profession for almost 14 years and this experience allowed me to develop strong skills in communication, teamwork, and problem solving made me passionate and enthusiastic. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB819, which aims to establish an international teaching license. Professionally speaking, I am demonstrating my loyalty to the institution or district or state by being committed, dedicated, trustworthy, detail-oriented in any given task and ensuring I equip myself up to date teaching strategies that go with the fast-changing trends in the field of science education. I am confident that my skills and experiences align well with the needs of your state, I am eager to bring all of these to contribute to the success of your state or district and of course the students.

Moreover, I am adaptable, flexible, and supportive of the institution I am part of, by sharing my talents as a performer and coach. And I could demonstrate the mission & vision and core values in my teaching methods by considering how to manage the classroom and giving consistent routine procedures to ensure my students reach their full potential.

However, despite my background and experiences, securing full licensure in Hawai'i continues to be a major hurdle due to the financial and logistical challenges posed by the Praxis exams. These tests are expensive and not readily available throughout the islands, often necessitating travel to O'ahu, which further adds to the costs. These obstacles overlook the expertise, training, and international credentials that educators like myself have already acquired. This bill recognizes the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience we bring from our home countries and offers a fair and practical route for us to continue contributing meaningfully to Hawai'i's schools.

Like numerous other states, Hawai'i is experiencing an ongoing shortage of teachers, especially in remote and disadvantaged areas. Implementing an international teacher license would help alleviate this challenge by acknowledging the credentials of qualified and committed educators who are already making a difference in the state's schools. Approving this bill would promote diversity, inclusivity, and the significance of global expertise, ensuring that Hawai'i's students continue to receive a high-quality education.

I earnestly encourage you to endorse this bill and establish an equitable, straightforward route to licensure for international educators. I appreciate your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Norman R. Marquez
Physics Teacher
Kaua'i High School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:50:58 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abigail L Cayabyab	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support to SB819 – International Visiting Teacher License

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am ABIGAIL LUMANLAN CAYABYAB, and I am a 3rd grade teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I am writing this testimony to express my strong support to SB819, which would create an International Visiting Teacher License.

I am a J1 teacher here in Hawaii, bringing years of experience and passion for education to my students. I hold professional teaching license in the Philippines. I was hoping that my credentials would be fully recognized, but instead, I was just classified as an emergency hired teacher, we receive lower salaries than fully licensed teachers. Housing costs alone take up a huge portion of my salary. SB819 would change everything. If passed, this bill would:

- Grant international teachers a full teaching license, eliminating unnecessary exams.
- Ensure that we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, allowing us to support our families.
- Extend our stay for five years, giving our students consistency in their learning.

Hawaii is in urgent need of qualified teachers, and international teachers are already here, working hard every day to fill these gaps. We are dedicated, passionate, and committed to the success of Hawaii’s keiki, but we need stability to continue making a difference. I truly love Hawaii—its people, its culture, and especially the school community that has given me a very warm welcome. I have these very supporting colleagues who always feel me that I belong. My goal is to continue inspiring and supporting students without the burden of excessive testing requirements.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB819 so that international teachers can continue serving Hawaii’s students without unnecessary barriers,
Mahalo for your time and support.

Abigail Lumanlan Cayabyab
3rd Grade Teacher
Kahului Elementary School

Greetings!

I am Eric D. Asuncion, a J1 teacher from the Philippines handling US History/Government subject of freshman students at Maui High School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819 which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As someone who sees the importance of having an educated mind complemented with an educated heart, I have devoted most of my time impacting change to my students by providing them with quality education to the best of my knowledge. I have offered them a safe space also so they could be themselves and be the catalyst of the change that we wanted to.

Aside from being a History teacher, I am also handling one of the many clubs that our school has, the Filipino Cultural Club wherein we cater the needs of the Filipino students since most of our students are Filipinos. We provide them firsthand experiences of the good things about being a Filipino. We try to create an avenue wherein they could imagine the vibrant side of Filipino life. And with these, I must say my stay here at Maui High School has somehow created a feeling of sense of pride and urgency since there is a transfer of knowledge as well as culture and tradition which are important to the development of everyone.

The presence of Filipino teachers spells a big difference. With the number of years of teaching experience and the exposures we had before, truly our presence is something to be considered knowing that Filipino teachers are passionate and dedicated.

However, we are on the verge right now of uncertainties because the state is looking for someone who is licensed to teach. It's a must for us to take Praxis Exam which is expensive and not that convenient on our end since our focus is on it instead of our students.

With this, may I urge the body to consider us and pass SB819 so together we can make a difference by doing what's best for everyone.

Sincerely yours,

ERIC D. ASUNCION

Teacher, Maui High School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:53:23 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
FRITZ MARATA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819

Submitted by Fritz Marata, J-1 Teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School

Aloha, Committee Chair Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Donna Mercado Kim, and committee members!

My name is Fritz Marata, and I am privileged to serve as a J-1 international teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School. I came to Hawaii with a heart full of purpose—to share my passion for science, nurture young minds, and contribute to a school community that has faced tremendous challenges, including the aftermath of the Lahaina wildfire.

Since stepping into my classroom, I have dedicated myself to creating an engaging, supportive, and culturally responsive learning environment. My students, many of whom are still navigating the emotional and academic impacts of the wildfire, have found stability and inspiration in our classroom. I have worked tirelessly to make science meaningful to them, fostering curiosity, critical thinking, and resilience. Beyond academics, I have been a mentor, a guide, and a steady presence in their lives.

But my impact extends beyond my students. I have contributed to the broader school climate by organizing cultural exchange activities that celebrate diversity and deepen understanding. I have built relationships with colleagues and families, reinforcing the idea that we—regardless of where we come from—are part of one ‘ohana, committed to the success of our keiki.

However, the reality remains that international teachers like me face immense hurdles to continue this work. SB819 is more than just a bill; it is a lifeline for J-1 teachers who have proven their dedication to Hawaii’s schools. By creating an international visiting teacher license, this bill recognizes the value we bring—our experience, our international credentials, and our commitment. It allows us to stay for five years, providing much-needed stability in schools facing a chronic teacher shortage. It ensures equal pay for equal work and grants access to differentials, acknowledging that we, too, are qualified and deserving. Most importantly, it removes unnecessary barriers like costly Praxis exams, which disregard the rigorous training and credentials we already hold.

Passing SB819 means that I and many other international educators can continue to serve the students of Hawaii without the constant uncertainty of our future here. It means we can focus on what truly matters—empowering the next generation.

I urge you to pass SB819 and take a stand for equity, for quality education, and for the students who deserve experienced, dedicated teachers in their classrooms.

Mahalo for your time and support.

Fritz Marata

8th Grade Science Teacher

Lahaina Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:55:15 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mayvelyn Estacio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Favor of SB819 – International Visiting Teacher License
Mayvelyn R. Estacio
General Education Teacher/Kihei Elementary School
February 4, 2025

Chairperson and Committee Members,

I am privileged to present my testimony in favor of SB 819, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. As an exchange teacher, I have had the honor of working with students in Hawaii, making a significant impact not only in the classroom but also in the wider community.

In my capacity as a general education teacher, I also commit time to tutoring students in our After-School Program, providing them with essential academic support to help them thrive. This experience has allowed me to witness the remarkable influence that committed and highly qualified educators can have on students' lives.

Throughout my teaching career, I have been actively involved in professional development and training to refine my skills in accordance with the standards established by Hawaii Department of Education. However, the financial challenges associated with certification exams pose difficulties for international teachers like me, hindering our ability to continue contributing to the education system. SB 819 would create a pathway to acknowledge my experience, qualifications, and commitment while recognizing the vital role that international educators play in addressing teacher shortages.

The demand for qualified teachers in Hawaii is pressing. Should this bill fail to pass, educators like myself may have to leave, which would disrupt students' learning and worsen the current teacher shortage. Enacting SB 819 will not only help retain enthusiastic educators but also ensure that students continue to benefit from a variety of perspectives and high-quality instruction.

I sincerely urge you to support SB 819 and offer international educators like me the chance to keep serving the students and communities of Hawaii.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Mayvelyn R. Estacio

General Education Teacher

Testimony in Support of SB819

Hearing Date: February 7, 2025, at 3:00 PM

Good day, members of the committee. My name is John Paulo Rivera, and I'm a high school teacher at H.P. Baldwin High School on Maui. I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of international teachers here in Hawaii. I'm here to respectfully advocate for an exemption from the state's standardized testing requirements, specifically the Praxis exam, for J-1 visa teachers who are committed to serving Hawaii Department of Education students for five consecutive years. We recognize the importance of ensuring qualified educators, and I want to emphasize that prior to coming to the U.S., we have all earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines. Our academic credentials, including our Transcripts of Records, have also undergone thorough evaluation to confirm their equivalency and ensure we meet the standards for teaching in the United States.

The state of Hawaii has been incredibly welcoming to J-1 teachers, and we deeply appreciate the opportunity to contribute to its educational system. We are fortunate to share our diverse cultural perspectives with students, which we hope enriches their understanding of the world. We also understand the importance of filling critical teaching needs, particularly in areas like STEM, foreign languages, and special education, and are grateful to play a role in addressing these shortages. As educators, we are dedicated to investing our time and energy in supporting our students and their growth.

While we deeply value the opportunity to teach in Hawaii and contribute to its educational system, we respectfully suggest that the current requirement for J-1 teachers to undergo state standardized testing within our initial years of service presents some significant challenges, which we believe ultimately impact our schools and students. We understand the importance of ensuring teacher competency, and we are absolutely committed to meeting all necessary requirements. In fact, even during a proposed exemption period, we are dedicated to demonstrating our qualifications and commitment to professional growth in every single year through other means, such as classroom observations, professional development activities, and ongoing evaluations, and we hope the committee will also consider the following factors:

1. **Cultural and Linguistic Nuances:** Many J-1 teachers come from diverse educational backgrounds and pedagogical approaches. While we possess the required English proficiency, navigating the nuances of standardized tests often focused on specific state curriculum frameworks can be particularly challenging during our initial years. This is compounded by the significant adjustments we make to a new culture, school system, and sometimes, a different language environment. We are eager to learn and adapt, but this process takes time.

2. **Focus on Classroom Instruction:** Our primary focus as J-1 teachers is to dedicate our time and energy to our students. We believe that our greatest contribution lies in concentrating on classroom instruction, building strong relationships with students, and engaging in professional development that directly benefits them. Time spent preparing for and administering standardized tests can detract from these core responsibilities. We are willing to fulfill testing requirements, but we believe that prioritizing classroom instruction in our early years, alongside annual demonstrations of our qualifications, would be more beneficial for our students.
3. **Recruitment and Retention:** Adding another layer of complexity and cost to the already challenging process of obtaining a J-1 visa could create a significant deterrent for qualified international teachers seeking to teach in Hawaii. This could exacerbate existing teacher shortages, particularly in critical areas, and limit our students' access to diverse perspectives. We hope to ensure that Hawaii remains an attractive destination for international educators.
4. **Program Alignment:** The J-1 visa program is designed to promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Requiring standardized testing focused on specific state curricular standards may not fully align with this broader goal. We believe a more holistic approach to evaluating teacher effectiveness, including annual demonstrations of competency, would better serve the program's objectives.
5. **Five-Year Exemption as a Reasonable Timeframe:** We propose a five-year exemption from standardized testing for J-1 teachers. This timeframe would allow us to acclimate to the state's curriculum framework, adjust our teaching methods as needed, and become fully integrated into the school community- all while demonstrating our qualifications annually. We could then focus our initial years on what matters most – teaching our students. After this period, we would be prepared and expected to meet the same testing requirements as other teachers. We are confident that with this initial period of adjustment, and with our ongoing commitment to demonstrating our competency each year, we can successfully meet all requirements and contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's educational system.

We firmly believe this proposed exemption will not negatively impact the quality of education in Hawaii. The J-1 visa process itself involves rigorous screening, including thorough evaluation of our English competency and teaching qualifications, ensuring we are well-suited for our respective teaching assignments. Furthermore, we are held to the same accountability standards as all other teachers in Hawaii, subject to regular evaluations through established school and district procedures.

In fact, granting J-1 teachers an exemption from state standardized testing for the first five years would send a powerful message. It would demonstrate that you value our contributions to Hawaii's schools, support our ongoing professional development, and recognize the importance of allowing us to focus on our primary mission: educating our students. We believe this focused

approach during our initial years will ultimately benefit the students of Hawaii. We respectfully urge the committee to give this proposal your favorable consideration.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 9:03:12 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glysa Cadano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a J-1 teacher here in Hawaii, I strongly support SB 819. This bill is essential in addressing the ongoing teacher shortage in Hawaii by allowing qualified international educators like myself to obtain an international teacher license. Our presence enriches the learning experiences of students by bringing diverse perspectives and teaching methods into the classroom. Passing SB 819 will not only strengthen Hawaii's education system but also ensure that students continue to receive high-quality instruction. I urge lawmakers to support this important initiative.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 9:08:37 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JEANET TABOR PAURA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 7, 2025

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jeanet Tabor Paura, and I strongly support HB 439, the International Visiting Teacher License bill. This legislation is vital for educators like me, who hold teaching licenses from the Philippines but face challenges such as the Praxis exam, which hinders our ability to continue teaching in Hawaii. I have 20 years of teaching experience in the Philippines, earned my master’s degree in education in 2024, and have had my academic credentials evaluated by SpanTran, confirming my qualifications to teach in Hawaii.

International teachers bring dedication, expertise, and a commitment to providing high-quality education that prepares students for the future. As an international educator, I am passionate about sharing my knowledge and skills with my students. I aspire to teach in Hawaii for five years, embracing its culture and gaining diverse teaching experiences that will further enrich my professional growth. The passage of this bill would make that goal attainable.

Additionally, Hawaii’s high cost of living presents a significant challenge. To sustain ourselves and support our families, it is crucial that we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers. Removing barriers such as the Praxis exam—an exam that demands both time and financial resources—would allow us to focus more on delivering meaningful and effective instruction to our students. We are highly qualified, experienced, and deeply committed to serving Hawaii’s keiki.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, enabling international teachers to continue making a positive impact in Hawaii's classrooms and communities.

Jeanet Tabor Paura

5th Grade Teacher

Naalehu Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 9:09:07 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carlby Lou U. Singson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

e-Testimony in Support of SB 819 - International Visiting Teacher License Hearing Date: February 7, 2025

Aloha to all the Members of the Committee,

My name is Carlby Lou Singson, a licensed professional teacher in the Philippines with over 8 years of teaching experience in a secondary public school and now teaching in a public high school in Oahu, Hawaii through the BridgeUSA J-1 Visa Program or the Teacher Cultural Exchange Program. I am writing in strong support to the International Visiting Teacher License to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries like the Philippines.

I believe that the knowledge and skills I acquire from my professional teaching experiences and the professional teacher license from the Philippines are more than enough to qualify me as a public secondary teacher in Hawaii. And I don't need to get another teaching license in Hawaii but shall be given an equivalent international teaching license after having fulfilled the requirements for conversion of the license. Our stay in Hawaii is just 3-5 years which is not enough to compensate us in our service and dedication in addressing the teacher shortage in Hawaii. As we all know the first year or year and a half are for us to pay all our debts in the Philippines that we used in coming to Hawaii. The remaining years is for saving a little. If we would be spending almost \$500 for the license that would be a very huge loss for us. So, it would be of great help for the many sacrificing Filipino teacher like me to save money from not taking anymore the Praxis Test or any Hawaii Teaching License and just convert our Philippine Teacher License into an International Visiting Teacher License. It will be a win-win situation for both parties.

Also, it is known to many that Filipino teachers excel in any field of expertise. And that they are very dedicated and passionate in teaching diverse students. Their patience and utmost understanding to children help them give the quality of education the learners deserved. I definitely support the passing of SB819 to acknowledge the internationally recognized foreign credentials as highly qualified and experienced educators so that we can focus on supporting the school, students and community as a whole.

Mahalo nui,

Carlbhy Lou Singson
Secondary Mathematics Teacher
Roosevelt High School
1120 Nehoa St. Honolulu, HI 96822

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 9:10:09 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jan Mariae Margaret Labadan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jan Mariae Margaret M. Labadan, and I am a J-1 teacher in Hawaii. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, a bill that will significantly benefit Hawaii's students and schools by addressing the challenges faced by J-1 teachers.

As a J-1 teacher, I have witnessed the great contributions my colleagues make to our educational system. We bring various outlooks, improving classrooms with global experiences and promoting cross-cultural understanding. We introduce creative teaching methodologies, ignite a passion for learning in students, and provide critical support to those with diverse learning needs. My fellow J-1 teachers serve as mentors, actively participate in extracurricular activities, and become deeply integrated members of our school 'ohana. Outside of the classroom, we expand horizons and reinforce community ties by sharing our cultures through storytelling, activities, and culinary adventures. We act as role models by exhibiting fortitude, flexibility, and a strong dedication to education. Nonetheless, there are a number of difficulties with the existing J-1 visa regime. We are unable to properly invest in our students and the communities we serve because of the ongoing uncertainty caused by the temporary nature of our permits. Our mid-year departures produce disruptions that have a detrimental effect on student learning and deprive schools of committed, experienced teachers. We are also unable to adequately support our schools' long-term objectives and strategic plans because of this volatility. SB819 provides an important remedy. It would give teachers and schools much-needed stability if J-1 teachers were allowed to stay in Hawaii for five years after receiving their license. Fundamental justice and a fair assessment of our abilities and knowledge require equal compensation for equal labor, which includes differentials for certified teachers. It shows respect for our professional status and expedites the licensing procedure when we acknowledge our globally recognized credentials as proof of our qualifications and waive the expensive and time-consuming Praxis exams when we already hold international degrees and licenses. Enacting SB819 is an investment in the future of Hawaii's educational system, not just a way to help J-1 teachers. It guarantees that we can keep improving our students' lives and adding to Hawaii's dynamic educational environment. This law enables us to concentrate on the things that really count: fostering student development, fortifying our school communities, and creating a welcoming and stimulating learning environment for everyone. With all due respect, I implore the legislature to back SB819 and give Hawaii's keiki's future top priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 9:22:29 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JOMAR MAESTRE MENDEZABAL	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jomar Mendezabal, and I am a Special Education teacher at Samuel Enoka Kalama Intermediate School handling English Language Arts and Social Studies in an inclusive setting and resource class. I am writing this testimony to support the proposal of HB439 establishing an international Teacher License for certain visa holders in Hawaii.

As Hawai'i continues to embrace cultural diversity and address the growing demand for qualified educators, implementing an International Teacher License is essential. This initiative will provide schools access to a broader pool of skilled and experienced teachers.

Allowing qualified international educators to obtain a recognized teaching license will help Hawai'i effectively address teacher shortages, particularly in critical subject areas and underserved communities.

International teachers bring diverse experiences and teaching methodologies that enhance the learning environment for students. Exposure to various cultures and global perspectives fosters inclusivity and prepares students for success in an interconnected world.

Many schools in Hawai'i face challenges in filling teaching positions, especially in rural areas. Facilitating the licensure of qualified international teachers will assist the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) in helping schools meet staffing needs while maintaining educational excellence.

I respectfully advocate for the progression of HB 439, acknowledging the considerable positive influence that international teachers can have on students, educational institutions, and the wider educational community.

Sincerely,

Jomar Mendezabal

Samuel Enoka Kalama Intermediate School

808-758-4117

February 4, 2025

Aloha!

I am Maria Concepcion Campano, a Filipino J1 teacher, teaching Physical Science subject, of freshman students at King Kekaulike High School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819.

As teachers, we have invested countless hours into perfecting our craft and meeting the needs of our students. We have worked hard to provide high-quality education, despite the many challenges we faced in our home country, and we are ready to continue our journey in the U.S., contributing to the growth of the American educational system.

However, the recent requirement by the Department of Education (DOE) to take the Praxis exam is placing a significant burden on educators like myself. The cost of the exam is extremely high, and many of us are already financially stretched after relocating to the U.S. and adjusting to a new environment. Additionally, this requirement feels redundant given the qualifications and experience we have already attained. We are not asking to bypass necessary assessments but to be recognized for the expertise we have gained through years of teaching and education.

It is important to remember that teachers are not just employees, but lifelong learners who continuously strive to better themselves and the students they serve. Filipino teachers, in particular, have a deep commitment to education and have consistently demonstrated the ability to adapt, innovate, and inspire. Our primary goal is not just to earn a paycheck, but to make a difference in the lives of students, both here in the U.S. and in the Philippines.

We want to continue serving as educators and contributing to the future of our students. Please consider alternative pathways that acknowledge our experience and qualifications, so we can continue to make meaningful contributions to education.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued support.

Sincerely yours,

Maria Concepcion Campano

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 9:49:10 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grace Marie Hatton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! I am Grace Marie B. Hatton, a Special Education Teacher at Kahului Elementary School, Maui, Hawaii. I am writing in support of SB819, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License.

My journey as a teacher in Hawaii has been one of immense growth, both professionally and personally. Teaching in this paradise has been a dream, but it is not without its challenges. Although Hawaii is beautiful, the high cost of living is a significant challenge. Housing, groceries, and utilities are expensive.

Despite the challenges, being a teacher in Hawaii is an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. The joy of seeing my students succeed, the kindness and warmth of the community, and the opportunity to immerse myself in Hawaii's culture make it all worthwhile. Teaching here has taught me resilience, adaptability, and the importance of building meaningful connections.

I have a Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree in Special Education, 8 years of experience teaching and hold a professional teaching license in the Philippines. I learned that each country—and even each U.S. state—has its own requirements for teachers. Hawaii is no exception. I felt hesitant at first. After all, I have already proven my skills. I am hoping our licenses will be acknowledged here in Hawaii. I truly hope that this bill will pass because it represents more than just eliminating an exam—it's a step toward recognizing the value of international educators who bring unique perspectives and experiences to the classroom. By removing this hurdle, it will allow us to focus on what matters most: teaching and inspiring students.

To those involved in this decision, I urge you to consider the dedication, skills, and passion that we foreign-trained teachers bring to the table. Passing this bill would not only benefit

educators but also enrich the learning experiences of students across Hawaii. Let us break down barriers and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone in education.

I am hoping and advocating for this positive change. And with everyone's help, we can create a future in which educators, regardless of their backgrounds or where they came from, are empowered to share their knowledge and change the world.

Thank you for your consideration!

GRACE MARIE B. HATTON

Kahului Elementary School

Maui, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 10:11:07 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Joy Fernandez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii. As an 8th-grade special education teacher at Kalama Intermediate School and a holder of a professional teaching license from the Philippines, I strongly advocate for the recognition of international teaching credentials, allowing us to obtain a Hawaii teaching license without the need to take the Praxis test.

Granting international teachers the ability to serve the Department of Education for up to five years would be mutually beneficial. Having fully adapted to the norms and school culture, I am committed to continuing my service. In turn, the department would benefit from retaining experienced educators without the additional costs and efforts required to recruit and train new teachers.

The current requirement to pass the Praxis test—covering at least five and up to nine different categories—is both time-consuming and financially burdensome. Additionally, international teachers are initially granted only a three-year stay, with the possibility of an extension to five years contingent upon passing Praxis. This limitation makes it difficult for dedicated educators to continue serving Hawaii’s students without undue hardship.

If passed, SB819 would grant international teachers a full teaching license by recognizing the rigorous licensure process we have already completed in our home countries, which aligns with the Praxis assessment standards. Furthermore, it would allow us to stay for the full five years, providing greater stability for our students and enabling us to make a lasting impact in Hawaii’s schools.

I urge you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Joy M. Fernandez
8th-Grade SPED Teacher
Kalama Intermediate School

Testimony in Support of SB 819 (Hawaii Bill 439)

To the Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819 (companion: Hawaii Bill 439), which recognizes the qualifications and experience of international educators while ensuring equitable compensation by requiring the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish a provisional licensing pathway for visiting international teachers.

First of all, I would like to express my warmest gratitude for having this bill presented and heard before the EDN Committee today (February 4, 2024) and for its recommendation to be passed with amendments.

As one of the J1 teachers who arrived in Hawaii on July 9, 2023, I came here with the hope of gaining better learning opportunities that would hone my teaching skills while also building a better life for myself and my family. Carrying the American Dream of a brighter future, I made the difficult decision to resign from my well-established career as a Master Teacher in the Philippines and embark on this new journey.

During my first year in Hawaii, I took the state licensure exam, successfully passed it, and obtained my **Hawaii Provisional License**¹. While this was a significant achievement, it came with financial challenges. Taking the licensure exam required me to allocate a substantial portion of my salary, which added to the financial strain of high living expenses, including rent and utilities.

The establishment of a **Visiting International Teacher License** would provide a more accessible and supportive pathway for educators like me and especially to my fellow J1 teachers holding emergency hired permits. Moreover, acknowledging our international teaching licenses also adds to our qualifications that will boost our teaching confidence in delivering quality education to our students here in Hawaii.

While it is true that the **Hawaii Teacher Standards Board** has all the rights stated in their **mission and vision**² of providing and ensuring Hawaii has qualified teachers that promote professionalism and teaching excellence, and by obtaining another license that

¹ [A Provisional License may be issued to individuals who have completed a state-approved teacher education program \(SATEP\) in Hawai'i or another U.S. state and have less than three \(3\) years of full-time teaching experience within the last five \(5\) years. This license is a NASDTEC Stage 2 License](#)

² [HSTB Mission and Vision](#).

the state requires shall build public confidence and accountability. This HSTB vision and mission also congruences to the **Philippine Regulation Commission vision and mission**³ which ensures Filipino professionals secure reliable, trustworthy, and progressive systems of determining the competence of professionals by credible and valid licensure examinations and standards of professional practice that are GLOBALLY recognized. Therefore, acknowledging a visiting international teacher license can create a more inclusive and equitable system for J1 visa teachers. Thus, strengthening the international ties of Hawaii, USA and the Philippines by streamlining the teaching licensing process and continuous collaboration for professional support.

Having seen the initial results of this program of bringing visiting international teachers under cultural exchange (J1) visa in Hawaii, we are already bringing diverse cultural perspectives, innovative teaching strategies that synthesize with existing strategies in the state, and a deep passion for education. This bill would ensure that highly qualified teachers are recognized and supported while also addressing the ongoing teacher shortage in the state.

I strongly urge the honorable members of the Hawaii State Legislature to pass this bill. While this bill is being heard I will remain committed to my role as an educator and hopeful that this measure will pave the way for a more sustainable teaching experience for international educators in Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

JERICO V. JARAMILLO

Doctor of Philosophy in Linguistics

English Language Arts

High School Department

Lāna'i High & Elementary School

Aloha i kekahi i kekahi

Agkaykaysatayo, Sama-sama tayō

E alu like mai kākou

Let's all work together.

³ [Philippine Regulation Commission Vision and Mission](#)

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 10:34:53 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noralyn Suniga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Noralyn A. Suniga, and I am a Math Teacher from the Philippines currently teaching at Campbell High School.

I strongly support the proposed International Visiting Teacher License. This bill would greatly benefit teachers like me, who have earned years of experience and eligibility in our home countries but are still required to undergo the current licensing process.

Since arriving in Hawaii, I have dedicated myself to demonstrating my worth. Equipped with rigorous experiences from my previous school in the Philippines, I volunteer my time after school hours, staying until 5 PM, to provide math tutorials for students needing extra help and enrichment. I also assist in preparing students for math competitions.

My passion for teaching has positively impacted our school community, particularly my students. They have responded well to my care and dedication. In fact, most of my students are male, but surprisingly, some have opened up about their family problems.

In the recent Panorama Education Student Perception Survey, my students rated me highly in key areas:

- Teacher-student relationship: 81% (significantly higher than the Hawaii Department of Education's average of 64%)
- Pedagogical effectiveness: 74% (higher than the state average of 72%)
- Classroom engagement: 47% (surpassing the state average of 45%)

These results reflect my commitment to creating a productive learning environment.

However, as international teachers, we face unique challenges. We must prepare for licensure exams, such as the Praxis tests, which add to our financial burdens. Moreover, the uncertainty of visa renewal each year creates instability, making it harder for us to fully commit to our students' long-term success.

A more efficient licensing procedure would provide us with greater job security, allowing us to focus on our teaching roles. This measure is necessary and advantageous, considering Hawaii's

persistent teacher shortage. It ensures that schools continue to employ committed and highly skilled teachers.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, enabling skilled, experienced, and driven teachers like myself to continue improving Hawaii's schools without unnecessary obstacles.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,
Norilyn A. Suniga
Math Teacher, Campbell High School

Testimony: Support of Establishing a Provisional Licensing Pathway for Visiting International Teachers

Dear Members of the Legislature,

My name is Mark Vincent Espiritu, and I am a J-1 teacher at Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School, where I teach 8th grade English Language Arts and Social Studies Inclusion Class. Kalama Intermediate is home to over 800 students, serving grades 6 through 8, with students coming from diverse communities spanning Huelo to Kipahulu. I am honored to be part of this vibrant learning environment, where I contribute to student success while engaging in meaningful professional growth.

The J-1 visa program has provided me with the opportunity to bring my expertise, cultural perspective, and passion for education to Hawaii's public schools. My foreign-evaluated transcripts and licensure from the Philippines reflect my years of training and experience—qualifications that align with global teaching standards. However, despite these credentials, Hawaii's current licensing structure presents challenges for J-1 educators. The additional testing requirements, which can cost over \$1,000, create unnecessary financial and logistical barriers. This process detracts from the time and focus that should be dedicated to analyzing formative assessments, collaborating with families, and planning effective instruction.

Despite these challenges, my experience at Kalama Intermediate has been deeply fulfilling, thanks to the unwavering support of the department head, administrators, teachers, and the school-wide community. From the moment I joined the faculty, I was welcomed with open arms and provided with the necessary guidance to transition smoothly into my role. The mentorship and collaboration I have received have allowed me to not only contribute to student learning but also grow professionally.

Furthermore, my presence in the classroom has had a profound impact on students, particularly those of Filipino heritage. Representation in education matters—when students see teachers who share their background, they gain confidence, motivation, and a stronger sense of belonging. Beyond academic benefits, diverse educator representation fosters cultural appreciation, empathy, and global-mindedness among all students.

By establishing a provisional licensing pathway for visiting international teachers, Hawaii can fully recognize and leverage the talents of educators who are already making significant contributions to student learning. Streamlining this process will ensure equity in hiring and compensation, attract more highly qualified teachers to serve in hard-to-fill positions, and reinforce Hawaii's commitment to a globally competitive and locally committed education system.

I wholeheartedly support the creation of this provisional licensing pathway and urge the Legislature to take this important step toward recognizing the value of international educators. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Vincent Espiritu
J-1 Inclusion Teacher, 8th Grade ELA & Social Studies

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 12:51:34 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LIZA V. CADANO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha to Senator Michelle Kidani, Chair, Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair, and the committee members,

I am writing in strong support of **SB819**, a bill that would allow an extension of two years for my visa contract without the requirement of passing the Praxis exam. This extension would greatly benefit both my professional development and the school community here in Hawaii.

While I am fully willing to cover the costs of the exam, the primary concern I face is the time needed to prepare for it. The demands of studying for the exam detract from the time I need to prepare lessons and activities that will directly benefit my students. As a Social Studies teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School, I teach 8th-grade US History, a subject that requires extensive research, cross-referencing of resources, and careful planning to create an engaging classroom experience.

If this bill is approved, it will not only help resolve staffing issues at the school, but it will also enable me to continue focusing on what matters most—helping my students realize their potential and become positive, contributing members of their families and communities.

Mahalo for your hard work and consideration.

Sincerely,

Liza V. Cadano
Social Studies Teacher, Lokelani Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 1:13:32 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
MARIA CHRISTINE ESPINA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of SB 819

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Maria Christine L. Espina**, and I am a **J-1 teacher from the Philippines** as well as a **wildfire survivor in Lahaina**. I am writing in **strong support of SB 819**, which seeks to create an **International Visiting Teacher License**.

This bill is essential for teachers like me who have already **earned a teaching license in the Philippines** but face additional barriers, such as completing the **Praxis exam**, to continue serving students in the **Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE)**.

Before coming to Hawai'i, I was **trained and experienced in working with diverse students**. I have completed my **Master's degree**, authored **published books** that support student learning, and provided **teacher training** to strengthen education in the Philippines. I brought these **teaching strategies** with me to Hawai'i, enriching my students' learning experience and sharing my knowledge with my colleagues.

At Princess Nahienaena Elementary School, I have **introduced and led a school newspaper initiative**, where I **taught elementary students journalism**—an achievement that makes our school one of the first to have a student-published newspaper.

As a **Special Education (SPED) teacher**, I am deeply committed to **providing accommodations and individualized support** to ensure that every student, regardless of their abilities, has the opportunity to thrive. I work closely with my students to help them build confidence, develop essential skills, and overcome challenges. The impact of **specialized instruction and differentiated teaching** is vital, and I take great pride in making a difference in their lives.

Experiencing the **Lahaina wildfire** firsthand, I witnessed how the **community came together with love and support**. It reaffirmed my **purpose and dedication to this place**. I want to continue serving the students and families of Lahaina and contributing to the school community.

I urge you to **allow J-1 teachers to stay in Hawai'i for five years**, ensure **equal pay for equal work**, and grant **access to differentials** for being licensed. The **cost of living has significantly increased**, especially after the wildfire, making these provisions even more critical.

Lastly, I **ask for the recognition of our foreign credentials**, acknowledging us as **highly qualified and experienced educators** so that we can **focus on supporting our schools, students, and the community**.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Maria Christine L. Espina

J-1 Teacher | Princess Nahienaena Elementary School

Wildfire Survivor | Special Education Teacher

Testimony in Support of SB819

Aloha, my name is Dimna Marie C. Mocco, I appreciate the chance to share my experience as an international teacher in beautiful Kauai, Hawaii. My journey began on September 6, 2024, when I joined the wonderful team at Ele'ele Elementary School as a special education teacher.

Moving to Hawaii on a J-1 visa allowed me to fully engage with this amazing community and experience Hawaii's unique education system firsthand. My teaching license is classified as an emergency hire by the state, which means I need to take the Praxis exam to meet Hawaii's teaching standards and qualifications. This added responsibility reflects my dedication to providing my students with the best education possible.

I find this new role both fulfilling and humbling. Every day, I work with students who inspire me with their resilience and potential. My transition has been made even more meaningful by the incredible warmth and kindness of the people here. My colleagues have welcomed me with open arms, and families, along with community members, have created a sense of home for me. Living in Kauai has given my journey a deeper purpose, thanks to the strong sense of ohana.

I am writing this testimony to strongly encourage legislators to support the passage of SB819. This important bill aims to enhance education and increase opportunities for students and teachers. Specifically, I am advocating for international teachers like myself to be granted a full teaching license, acknowledging the credentials and experience we bring from the Philippines. This change would allow us to receive the same salary as licensed teachers, helping us manage the high cost of living in Hawaii. Lastly, I urge our stay be extended from three to five years, enabling us to fully invest in our schools and communities, ensuring a lasting impact on the students we serve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

I am Marcel C. Suniga, a Second Grade Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB 819, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As a Gen Ed teacher, I am passionate about my career shaping young ones and ensuring my kids that they receive a quality education. I have worked tirelessly to provide differentiated instructions to my students with various backgrounds, abilities and needs. I always design and implement various teaching strategies that cater my student's needs. As their teacher, I want each of my students to receive the support and encouragement that will reach their full potential.

Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom, I actively engage in collaborating with my colleagues, in the school community, with our parents and stakeholders to foster a culture of excellence. I participated also in various community programs wherein I was able to showcase Filipino cultures and traditions.

Despite my experiences and contributions, obtaining full Licensure in Hawai'i remains a challenge due to financial and logistical burdens of the Praxis Exam. These exams are expensive and not readily available within the island.

SB 819 would change everything. By passing this bill, international teachers will be having full teaching licenses, and extending our stay for five years, giving our students consistency in their learning.

Hawaii faces teacher shortage just like other states. Having international teachers who are dedicated, passionate, committed and continuing making a huge difference in teaching our students, would greatly help to fill these gaps.

I, as an international teacher in the island of Hawai'i, respectfully urge to pass SB 819 so that I can continue serving Hawaii's Keiki.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Marcel C. Suniga
2nd Grade Teacher
Kahakai Elementary School
Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 6:21:40 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dianne Cabrera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Dianne Cabrera, and I am a 2nd grade teacher at Kahakai Elementary School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support to SB819.

As an educator, my philosophy of teaching centers around fostering the holistic development of children in terms of academically, socially, emotionally, and morally. I believe that education should not merely be about imparting knowledge but should focus on shaping well rounded individuals. My goal is to create an environment where each child can thrive, feel valued, and develop the skills necessary for lifelong success. I intentionally provide engaging and effective instruction that was learner centered for each day. The bill SB819 acknowledge the qualifications and experience we bring from our home countries, and it provides a fair pathway for us to continuously making a significant impact in Hawai'i DOE Schools.

I strongly urge you to support this bill, which will provide international teachers like myself with a fair path to licensure and extend our stay for five years. By supporting this bill, we can help foster a more inclusive and effective educational environment for all.

Respectfully,

Dianne A. Cabrera

Second Grade Teacher

Kahakai Elementary School

Here is a written testimony in support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License bill as Ma. Arriesa B. Tejano, 5th Grade Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School:

Testimony in Support of HB 439: International Visiting Teacher License Bill

To the Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I, Ma. Arriesa B. Tejano, 5th Grade Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School, am writing to express my wholehearted support for HB 439, the International Visiting Teacher License bill. As an educator in Hawaii, I have seen firsthand the benefits that international visiting teachers bring to our classrooms and our students.

The current requirements for international visiting teachers to obtain a teaching license in Hawaii can be a significant barrier to entry, resulting in unnecessary exams and paperwork that can be daunting. HB 439 seeks to eliminate these unnecessary hurdles, allowing international visiting teachers like myself to focus on what matters most: providing high-quality education to our students.

By granting international visiting teachers a full teaching license, we can ensure that our students receive consistent and high-quality instruction from experienced educators who are passionate about teaching. This is especially important for our students who may not have the same access to educational resources or opportunities as their peers in other parts of the world.

Furthermore, extending the stay of international visiting teachers for 5 years will provide our students with the consistency and stability they need to thrive academically. It will also allow us to build stronger relationships with our students and their families, leading to better academic outcomes and a more positive school culture.

I urge you to pass HB 439, which will not only benefit international visiting teachers but also our students, schools, and communities. By supporting this bill, we can attract and retain top-notch educators from around the world, providing our students with the best possible education and setting them up for success in an increasingly globalized world.

Mahalo for considering my testimony. I look forward to working with you to make HB 439 a reality.

Sincerely,

Ma. Arriesa B. Tejano
5th Grade Teacher
Kahakai Elementary School
Kailua-Kona, Big Island, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:03:56 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeremiah Brown	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chairperson Kidani, Vice Chair Mercado Kim, and Members of the Committee on Education,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, which will establish a visiting international teacher license in Hawai'i, ensuring that international educators can contribute meaningfully to our schools while receiving equitable recognition for their qualifications and experience.

Hawai'i is facing a chronic teacher shortage, particularly in hard-to-fill subject areas and geographically isolated schools. The BridgeUSA J-1 visa program has played a crucial role in addressing this shortage by bringing in highly qualified international teachers to serve in our public schools. These educators not only help alleviate staffing shortages and enhance classroom diversity and bring valuable global perspectives to Hawai'i's students. Approximately 25% of DOE students are of Filipino ancestry, but only 7% of DOE teachers are. If students see themselves reflected in their teachers, they will have better educational outcomes and may even be inspired to pursue a career in education..

Despite their significant contributions, J-1 visa teachers in Hawai'i currently face unnecessary barriers to full licensure. Unlike other states, Hawai'i classifies these teachers as "emergency hires", requiring them to undergo costly and time-consuming licensure exams. This burden takes valuable time away from lesson planning, student engagement, and professional development. Additionally, these teachers are ineligible for extra compensation provided to those in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same duties.

This bill aligns with the DOE's commitment to being "globally competitive and locally committed." By streamlining the licensure process, we can attract and retain diverse, high-quality educators who enrich our schools and inspire students—especially those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB819.

**Sincerely,
Jeremiah Brown
Waipahu High School**

Testimony in Support of SB819 International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 7, 2025, at 3:00 pm

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee;

My name is Aloha Mae E. Tamulac, and I wholeheartedly support HB 439, the International Visiting Teacher License bill. This legislation is crucial for teachers like myself, who are already licensed in the Philippines but face obstacles like the Praxis exam, preventing us from continuing to teach in Hawaii. I taught for 12 years in the Philippines, graduated with my master's in teaching in 2022, and have had my transcript of record evaluated by SpanTran, confirming my qualifications to teach here in Hawaii.

International teachers are dedicated to providing their students with a top-notch education and preparing them for the future. As one such teacher, I am passionate about sharing my expertise with young minds. I hope to stay for five years, immersing myself in the culture and learning diverse teaching strategies that will enhance my professional skills. This will be possible if this bill passes. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that Hawaii has one of the highest costs of living in the United States. To ensure we can cope with these significant expenses, it is essential that we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, enabling us to support our families.

We believe that eliminating a burden like the Praxis test, which requires both time and money, will allow us to focus more on ensuring that our daily teaching is fruitful and meaningful for our students. We are dedicated, committed, and qualified, with exceptional experience both in our home country and here in Hawaii, where we give our best to Hawaii's keiki.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439 to help us, International Teachers, continue serving Hawaii's keiki and the community.

Aloha Mae E. Tamulac

Pre-K Teacher

Naalehu Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:11:11 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

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

Comments:

My name is Mark Damo, and I strongly support SB819, a bill that I believe is essential for addressing Hawaii's critical teacher shortage and enriching our classrooms with diverse perspectives. This bill, requiring the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders, is a crucial step towards streamlining the licensing process and recognizing the valuable contributions of international educators. As a teacher from the Philippines and currently working in Hawaii on a J-1 visa, I have experienced firsthand the challenges and frustrations of navigating the current licensing system. I hold a Master's degree in Education and have been a certified teacher in my home country for eight (8) years. I came to Hawaii eager to share my passion for teaching and my expertise in science with local students. However, I was disheartened to discover that despite my qualifications and experience, I am required to take the Praxis in Hawaii, even though I have already passed rigorous teacher certification exams in my home country. This requirement feels redundant and creates an unnecessary barrier to my ability to fully contribute to Hawaii's educational community. I know many other qualified international teachers on J-1 visas who face the same frustrating situation. We are ready and willing to teach, but the current system often prevents us from doing so efficiently.

SB819 offers a solution by mandating the creation of an international teacher license. This license, as envisioned by the bill, should recognize the existing credentials of international educators, streamlining the process and eliminating the need for redundant testing like the Praxis. This bill will not only alleviate the burden on international teachers but also significantly benefit Hawaii's public schools. It will provide a more efficient pathway for qualified international educators to enter the workforce, filling critical vacancies, particularly in high-need areas and specialized subjects. Moreover, it will bring diverse cultural perspectives, language skills, and teaching methodologies into our classrooms, enriching the learning experience for all Keiki and preparing them for success in a globalized world. I urge the committee to support this bill. It is a practical and much-needed measure that will benefit our students, our schools, and our community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:16:30 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melinda Luz Bolo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a resident of Lanai City, HI, and have had the pleasure of working with Filipino J1 teachers since the pandemic through work, community activities, and personal encounters. Each teacher I have worked with has truly enhanced their students lives, providing a very committed attitude to their job. I believe their level of education and execution is exceptional, and, many of my parent friends would rather have their child in a J1 teachers classroom than a standard American teacher because of their level of professionalism.

with the short staffing of teachers in Hawaii, and the cultural melting pot that we are, I believe J1 teachers should be given a bigger platform in our school system, and have a healthier partnership with DOE to acknowledge their degrees. Their presence in our LHES school and in our community fosters a place of aloha and enrichment that makes Lanai a better place. they are empowering beyond the education system, and for that, I fully support their advancement in their careers in the US.

Dear Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice-Chair Donna Mercado Kim and committee members,

Aloha, my name is Anna Marie A. Monares, currently teaching in Wailuku Elementary School as a 4th grade teacher. I'm writing today in strong support of SB819, which seeks to create an International Visiting Teacher License. As a current J1 teacher in Hawaii, I had the incredible privilege of contributing to the education of students from diverse backgrounds, and I can personally speak to the profound impact that international teachers can have on our schools and communities.

I saw the value of having a culturally diverse and globally-minded teaching staff. The students I worked with, whether local or international, benefited from the different perspectives and teaching methods we brought into the classroom. As international teachers, we adapt quickly, are creative in our approaches, and are eager to invest in the success of our students. The challenges we face, however, when it comes to transitioning from an emergency hired teacher to a regular teaching position are significant, particularly in the area of license.

While I fully support the creation of a specific pathway for international teachers through SB819, I would also like to respectfully request that the Praxis exam requirement be reconsidered for those of us who already have substantial teaching experience and have demonstrated our ability to manage diverse classrooms.

As it stands, international teachers who wish to transition to regular license in Hawaii are required to take the Praxis exams. For some of us, this includes multiple sub tests—often more than five—each testing different aspects of education and requiring extensive preparation. While I understand the importance of ensuring that teachers are highly qualified, I believe that the Praxis exam, in its current form, places an undue burden on teachers who already have experience in the classroom and who have demonstrated the ability to teach effectively, especially in culturally diverse settings.

For many of us, especially those from countries with different teaching systems, the Praxis exams are not an accurate reflection of our teaching capabilities. The structure of the exam doesn't take into account the unique experience we have, nor does it address the ways in which we've already successfully adapted to the needs of our students in Hawaii.

In my case, I came to Hawaii with a strong background in education, a proven track record in the classroom, and a passion for working with students. However, preparing for the Praxis exams—especially with multiple sub tests—was an overwhelming and time-consuming process, especially while managing the day-to-day demands of teaching. Additionally, many international teachers may not have had the same exposure to the types of standardized testing that are emphasized in the U.S., making this process even more challenging.

I respectfully ask that SB819, , which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders push through to allow for a more flexible pathway to have license that takes into account the real-world teaching experience of international teachers. I strongly believe that the requirements for the license, particularly with regard to the Praxis exams, should be reconsidered for those who have already proven their ability to teach and contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's classrooms.

Removing or reducing the Praxis exam requirements for international teachers would not only allow us to continue contributing to Hawaii's educational system but also ensure that we are able to stay and grow within the profession without being burdened by additional barriers that do not accurately reflect our qualifications or experience.

In closing, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have worked with Hawaii's students, and I hope you will consider supporting this bill to make it easier for international teachers to continue making a positive impact. Thank you for your time and for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

ANNA MARIE MONARES
4th Grade Teacher
Wailuku Elementary School
annamarie.monares0204@gmail.com

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:32:37 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Spencer Margaret	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for SB819 RELATING TO EDUCATION, which seeks to allow J-1 visa holders who are teaching in Hawaii to obtain a teaching license in the state. As we know, Hawaii’s educational system faces ongoing challenges in securing qualified and diverse educators. This bill would significantly enhance the pool of potential teachers, improve educational outcomes for students, and contribute to the overall strength and diversity of Hawaii’s workforce.

Hawaii’s student population is diverse, representing a unique blend of ethnicities, cultures, and traditions. The benefits of having a diverse teaching workforce cannot be overstated. J-1 visa teachers bring a wealth of international experience and cultural perspectives that enrich the classroom and foster an environment of global understanding. By allowing these educators to become licensed, Hawaii can better reflect its cultural diversity and provide students with a broader, more inclusive educational experience.

Hawaii, like many states, has faced persistent teacher shortages, particularly in specialized areas like science, mathematics, special education, and foreign languages. The J-1 teacher exchange program has served as an essential tool for attracting talented individuals from around the world to fill these gaps. However, without the ability to earn a full teaching license, these educators are often limited in their professional opportunities. Allowing J-1 teachers to obtain teaching licenses will provide Hawaii’s schools with a steady and skilled workforce, addressing both the teacher shortage and the need for greater expertise in critical subject areas.

Many J-1 teachers come to Hawaii with advanced degrees, teaching credentials from their home countries, and years of experience in their respective fields. However, current licensing restrictions often prevent them from fully utilizing their qualifications. By creating a pathway for J-1 teachers to obtain licensure, we can ensure that highly qualified educators who are already in our schools can continue to contribute to the academic success of Hawaii’s students. This bill would streamline the process and provide a clear, fair path for these educators to achieve full licensure based on their experience and education.

In a rapidly changing educational landscape, stability is key. Allowing J-1 teachers to obtain teaching licenses would enhance the continuity of education for Hawaii’s students. Teachers with J-1 visas who have spent time in Hawaii’s classrooms and built relationships

with students are uniquely positioned to provide long-term educational consistency. By creating a system that recognizes the value and experience of these educators, we can avoid disruptions in the classroom and better serve the needs of our students.

Passing this bill is a practical and impactful step toward addressing Hawaii's teacher shortage, enhancing diversity in the classroom, and supporting the professional growth of qualified educators.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Spencer Margaret D. Saragena

8th grade Co-Math, Chiefess Kamakahahei Middle School

margaretsaragena@gmail.com/ 808 378 8489

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:39:02 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
KAREN FAYE SOBERANO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

MY TESTIMONY

I am Karen Faye Soberano, a SPED Teacher at Solomon Elementary. I've been teaching in Solomon for two years now. For the two years of experience teaching here in Hawai'i- I might say this is a testimony of loving the Island, loving the culture, loving the keiki of Hawai'i and loving teaching as my profession. That DOE is my ohana- my home away from home.

Education in Hawai'i reflects the state's unique cultural, historical, and geographic context. The state's diverse population, the central role of Native Hawaiian culture, and the challenges posed by its island geography make Hawai'i's educational system distinctive. This is why my interest in teaching here in Hawai'i becomes deeper.

As a teacher, I've seen firsthand how diversity in teaching staff can bring unique perspectives and innovations to the classroom. However, we face significant barriers when it comes to hiring highly qualified teachers, as current licensing requirements are often restrictive or difficult to navigate. The Praxis exam can be a real challenge for me, especially when I am balancing everything else on my plate. It can feel overwhelming because it's not just about knowing the material, but also about how you can best demonstrate your understanding under pressure and the cost of the Praxis exam adds to the stress. The fees for the test, plus the cost of study materials or prep courses, can really add up, especially if I need to retake sections. It's one of those extra barriers that doesn't always feel fair, especially for me who is already managing a lot of responsibilities.

An international teacher license would help alleviate teacher shortages by attracting qualified educators from other countries, ensuring that every student has access to high-quality education, no matter where their teacher is from. It would also help our students develop global awareness and adaptability in an increasingly interconnected world.

For teachers like myself who have gained qualifications abroad, navigating complex and often costly certification processes can be an overwhelming and time-consuming experience. An international license would streamline this process, allowing skilled teachers to enter the workforce sooner, providing more opportunities for professional growth and financial stability.

The J-1 program allows teachers from other countries to come to the U.S. for a period of time to share their knowledge, skills, and cultural perspectives with American students, while also getting the chance to experience life and work in the U.S. It's a fantastic way to foster global understanding and diversity in schools. We- the J1 teachers hired because of our eligibility. We have the qualifications since we are also licensed teachers in the Philippines. We have passed the Licensure examinations which are composed of General Pedagogy, Subject-specific knowledge, Reading and writing and Professional ethics. Which I believe have the same content with the Praxis. We were hired by a certain agency that links to the DOE here in Hawai'i and paid an amount for the processing and everything that needed to be paid just to come here including plane tickets, housing, and some of our prime commodities when we arrived here. We have decided to apply and get qualified not to be forced to apply and pay the amount needed. The loan we owe just to come here is our discretion if we do like to grab it and use it. That loan helps us a lot to suffice the needed amount just to come here. We, already have the heart of teaching here in Hawai'i despite the challenges that we had. In fact, we had been participating community services to the state. We also dedicated our time in the different churches and denominations. We have participated statewide activities and the like.

In conclusion, I fully support this bill because I believe it will create a more inclusive, dynamic, and effective education system for our students. By recognizing the qualifications of international teachers and offering them a streamlined path to licensure, we will not only support educators but also empower the next generation of learners to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. In this way, we the J1 teachers could really do our job to be an advocate of cultural exchange and to help our learners to broaden their worldviews.

Testimony in Support of SB819

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dean Patrick R. Espiritu, and I am a special education (SPED) teacher at Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School. I am submitting this testimony to express my strong support for SB819, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As a SPED teacher, my role is dedicated to meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities, ensuring they receive a high-quality education tailored to their individual strengths and challenges. Being part of this J-1 visa program brings the opportunity to learn from various education backgrounds to provide academic and cultural exchange to our diverse students.

This is my first year teaching at Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School, I am still getting used to the culture and practices of my workplace. However, the warm welcome from the school and the Special Education Department has made me feel supported and well-accommodated. This support motivates me to work hard, create engaging lessons, and help my students both academic and personal growth.

Because we are considered emergency hire teachers, we earn lower salaries than fully licensed teachers. We must take the PRAXIS exam and pass it to become fully licensed. However, obtaining such a license can be difficult and costly. I need to pass all the different exams to become a fully licensed teacher. Also, I am struggling to keep up with my expenses. Aside from my housing bills and other expenses, as a father I have to support my family. It is really hard to start but if SB819 is approved this will help us a lot.

Hawaii is in urgent need of qualified teachers, and international teachers are already here, working hard every day to fill these gaps. We are dedicated and passionate about the success of our students, but we need stability to continue making a difference. I urge you to support SB819 and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure. It will grant international teachers a full teaching license, eliminating unnecessary exams. Also, it ensures us receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, allowing us to support our families. And it extends our stay for five years, giving our students consistency in their learning and allowing us to fully invest in our schools and communities. Thank you for your time and support.

Respectfully,

Dean Patrick R. Espiritu
Special Education Teacher
Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:49:36 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
June Kenneth G. Roska	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 819 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 7, 2025, at 3:00 PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

My June Kenneth G. Roska, and I am writing in strong support of SB 819, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is essential for teachers like me, who have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines but face additional barriers, such as the Praxis tests, to continue serving students in the Hawaii Department of Education. As international teachers, we are committed to providing the best education possible for our students. However, balancing our teaching responsibilities while preparing for multiple licensure exams creates unnecessary stress and takes valuable time away from lesson planning and student engagement. While I understand the importance of demonstrating subject knowledge, I believe that our experience, qualifications, and dedication should be recognized without having to go through multiple standardized tests that add financial and emotional strain. Additionally, the limited duration of our visas—ranging from three to five years—adds another layer of uncertainty. I have also heard that extending our stay to the full five years is contingent upon obtaining licensure, which further compounds the pressure we face. The high cost of Praxis exams, along with the limited time we have, makes it challenging to focus entirely on what truly matters—our students. I like Hawaii—its people, its culture, and the school community that has welcomed me with open arms. My goal is to continue inspiring and supporting students without the burden of excessive testing requirements. I respectfully urge you to pass SB 819 to ensure that international teachers can focus on what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii’s students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

June Kenneth G. Roska

Mathematics Teacher

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:54:11 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
MARK ANTHONY T. DOMINGO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for allowing J-1 teachers in Hawaii to teach for a period of five years without requiring us to take the Praxis exam, given that we are already licensed and highly qualified teachers in the Philippines. The current requirement places undue constraints on J-1 teachers, hindering our ability to contribute fully to Hawaii's educational system and negatively impacting our students.

The Praxis exam presents significant financial, physical, and emotional burdens for J-1 teachers. The cost of the exam itself, coupled with study materials and potential retake fees, represents a substantial financial strain, especially considering our already limited salaries. Furthermore, the preparation process demands significant time and energy, often requiring us to juggle our teaching responsibilities with rigorous study schedules. This can lead to burnout and added stress, impacting our overall well-being and effectiveness in the classroom. The emotional toll of preparing for and taking such a high-stakes exam, while adapting to a new culture and educational system, is immense.

J-1 teachers are highly qualified professionals who have undergone rigorous training and certification processes in the Philippines. We possess the necessary pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and experience to effectively educate students. We are actively involved in engaging activities that promote quality education, contributing to the enrichment of Hawaii's classrooms. Many of us have years of experience teaching in our home countries and have demonstrated our commitment to the profession.

I urge the HTSB to consider granting a waiver for the Praxis exam requirement for licensed Filipino teachers participating in the J-1 program. This would not only alleviate the burdens mentioned above but also streamline the process for bringing qualified teachers to Hawaii, addressing potential teacher shortages. It acknowledges the existing qualifications and licensure we hold in the Philippines.

It is important to note that other states recognize the qualifications of internationally licensed teachers without requiring them to take similar exams. Researching specific state requirements and the number of states that accept international licensure without additional testing would provide compelling evidence to support this claim. This demonstrates that Hawaii's current requirement is not universally applied and that alternative pathways for recognizing teacher qualifications exist.

The Panorama Survey is a great tool to consider as how we performed as teachers in Hawaii. Results showed that we are even surpassing the state's standards.

The impact of the Praxis requirement on student learning outcomes should also be carefully considered. The financial and emotional stress placed on J-1 teachers can indirectly affect their classroom performance. Furthermore, the time spent preparing for the exam takes away from valuable time that could be dedicated to lesson planning, student interaction, and professional development. By removing this barrier, J-1 teachers can focus on what they do best: teaching and inspiring students.

Allowing J-1 teachers to teach for five years without the Praxis exam, based on our existing Philippine licenses, would be a practical and equitable solution. It would recognize our qualifications, alleviate unnecessary burdens, and ultimately benefit the students of Hawaii. I respectfully request the body to give this matter serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Anthony Domingo/ ELA Teacher/ Maui Waena IS

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:31:49 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherie Mae Pablo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

My name is Cherie Mae Pablo, and I am a J1 teacher from the Philippines currently teaching in Hawai'i. I am writing to express my support for SB819, which will help international teachers like me get a teaching license in Hawai'i.

This bill is important because it will make it easier for qualified international teachers to continue working in Hawai'i, helping to fill the teacher shortage. As a teacher from the Philippines, I have had the opportunity to bring my unique cultural background and teaching skills to Hawai'i's classrooms. I believe this diversity benefits students and helps them learn in new and exciting ways.

SB819 will create a clear process for teachers on certain visas to get licensed, making it easier for us to stay and continue teaching here. This bill will help ensure that schools have the teachers they need while also bringing different perspectives to students.

I strongly support SB819 and encourage you to pass this bill to help both teachers and students in Hawai'i.

Mahalo,
Cherie Mae D. Pablo
J1 Teacher from the Philippines

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:43:48 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sannylee Ermac	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sannylee Ermac, an English Language Arts teacher at Maui Waena Intermediate School. My educational mission is to guide and inspire students toward a high-quality education. For more than a decade in education, I've focused on building a strong school community, and supporting student growth...and that's what I'm doing in my present school. However, despite my experience and license from the Philippines, I still need to take and pass the Praxis exams which adds to my financial burden and preparation stress.

Hence, I am writing to express my strong support for SB819 which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This legislation is a vital step toward addressing the ongoing teacher shortage and enriching the educational experiences of students across the state. It also acknowledges the extensive training and qualifications international teachers possess, offering a fair pathway to continue our positive impact on Hawai'i schools.

I urge your support for SB819, extending our visas for five years to promote stability for our students and enable us to become fully integrated members of our schools and communities, guaranteeing equal pay and benefits to ensure we can adequately support our families, and providing international teachers with full teaching licensure to remove additional testing requirements. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Sannylee Ermac

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:45:49 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Federlie Abejero	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Federlie Sabado-Abejero and I am a SPED/English and World History Inclusion teacher in Kaua'i High School. I am currently handling the Grade 10 class. I am writing in strong support of SB 819, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii. This bill is important for teachers like me, who have already earned our teaching license in the Philippines, but experience additional challenges, such as the Praxis tests, in order to keep on serving students in Hawaii.

As an educator with 21 years of teaching experience, I have shown dedication in ensuring the holistic development of my students. Since joining Kaua'i High School in September 2025, I have worked tirelessly to give effective instruction and engaging activities, support my students in their learning and personal growth, and contribute to the success of the school community.

However, despite my full experience and commitment, obtaining full licensure in Hawaii remains a big challenge due to the financial and logistical constraints of the Praxis tests. These tests are expensive and it adds to our struggles as teachers.

Hawai'i is my dream place to teach and now that I am finally here, I can truly say that it is my second home because it is so similar to the Philippines. I love its people, its culture, and the school and the Filipino-American community welcomed me with open arms. My goal is to continue what I love most, to teach and inspire students. I respectfully urge all of you to pass SB 819 to make sure that international teachers can continue enhancing and shaping the young minds of Hawai'i.

Thank you for your time and we are looking forward to a positive response from you.

Respectfully,

Federlie Sabado-Abejero

SPED-English and World History Inclusion Teacher

Kaua'i High School

Lihue, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:58:16 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LORALIE N BAGASBAS	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of SB 819 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 7, 2025, at 3:08 PM

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Loralie Bagasbas, and I am an international educator currently serving in the Hawaii Department of Education as a 2nd Grade Teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of SB 819, legislation that seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As a dedicated educator from the Philippines, I arrived in Hawaii with a deep commitment to sharing my expertise and passion for teaching. However, despite holding a valid teaching license from my home country and possessing extensive classroom experience, I have encountered significant challenges in obtaining licensure in Hawaii. One of the most pressing obstacles is the Praxis exam requirement, which not only imposes a financial burden but also adds undue stress, diverting valuable time and energy away from my students.

International educators, including myself, have undergone rigorous training and met high teaching standards in our respective countries. We bring extensive professional experience to the classroom, yet we are required to complete additional standardized assessments that do not always serve as an accurate measure of our competencies. Furthermore, the temporary nature of our visas, typically ranging from three to five years, further complicates our situation, as securing an extension is often contingent upon passing these examinations. This uncertainty not only places additional strain on educators but also disrupts the stability and continuity of education for the students and schools that depend on our dedication and expertise.

Hawaii has welcomed me with open arms, and I remain deeply committed to my students and the local community. However, without reforms like SB 819, many qualified and passionate international teachers may find it increasingly difficult to continue their work here. By passing this bill, the state of Hawaii can remove unnecessary barriers and ensure that international educators remain focused on what truly matters delivering high-quality education and shaping the future of Hawaii’s students.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support and pass SB 819 to provide international teachers with the opportunity to continue making a meaningful impact on Hawaii's education system.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,
Loralie Bagasbas
2nd Grade Teacher, Kahului Elementary School

My Name is Oscar Gatchalian, I was a former principal in the Philippines and now as a J1 teacher here in Hawaii.

Before coming here we have been scrutinized and gone through a lot of assessments in order to qualify for J1. As J1 teachers we have been struggling with finances because of the high cost of living here but with the exemption of taking the praxis exam would mean a lot to me. I got my out of state license back in the Philippines and at the State of New Mexico valid until 2031. I'd applied for probationary status but it says I still have to take praxis. This scenario also causes me to struggle with my finances and logistics, the fact that we do need to pay for it compared to some states that don't require the exam anymore.

Aside from the fact that we have only given our emergency permit and we stay here for about 3 to 5 years. Having one credited license also would allow us to raise our salary. We J1 are only paid a minimum amount and have been struggling a lot. If given the opportunity, the money would be a great help for us to send that to our family back home.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 9:55:23 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lanz Arana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819

Dear Members of the Committee, My name is Lanz S. Arana, and I am honored to write in strong support of SB819, a bill that seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. As a dedicated educator from the Philippines, I have already earned my teaching license and devoted my career to shaping young minds. However, the additional barriers imposed by standardized tests like the Praxis create unnecessary challenges that hinder my ability to fully focus on what truly matters—my students. Teaching is not just a profession for me; it is a calling. Since arriving in Hawaii, I have poured my heart into ensuring my students receive quality education, cultural enrichment, and unwavering support. Yet, balancing my responsibilities in the classroom while preparing for multiple licensure exams is an overwhelming burden—one that diverts my time and energy away from lesson planning, student engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. While I recognize the need for teacher accountability, I firmly believe that my qualifications, experience, and dedication should speak for themselves. The Praxis exams, aside from being financially and emotionally taxing, do not necessarily measure the passion, adaptability, and commitment that international teachers bring into Hawaii’s schools. Additionally, the constraints of our three- to five-year visas make the process even more daunting, as our ability to continue teaching here is often tied to passing these tests within a limited timeframe. Hawaii has become my second home. I have come to love its people, culture, and the vibrant school community that has welcomed me with open arms. My greatest hope is to continue making a difference in the lives of my students without being held back by excessive testing requirements. By passing SB819, you would not only be supporting teachers like me but also ensuring that Hawaii’s students benefit from passionate, experienced educators who can dedicate themselves fully to their success. I respectfully urge you to consider the profound impact of this bill and to support international teachers who are deeply invested in the future of Hawaii’s education system. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Lanz S. Arana

Geometry Teacher, Kulanihako'i High School, Kihei

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:04:25 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jerome Menesses	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jerome Menesses, and I am a middle school Science Teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, a bill that would create an International Visiting Teacher License.

Both my wife, Maria Joy Menesses and I are J-1 teachers here in Hawai'i, bringing years of teaching experience and a passion for education. We both hold professional teaching licenses from the Philippines, and I also have out-of-state licenses from New Zealand. I applied for reciprocity in Hawai'i, hoping my credentials would be fully recognized, but I was only granted a reduction in the number of PRAXIS exams required. Despite having proven my qualifications, I still cannot obtain a full Hawai'i teaching license without taking more exams. I know that this is part of HTSB rules to hire globally competitive teachers but I also heard that some of the out of state license are just being converted to Hawai'i Teaching License and not taking PRAXIS Exams. I feel being discriminated by this rules.

This has placed a heavy financial burden on our family. Even though we both work as full-time teachers, the high cost of living in Hawai'i makes it difficult to make ends meet. As emergency hire teachers, we earn less than fully licensed teachers, and with housing costs taking up a large portion of our income, supporting our two sons has been an ongoing challenge.

SB819 would make a huge difference. If passed, this bill would:

- Grant international teachers a full teaching license, eliminating the need for additional exams.
- Ensure we receive the same salary and benefits as licensed teachers, helping us better support our families. Extend our stay for five years, providing our students with consistent learning and allowing us to fully invest in our schools and communities.

Hawai'i is in desperate need of qualified teachers, and international teachers are already here, working hard every day to meet this need. We are dedicated and committed to the success of Hawai'i's students, but we need stability to continue making a difference in the classroom.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB819, so international teachers can continue to serve Hawai'i's students without unnecessary barriers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Jerome Menesses
Middle School Science Teacher

Lahaina Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:10:38 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maria Joy Menesses	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am Maria Joy Menesses, a 5th-grade teacher at Princess Nahienaena Elementary School and an international visiting teacher from the Philippines. I am writing to advocate for the recognition of our Philippine teaching licenses and credentials as equivalent qualifications for licensure in Hawai‘i, eliminating the need for us to take the Praxis exam.

Filipino teachers who come to Hawai‘i have already met rigorous standards for teaching in our home country. We hold professional teaching licenses from the Philippine Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), which requires us to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET)—a comprehensive test that assesses subject mastery, pedagogy, and educational competence. This examination ensures that we are fully prepared and qualified to teach.

Requiring internationally licensed teachers to take the Praxis exam creates unnecessary redundancy and financial burdens. Many of us arrive in Hawai‘i already possessing years of teaching experience, strong pedagogical skills, and a deep commitment to education. The additional requirement of Praxis does not necessarily reflect our ability to teach effectively in a real classroom setting, as our professional credentials and teaching experience already demonstrate our qualifications.

Furthermore, waiving the Praxis requirement for Filipino teachers would help address Hawai‘i’s ongoing teacher shortage by streamlining the process for experienced international educators to contribute to the local education system without unnecessary delays. By recognizing our existing credentials, the state can ensure that schools have access to well-qualified, passionate educators who are ready to serve students immediately.

I respectfully urge the committee to consider policies that acknowledge the qualifications of internationally licensed teachers, particularly those from the Philippines, and allow us to obtain Hawai‘i teaching licenses without requiring Praxis exams. This policy change would benefit not only international teachers but also Hawai‘i’s schools and students by ensuring a steady and qualified workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to improving education in Hawai‘i and would be happy to provide further information if needed.

Mahalo,

Maria Joy Menesses

5th Grade Teacher

Princess Nahienaena Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:25:47 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samson Bulanandi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

I'm Samson Garingan Bulanandi, an English Language Development teacher at Konawaena Middle School on the Big Island.

I'm writing to wholeheartedly support **SB819**, which proposes establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As a dedicated educator with a proven track record, I've faced unnecessary barriers to obtaining full licensure in Hawai'i due to the Praxis exams. These exams are cost-prohibitive and logistically challenging, requiring travel to O'ahu.

This bill recognizes the value of international teachers like myself, who bring rigorous education, qualifications, and experience from our home countries. It provides a fair and reasonable pathway for us to continue making a meaningful impact in Hawai'i's schools.

By passing this bill, Hawai'i will address its ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved communities. It will also honor diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent, ensuring our keiki receive the best possible education.

I urge you to support this bill, providing international teachers with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Samson Garingan Bulanandi

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 11:13:01 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jocelle Ale	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Jocelle Cina Ale, and I am writing to strongly support the SB 819 that aims to create an international Visiting Teacher License. and I am currently employed as a Math and Math Work Shop Teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School in Maui District. I hold a Bachelor of Secondary Education and also Master’s Degree in Teaching Mathematics in the Philippines and I have 11 years of teaching experience in Philippines and this year in Mau, Hawai‘i USA. During this time, I have had the privilege of working in diverse educational systems and have developed a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and educational exchange.

As an international educator, I am dedicated to offering the highest quality education to my students. I have devoted my career to shape their minds and ensuring they receive an exceptional learning experience. As a middle school Math and Math Workshop teacher, preparing five lessons a day with differentiated instruction was exhausting, but it never discouraged me. My passion for providing the best education for my students kept me going. I strongly believe that education should be inclusive, engaging, and adaptable to the needs of each student, and I consistently strive to create a learning environment that reflects these values.

Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom I offer a free tutorial in Math to some of my students after school to further practice their learning in Math. I actively engage in the school community, working together with colleagues, parents, and stakeholders to cultivate a culture of excellence.

My role as an international teacher has allowed me to broaden my professional knowledge and teaching skills. However, balancing my teaching duties and preparing for the PRAXIS exams creates unnecessary stress and takes precious time away from lesson planning and engaging with my students. I believe that our qualifications, experience and dedication should be acknowledged without the need for multiple standardized tests, which place both financial and emotional strain on teachers, especially those who manage five or more subjects in a day. The impact of my work goes beyond academics; I instill values, build self- confidence, and prepare my students for lifelong success. I respectfully urge you to pass SB 819 to allow me and other international teachers to focus on what we do best—teaching and nurturing our Hawai‘i students, not just academically, but to help them reach their fullest potential.



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

Date: 02/07/2025

Time: 03:08 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: Senate Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 0819 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Establishes criteria for obtaining an international teacher license.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) strongly supports SB 819 which creates an international visiting teacher license and is committed to working with the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) should this bill pass.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators work in 55 schools across Hawai'i, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā'ālehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide Hawai'i students the highest quality education while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 2025-2026, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international educators, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439 ensures qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating a more inclusive and equitable licensing system, the State can fully leverage international educators' skills, knowledge, and experience and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 819.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 11:56:41 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Donna Soriano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an educator in our diverse school system, I have witnessed the immense benefits that come from having a varied teaching staff that reflects the rich cultural tapestry of our student population. SB819 presents a valuable opportunity to enhance our educational environment by allowing qualified international teachers to bring their unique perspectives, skills, and expertise to our classrooms.

Establishing an international teacher license will not only help to address the ongoing teacher shortage we are facing in Hawaii but will also ensure that we maintain high standards for quality education. By setting clear criteria for obtaining this license, we can ensure that international teachers meet the necessary qualifications and are prepared to effectively support our students' learning needs. This will ultimately lead to improved educational outcomes for all students.

Moreover, the inclusion of international teachers in our schools can foster a more global understanding among our students. Exposure to diverse teaching styles and cultural backgrounds encourages students to develop empathy, critical thinking, and a broader worldview. This aligns perfectly with our mission to prepare students for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

I also believe that SB819 will empower our local communities by allowing us to draw upon a wider pool of talent. Many qualified international educators are eager to contribute to our schools, and by providing them with a pathway to licensure, we can attract passionate individuals who are committed to the success of our students.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support SB819 and urge you to consider the positive impact this legislation will have on our educational system. Establishing an international teacher license is a crucial step toward enhancing the quality of education in Hawai'i and enriching the learning experiences of our students.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 11:59:01 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joseph Cassler	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Our J-1 visa teachers at Kauai High School have strongly benefitted our students and the greater community. They have increased the rigor of our educational priorities while also have been present at our local community events. They have come with ample experience in the teaching profession and do not hesitate when offered an opportunity to increase their professional pedagogy. Please move this bill forward so they can be professionally recognized through a HTSB teaching license.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 12:07:51 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rica Gilbuena	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! I am Rica Gilbuena, a J-1 visa holder and a 2nd grade teacher in Maui. As a visiting international teacher, I have experienced firsthand the joy and privilege of working with students here in Hawai'i. Every day, I see the spark of curiosity in the eyes of my students and the potential within each of them. I strive to bring not only my subject matter to life, but also a broader understanding of the world and different cultures. I have built strong connections with my students, becoming a mentor and a guide, and I have seen them grow and develop a love for learning. These relationships are incredibly precious to me.

However, the current licensing requirements create a significant hurdle to us, visiting international teachers. While I hold a valid teaching license in my home country, the process of obtaining a new license here is a substantial burden, not just financially, but also in terms of time. The cost of the exams alone is a significant challenge, but even more so is the time commitment required for preparation. Instead of spending precious time planning engaging lessons, collaborating with colleagues, or simply being with my family, I have to divert countless hours to studying for these exams. This takes away from the time I could be dedicating to my students and my own well-being. More importantly, it puts my ability to continue teaching here and support my students at risk. This proposed bill would be a game-changer. It would allow me, and other international teachers like me, to focus on what truly matters: our students. It would remove the unnecessary financial and time strain and ensure that we can continue to provide stability and enrichment in the classroom. Passing this bill would not only benefit international teachers, but it would also greatly benefit the students who rely on us. It would allow us to continue nurturing their growth and inspiring their potential for years to come.

Mahalo!

TO: Senate Committee on Education
RE: Support for SB819 Relating to Education

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support SB819, which would require the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders and establish criteria for obtaining an international teacher license.

Through my role as Kauai High School's Academy Director and as a Counselor, I have directly witnessed the impact of our Filipino J-1 teachers. They have become integral members of our school 'ohana, establishing robust communication systems with students, families, and staff while consistently demonstrating openness to feedback and an unwavering commitment to student success.

In coordinating professional development opportunities for these teachers, I've been consistently impressed by their eagerness to adapt their teaching methods to meet our students' unique needs. They actively participate in training sessions, readily incorporating innovative strategies for student engagement and teacher clarity into their practice. Their willingness to refine their approaches while maintaining high academic standards has positively impacted student achievement and enriched our campus culture.

This legislation would address a critical barrier our J-1 teachers currently face by acknowledging their international credentials and existing teaching licenses. The opportunity for these teachers to obtain an international teacher license would help to provide valuable continuity for students and strengthen school communities.

Removing barriers would allow our international educators to focus entirely on what they do best: supporting students and enriching our educational community. Their dedication to professional growth, combined with their willingness to embrace our local culture while sharing their own, creates meaningful cultural exchanges that benefit all students.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Dawn Taba
Academy Director/Early College Coordinator
Academy of Innovation & Design Counselor
dawn.taba@k12.hi.us
(808) 977-9723

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 12:26:11 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather Morgado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Chair Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Donna Mercado Kim, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of SB 819, which would establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. As the Curriculum Coordinator at Kauai High School, I have seen firsthand the significant challenges we have faced in filling critical teaching positions, particularly in mathematics and the sciences.

This year, we were fortunate to welcome five new teachers from the Philippines to our school. These educators come with graduate-level expertise in their subject areas and possess exceptional teaching skills. Moreover, they have demonstrated a genuine willingness to embrace our school's culture and community. They have actively participated in professional development, volunteered for various school initiatives, and worked collaboratively with our existing faculty to implement best practices in the classroom.

By establishing a special teacher's license for qualified, knowledgeable, and respected educators from abroad, SB 819 will not only address the pressing need for subject area experts in our schools, but it will also reinforce our commitment to high-quality education for all students. This initiative will ensure that we continue to benefit from the talents of international educators, enriching our community and bolstering the educational experience for our students.

I urge the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board and our legislators to support SB 819. It is a necessary and forward-thinking step that will help us attract and retain exceptional educators, ultimately benefiting our students, our schools, and our entire community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Morgado

Curriculum Coordinator

Kauai High School

heather.morgado@k12.hi.us

808-977-9722

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 1:04:57 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grezylen O. Lalusin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Grezylen Lalusin, and I am currently a Math Teacher here in Hawaii. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. As an international educator, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to teach in Hawaii and to contribute to the academic growth and personal development of my students. However, I am also aware of the significant challenges faced by international teachers under the current licensing requirements, which this bill aims to address.

Teaching is more than a profession for me—it is my calling and my passion. Every day, I strive to help my students not only excel in Mathematics but also develop critical thinking skills, confidence, and a love for learning. I take pride in fostering an environment where students feel supported and encouraged to succeed.

As an international teacher, I bring a unique and valuable perspective to my students. My training and experiences in the Philippines allow me to enrich their learning by exposing them to new ways of thinking and problem-solving. By teaching Mathematics through real-world and globally relevant examples, I help my students develop a broader understanding of the subject while also preparing them to thrive in a multicultural world. This cultural exchange is not only beneficial to students academically but also helps build a classroom environment of mutual respect and diversity.

Despite these contributions, the current licensing process creates unnecessary obstacles for international teachers. While my qualifications and teaching experience have been thoroughly evaluated in my home country, I am still required to pass costly and time-consuming exams. These exams place an additional financial and emotional strain on educators who are already giving their all to support their students.

The International Visiting Teacher License is a fair and practical solution. It acknowledges the professional training, expertise, and dedication of international teachers, allowing us to focus on our primary goal: providing high-quality education for Hawaii’s students. This license would also bring much-needed stability to our roles, ensuring that we can continue contributing to our schools and communities without the looming uncertainty of licensing hurdles.

Without this bill, many of us will face the difficult choice of leaving Hawaii, interrupting the progress and relationships we have built with our students, their families, and our colleagues. The passage of this bill would provide the recognition and support we need to remain in our schools and continue making a difference.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill and to recognize the exceptional value that international teachers bring to Hawaii's education system. By removing unnecessary barriers and granting this license, you will be empowering us to dedicate ourselves fully to our students and to help them achieve their fullest potential.

Thank you for your time, attention, and commitment to the future of education in Hawaii.

Respectfully,

Grezylen Lalusin

My name is Emelito Ortillo, and I am a Special Education Teacher at Kalama Intermediate School in the Maui District. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819, which proposes the establishment of an International Teacher License.

This bill would significantly benefit Filipino teachers who have relocated from the Philippines by allowing them to obtain licensure in Hawaii without the necessity of passing the Praxis exam as a major requirement. The burden of taking this test can be substantial, as it not only incurs a considerable financial cost but also demands extensive study time in preparation for the exam. I firmly believe that the licensure we hold from our home country, the Philippines, should suffice for obtaining a teaching license in another country or state. Our educational qualifications include degrees that are equivalent to U.S. standards, as evidenced by our transcripts of records. Furthermore, we have successfully passed the board examination, which qualifies us for an international license with U.S. equivalency. In addition, we have engaged in various training sessions and workshops aimed at enhancing our effectiveness and efficiency as educators. These experiences have equipped us to be not only competent teachers but also globally competitive professionals. Consequently, we are recognized as international teachers with foreign credentials, and we possess the qualifications and experience necessary to excel in our roles.

Being an international teacher empowers me to be a globally competitive educator, dedicated to fostering a rich learning environment for all students. I believe that my role as an international teacher profoundly impacts my students by enriching their understanding of the world beyond their immediate surroundings. By employing various teaching strategies and sharing experiences from different cultures, I promote personal growth while cultivating a deeper appreciation for diversity.

Through sharing my experiences, students gain valuable insights into the cultures and traditions of various countries. My cross-cultural exchange and experience equip my students with the skills necessary to thrive in a multicultural and interconnected world, enabling them to discover the unique values and perspectives of people across the globe. By exploring and learning about different cultures and traditions, students are better prepared for success in various aspects of life, including becoming responsible and responsive citizens of the United States of America.

Thank you for considering this important matter. I urge you to support SB 819 for the betterment of our educational community and the recognition of the contributions of Filipino educators.

Sincerely and with respect,

EMELITO ORTILLO
SPED Teacher / J1 Teacher
Kalama Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 12:57:28 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April D. Asuncion	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is April D. Asuncion, a J1 teacher from the Philippines and currently working as a teacher at Haiku Elementary School. I am in my second year now working with diverse teachers and pupils who have contributed to my growth and well-being.

For somebody who has been passionate since I had my job, I have been in search for the best measures to suffice the needs of students for them to grow the way our society would need them, somebody who is well-rounded, ready to face life in its greater heights and become an asset of the society as much as possible.

Since last year, I have been scratching all means to meet the demands of our school of providing quality education to everyone. This was backed up by exposing myself to different seminars and trainings offered by the Department of Education. This, I believed, also helped me bring out the best in my learners as manifested in their achievements.

However, my desire to bring out the best from my learners is being distracted by the demand of having to take the Praxis test which I think should not be since we have license in the Philippines, and we had been teaching there for almost a decade now. Not to discredit but we have been exposed to experiences which shaped us to what we are right now. Our focus is being diverted to that which bothers us.

With this, may I urge everyone to please consider us so we can still take part in providing the much-needed help and support for everyone.

Thank you so much.

Very truly yours,

APRIL D. ASUNCION

J1 Teacher

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 1:29:10 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ELVIN BEJERANO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 819 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 5, 2025.

Dear Chair Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Senator Donna Mercado Kim, and Esteemed Committee Members,

My name is Elvin Valero Bejerano, and I am an international visiting teacher at Kihei Elementary School. I am writing to strongly support SB 819, which aligns with HB 439, to establish an International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii.

With over 25 years of teaching experience, I have dedicated my career to shaping young minds and fostering academic growth. I hold a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Management, a Master’s in Elementary Education, and 42 doctoral units in Educational Administration and Supervision. In addition to my teaching license from the Philippines, I have obtained out-of-state teaching licenses from Nevada and New Mexico. However, despite applying for reciprocity in Hawaii, my licenses were not converted to a Hawaii teaching license. I was only granted a reduction in the number of PRAXIS exams required.

Teaching in Hawaii has been an incredible experience, and I take great pride in the positive impact I make on my students every day. However, the licensing barriers for international teachers create unnecessary challenges that make it difficult for us to continue serving in the classroom. My wife, Arlene M. Bejerano, and I are both teachers in Hawaii, yet we continue to struggle financially due to the high cost of living. With two children to support, our current emergency hire salaries make it difficult to make ends meet. If this bill is passed, it would provide us with fair pay, additional compensation through differentials, and the stability of a five-year license—allowing us to focus on what truly matters: educating and supporting Hawaii’s keiki.

Beyond our challenges, this bill is essential in addressing Hawaii’s ongoing teacher shortage. International teachers bring diverse perspectives, multilingual skills, and years of experience that enrich the learning environment for students. By removing excessive licensing barriers and recognizing our qualifications, Hawaii can retain highly skilled educators who are committed to student success.

I urge you to pass SB 819, as it will not only support international teachers but also ensure that Hawaii's students continue to receive the quality education they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elvin Valero Bejerano

4th Grade Teacher, Kihei Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 1:33:02 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Dingus	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

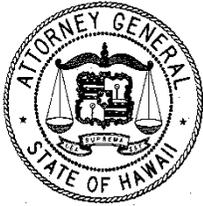
Comments:

I am an 8th grade teacher on Kauai. For the past 2 years I have worked with several J1 teachers at CKMS. During this time multiple teachers have shown competence, knowledge and professionalism.

I am also the father of an 8th grader at the school. This year, two of her core teachers are J1 teachers. Again, they are both professional and knowledgeable.

Without these teachers on campus, those classrooms would have a much less educational environment. There would either be a constant rotation of substitute teachers or classes without substitutes grouped together with an administrator in the cafeteria. Neither of these are effective educational environments.

The J1 teachers have helped our community and should be allowed to continue on.



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
S.B. NO. 819, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

BEFORE THE:
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Friday, February 7, 2025 **TIME:** 3:08 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 229

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi or Randall M. Wat, Deputy Attorneys General

Chair Kidani and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

The bill requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders, and establishes criteria for obtaining an international teacher license.

Section 2 of this bill proposes to amend section 302A-802(c), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), to add a new paragraph (7) that requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish the international teacher license. In the new paragraph (7), the word "educators" is used twice, but "educators" is not a defined term in chapter 302A, HRS. The Department recommends that a synonymous word, "teacher," defined in section 302A-101, HRS, be used instead. We recommend replacing "educators" with "teachers" on page 6, lines 9 and 12.

We also recommend replacing "school" with "schools" to read "or public charter schools" on page 6, line 10.

The Department further notes that new paragraph (7) combines two concepts, establishing the license and setting forth conditions for the issuance of the renewable license, which may be confusing. Moreover, the bill does not discuss any conditions that may be necessary for renewing the license. To address these concerns, the Department recommends separating the two concepts and adding wording to address

requirements for the renewal of the license. The Department suggests that the new paragraph (7), on page 6, line 6, through page 7, line 5, of the bill be amended as follows:

- (7) Establish a visiting international teacher license to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries. The international teacher license shall provide ~~[educators]~~ **teachers** hired by the department or public charter ~~[school]~~ **schools** the ability to teach all subjects and grade levels that the teacher is qualified to teach~~[-];~~ **provided that:**
- (A)** International ~~[educators]~~ **teachers** hired by the department or public charter schools ~~[with an appropriate visa]~~ **as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State** shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following:
- (i) A valid and current J-1 visa;**
- ~~[(A)]~~ **(ii)** The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;
- ~~[(B)]~~ **(iii)** Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;
- ~~[(C)]~~ **(iv)** A valid ~~[and active international teacher]~~ **teaching** license~~[-];~~ **in the teacher's home country;** and
- ~~[(D)]~~ **(v)** Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting~~[-];~~ **and**
- (B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license is conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State.**

(Suggested changes Ramseyered against the wording in the bill and in bold.)

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

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 3:34:57 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Liza Ryan Gill	Testifying for Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We **strongly support HB439** requiring the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teachers license for J-1 visa holders and establishes criteria for obtaining international teachers license. The bill will help Hawai'i address teacher shortages by providing competent teachers particularly in geographic and disciplines. In addition, J-1 visa holders with cultural and linguistic skills can work with students from these backgrounds. The Department of Education currently has over 200 J-1 visa teachers from the Philippines and my personal contact with some of the individual teachers and comments from my community contacts makes me confident that these teachers and the students are well-served. These J-1 visa teachers can serve at any of the public schools, including schools with high proportion of local and immigrant Filipino students. As noted, Filipino students are the largest ethnic group in the public schools and immigrants from the Philippines represent the largest country of origin group, making up nearly half—or 45.8 percent—of all immigrants in Hawai'i. Currently there are 32,044 (10%) English language students in the public schools. These students are native speakers of languages other than English and need assistance to learn English. We support this bill as it will benefit our schools and teachers by having international licenses for these teachers.

To the Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Donna Mercado Kim, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Vicdona Reyes, and I am a J-1 teacher and a 2nd-grade teacher in an inclusion class at Mauka Lani Elementary. I am writing in strong support of SB 819, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Teaching in an inclusion classroom has allowed me to work closely with diverse learners, ensuring that every child, regardless of ability, receives the education, support, and encouragement they need to succeed. My experience in Hawaii has been deeply fulfilling, and my passion for teaching is fueled by my compassion as both an educator and a mother. I strive every day to create a nurturing environment where my students feel valued, capable, and inspired to learn.

However, the current licensing restrictions pose challenges for international teachers like myself, despite our qualifications, dedication, and the critical need for educators in Hawaii. Passing SB 819 would not only recognize the contributions of international teachers but also help address the ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in high-need areas like special education and inclusion classrooms. Stability in the classroom is crucial for student success, and allowing experienced international teachers to continue serving Hawaii's schools ensures that students receive consistent, high-quality instruction.

I have seen firsthand the positive impact that international teachers bring to Hawaii's education system, from enriching classroom diversity to fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. I urge you to support and pass SB 819 to ensure that passionate educators like myself can continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of Hawaii's keiki. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

VICDONA REYES

Grade 2, Inclusion Teacher
Mauka Lani Elementary
91-1300 Panana St.,
Kapolei Hi, 96707

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 3:50:19 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vince Patrick Pastor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819

Hearing Date: February 7, 2025

Honorable Chair Senator Michelle Kedani, Vice Chair Donna Mercado Kim and Members of the Committee,

My name is Vince Patrick Pastor, and I am a first-year J-1 teacher at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School in Kauai. I am writing in strong support of SB819, which seeks to establish a fair and streamlined licensing process for international educators like myself.

Moving to Hawaii to teach has been an incredible opportunity, both professionally and personally. I came here with years of experience in education, eager to share my knowledge while learning from my students and colleagues. However, the current licensing system classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires," requiring additional exams that are costly and time-consuming. These requirements not only add financial stress but also take away valuable time that could be spent focusing on student learning, preparing lessons, and engaging with families.

Despite these challenges, I see the positive impact that international teachers bring to Hawaii's classrooms every day. Representation matters—students benefit from seeing educators who share similar backgrounds and experiences. It inspires them to dream bigger and recognize the value of diversity in education.

SB819 is an important step in ensuring fairness and equity for international teachers who are already contributing so much to Hawaii's schools. By creating a visiting international teacher license, the state will remove unnecessary barriers and allow us to fully dedicate ourselves to the success of our students.

I respectfully urge you to pass this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Vince Patrick Pastor

J1-Teacher, Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School
sir.vincepastor@gmail.com
808-779-8493

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 3:42:17 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Geralyn E. Nabaysa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am Geralyn E. Nabaysa, a J-1 Cultural Exchange Teacher currently teaching 7th-grade Reading Workshop at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. I am writing in strong support of SB819, which seeks to address the challenges faced by cultural exchange teachers like myself in fulfilling our mission to contribute meaningfully to the school communities we serve.

I am an experienced educator with 14 years of teaching, specializing in Reading and Writing, and have dedicated my career to fostering literacy and cultural appreciation among diverse student populations. Before coming to the United States, I implemented various educational initiatives in the Philippines, including the development of learning resources aimed at enhancing students' vocabulary in the Itneg language, as part of my commitment to cultural preservation. I also collaborated with cultural masters to integrate indigenous knowledge into the curriculum, ensuring that students remained connected to their heritage while excelling academically.

As a cultural exchange teacher, my purpose extends beyond delivering lessons—I am here to build meaningful connections within and among my school community, my students, and my colleagues. Through culturally responsive teaching, I strive to create an inclusive learning environment that celebrates both Hawaiian and global perspectives, enriching the educational experiences of the students I serve. However, the current licensing system, which requires passing the Praxis exams within a limited timeframe, poses a significant barrier to fully realizing this goal.

The impact of a teacher goes beyond a few short years. Building strong relationships, fostering academic growth, and creating sustainable educational programs require time and continuity. The limitations imposed by the licensing system restrict our ability to make long-term contributions, despite our expertise and dedication to student success. Granting cultural exchange teachers more time to meet licensing requirements would not only benefit us professionally but would also strengthen the stability and quality of education in our schools.

I respectfully urge the committee to consider the passing of SB819, which would allow cultural exchange teachers to continue their work without the undue pressure of restrictive timelines. By

supporting this bill, you are investing in a diverse, globally connected, and culturally rich educational system that will serve students, schools, and communities for years to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

GERALYN E. NABAYSA
7th Grade Reading Workshop Teacher
Kalama Intermediate School, Maui, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 3:30:53 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arlene Macotocruz Bejerano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 819 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 5, 2025

Dear Chair Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Senator Donna Mercado Kim, and Esteemed Committee Members,

My name is **Arlene Macotocruz Bejerano**, and I am an **international visiting teacher** at **Kihei Elementary School**. I am writing to express my **strong support** for **SB 819**, which aligns with **HB 439**, to establish an **International Visiting Teacher License** in Hawai‘i.

With over **20 years of teaching experience**, I have dedicated my career to **shaping young minds and fostering academic growth**. I have completed **42 doctoral units** in **Educational Administration and Supervision** and hold a **teaching license from the Philippines**.

Teaching in Hawai‘i has been an **incredibly rewarding experience**, and I take great pride in the **positive impact** I make on my students each day. However, the **licensing barriers** for international teachers create **unnecessary obstacles**, making it difficult for us to continue serving in the classroom. My **husband, Elvin V. Bejerano, and I are both teachers in Hawai‘i**, yet we **struggle financially** due to the **high cost of living**. With **two children to support**, our **emergency hire salaries** make it challenging to make ends meet. If **SB 819** is passed, it would provide us with **fair pay, additional compensation through differentials, and the stability of a five-year license**—allowing us to focus on what truly matters: **educating and supporting Hawai‘i’s keiki**.

Beyond our **personal challenges**, this bill is **critical** in addressing Hawai‘i’s **ongoing teacher shortage**. International teachers bring **diverse perspectives, multilingual skills, and extensive experience** that enrich the learning environment for students. By **removing excessive licensing barriers** and recognizing our qualifications, Hawai‘i can **retain highly skilled educators** who are dedicated to student success.

I respectfully urge you to **pass SB 819**, as it will not only support international teachers but also ensure that **Hawai‘i’s students receive the quality education they deserve**.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

**Sincerely,
Arlene M. Bejerano
3rd Grade Teacher, Kihei Elementary School**



STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD

650 IWILEI ROAD, SUITE 268
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

PERSON TESTIFYING: Kristi Miyamae, Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board Chairperson

DATE: February 7, 2025

TIME: 3:08 pm

LOCATION: Conference Room 229 and Video Conference

TITLE OF BILL: SB819, RELATING TO EDUCATION

PURPOSE OF BILL: Requires HTSB to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Establishes criteria for obtaining an international license.

POSITION: Opposes

Chair Kidani and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) opposes SB819, relating education.

The mission and vision of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) is to ensure that all public-school students in Hawai'i are taught by qualified teachers. This is achieved through the development of rigorous professional teacher licensing standards. HTSB holds all applicants to the same standards, regardless of whether their educational credentials come from a regionally accredited institution or a non-U.S. institution. HTSB also provides all applicants with access and opportunity to obtain licensure, if they meet the required standards.

This bill states that Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires". This statement is not correct. J-1 teachers who possess the qualifications necessary for licensure have been issued licenses in their approved license field.-HTSB is statutorily responsible for setting the criteria for the requirements of each license. HTSB is a regulatory agency which is administrative attached to the Hawai'i Department of Education ("HIDOE"), but not under the HIDOE. HTSB became a separate entity by statute from HIDOE to ensure that there would be no conflict of interest or entanglement between employment and licensure HTSB receives their authority from Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) §302A-802 to determine licensing and certification standards which is expressed in detail in Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR).

HTSB knows this bill was well intentioned, but it is not the answer to the problem. What is more concerning is the fact that J-1 visa holders are being taken advantage of by loan sharks. These loan sharks are offering J-1 visa holders high interest loans to move to the U.S. and are offering super high-interest loans (around 50% interest!) to pay for their flights, moving expenses to move to the U.S. to work, relocation fees, flights, etc. licensing, etc. to become a teacher in the U.S. At the National Conference for State Legislatures (NCSL) a few years back, there was a labor session and a resolution that specifically served to protect J-1 Visa holders. **The legislators decided to add language to the NCSL resolution to protect J-1 teachers from 3rd party "coyote" companies offering J-1 Visa holders these high-interest loans.** The 3rd party "coyote" companies even charged J-1 Visa holders a licensing fee even when states, such as ours do not have licensing fees. NCSL brought it to the attention of members that there have had major problems in many other states before we

even heard about it in Hawai'i, so they were letting us know. NCSL passed this resolution with those protections for J-1 teachers. We should follow suit as NCSL did in protecting J-1 visa holders from these loan sharks.

Here are links to documents that explain more that were shared at NCSL. AFL-CIO [Use and Abuse of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Teacher Program — Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO](#) Note: Make sure you check out the articles they cite as well at the bottom of this report. Here is also a report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) [Importing Educators: Causes and Consequences of International Teacher Recruitment](#) who is more aware of this problem as it hit them first. [Start on page 17 to see the fraud and the 'coyote' recruiting tactics that are being used.]

At HTSB we only have 5 Licensing Specialists that are responsible for all teacher licensing and certification. Our licensing is free to all who apply, since we are now funded by the legislature for our operations. HTSB used to rely on licensing fees, but now we have ZERO licensing fees, since being funded by the legislature.

It has been brought to our attention that some principals have been covering the costs of the Praxis tests for some J-1 teachers, as well as other teachers who may need to take the Praxis tests. This is a commendable gesture, and it's possible they are utilizing Title II funds to do so. which is commendable. The Praxis Core is \$150, PLT is \$156, and content exams range from \$130 to \$180, depending on the specific test taken, the cost for all three is typically less than \$500.

While J-1 visa holders are responsible for covering the Praxis test fees, it's important to note the HTSB does not charge licensing or application fees beyond the tests cost. In contrast, other states, such as Alaska (as mentioned in the preamble) charge a licensing fee of approximately \$200 and an additional application fee of \$50, as do Nevada, and North Carolina. Alaska also does require passing scores from a basic competency exam for teachers with preparation outside the U.S. (See #8 [Alaska Teacher Certification FAQ](#)). These states also require applicants to complete additional coursework as part of their licensing requirements; Nevada requires a Family Engagement course and Alaska requires a Multicultural course.

In the most recent bargaining session, HSTA successfully negotiated an increase in pay for Emergency Hires as part of the 2024-2027 contract. Prior to this new agreement, salaries for individuals holding Emergency Hire Permits were set at \$45,593 per year. However, under the new contract, their salaries have been raised to \$50,325 for the 2023-2024 school year, \$51,835 for the 2024-25 school year, and \$53,649 for the 2026-27 school year.

Through these negotiations, HSTA has secured an addition \$6,242 for Emergency Hire teachers in the 2024-2025 school year, with further increases in the following year. **Once applicants pass the Praxis tests, they can transition to a full teaching license and move onto the HDOE Licensed Teacher pay scale, that begins at \$53,390 per year in the 2024-25 school year, and rises to \$55, 250 per year in the 2026-27 school year.**

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) requires teachers who have completed out-of-state educator preparation programs outside the U.S., including international teachers and those teachers with international licenses, to pass three Praxis tests to gain licensure. This process is designed to ensure that these teachers have a thorough understanding of the content they will teach, the grade levels they will instruct, and the specific field and grade span of their degree. It is essential for our teachers to meet these standards to effectively address the needs of our students. Additionally, it's important to note that special education laws in the U.S. differ from those in other countries, and acceptable forms of discipline also vary. For instance, we've been informed by J-1 teachers from the Philippines that corporal punishment is allowed in their home country, but

it is explicitly prohibited in our state. This is just once example of the differences international teachers may face when transitioning to teaching in the U.S.

The idea of creating an International License for the J-1 Visa Holders was previously presented to the board's committee responsible for teacher licensure. However, committee members strongly opposed this proposal, stating that they want international teachers to complete the three required Praxis exams, just as the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) mandates for teachers who obtain a teaching degree from out-of-state institutions, even if they are already within U.S.

As the state's official teacher licensing agency, HTSB is deeply familiar with the trends and best practices in teacher licensure. We are committed to ensuring that only qualified teachers are allowed to teach in Hawai'i. HTSB is also vigilant about preventing fraud and the actions of bad actors in this field. This is a critical part of our responsibility to protect the integrity of our licensing process, our educators, and our state. That is why the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board is entrusted with the authority to establish and enforce licensing requirements, as set in our Hawaii Administrative Rules.

Lastly, there are for-profit companies out there, even in the U.S., offering "International Teacher degrees", and some of them are BAD actors.

This bill is unnecessary, and HTSB wants to be able to license, renew licenses, and add-fields to licenses, at our agency, but this bill would dilute our licensing standards rigors and make us a license mill for international agencies who are bad actors in all of this.

We already license teachers from other countries, and we do require three tests for quality assurance from applicants with degrees from somewhere else in the U.S. or internationally. Even most in-state Educator Preparation Programs require Praxis tests, so it is not unusual at all.

Therefore, we humbly ask this committee to **oppose** this bill.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 5:00:24 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deonel R Advincula	Testifying for Hawaii DOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, esteemed members of the Senate Legislature,

My name is Deonel R. Advincula, and I am a Filipino teacher currently serving in Hawaii under the J-1 visa program. I humbly share my story today in support of SB819, a bill that would allow for the reciprocation of out-of-state and international teaching licenses in Hawaii. This measure is not just a legal adjustment; it represents an opportunity for dedicated international educators like me to continue making a positive impact on the lives of Hawaii’s students, schools, and communities.

Since arriving in Hawaii, I have devoted myself wholeheartedly to my students. Teaching is more than a profession for me—it is a calling. I have seen my students grow academically, socially, and emotionally through the lessons I impart, and I am grateful for the chance to contribute to their future. The presence of international teachers enriches Hawaii’s classrooms by introducing diverse perspectives, fostering cultural understanding, and helping to address the persistent teacher shortage.

However, the journey of an international teacher is not without struggles. As a father of two young daughters who remain in the Philippines, I carry the deep responsibility of providing for their future. The financial burden of obtaining a Hawaii teaching license is overwhelming. The required Praxis exams alone are extremely costly, and in my case, I must pass eight subtests despite already being a certified teacher in the Philippines. This creates an unnecessary hardship, particularly since my credentials have been rigorously evaluated and approved for American foreign credential equivalency before I was granted a teaching position in Hawaii. This entity made sure that we had the equal capacity to teach like the native language speakers.

With only a limited time to teach under my current visa, the licensing barriers make it difficult for me and many others to continue our service beyond our initial term. If SB819 does not pass, I may be forced to leave Hawaii after my second year to find a state that recognizes my qualifications. This would not only disrupt my life and my ability to support my daughters, but it would also mean leaving behind the students and school community I have grown to love.

SB819 offers a solution that benefits everyone. By allowing the reciprocation of out-of-state and international teaching licenses, Hawaii can retain highly qualified, passionate educators who have already proven their dedication. This bill acknowledges the contributions of international teachers and ensures that we can continue to serve where we are needed most. Passing this bill is

not just about helping teachers like me—it is about securing a strong, stable, and diverse education system for Hawaii’s keiki.

I humbly ask for your support of SB819. By breaking down these barriers, you will be giving committed educators like me the opportunity to continue our mission, provide for our families, and help shape the future of Hawaii’s children.

Mahalo,

Mr. Advincula

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:38:29 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JEFFREY C. DEL ROSARIO	Testifying for Hawaii Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Embracing each student's individuality has always been important to me as a special education teacher. In Hawaii for over 6 months now, however, I have been learning how important diversity in culture is to forming my teaching style. The rich blend of different cultures influences has given me a new insight into how different cultures affect teaching and learning methods. And the Cultural Exchange Program for Teachers has made me more passionate about engaging learners especially the ones with special needs, school administrators, colleagues, parents and stakeholders.

The Cultural Exchange Program for Teachers has strengthened my conviction in the value of cultural competence in education while also improving my teaching methods. Learning from an environment that values diversity and interacting with educators who share my enthusiasm for helping all learners gave me a newfound sense of purpose and a wider range of resources to help my learners.

Thankfully, August Ahrens Elementary School in Waipahu has been providing me trainings and first-hand experience to better comprehend Inclusive Education, an integral part of the SPED Curriculum. It has been my joy, inspiration and motivation to nurture my learners with disabilities with so much love, care, willingness, and enthusiasm. I want to create an atmosphere where each student here in Hawaii, feels seen, heard, and appreciated for who they are—regardless of their difficulties or skills—is what I believe real inclusion is all about.

Thus, it is my fervent prayer that the wellbeing of the learners here in Hawaii most especially the SPED learners must be a priority. Therefore, I strongly support whatever initiative or move to strengthen this program.

I am Jeffrey C. Del Rosario, Inclusion Teacher (SPED) of August Ahrens Elementary School, a thankful and dedicated J1 Teacher.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
LIHIKAI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
335 S. Papa Ave.
Kahului, HI 96732

February 5, 2025

Re: SB819 - Establishment of an International Teacher License

Dear Senator Kidani and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for establishing an international teacher license that would recognize the credentials of foreign teachers, particularly those recruited from the Philippines, to help address the ongoing teacher vacancies in Hawaii. As a principal, I have witnessed firsthand the invaluable contributions of Filipino teachers to my school and community.

Teachers from the Philippines bring with them a deep commitment to education, a strong work ethic, and a sincere desire to contribute meaningfully to the learning and development of our students. Their presence in our school has had a profoundly positive impact in multiple ways.

1. **Enhancing Student Learning** - Filipino teachers consistently demonstrate dedication to student success. They bring diverse teaching strategies, a firm grasp of the subject matter, and a nurturing approach that resonates with Hawaii's multicultural student population. Their ability to adapt to different learning styles has enriched the educational experiences of countless students.
2. **Fostering a Collaborative School Culture** - These teachers are eager learners and invaluable team players who support and uplift their colleagues. They embrace professional development, readily incorporate new academic practices, and contribute to the overall growth of our school. Their gentle and respectful demeanor fosters a harmonious working environment, strengthening the bonds between staff members.
3. **Enriching the School Community** - Filipino teachers bring cultural diversity that enriches the broader school community. They respect and embrace Hawaiian values, traditions, and educational practices while sharing their cultural perspectives, promoting a more profound global awareness and inclusivity among students and staff.

Recognizing these professionals' teaching licenses and degrees through an international teacher license would streamline their transition into Hawaii's education system and ensure that our schools continue to benefit from their expertise and commitment. Removing barriers to full participation in our schools will allow them to focus on what matters most - educating and inspiring the next generation.

I urge the Senate Committee on Education to do all it takes for the HTSB to establish an international teacher license to support the recruitment and retention of these dedicated educators. This initiative is a critical step in addressing our teacher shortage while strengthening the quality and diversity of Hawaii's educational workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you seek additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara Oura Tavares".

Barbara Oura Tavares

Principal - Lihikai Elementary School

AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 11:09:29 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Neil Christian T. Corales	Testifying for Hawaii State Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chair and respected members of the committee, my name is Neil Christian T. Corales, a J-1 teacher from the Philippines currently serving as a first-grade generalist teacher at Mokulele Elementary School within the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. As a J-1 visa holder dedicated to educating the children of our military families stationed on Oahu, I stand in strong support of SB 819. This bill is not just important—it is essential for the future of our public schools and the well-being of our students.

My experience as a J-1 teacher in Hawai‘i has been profoundly rewarding. I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact we have on our students, schools, and the broader community. Filipino teachers like myself bring a unique blend of cultural understanding, diverse teaching methodologies, and a deep commitment to nurturing young minds. We forge strong bonds with our students, often connecting with local families through shared values of respect, family, and a strong work ethic. Moreover, we contribute to a more diverse and inclusive learning environment, enriching the educational experience for all. Many of us are actively engaged in local cultural and community initiatives, further cementing the vital connections between our schools and families.

However, my current J-1 visa status, and that of many other dedicated international teachers, creates a precarious situation. SB 819 directly addresses a critical need: retaining qualified and experienced educators within the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. My J-1 visa limits my time here in Hawai‘i, and the potential loss of dedicated teachers creates instability for our students. SB 819 offers a solution by providing a pathway for J-1 teachers to remain for up to five years through an international teacher license. This stability is paramount for our students, especially in the crucial early grades where consistency in education is fundamental to their future success. The disruption and emotional impact on children when a beloved teacher departs due to visa restrictions is significant. SB 819 allows us to maintain these vital student-teacher relationships, contributing to the long-term health and stability of our schools.

Beyond stability, SB 819 promotes fairness and equity. It ensures "equal pay for equal work" by granting internationally licensed teachers access to the same salary differentials as locally licensed teachers. This recognition of our qualifications is not simply about compensation; it acknowledges the expertise and experience we bring to the classroom. We have invested years in our education and professional development, earning undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate

degrees and credentials. This bill rightly recognizes the value of that investment and affirms our standing as highly qualified and experienced educators.

Currently, the process of obtaining a local teaching license often necessitates taking the Praxis examinations, even when we hold valid licenses and degrees from our home countries. This requirement imposes an unnecessary financial and logistical burden, particularly on teachers coming from overseas, and does not always accurately reflect our teaching abilities or experience. SB 819 offers a more streamlined approach, recognizing the validity of our international credentials and allowing us to concentrate on what truly matters: supporting our students and contributing to the Hawai'i State Department of Education.

The Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) in the Philippines is a rigorous, nationally standardized exam designed to ensure teacher competency. It covers many of the same core areas as the Praxis examinations, including professional education, subject-specific content knowledge, and pedagogy. Both examinations aim to assess a teacher's readiness to effectively instruct students. Specifically, both the LET and relevant Praxis examinations evaluate understanding of educational psychology, teaching methodologies, assessment strategies, and classroom management. Furthermore, the LET, like the Praxis, requires aspiring teachers to demonstrate their knowledge in their specific subject area of expertise, ensuring they are qualified to teach the content.

Requiring J-1 teachers to take the Praxis creates an unnecessary barrier. Many of us have already demonstrated our competency through a comparable, government-mandated examination process in our home country. This requirement not only creates a financial burden but also delays our entry into the classroom, potentially exacerbating existing teacher shortages. Instead of requiring the Praxis, Hawai'i could explore reciprocity agreements with the Philippines, acknowledging the rigor of the LET. This approach would be far more efficient and respectful of our existing qualifications.

While specific course titles and institutional structures may differ, the fundamental knowledge and pedagogical skills required to be an effective educator are universal. Foreign Credential Evaluation (FCE) organizations, such as those belonging to the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES), meticulously assess international educational credentials, including teaching degrees. These evaluations compare the curriculum, coursework, and overall educational experience to U.S. standards, determining equivalency. A positive FCE outcome demonstrates that a foreign teaching degree meets the requirements for licensure or further study in the U.S., effectively proving its equivalence. Therefore, a teaching degree from the Philippines, when favorably evaluated by a NACES member, is indeed recognized as equivalent to a U.S. teaching degree.

SB 819 is not simply about individual teachers; it is about strengthening our entire public school system. It is about ensuring that our keiki have access to the best possible education by retaining qualified and experienced teachers. It is about strengthening our communities by fostering stability and continuity in our schools. It is about acknowledging the invaluable contributions of international educators who are dedicated to serving the students and families of Hawai'i. I

strongly urge you to support SB 819. It is an investment in our children, our schools, and the future of Hawai'i. Mahalo.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 5:16:40 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cristel Key Gapas	Testifying for Hawaii State Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Cristel Key Gapas, a J-1 teacher from the Philippines and currently a Preschool Special Education Teacher at Alvah Scott Elementary School in the Hawaii State Department of Education. As a J-1 visa holder, I am writing in strong support of SB819.

My experience as a J-1 teacher in Hawaii has been incredibly enriching and has provided me with the opportunity to make a meaningful, lasting impact on the school, students, and community. By working collaboratively with my colleagues, building positive relationships with students, and becoming involved in the community, I've been able to contribute to a better learning environment.

SB819 will allow qualified J-1 teachers like myself to remain in Hawaii for up to five more years with an international teacher license. This will provide our students with consistent instruction and support their academic success.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass this bill so that Hawaii's students can continue to benefit from the service of international teachers without unnecessary obstacles.

Aloha!

May I take this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to the Chair of the Board, esteemed members of the committee and/or legislatures for giving us the opportunity to provide testimonies in support of HB 439.

My name is Florante D. Romero a J1-Teacher at Mauka Lani Elementary School, Kapolei. I am submitting this testimony in support to the said Bill. This testimony emphasizes the importance of supporting international teachers, not just for our own benefit, but for the overall improvement of the educational system in the State particularly in Hawaii.

It cannot be denied that we, the J1 teachers, sacrificed our teaching positions in the Philippines to provide enough needs for our own families and of course our 'will' to serve as an international teacher. Of course, as an international teacher, I don't just serve as a teacher but to be an exemplary in all aspects. Being committed to provide the best education possible for our students in my/our utmost priority. However, many of us faces significant barriers such as taking the Praxis tests to continue serving the students. This is so because taking the said test requires time, effort and money especially in the application process. I would say that our qualifications should be recognized without undergoing state's standardized tests, and financial constraints.

May I humbly request the Chair, members of the committee, legislatures and other significant individuals to support this Bill to provide international teachers with a clear and fair path to licensure. With this, it will also create a more inclusive, diverse and effective educational system for all. This bill is not just an investment in international teachers for today's generation but in the future of education itself. Consequently, this Bill is an essential step toward strengthening the quality of education that may benefit the students because international teachers bring unique perspectives, skills, and expertise that enrich the learning environment in the State as a whole.

Thank you for your time and effort in this endeavor.

Mahalo!

Much Aloha,

Florante D. Romero
Elementary Teacher
Mauka Lani Elementary
Kapolei, HI

ALLIANCE ABROAD

Dear Members of the Consumer Protection & Commerce Committee:

My name is Crystal Bunts, and I am the Vice President of Programs at Alliance Abroad Group. Alliance Abroad is a visa sponsor for several J-1 programs, including the J-1 Teach Program. We have sponsored the program since 2009, and during the past 15 years have brought thousands of international teachers into the country to share their culture and teaching methodologies with students in K-12 schools. We have partnered with the Department of Education in Hawaii since 2019, sponsoring over 200 teachers into the state, with another 100 hired for the 2025-2026 school year.

When I visited our teachers in Hawaii last May I was able to travel to several schools across islands to meet our international teachers, domestic teachers, principals, students, and community members. Overwhelmingly the feedback on the impact of the program was positive and covered an improvement in school culture, students seeing themselves and their culture in their teachers, and dedication to succeeding in the classroom. We want to see that positive impact continue; therefore we ask for your support on passing SB 819. This bill creates an international visiting teacher license that honors former reciprocity agreements as well as the significant experience with which the international teachers come.

The current licensing process is cumbersome and creates barriers for international teachers to obtain certification. Those barriers are varied and include the stress of passing exams and of covering the associated costs. Additionally, until the teachers do pass these exams, they are not eligible for the salary differentials that others receive for being hired in a hard-to-staff location. In other words, the teachers are not appropriately paid for their experience or the location in which they are hired.

We have seen visiting international teaching licenses work well in numerous states. The most notable example we have is in the State of Texas, which is where our office is located. Similarly to Hawaii, the Texas Education Agency realized that the path to licensure was cumbersome and costly for their international teachers. The Texas Education Agency launched the VIT, allowing visa sponsors and districts to apply to sponsor and host international teachers on the program. Upon evidence that the sponsor is meeting Department of State eligibility requirements for their teachers, TEA approves the sponsor. Since Alliance Abroad is an approved sponsor, our teachers are able to apply for the VIT with a nominal application fee; this allows them to teach for the first three years. They can then apply for an extension for the additional two years once that extension is approved by the Department of State, allowing them to continue teaching for the district up to five years total.

ALLIANCE ABROAD

Without the passing of this bill, I must impress upon you the difficulty we as the visa sponsor will face. Already we have teachers who choose to leave Hawaii and move to another state that offers an easier licensure path. Without a change to the current licensure situation, we will have no choice but to re-evaluate our ability to sponsor the number of teachers we currently do in Hawaii, quite possibly determining we cannot sponsor any additional teachers at all.

I ask you to please vote in favor of SB819. A yes vote allows international teachers to continue coming to Hawaii on the J-1 visa and positively impacting students and communities. A yes vote allows teachers who are acclimating to a new home and a new culture to remove the worry of passing exams and paying for the associated costs. A yes vote allows equal pay for equal work by activating access to the differentials not currently available to international teachers prior to licensure. A yes vote for the international teachers is a yes vote for your communities and your children.

I would be happy to offer further information and support if you would like. You can reach me at the details below.

Warmly,

Crystal Bunts

Crystal Bunts

Vice President of Programs

Alliance Abroad Group, Inc.

512-904-1134

cbunts@allianceabroad.com

Testimony in Support of Hawaii's International Visiting Teacher License

Dear Members of the Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii. This initiative is crucial for enhancing the quality of education in your schools by allowing qualified international teachers to share their expertise and enrich the learning experiences of your students.

One exemplary model to consider is Minnesota's approach to licensing J-1 teachers, which has proven effective without requiring additional examinations. Minnesota has successfully implemented a streamlined licensing process that recognizes the qualifications and experiences of international teachers, facilitating their integration into the U.S. education system. This model can serve as a valuable reference for Hawaii as you develop your own International Visiting Teacher License.

Here are Several Key Benefits of Minnesota's Model:

1. **Recognition of International Credentials**: Minnesota evaluates the authenticity of international educators' credentials, allowing teachers with diverse backgrounds to teach in their classrooms. This ensures that only qualified individuals are granted licenses while respecting their previous training and experiences.
2. **Cultural Enrichment**: By allowing international educators to work in local schools, Minnesota has witnessed significant cultural exchange benefits. Students gain exposure to different perspectives and teaching methods, which fosters a more inclusive and globally-aware learning environment.
3. **Support and Mentorship**: Minnesota has established programs for J-1 teachers that include mentorship and professional development. This support helps international

educators acclimate to the U.S. educational system and enhances their teaching effectiveness.

4. ****Addressing Teacher Shortages****: Like many states, Hawaii faces challenges related to teacher shortages. By implementing the International Visiting Teacher License, we can attract qualified professionals from around the world to fill critical teaching positions, particularly in hard-to-staff subjects and areas.

5. ****Positive Community Impact****: The inclusion of international teachers has a ripple effect on communities, promoting diversity and fostering international understanding. This not only benefits students but also enriches the broader community through cultural events, language exchange programs, and collaborative projects.

The International Visiting Teacher License represents a vital opportunity for Hawaii to enhance its educational landscape. By adopting a licensing process similar to Minnesota's, you can ensure that you attract talented educators who will contribute positively to your schools and communities.

I urge you to support the passage of this important legislation, which will pave the way for a brighter educational future in Hawaii.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Allison Chandler

Teaching & Learning Coordinator, International Teaching Coordinator - MN Public School #2365

allison.chandler@gfwschools.org (507) 207-2301

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 12:36:49 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Adrian Ardiente	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am Adrian Ardiente, a J-1 teacher holding a Hawaii teaching license for Grades 6–12. I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of HB 439, a bill that seeks to establish an international visiting teacher license. In 2021, I was granted the opportunity to teach at Waimea Canyon Middle School, where I continue to serve today. I was among the first international teachers given the privilege to work in Hawaii public schools and was the sole J-1 educator in the Kauai district from 2021 to 2023. Being an international teacher comes with unique challenges—being far from home and family, adjusting to a new education system, and navigating cultural differences. However, I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support from my school administrators and colleagues, who have guided me throughout my transition and continue to equip me with the necessary tools for success in my classroom. The Department of Education (DOE) Kauai District has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to ensuring that J-1 teachers are well-supported. Through various professional development initiatives at both the school and district levels, I have gained invaluable training in classroom management, teaching strategies, and understanding the Hawaii public school system. This school year, a specialized, ongoing professional development program tailored specifically for J-1 Filipino teachers has been implemented, further strengthening our capacity to contribute effectively to our students' education. Through the J-1 program, I have had the privilege not only to teach but also to share and learn new cultural perspectives within my school and the broader community. I take great pride in serving students of Filipino heritage, as Filipinos represent one of the largest ethnic groups in Hawaii. Beyond the classroom, I actively engage in school and community initiatives. I am a member of the Waimea Canyon Middle School Community Council (SCC), an integral leadership body that collaborates with administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members to enhance student achievement. Additionally, I serve as a board member of the Kauai Visayan Club Organization, a distinguished nonprofit dedicated to preserving and promoting Visayan cultural heritage through educational programs and cultural exchanges. On October 26, 2024, I had the honor of chairing the International Costume Ball, themed "Investing in Tomorrow's Leaders." This fundraising event supported Kumu's Cupboard, a nonprofit organization in Kauai that provides free school supplies to students and teachers. Through such initiatives, I have been able to give back to the community that has warmly welcomed me. The passage of HB 439 would be a transformative milestone for my fellow J-1 educators. This bill would not only extend their stay for up to five years but also provide them with the same invaluable opportunities I have experienced. By alleviating the burden of passing the Praxis exam, international teachers could focus entirely on delivering meaningful and impactful

learning experiences for their students. I am just one of many J-1 teachers striving to make a difference in Hawaii's public schools—one lesson, one student, and one day at a time. My journey in Hawaii, both within the classroom and in the community, has been deeply enriching, fostering my personal and professional growth. As cliché as it may sound, Kauai has truly become my home away from home. Mahalo for your time and consideration. I sincerely hope for your support in passing HB 439, which will empower more international educators to contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's schools and communities.

With gratitude,

Adrian Ardiente



ReplyForward

Aloha, my name is Zhylaine Dacoron, and I am writing to express my strong support for the SB819 that would require the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders, such as myself. I am a dedicated educator here in Hawai'i, and I firmly believe that this bill will not only honor the exceptional experience and qualifications that teachers like me bring to our schools, but also allow us to continue making a meaningful impact on our students.

I have had the privilege of teaching in Hawai'i for 6 months now, and during this time, I've worked hard to create an inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning environment for my students. I'm proud to have contributed to their growth and success, whether it's through personalized instruction, fostering a love of learning, or helping them develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. My background and diverse experience as a teacher—honed in my home country, where I earned my teaching license and underwent rigorous training—have equipped me to offer unique perspectives and methods in the classroom.

However, as a foreign-trained educator, I've faced significant challenges when it comes to obtaining a teaching license in Hawai'i. While my qualifications have been evaluated and recognized, the process of taking and passing the required exams is expensive and logistically difficult. In some cases, scheduling the exams locally on Maui can be difficult. I have often found myself running out of available exam dates here, which means I need to travel to Oahu in order to take exams that are not available locally. This will result in additional financial burdens and time away from my students, which is particularly challenging for teachers who are committed to being present for their students' learning. This often means I must wait for an open exam slot on Maui before I can proceed with the testing. These barriers create unnecessary hardships for teachers like me, who are committed to making a difference here in Hawai'i but are limited by the current system.

This bill will alleviate these challenges by providing a clear and accessible path for international teachers to earn a license that reflects their expertise and qualifications. Having a specific international teacher license will streamline the process for teachers who have already demonstrated their abilities abroad and make it easier for us to continue contributing to the Hawai'i educational system. The ability to teach without unnecessary barriers would allow us to focus on what truly matters—our students' success.

I truly believe that the diverse backgrounds and experiences of international educators add significant value to our classrooms, and this bill recognizes that value. By establishing criteria for an international teacher license, we can ensure that more highly qualified educators have the opportunity to share their knowledge, enhance the learning experience, and contribute to the future success of our students and communities.

Thank you for considering this important bill. I hope that you will support it so that teachers like me can continue making a positive and lasting impact here in Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui loa,
Zhylaine Dacoron
6th grade ELA/ Social Studies/ Reading Workshop Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School
zhylainecdacoron@gmail.com/ 8083853349

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 4:48:07 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
RODRIGO DOMINGO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rodrigo T. Domingo, and I am a Science and AVID teacher at Henry Perrine Baldwin High School. I also serve as the adviser of the Bayanihan Club (Filipino Club) and the choreographer and Dance Director of Maui’s first-ever Naragsak Dance Troupe—an organization dedicated to preserving and promoting Filipino culture among young Filipinos born and raised in Hawaii. Our dance troupe includes retired educators who are passionate about cultural education and community engagement.

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As a J-1 teacher, I bring years of experience and dedication to the classroom, enriching the educational landscape of Hawaii. I also hold professional teaching licenses from the Philippines. However, despite my qualifications and unwavering commitment, international educators like myself face significant challenges that hinder our ability to thrive and contribute fully.

While I am honored to teach Hawaii’s students, it has also come at a great sacrifice. The high cost of living, especially housing expenses, makes financial stability nearly impossible. Classified as emergency hire teachers, we receive lower salaries than fully licensed educators, even though we perform the same responsibilities and meet the same demands.

SB 819 would be a transformative solution. If passed, this bill would:

- ✔ Grant international teachers a full teaching license, eliminating unnecessary testing barriers.
- ✔ Ensure equal pay and differentials comparable to licensed teachers, allowing us to provide for our families.
- ✔ Extend our stay for five years, ensuring students receive consistency in their education and allowing us to invest more deeply in our schools and communities.

Hawaii is grappling with a severe teacher shortage, and international educators are already here, filling critical gaps and making a meaningful impact. We are dedicated, highly qualified, and committed to the success of Hawaii's keiki. However, without the stability and recognition that SB 819 provides, our ability to continue serving Hawaii's students remains uncertain.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB 819 and support international teachers in their mission to educate and uplift Hawaii's students. This bill is not just about fairness—it is about ensuring that every student has access to the high-quality education they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

RODRIGO T. DOMINGO

Science & AVID Teacher | Henry Perrine Baldwin High School, Wailuku, Maui

Bayanihan Club Adviser | Choreographer & Dance Director, Naragsak Dance Troupe

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 5:07:44 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
HAZEL T. DAMIAN	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

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

My name is Hazel T. Damian, and I am a teacher at King Kekaulike High School. I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. As a Special Inclusion Teacher in Hawaii, I have dedicated my career to fostering an inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment for students with diverse needs.

In my role, I work closely with students who require specialized instruction and accommodations to succeed. I am committed to ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, receive the individualized support they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Through differentiated instruction, behavioral support, and collaborative teaching strategies, I strive to make learning accessible and meaningful for every student.

My training in Special Education has equipped me with the essential skills to effectively support students with disabilities. I have experience conducting Individualized Inclusive Education Plan (IIEP) meetings and collaborating with parents, general education teachers, and support staff to develop personalized learning plans that align with students’ strengths and challenges. Additionally, my experience working with special education students has deepened my understanding of their unique needs, including behavior management techniques, assistive technology integration, and fostering independence in learning.

The passage of HB 439 will have a significant impact on my professional growth and my ability to continue serving Hawaii’s students effectively. This license would provide access to further training, advanced teaching strategies, and innovative approaches to Special Education, ultimately enhancing the quality of instruction I provide. Furthermore, obtaining this license would allow me to earn a higher salary, which is essential for supporting my daughter and managing the increasing cost of living in Maui, particularly the high rental prices.

By supporting HB 439, you are not only recognizing the valuable contributions of international teachers but also ensuring that Hawaii's students receive the best possible education from well-trained, dedicated professionals. I remain committed to my role as a Special Inclusion Teacher and to making a lasting impact on my students and the broader school community.

Mahalo for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439.

Hazel T. Damian

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee

I am Ligaya R. de Vera, and I am an Inclusion Teacher of Math, Grade 7 and 8 at Lokelani Intermediate School, I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB819 which seeks to create an international teacher license for qualified visa holder. My time as a J-1 teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School has been an incredibly rewarding experience. I've been consistently impressed by the dedication of the staff, the resilience of the students, and the supportive atmosphere within the school community. I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this positive learning environment. This exchange has broadened my understanding of education and has allowed me to develop more culturally responsive teaching practices. I have seen how exposure to different cultures and viewpoints can spark curiosity, promote empathy, and prepare students to thrive in an increasingly globalized society.

And from the day 1, I felt welcomed and supported by the faculty and staff, fostering a collaborative environment that encourages growth and innovation.

As an educator, I have dedicated my career to nurturing young minds and ensuring that each of my students receives a high-quality education tailored to their needs. Whether it's helping a student grasp a challenging concept, witnessing their confidence grow as they master a new skill, or simply providing a supportive presence during a difficult day, I strive to make a positive difference in their lives. I've focused on creating a classroom where every student feels safe, respected, and empowered to learn. It's truly inspiring to witness their growth, both academically and personally.

Our training and experience as J-1 teachers have provided us with a solid foundation for this work. We've been equipped with valuable strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom management, and building positive relationships with students. We've learned how to adapt our teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of our learners, recognizing that each student has unique strengths and challenges. This training has been essential in helping us create an inclusive and engaging learning environment for all. Furthermore, the collaborative environment at Lokelani has allowed us to learn from experienced educators and share best practices, further enhancing our skills and knowledge.

Beyond the classroom, I've actively engaged with the school and wider Filipino community. This has included participating in events like cultural festivals, community center events, church gatherings like the Feast of Sto. Niño. I've enjoyed contributing to extracurricular activities, including a J1 teacher cultural dance group and the church choir. These experiences have provided valuable opportunities for cultural exchange, allowing me to share my heritage while immersing myself in the local traditions. I firmly believe that a thriving school community is crucial, and I'm dedicated to contributing to that sense of belonging and support.

In conclusion, my time at Lokelani Intermediate School has been a mutually experience. I'm confident that the work we're doing is making a lasting impact on our students, preparing them for success in high school and beyond. This experience has been invaluable, both professionally and personally, and I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow alongside the students and staff at Lokelani.

My experiences and involvement within the Hawaiian educational system have highlighted the challenges faced by international teachers. As a dedicated teacher licensed in the Philippines, I've witnessed firsthand the struggles in navigating the Praxis examination requirements. While I appreciate the value of standardized assessments like the Praxis, many Filipino teachers, myself included, encounter significant hurdles in meeting these requirements. These challenges create both a financial and emotional burden, adding stress and complexity to the process of obtaining licensure in Hawaii.

I believe that HB439 is a vital step towards strengthening Hawaii's educational system and ensuring that all students have access to high-quality teachers. It will create a more inclusive and diverse teaching workforce, which will ultimately benefit our learners and our communities. I urge you to support HB439 and help bring this important legislation to reality.

Sincerely,

LIGAYA R. DE VERA
Inclusion Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School
Kihei, Hawaii

Aloha,

My name is Ligaya R. de Vera, I am writing in strong support of HB439, which proposes establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders in Hawaii. As a J-1 visiting teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School, I have experienced firsthand the value and contributions that international educators bring to our classrooms and communities.

My time at Lokelani Intermediate School has been incredibly rewarding. I have had the opportunity to share my [mention your area of expertise or cultural background] with my students, enriching their learning experience and exposing them to diverse perspectives. I've also learned so much from my colleagues and the local community about Hawaiian culture and educational practices. This cultural exchange has been invaluable, broadening my understanding of teaching and fostering a deeper appreciation for the diverse backgrounds of our students.

However, the current process for international teachers seeking licensure can be challenging and complex. HB439 offers a crucial solution by creating a clear, accessible, and fair pathway for qualified visa holders to obtain licensure in Hawaii. This will not only benefit international teachers like me, but also, more importantly, it will benefit our students.

By streamlining the licensure process, HB439 will make it easier for Hawaii's schools to attract and retain qualified international teachers. These teachers bring unique skills, experiences, and perspectives that enhance the quality of education for all students. They can fill critical teaching shortages, particularly in specialized subjects or underserved areas. Moreover, they serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting global understanding and preparing our students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

I believe that HB439 is a vital step towards strengthening Hawaii's educational system and ensuring that all students have access to high-quality teachers. It will create a more inclusive and diverse teaching workforce, which will ultimately benefit our learners and our communities. I urge you to support HB439 and help bring this important legislation to fruition.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ligaya R. de Vera
J-1 Visiting Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 5:14:03 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Crystal Rowe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 5, 2025

Senate

Hawaii State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Honorable Senators Michelle Kidani, Chair

Committee of Consumer Protection & Commerce

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair & Members

Dear Chair Kidani and Members:

RE: [SB819](#)

Aloha! My name is Crystal Valenciano Rowe. I am writing in support of this legislation that recognizes J-1 educators who have the qualifications and experiences to be considered in this pathway towards an international teacher license.

I grew up in the K-12 public schools on Kaua'i, a child of immigrant parents from the Philippines. My father was a welder for Olokele Sugar Plantation and my mother became an LPN after having 6 children. As we attended school, I had no teacher of my ethnicity until I was in the fifth grade. Then up through my high school graduation, there were no other Filipino teachers in my educational program. Many of us with roots from the plantation went on to colleges and became teachers ourselves in all levels of education. For 42 plus years, I served my community on Kaua'i as a Special Education and Transition Teacher from 1977-2021 in K-12 schools with an emphasis in secondary education.

As a classroom teacher and with time spent with registrars and administrators at several schools, I saw how difficult it was to fill positions especially in the middle and high schools

in the areas of STEM. Over the years, there was an increasing shortage of teachers in these critical problem solving areas. Principals had to be creative in utilizing their staff to address these subject areas and to build capacity.

The decision made by the Department of Education and legislators to look towards the Philippines for teachers to fill these critical areas was a very innovative way to look “outside the box”. I was aware of the first year of the J-1 teachers only as a means of providing transportation and as a fellow educator on the island. However, with the second group of teachers, I was determined to become more involved, especially with two teachers who taught at schools close to my home.

At the orientation event held in July, I was aware of the enthusiasm by the principals of the schools with J-1 teachers. They were impressed at the dedication and commitment of these teachers to do their best and of their strong support of students in their care..

In speaking to the two teachers I chose to mentor, it became apparent to me that these were highly experienced, highly trained, and professional teachers. One had been teaching for 10 years and one had been a principal at three different secondary schools. I mistakenly thought that these were new teachers on their first teaching assignment. No, these are experienced teachers who have spent quality time working with rigorous curriculum, analyzing assessments, and being consistent role models to students.

These teachers are already making a positive impact on our students as many of our Filipino immigrant students can identify with the culture and challenges of these teachers. To see that type of representation does much towards a student’s confidence level and awareness of possibilities. They are also making a positive impact on our community as they participate in community events and assist in charitable activities.

This pathway towards an international teaching license would go far in validating the important work they are doing and acknowledging their years of experience and competence. They are here sacrificing their personal lives as many have spouses or children back home.

I strongly support and urge your committee to be like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina and be a leader in developing a pathway towards an international teacher license. What better place than in our very diverse Hawai’i? This will provide an incentive to these teachers that their accomplishments here will lead towards a more global recognition.

Mahalo for your time and attention.

Crystal M. V. Rowe

Retired Special Education/Transition Educator

Kalaheo Elementary, Kapa’a Middle School, Kapa’a High School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 5:24:37 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Norven Perez Badillo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Norven P. Badillo, a STEM teacher at Kahakai Elementary School, and I am honored to be part of this vibrant educational community here in Hawaii. As a new J1 teacher in the United States, particularly in Hawaii, the experience has been nothing short of a transformative journey. Coming from the Philippines, I've faced various challenges as I adapt to the differences in lifestyle, teaching methodologies, and cultural norms. These changes, while daunting at times, have provided me with invaluable opportunities for growth both as an educator and as an individual. The adjustment to the American education system, the diverse learning styles of my students, and the dynamics of working with new colleagues have required patience, resilience, and an open heart. However, one of the most rewarding aspects of this experience has been the chance to contribute my passion for teaching and learning to a new community. The Filipino teachers here, including myself, bring with us not only a wealth of knowledge but also an intrinsic love for teaching and nurturing young minds. This passion, combined with our unique perspectives and experiences, allows us to build meaningful connections with our students and their families, making the journey of teaching in this new environment much more fulfilling. As a STEM teacher at Kahakai Elementary, I am dedicated to bringing innovative and cutting-edge knowledge to our students. In particular, I focus on coding and programming, subjects that are increasingly relevant in today's technology-driven world. By equipping our students with the foundational skills of coding, I aim to empower them with the critical thinking and problem-solving abilities that are essential for success in the 21st century. Seeing the excitement and curiosity in their eyes as they begin to grasp the concepts of coding has been one of the highlights of my teaching career. One of the most significant milestones I've had so far was hosting our STEM Night, an event that I can proudly say was a huge success for our school community. This event wasn't just a celebration of STEM learning, but also an opportunity for our students' families to engage in the learning process alongside their children. It was heartwarming to see families come together to explore the fascinating world of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and to witness the bond that formed between the students, their families, and the school. The enthusiasm and participation of everyone involved demonstrated the power of collaboration and community, reinforcing the idea that learning doesn't stop at the classroom door. It continues in the home, in the community, and throughout life. Overall, while the transition to a new country and a new teaching environment presented its challenges, I firmly believe that the work we do as educators—especially as STEM teachers—is making a significant impact. We are not just teaching our students about coding or problem-solving, but also helping them build the confidence and curiosity they need to succeed in the future. The journey may have its hurdles, but the rewards are incredibly fulfilling, and I am

grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the growth and development of the next generation of learners here in Hawaii.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 5:22:31 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aina Mae Ranises	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Please allow me to introduce first myself. I'm Aina Mae Ranises, a Special Education Teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I've been teaching for 15 years in one of the public schools in the Philippines before I applied as a J1 teacher in Hawaii.

At first, I was hesitant for some reasons. First, I need to leave my teaching position in my home country in fact I already had a stable job. Then, I'm very far from my family and living in a foreign land is not easy. Lastly, the expenses that I need to spend just to get through of the program. Honestly, my passion is to teach the children because I want to be an agent of change. I don't want to teach only their minds but I want also to touch their hearts and transform their lives. That's why I decided to push through my application regardless of the hindrances or hesistancies that I'll face in the future.

When I arrived in Maui, I was amazed by the place as well as the environment and I even told myself if given the opportunity, I want to work here a little bit longer before I'll go home to my home countrty. In terms of the school community that I'm part now, I really like to work even if we are still short staffed because I love what I'm doing and I want to support the kids in school. Teaching students with different special needs, different nationalities are quiet challenging but I want to be part of their success to live in the community independently that they belong. Although there are some challenges but I always think that an easy task becomes difficult if you do it with reluctant. Thankfully, I was able to surpass some of the challenges with the support of the school administrators, department head, colleagues, and most of all my strong faith in God.

Lastly, I'm knocking each one of you to please hear our side and please us give us the chance to spend more years in your country so that we will be able to finish our program successfully. We will be able to do this if you are going to pass the bill for SB819 relating to educationand for the exemption of the Praxis Exam. There are a lot of things to be considered in taking the exam like the exam fees, readiness to take the exam, etc. To have a teaching license here in Hawaii is one of the keys that we will be able to finish our program successfully and I still prefer to teach here compared to the other states if I'm given a chance. Thank you and more power.

Mahalo,

Aina Mae Ranises

Being selected as one of the international exchange teachers is an honor. I, Melvin C. Dumelod, have always believed that teaching is the noblest profession, and I am equipped with passion and dedication to molding each learner.

I've been given the chance to share my expertise, gain knowledge from one of the most notable educational systems, and become fully involved in a kind and diverse community. However, the string of qualifying tests that foreign teachers must take has put us under needless stress and pressure to demonstrate our teaching abilities despite our prior training and experience. Hence, I am writing to present my full support for SB 819.

While I understand the importance of maintaining high educational standards, the multiple exams required for us are overwhelming. Time and effort are diverted from what matters which are our students. This burden is further increased by the monetary expense, psychological toll, and time constraints brought on by visa restrictions. To stay in the classrooms where we are already having an impact, we are compelled to put exam preparation ahead of lesson planning, student engagement, and professional growth.

Staying in Hawaii for the entire four to five years of the exchange program is crucial not only for my personal and professional development but also for the advantage of the students and the broader school community. This duration will enable me to gain a richer understanding of the American educational framework, implement innovative teaching methods, and enhance the cultural and academic diversity within our school.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB 819 to ensure that international teachers can focus on delivering lessons with utmost excellence. By alleviating the burden of excessive qualifying exams and permitting educators like me to remain for the entire program duration, we can continue to deliver high-quality education while also enhancing our professional skills. Our aim is not just to teach but to make a meaningful difference in our students' lives, and for that, we require the necessary time and opportunities.

Hawaii has embraced me wholeheartedly, and I wish to reciprocate by dedicating my knowledge, passion, and expertise to my students. I aspire to continue this journey, not merely as a visitor, but as an educator who is genuinely committed to shaping the future of Hawaii's students.

As part of the International Teachers here in Hawaii, my compatriots and I wholeheartedly serve our work as teachers to our students knowing that we share not only knowledge but love as second parents to them while they are at school, However, the need to prepare for multiple licensure exams while managing our teaching responsibilities places unnecessary stress on us and takes valuable time away from lesson planning and student engagement. As a teacher of young people with special needs, there are many subjects they must learn, especially the life skills that are important for them so that they can use them in their future life and so that they can have their own lives and abilities that expect nothing else but to be able to stand on their own feet, We teachers, although we teach a different race, our love for our work has not changed and our love for the students we teach is also there. We are also open to learning from our schoolmates as part of the Cultural Exchange Program and we are also ready to help as much as we can and learn the different methods and cultures that exist in the country of Hawaii. In my teaching now although it will take three to five years, I can say that my dedication to teaching will remain there no matter where I go not only the ability to share knowledge but to love my work, students and co-workers. My students today I can see, and I can tell that there is a change in them when it comes to cognitive, sociability, love for others and their readiness to stand on their own feet using their own abilities. I love my job, I love my School, students and coworkers and most of all I love Hawaii so I hope the law about HB439 is pass for our teachers who want to continue our teaching here in Hawaii as far as possible of our ability and we can continue teaching and shaping the students.

Testimony for SB819

My name is Rowena Aldana, and I am a J-1 teacher currently teaching 9th Grade Science at Henry Perrine Baldwin High School in Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii. I am honored to share my perspective as an international educator directly benefiting from the provisions that SB819 seeks to enhance.

As a J-1 teacher, I have the privilege of bringing diverse cultural perspectives into the classroom, enriching the educational experiences of my students while also fostering global awareness and cross-cultural understanding. This program not only allows me to share my knowledge and heritage but also to learn from my students and colleagues, creating a dynamic, inclusive learning environment.

SB819 is critical because it supports the professional growth and well-being of J-1 teachers like myself. Specifically, this bill addresses the process for obtaining an international teacher license in Hawaii, which is essential for ensuring that qualified educators from around the world can continue to teach and contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's classrooms. By streamlining licensing procedures, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and enhancing access to resources, SB819 will make it more feasible for passionate, qualified educators to thrive both professionally and personally.

Moreover, this bill recognizes the value of cultural exchange as a cornerstone of educational excellence. In an increasingly interconnected world, exposing students to diverse perspectives prepares them to be thoughtful, informed global citizens. The presence of international teachers helps bridge cultural gaps and promotes mutual respect and understanding among students from different backgrounds.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to support SB819. This legislation will not only benefit J-1 teachers by facilitating the international teacher licensing process but also enrich the educational experiences of countless students across Hawaii.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

ROWENA ALDANA

J-1 Teacher

H.P.BALDWIN HIGH SCHOOL

February 05, 2025

February 04, 2025

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819, a bill that recognizes and values the experience and qualifications of teachers like myself, who have earned their credentials internationally and have demonstrated commitment to student success here in Hawaii.

As an educator, I foster academic excellence, support student growth, and create a nurturing environment in my school. Every day, I witness the positive impact I have on my students, helping them reach their full potential and guiding them toward a bright future. My background and training have equipped me with the tools necessary to inspire young minds, implement effective teaching strategies, and contribute meaningfully to my school community.

However, despite my experience and credentials, the current licensure requirements present significant barriers that make it difficult for qualified teachers like myself to continue serving Hawaii's students. The Praxis exams, while intended to standardize teacher qualifications, is costly. The high fees associated with these tests create financial strain. This burden is challenging for teachers like me.

SB 819 is a step in the right direction. By honoring the exceptional experience and qualifications that educators have demonstrated through foreign-evaluated transcripts and international licensure, this bill acknowledges the rigorous training and dedication we bring to our classrooms. Recognizing these qualifications would not only ease the licensure process for experienced educators but also help alleviate Hawaii's ongoing teacher shortage by retaining skilled professionals who are already making a difference in our schools.

Passing SB 819 would demonstrate the state's commitment to valuing and supporting its educators while ensuring that students continue to benefit from highly qualified teachers. I urge you to support this bill and remove unnecessary barriers that prevent dedicated teachers from fully contributing to Hawaii's education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,


Cecé B. Medina

(808) 830 – 9055

Staff (Gen. Education Teacher)

Wailuku Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 1:01:00 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JOY HERMOSO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 6, 2025

Sir/Madam:

Aloha!

My name is Joy Hermoso and I am currently a J1 teacher in Hawaii. Coming from the Philippines I have been passionate about education, and having the opportunity to teach in the US has been a transformative experience for me both professionally and personally. It was an honor to me to have a learning opportunity to deal with students with special needs and I keep on learning, exploring and expanding more my teaching profession here in Hawaii.

In addition, one of the greatest advantages of having experienced as a J1 Teacher is the ability to obtain a Hawaii Teaching License without going through the rigorous process of taking the state's licensure exams. Since I already hold a valid teaching license from my home country and have met the necessary qualifications through my J1 program, I still need to receive a Hawaii teaching license through reciprocity. This process has saved me time, effort, and stress of preparing for and passing additional exams.

I am writing in strong support of SB819. Recognizing educators like myself is essential in promoting quality education and acknowledging the invaluable contributions of dedicated teachers that ensure receive recognition, resources and opportunities we deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

**JOY HERMOSO
SPED-Inclusion Teacher**

SOLOMON ES/OAHU

My Testimony as a J1 Teacher in Hawaii:

I am Mr. Anelito M. Ladres, currently living in Hawaii as a J1 teacher at Wailuku Elementary School. My experience as a J1 teacher in Hawaii has been incredibly rewarding, both professionally and personally. I came to Hawaii with a passion for teaching and a desire to learn about different cultures. The islands' rich diversity and strong sense of community made it the perfect place for me to grow in my career and broaden my horizons.

The teachers and staff at my school have been incredibly welcoming and supportive from day one. I quickly felt like part of the team, and the professional development opportunities have been abundant. I was able to collaborate with local educators, gain new teaching strategies, and learn about the unique educational needs of students here in Hawaii. The students I have this school year are always expressing their appreciation, telling me they've learned a lot from the way I teach using a variety of strategies and techniques. They particularly appreciate my deep understanding of the subject content and how I manage them in the classroom.

I have also felt immense gratitude from the parents of my students. They often commend my work and recognize my dedication. Many parents have mentioned that for the 2024-2025 school year, their children have had one consistent teacher without experiencing substitute teachers for the entire year. It is truly an honor to be recognized for my commitment to the students' education.

However, there is one matter I hope to address: I wish that the Department of Education here in Hawaii would allow our licenses to be reciprocated or converted into Hawaii teaching licenses. This would enable us to remain in Hawaii for the full duration of our contracts, which is typically five years.

Preparing for and passing the Praxis exam is a challenge, as it requires sufficient time to study and prepare. Before coming to Hawaii, I underwent interviews and submitted valid documents, including my teaching license and ID from the Philippines.

As foreign teachers, we are dedicated to providing consistent and high-quality education to our students. We are fully committed to doing our best to help produce competitive learners who can take pride in their achievements and integrity.

This experience has not only made me a better teacher but has also broadened my understanding of the world. The J1 program has opened doors to new friendships, professional opportunities, and memories that I will cherish forever. I truly feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to teach in such an inspiring place, specifically here in Maui, Hawaii.

I hope that those who read this will consider my concern about the conversion of our Philippine teaching licenses into Hawaii teaching licenses.

Sincerely,

Anelito M. Ladres

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:34:07 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JEOHANA PEARL JAMON	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

It is an honor for me to testify in favor of SB819; my name is Jeohana Jamon. To guarantee that highly qualified foreign instructors like myself have a fair and transparent road to licensure in Hawai‘i, this measure is an essential step.

My foreign-evaluated transcripts and my domestic teaching license, as well as my years of professional development as an educator, demonstrate the breadth of knowledge and abilities I have developed over the course of my career. The state acknowledges the enormous contribution that foreign educators make to Hawaii's educational system by acknowledging these credentials. We enhance our students' experiences by offering a global approach to learning, specific knowledge, and a variety of viewpoints.

I have had the honor of working as a teacher at a school that promotes a welcoming and encouraging learning environment. In addition to promoting excellence, this institution respects students' cultural backgrounds and makes sure that a variety of learning styles are accommodated. My approach to education has been formed by the emphasis on critical thinking and ongoing professional development, which has strengthened my dedication to student success and lifelong learning.

In addition, I have a deeper knowledge of the significance of integrating Hawaiian cultural values into the classroom thanks to my training in Hawai‘i. By focusing on ideas like 'ohana (family), mālama (care), and kuleana (responsibility), I have been able to establish closer bonds with my students and foster a polite and supportive learning environment. As an educator, this cultural sensitivity has been crucial to my development on the job and personally.

The road to complete licensure in Hawai‘i, however, is fraught with difficulties. The financial burden of mandatory exams is significant, and further challenges are created by their limited availability, which frequently necessitates travel to O‘ahu. For foreign educators who are already devoted to their students and their career, these obstacles may be disappointing. The legislature will provide a much-needed remedy by adopting SB819, guaranteeing that qualified and enthusiastic teachers can continue to serve Hawaii's students without needless hardship.

I implore the committee to back SB819 and acknowledge the role that foreign teachers have had in bolstering Hawaii's educational system. Thank you for your thoughtfulness and time.

Sincerely,

Jeohana Jamon

J1 Teacher

Kihei Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:48:03 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
APPLE JANE DONADILLO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

"Good afternoon Members of the Committee, my name is Apple Jane Donadillo, and I'm a Computer Science teacher at Nanakuli High and Intermediate School. I'm a J-1 teacher, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my experiences and speak in support of the proposed measures regarding J-1 teachers in Hawaii.

Coming to Hawaii to teach has been an incredible experience. I'm passionate about sharing my expertise with the students at Nanakuli High and Intermediate School and learning from the rich culture and traditions of this beautiful island. I've been so warmly welcomed by the community, my colleagues, and my students. I've seen firsthand the positive impact I can have on my students' lives, both inside and outside the classroom. For example," I've been able to share my knowledge and expertise as a teacher" , "I've been able to help students who were struggling with the lesson by using Project Inquiry Approach. Seeing their confidence grow has been incredibly rewarding."I'm also learning so much from my fellow teachers and contributing to a collaborative and supportive school environment. I enjoy NIT MEETING AND PD: "sharing my own cultural traditions with the students" or "collaborating with other teachers on new curriculum development".

The opportunity to stay in Hawaii for five years if licensed would be invaluable. The current two-year limit makes it difficult to fully integrate into the community and build lasting relationships with students and colleagues. Knowing I could stay longer would allow me to invest even more deeply in the school and the community, and provide greater stability for my students. Continuity is so important for their learning and well-being.

It's also essential that J-1 teachers receive equal pay for equal work, including access to the same differentials as other licensed teachers. We bring valuable skills and experience to the classroom, and we should be compensated fairly for our contributions. My international credentials represent years of study and dedication to my profession. It would be a great relief to have these credentials fully recognized and to not have to face the added burden of the Praxis exams when I already hold international licenses and degrees. This would allow me to focus on what truly matters: my students.

By supporting these measures, you're not only supporting J-1 teachers like myself, but you're also investing in the future of Hawaii's keiki. We are dedicated educators who are passionate about making a difference. Thank you for your time and consideration."

Testimony in Support of SB819- International Visiting Teacher License

Chairperson and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I'm Jamiefel P. Pungtilan, a Math teacher at James Campbell High School. I'm submitting this testimony in support of SB 819 - that seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified J1 visa holders.

As a teacher handling Grade 9 Inclusion class, I'm deeply committed to the success of my students, especially those with diverse learning needs. In our classroom, I'm working closely with students from various backgrounds, including those who have special education needs and accommodations. Together with my co-teacher, we often stay after school to offer additional support to these students. This after-school tutoring is helpful for our inclusion students, as it gives them the extra time and attention they need to grasp key concepts.

As an educator committed to providing quality instruction to my students, particularly those in the inclusion program, I recognize the significant impact this bill could have on addressing the teacher shortages in the schools in Hawaii. One of the most important aspects of this bill is the acknowledgment of the equivalent education that international teachers possess, which meets the standards required in the United States. Many qualified international educators hold degrees and credentials that are fully comparable to those required here. However, despite this equivalent qualification, we international teachers often face numerous financial and logistical barriers.

The current requirement for passing the Praxis exams places a significant burden on us, not only financially but also in terms of the extra time and preparation it demands instead of focusing on the preparation for our lessons. This bill acknowledges the high standards of education, qualifications, and experience we possess from our home countries and creates an equitable pathway for us to continue making a positive and meaningful impact in Hawaii's schools.

By establishing the International Visiting Teacher License, this can remove many of the barriers that we international educators face. This will not only help address teacher shortages but also expose students to diverse teaching methods and global perspectives, which are vital in today's interconnected world. The value international teachers can bring to our classrooms is immense, and by supporting this bill, we are ensuring that students will have access to high-quality, culturally rich educational experiences.

I strongly urge you to support this bill and help create more opportunities for international collaboration in Hawaii's schools. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jamiefel Pungtilan
Math Teacher
James Campbell High School

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 819

Honorable Members of the Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for S.B. 819, which aims to create a fair licensing pathway for international teachers like me. As a Filipino J-1 teacher at Wailuku Elementary School, I've seen how my presence has made a positive impact, especially on my Filipino students. Having a teacher who understands their language, culture, and experiences helps them feel more connected, confident, and motivated to succeed in school. This connection fosters not just academic growth but also a stronger sense of identity and belonging.

Despite these contributions, the current licensing process poses challenges that limit our potential as educators. The complex and costly requirements take time away from what truly matters—helping students thrive. By passing S.B. 819, Hawaii will not only recognize the skills and dedication of international teachers but also ensure that students continue to benefit from a diverse and inclusive learning environment.

Thank you for considering this important bill, which will support both educators and students across the state.

Respectfully submitted,

MANUEL JAYJAY D. ASUNCION III

Filipino J-1 Teacher

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:58:28 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Franchette Alodia Ferrer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Franchette Alodia Ferrer, Special Education teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License. As a special education teacher, I have seen firsthand the challenges that schools in Hawaii face in recruiting and retaining qualified educators, particularly in specialized fields like special education. This bill provides an important solution to address our critical teacher shortages while enriching our education system with diverse, highly skilled professionals.

As a special education teacher, I bring patience, adaptability, and a deep commitment to individualized instruction to ensure that every student reaches their full potential. My role requires strong problem-solving skills, collaboration with families and other professionals, and the ability to differentiate instruction to meet diverse learning needs. I work with students who require specialized support, helping them develop academic, social, and life skills in a nurturing and structured environment. These same qualities—dedication, compassion, and resilience—are shared by many international educators who are eager to contribute to our schools and state.

Many educators in Hawaii struggle with housing affordability, high transportation costs, and the overall expenses of living in the state. These financial burdens contribute to frequent teacher turnover and unfilled positions, which directly impact student learning. Additionally, the Praxis exam poses another significant barrier for many potential educators, including myself. While subject-matter expertise and teaching experience are critical, standardized tests do not always accurately measure a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom. Many talented educators who have years of experience and specialized training

struggle with the financial and logistical challenges of the Praxis exam. Providing alternative pathways for international educators through SB819 would help address this issue while maintaining high teaching standards.

I strongly urge you to support SB819. Addressing our teacher shortages, particularly in special education, is crucial for the success of Hawaii's keiki and the future of education in Hawaii. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 9:03:34 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andemar Jamon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Andemar Jamon and I am honored to share my professional testimony regarding my enriching experiences as an educator in Hawaii and in strong support of SB819.

Teaching here has not only allowed me to grow personally and professionally, but it has also deepened my connection to a unique and culturally rich community. The school where I have had the privilege to teach has played a significant role in shaping my approach to education. The institution has created a supportive environment where students are encouraged to thrive academically while respecting their cultural heritage. The emphasis on inclusivity and the development of critical thinking skills has been deeply inspiring. It is a place where diverse learning styles are celebrated, and teachers are consistently supported with ongoing professional development opportunities. As part of the training provided, I have gained valuable insight into how to incorporate Hawaiian cultural values into the classroom. This focus on cultural sensitivity and awareness has not only enhanced my teaching practice but has also contributed significantly to my personal growth as an educator. Understanding the importance of ‘ohana (family), mālama (care), and kuleana (responsibility) has allowed me to connect with students in a more meaningful way, fostering a nurturing and respectful learning environment.

However, it is important to note that becoming fully licensed to teach in Hawaii comes with challenges. The cost of the required exams is a significant barrier. Additionally, the availability of these exams is limited, often requiring candidates to travel to Oahu to take them, further adding to the financial burden. These obstacles can be discouraging, especially for educators who already bring a wealth of experience and dedication to the classroom. This bill stands as a recognition of the exceptional qualifications and experiences that educators like myself bring to Hawaii’s educational system. My foreign-evaluated transcripts and teaching license earned in my home country reflect the skills and knowledge I have cultivated over years of professional development. I believe that by honoring these qualifications, the state acknowledges the diverse expertise that international educators contribute to the classroom and supports the continued success of our students.

In conclusion, my teaching journey in Hawaii has been transformative, both professionally and personally. The school’s commitment to excellence in education, combined with the profound impact of Hawaiian culture, has deeply shaped my teaching philosophy. I am proud to contribute

to the success of my students and look forward to continuing my work here, knowing that this bill will support educators like me in overcoming the challenges we face in pursuing our calling.

I urge the committee to support SB819 and recognize the contributions of international teachers in strengthening Hawai'i's schools. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Andemar Jamon

Testimony in Support of House Bill 439 Establishing International Teacher License Criteria

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

My name is **Erick Medrano**, and I am an international teacher from the Philippines, currently serving in Hawaii's public school system for almost two years. Today, I offer my strong support for House Bill 439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders.

This testimony will highlight how data underscores the urgency of this legislation while illustrating the transformational impact international teachers have on Hawaii's educational landscape.

Hawaii's Teacher Scarcity: The Data

Hawaii continues to experience a persistent teacher shortage, which jeopardizes the quality of education for our keiki. Consider the following:

1. Vacancy Rates:
 - In 2022-2023, over 1,000 teacher positions were unfilled at the start of the school year, impacting classrooms across the state (Hawaii DOE).
 - The teacher vacancy rate has been most pronounced in areas like special education, Hawaiian language immersion, and rural schools, leading to increased workloads for existing staff and larger class sizes.
2. Recruitment Challenges:
 - Hawaii's high cost of living (estimated 50% higher than the national average) and geographic isolation deter many mainland educators from accepting positions.
 - Teacher retention remains a challenge, with nearly 50% of new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years (Hawaii State Teachers Association).
3. Impact on Students:
 - Teacher shortages contribute to inconsistent instruction and less specialized education, particularly in high-need subjects.
 - A lack of qualified teachers in key areas, such as math and science, directly affects students' academic outcomes and career readiness.

The Role of International Teachers

International teachers are an essential solution to this ongoing crisis. As a Filipino teacher, I bring:

- **Qualifications:** My licensure and professional training meet rigorous standards, ensuring students receive high-quality instruction.
- **Longevity:** International teachers often remain in their positions longer, providing stability in schools where turnover is high.

Data in Support of International Teachers:

- According to the Hawaii DOE, recruiting Filipino teachers has significantly reduced vacancies in critical subject areas over the past five years.
- Studies show that schools with diverse teaching staff experience higher student engagement, with a 15% improvement in academic performance (National Center for Education Statistics).

Cultural Exchange: A Two-Way Benefit

Beyond addressing teacher shortages, international educators bring cultural richness to Hawaii's schools:

1. Enhancing Global Competence:
 - Sharing Filipino traditions, history, and values fosters students' respect for diversity and global awareness.
 - Research highlights that classrooms exposed to cultural exchange report higher critical thinking and interpersonal skills among students.
2. Strengthening Communities:
 - Filipino teachers actively participate in volunteer projects, church youth programs, and community festivals, promoting social cohesion.
 - Data from local surveys show that schools with international teachers report a 30% increase in parental and community involvement in school activities.

A Visionary Solution

Passing House Bill 439 is a transformative step toward addressing Hawaii's education challenges.

1. Recruitment with Standards:
 - The bill ensures that international teacher licensure meets Hawaii's high educational expectations, guaranteeing that hired professionals are well-prepared.
2. Sustainable Workforce Development:
 - By tapping into a global pool of qualified educators, Hawaii can stabilize its teacher workforce and focus on long-term retention strategies.
3. Cultural and Academic Enrichment:
 - International teachers not only fill vacancies but also enrich the lives of students and communities through their unique contributions.

In conclusion, Hawaii's keiki deserve the best education possible, and House Bill represents a data-driven, visionary solution to the teacher shortage crisis. By establishing an international teacher license, this legislation will ensure that qualified educators fill critical gaps, while also bringing the benefits of cultural exchange to our classrooms and communities.

Mahalo nui loa for considering this testimony. I urge you to pass this bill and invest in the future of Hawaii's children and schools.

Sincerely,

Erick Medrano (Sgd)

Hired International Teacher in Hawaii

8084799120

Hon. Members of Committee,

I am writing to request a waiver from the Praxis exam requirement for teacher certification in Hawaii. I am currently teaching 5th Grade at Lihikai Elementary School in Kahului Hawaii. Under a J-1 visa sponsored by Aliance Abroad Group. My qualifications include a Bachelor's Degree in Education Major in English from University of Pangasinan, Philippines. With 17 years of teaching experience at Pogo Elementary School. I have been promoted from Teacher 1 to Master Teacher III. This experience, combined with my educational background, demonstrates my competency to teach English in Hawaii. As a J-1 visa holder, the Praxis exam creates a financial and logistical burden. Because I am still currently paying my loan in a financing company. I am dedicated to my students and committed to remaining in the US to contribute to its education system. And to be able to share my knowledge and experience in my home country.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

ONALEE L. PINGUL

Elementary Teacher, Lihikai Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:10:25 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Analyn Yonzon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To all the esteemed members of the Committe who are the voice of equality and equity and to whom the SB819 be heard.

As an advocate of change and strong cultural support. I Analyn B. Yonzon currently assigned as J1 teacher in one of the hard to fill areas of the Leeward district of Hawaii Department of Education specifically at Waianae Intermediate School profoundly express my plea to all of you esteemed members to pass and support and finalized the bill as affirmative and be favored to us Filipino teachers.

Being part of this cultural program extending my love and passion to teaching to all of these middle schoolers have paved my deep connection and support to the Aloha spirit put into action from the start of my stay up to present.

The complex have had strongly supported us J1 teachers by immersing us into the culture of the community in all forms of programs and exposures from the start and up until now; I am truly welcomed and appreciative of the Ohana spirit from the complex to the admin down to all the staff of WIS is really alive through their efforts and in all so many ways.

As a teacher in the Philippines for more than 2 decades, It has been a challenging endeavour for me to take another stress and focus for the PRAXIS exams which would take a lot of time from me preparing for the quality lesson planning and classroom engagement which for me is the most important thing to which all of my efforts should be directed into. It is my passion and commitment to bring out the best in every student I have been handling; impacting change and empowering them as productive members of the society.

I strongly believe that our experience, educational qualifications and other related trainings we have had manifest how qualified we are and be considered qualified to benefit this SB819, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License.

May this be heard and favored.

All the best,

Mrs. Analyn B. Yonzon (WIS SS G7 teacher)

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:26:07 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Freddie Abulencia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Freddie Abulencia, and this is my second year participating in a cultural exchange program as an international teacher. One of my goals is to promote cross-cultural collaboration with my colleagues and equip students with global perspectives. As a J1 teacher, I strongly support the SB819 bill that recognizes our years of experience and teaching certification from our home country without requiring additional and costly tests, allowing us to focus on our role in the international visiting teacher program. This will help us to complete our 5-year program, maximizing our contributions as international educators. This bill ensures excellent classroom stability and continuity, benefiting learners through more profound cultural exchange and enhanced global awareness. I appreciate your support.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:36:42 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Joy Selda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for giving this Bill chance to be heard. It will make a great impact to the lives of J1 Teachers just like the way they do to every student.

One support, one decision, and one just will make a difference...

TESTIMONY

As a current SPED teacher of Kahului Elementary School, Maui, Hawai'i, may I humbly express my strong support for the passage of HB No. 439 – International Visiting Teacher.

I am Rosa Mae Felida Lumbo from the Philippines who had been qualified to be a part of the Teacher Exchange Program of Hawaii.

Generally, I strongly believe that having passed with my fellow foreign teachers, the high qualifications set by the department of Education of Hawaii, we are generally equipped with the skills, competencies and capabilities, acceptable by your international standards. Thus, we are globally competitive.

Personally, with the rich and substantial professional experience that I gained in my country, I would humbly say that I have the attributes of a teacher, specifically a SPED teacher demanded by international standards and guidelines. My exposure as Head of the Values Education Department of one of the biggest public schools in our locality coupled with my degree in the Masteral program major in in Special Education together with my more or less 20 years of teaching experience in the graduate, tertiary and secondary levels of our educational system, and a s Guidance counselor, I am optimistic and confident that I have the international qualifications set by the standards of your educational system.

As a teacher for the past six (6) months in Kahului Elementary School, I am handling young learners with Special Educational Needs. With such limited time that I have handled these kind of learners, I know that I have created, to some extent, an impact in the lives of my learners as evidenced by the various comments, remarks of the parents of my learners during IEP meeting sessions. Parents would overwhelmingly and gratefully tell me that their children have tremendously incurred positive changes through my guidance and competence in dealing, training and responding to

the needs of their children. One major duty that we do as SPED teachers is to prepare IEP. This is the Individualized Educational Plan/Program (IEP) of a certain learner with special educational needs. It is with humility that I say that the IEP's that I prepare are mostly commended by our school vice principal as "well written" and "well prepared." This is reflected further by the positive results on the behavior of our learners as professed by their parents through their open comments. Furthermore, one of my learner has been even awarded as "EAGLE of the month" in our school for the month of January. "EAGLE of the month" is an award given to our learners who exemplifies the THREE (3) core values of our school which are, ALOHA, KULEANA, and 'IMI NA'AUAO. This positive result, I believe, is made possible by applying the appropriate techniques in dealing with my learners that resulted to a consistent and harmonious relationship that I have established with my special learners. Inspired by these feedbacks, I am further motivated to continue with this endeavor in my professional life, that is to continuously touch lives of other people in my own little way. And this could only be done through a longer working relationship that I will forge with my school. One way therefore to establish such working relationship is by allowing us to exercise our profession as SPED teachers without undergoing additional examination administered by your State. Allowing us to continue with our profession without requiring us to undertake an additional examination is a way of nurturing further a strong bond and relationship that we have with our special learners. As special learners, they need, consistency, stability and tranquility in dealing with them. By requiring us to undertake additional examination for us to further qualify to continue as their teachers might distort and stir negatively the already stable orientations we have built with our learners, leading our learners to a more traumatic and adverse behavioral conditions.

Moreover, I believe that such positive results would not also be realized if we are not professionally qualified to handle these kinds of learners in our school.

On the other hand, taking the examination demands additional cost on our part. The examination is expensive, and it is also a fact that we have our respective families that we are supporting back in our home countries. The cost to be incurred, the fees, the transportation going to OAHU and accommodation expenses shall mean a substantial economic burden for us, who have families who are economically depending on us.

With all the foregoing, we beg for your consideration and understanding, we fervently pray that our plight as foreign teachers under this program shall be favorably considered. We vow that we shall continue to render our services with much fervor, and utmost competence and efficiency. May our substantial academic qualifications, robust professional work experience, and positive manifestations of our services as SPED teachers, be sufficient to be considered, for us to be no longer required to hurdle an additional examination. We fervently pray that this bill shall be passed and approved, for us to be able to continuously provide quality and excellent educational service to our learners. The approval of this bill shall be a strong indication of the high standards already set by your State's educational system and a recognition of our substantial qualifications to those high standards.

Again, may we sincerely appeal for your profound consideration and deepest appreciation on this matter.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 9:08:39 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Liza Resurrecion	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee,

My name is Liza Resurrecion, and I am a 6th-grade math teacher at Kalama Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

I hold a professional teaching license in the Philippines and hope that our credentials will be recognized, just as they are in other states. Despite having proven my qualifications, I am still unable to obtain a full Hawaii teaching license without additional testing.

The high cost of living, especially housing, takes up a significant portion of my income. In addition, I send financial support to my children back home, making it a constant challenge to make ends meet. The cost of Praxis exams and review materials adds another financial burden, making the path to full licensure even more difficult.

If passed, this bill would grant international teachers a full teaching license, removing unnecessary testing requirements. It would also allow us to extend our stay for five years, providing students with stability in their education while allowing us to fully invest in our schools and communities.

Filipinos have long been an integral part of Hawaii's culture, demonstrating dedication and excellence in everything we do. I am truly grateful for the warm welcome I have received in Hawaii, and I hope that by passing SB 819, international teachers like myself can continue to serve Hawaii's keiki and communities.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Liza Resurrecion
6th Grade Math Teacher, Kalama Intermediate School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 9:49:34 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lyn Nicole Chua	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB Relating to Education

Honorable Chairperson, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lyn Nicole M. Chua, one of the proud J-1 teachers deployed last year and I am a dedicated Science Special Education teacher with extensive experience in the field of education. I would like to express my strong support for HB 439, which seeks to recognize international teaching licenses—specifically granting equivalency to the Philippine teaching license here in Hawaii to teachers like us.

In the 6 months of stay here in Hawaii, I would like to believe that I have proven that I am capable and highly qualified for the teaching job. I have performed to the best of my abilities to deliver quality education to the learners here, have been an asset to the school and contributed to the community by participating in activities outside the four corners of the classroom. My skills and contribution to the school have been regarded highly by the school and the learners. With all the workload, activities, I have had a burden to carry-like all other J-1 teachers, which is to survive. Survive with the current pay that is lower than entry level since we are not categorized as Highly Qualified Teachers, study and pay for every Praxis test that we have to take and still provide quality education that is expected of us. Hawaii being the most expensive state in the country has become not just expensive for us but as if we almost cannot afford.

As an educator with the necessary credentials, experience, and a deep passion for teaching, I firmly believe that this bill would not only benefit qualified international teachers and alleviate some of the burdens we have but also enrich Hawaii’s diverse educational landscape. Many of us come with years of experience, a strong commitment to student

success, and a genuine love for fostering cross-cultural learning in the classroom. By allowing internationally licensed teachers to contribute to Hawaii's education system, I believe we can help address teacher shortages and bring valuable perspectives that enhance the learning experience for all students.

With all that being said, I believe our presence in the education system supports cultural exchange and global understanding, which are essential in preparing students for an interconnected world. Recognizing the Philippine teaching license would ensure that skilled educators are not hindered by unnecessary barriers but are instead empowered to serve Hawaii's students effectively.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support and pass this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Lyn Nicole Chua

J-1 Teacher

Aiea High School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 9:51:08 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Ann Ureta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am Rachel Ann Ureta currently stationed at Moanalua Middle School and part of the J-1 Cultural Exchange Program for teachers. I am an educator with 13 years of experience teaching in the Philippines and have been teaching in Hawaii for 2 years. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439 which seeks to grant equivalency to the Philippine teaching license in the State of Hawaii and allowing J-1 teachers to stay for 5 years in Hawaii to provide quality education and fulfill our cultural exchange program requirements.

As an international teacher, I have come with the proper credentials as stated in my foreign credentials evaluation that conforms to the US Standards, 15 years of professional teaching experience, and an unwavering dedication to shaping young minds. I am eager to contribute to Hawaii's education system—not just by filling critical teaching positions, but by enriching classrooms with diverse perspectives and cultural understanding and contribute positively to the community.

Hawaii is a place of diversity, and our presence as international educators fosters inclusivity and global awareness among students. By recognizing our teaching qualifications, this bill would provide more opportunities for dedicated teachers like myself to serve the students of Hawaii effectively and more efficiently, without unnecessary barriers like dedicating our valuable time in studying and preparing for the multiple Praxis tests when we could have utilized that time to prepare and produce quality materials and practices for our students and also personally pay for each test. This would definitely alleviate most of the burdens we carry while being expected to perform to the best of our abilities.

I strongly believe that passing this bill would benefit the educators, the students we serve, the community and moreover, the educational system of Hawaii. I respectfully urge you to support this legislation and help ensure that qualified, passionate teachers can continue making a difference in Hawaii's schools and moreover to the world.

Many mahalo!

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 9:54:49 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherry Lyn Valera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

This is Cherry Lyn Valera of Waimea High School, J1 teacher from the Philippines. I am writing this testimony in support for the Senate bill 819. Coming over here is not easy, aside from we have to spend our own money to be part of the program we have to be knowledgeable enough in our profession or subject course. As for me, my ticket for coming over is my 6 years experienced and a Masters Degree in Education to prove our capability in teaching. However regardless of holding this degree and licensed in the Philippines, we J1 still need to surpass Praxis Test in order for us to be tenured or extend our teaching life here in Hawaii. I am in Kauai, it is indeed a paradise with well diverse culture with different nationalities living here. For the past year, I learned the culture and rendered a good service for the school and our students. The students able to increase their End of Course Exam during my time. I wanted to stay more in this Island. I love to teach more kids and I wanted to help them more build their path. But because of Praxis that can be hindered.

Praxis is I know part of this from the very beginning but I never know that it would be hard for me to do it, due to financial constraint, the stress in flying to neighbor which added to my worry everytime I teach, and life here in Hawaii is expensive.

I am very much willing to render my service here for a long time. Please help us with this. Mahalo and Mabuhay

Cherry of WHS

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 1:05:06 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Pimentel	Testifying for Lana'i High & Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB439

To the Honorable Members of the Consumer Protection & Commerce Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 439, which seeks to address the licensing requirements for J1 visa teachers in our state. My experience working with J1 teachers on the island of Lana'i has demonstrated the immense value they bring to our schools and community, and I believe this bill is crucial for ensuring we can continue to benefit from their expertise.

Our school currently hosts 12 J1 teachers, instructing students in a wide range of grades, from 1st through 12th, including special education. These teachers come to us with diverse educational backgrounds and a wealth of knowledge, enriching our classrooms and broadening the horizons of our students. They are incredibly hardworking and possess a diverse skill set that allows them to effectively support our students and contribute to our community.

These J1 teachers are committed to a five-year stay in our schools, and it is unreasonable to burden them with additional, costly licensing requirements that are not only unnecessary but also create a significant barrier to their continued service. Our experience with these teachers has been overwhelmingly positive. They have consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to our students and a willingness to go above and beyond in fulfilling their responsibilities.

As a mentor for new teachers, including many J1 teachers, I have witnessed firsthand their dedication to our school and the Lana'i community. They consistently exceed expectations, providing exceptional care and respect to our students. They work diligently to meet all school requirements, demonstrating their right to receive the differential pay offered to their colleagues in our rural and hard-to-staff location. This differential is essential for attracting and retaining qualified teachers in areas like Lana'i, and J1 teachers serving in these locations should be eligible.

We are incredibly thankful to have these J1 teachers as part of our team. Their dedication and the positive impact they have on our students and community are undeniable. They are a vital asset to our school, and we urge you to support SB 439 to ensure we can continue to welcome and benefit from their valuable contributions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Pimentel

Assistant Principal

Lana'i High & Elementary School

2024 NAESP & HEMSAA Vice Principal of the Year

Testimony in Support of SB 819

Aloha, my name is Lyra Bertillo, and I am a 7th-grade Home Economics teacher at Kapaa Middle School on the beautiful island of Kauai, Hawaii. I am here to express my strong support for SB 819.

This bill is critical for teachers who are on J1 visas, like me, as it eliminates the need to take the PRAXIS exam. For many of us, the PRAXIS exam is a significant financial burden, costing hundreds of dollars, and in some cases, requiring travel to Oahu just to take the test. Given that many international teachers, including myself, hold degrees and professional licenses from our home countries, I believe that the PRAXIS exam is an unnecessary and inadequate measure of our teaching capabilities.

I have been teaching for eleven years and hold a master's degree from the Philippines, in addition to my teaching license from my home country. I am committed to continuously improving my skills, attending seminars, and participating in professional learning communities offered by my school and the Kauai District. I believe my experience and dedication as a teacher should be the focus, rather than a standardized exam that doesn't fully reflect my abilities or the value I bring to my students.

SB 819 will not only benefit international teachers but also the communities we serve. It will allow us to focus on what truly matters—providing quality education to our students. I strongly urge you to support this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 12:57:57 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jimel Ryan Mariano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jimel Ryan Mariano, and I am a teacher at Leilehua High School in Wahiawa, Hawaii. I am deeply grateful to Hawaii for embracing me as part of its educational system. Teaching here has allowed me to grow professionally and refine my expertise as an educator. I fully support SB819, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher program. Before coming to Hawaii, I spent 10 years teaching in the Philippines, where I earned my teaching license in secondary mathematics. With this extensive experience and certification, I believe my qualifications should be recognized as meeting the requirements for teacher licensure in Hawaii. Moreover, many educators, including myself, reside far from Honolulu, where the closest testing center is located. Traveling to take the exam poses a logistical challenge. Additionally, at \$90 per test—amounting to a total of \$450—the financial burden is significant, particularly for those of us who are our families' primary providers. Given these challenges, I respectfully request that reciprocity be considered as a means to support international educators like myself. Mahalo and God bless!

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 10:32:35 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeanelle Manahan Avila	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Legislature,

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for the proposed bill regarding the J-1 visa program, particularly as a current J-1 teacher here on the beautiful island of Kauai, Hawaii. This is my second year teaching 7th grade science at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School, and I have witnessed firsthand the invaluable contributions that international educators make to our schools and students.

The BridgeUSA J-1 visa program has provided me with the opportunity to share my knowledge and passion for science with my students, while also allowing me to engage in meaningful cultural exchange. This program not only addresses the ongoing teacher shortage but also enriches the educational experience for our diverse student population. As the bill highlights, representation matters, and having educators from various backgrounds can significantly impact student learning and aspirations.

Currently, the demographic disparity between our student body and teaching staff is concerning. With 22.4% of public school students identifying as Filipino, yet only 7.4% of educators sharing that background, it is crucial for our educational system to reflect the diversity of our students. The J-1 visa program plays a pivotal role in bridging this gap and promoting cultural understanding in our classrooms.

However, the existing licensing rules for J-1 teachers can be quite challenging and limit our potential. The classification of J-1 teachers as "emergency hires" necessitates navigating a series of costly examinations, which can exceed \$1,000. This not only places a financial burden on international educators but also detracts from our ability to focus on what truly matters—our students and their learning experiences.

I strongly believe that streamlining the licensing process and recognizing the qualifications of international educators would significantly enhance the educational landscape in Hawaii. By establishing a provisional licensing pathway for visiting international teachers, as proposed in this bill, we can ensure equitable compensation and allow us to fully utilize our skills and experiences in the classroom.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to support this bill to create a more inclusive and equitable educational system in Hawaii. The J-1 visa program has proven to be a success, and with your

support, we can continue to inspire and educate our students while fostering a rich cultural exchange.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Jeanelle Avila
J-1 Teacher
Kauai, Hawaii

Aloha Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Arien A. Potenciano, a teacher from Philippines and currently teaching at Wailuku Elementary School as a 3rd Grader teacher. I am here today to testify in strong support of policies that recognize our invaluable contributions as a J-1 teacher and allows us to continue serving our keiki and our community. I have had the privilege to be a part of the teaching workforce here in Hawaii Public Schools contributing to a vibrant, diverse, and dynamic learning environment here in Hawaii. The opportunity to work with students and local teachers from different backgrounds and share my own international perspective has not only shaped my teaching approach but has allowed me to have a positive and lasting impact on my students, the school community, and the overall campus climate.

One of the most significant benefits of being a J-1 teacher is the chance to stay in Hawaii for up to five years. This stability has allowed me to build meaningful connections with my students and immerse myself in the community. I have had the chance to watch my students grow over the years, both academically and personally, which has been deeply rewarding. The longer I am here, the more I can contribute to a positive, inclusive atmosphere, helping students feel supported and empowered to reach their fullest potential.

The program also ensures that I receive equal pay for the work I do. As a licensed educator, I am aiming to be eligible for pay differentials, which fairly compensates me for the experience and qualifications I bring to the table. This recognition of my professional background, regardless of where I was trained, fosters a sense of respect and mutual appreciation within the school community. It also helps me feel valued as a key member of the team, contributing to a collaborative, positive working environment.

Additionally, the recognition of my internationally earned credentials has been incredibly important. I hold a teaching degree and certification from my home country, and the fact that these qualifications are acknowledged as being on par with those of U.S.-trained educators is deeply affirming. It not only validates the hard work I've put into my career but also demonstrates the school's commitment to valuing diverse educational backgrounds and experiences. This recognition enhances my ability to contribute meaningfully to the educational experience, knowing that my skills and expertise are both appreciated and respected. It would be a great help if the state would be in favor of HB 439 to better continue our ultimate goal as a teacher.

One of the most impactful aspects of the program is the exemption from the costly and burdensome Praxis exams. Having already earned a degree and teaching credentials internationally, I don't have to navigate the expensive and time-consuming process of taking exams that would have little bearing on my actual ability to teach. This has allowed me to focus on what truly matters—supporting my students and engaging in the community. Without the added stress of extra testing, I can dedicate my energy to creating engaging lessons, building strong relationships with my students, and contributing to the school's growth.

Overall, the J-1 teacher program has allowed me to be fully present in my role as an educator. It has given me the opportunity to focus on what I do best: teaching and supporting the students and the community around me. The ability to stay for multiple years, receive fair compensation, and be acknowledged for my international credentials has allowed me to become a deeply involved and committed member of this school. I am grateful for the chance to work in a place that not only values my contributions but also creates an environment where both students and teachers thrive.

This version focuses on your personal experiences and the positive impact you've made as a teacher, while highlighting the benefits of the program. Let me know if you'd like to make any changes or additions!

Arien A. Potenciano
3rd Grader Teacher
Wailuku Elementary School

Testimony in Support of SB 819 – International Visiting Teacher License

Submitted by: Joana Marie G. Anonuevo

7th Grade Science Teacher, Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School, Kauai

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joana Marie G. Anonuevo, and I am a 7th-grade Science teacher at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School on the beautiful island of Kauai. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819 which would honor the experience and qualifications of teachers like myself who have earned teaching credentials in our home countries.

As a J1 teacher from abroad, I've had the privilege of teaching for nine years, and I am confident that my experience, skill set, and dedication to my students are what truly define my ability to provide quality education. However, I am also faced with significant challenges as I strive to meet the licensing requirements here in Hawaii, most notably the Praxis exams.

The cost of the Praxis exams is an ongoing burden. With fees totaling hundreds of dollars per exam, it places a financial strain on teachers like me who are already adjusting to a new culture and working hard to provide our students with the best education possible. Furthermore, access to these exams is not readily available. In some cases, I have to travel all the way to Oahu to take the exams, which not only involves additional costs but also time away from my classroom and students. These logistical and financial challenges make it even harder to focus on what truly matters: teaching and supporting my students.

In my nine years of experience, I have continually refined my craft, and I am certain that the knowledge and skills I bring to my classroom make me more than equipped to provide my students in Kauai with the high-quality education they deserve. I am fully committed to my students' growth and success, ensuring that they meet the necessary standards before advancing to the next grade level.

In addition to my teaching, I have also been fortunate to contribute to our community here in Kauai. I had the opportunity to perform with other J1 teachers at the Visayan Club Organization's fundraising event, which helped raise funds for Kumu's Cupboard, a nonprofit organization that provides free supplies to both students and teachers. This is just one example of how, as international educators, we bring more than our teaching expertise to the table—we bring our passion for community involvement and our commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of those we teach and work with.

I absolutely love teaching here in Hawaii. The connection I have with my students, the joy I feel when they grasp complex concepts, and the relationships I've built within the school and community are incredibly rewarding. The professional development opportunities we receive through monthly seminars and PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) have been invaluable, and I am continuously growing as an educator. These opportunities help me improve my practice, but they also make me feel supported and valued as a teacher.

It is my belief that SB 819 will be an important step forward in allowing teachers like me to focus on what we do best—teaching. The requirements to pass the Praxis exams should not be an obstacle that prevents us from continuing our work, especially when we have already demonstrated a high level of competence and professionalism in our home countries. The International Visiting Teacher License will acknowledge the strengths we bring to our schools and communities, and will allow us to focus on our students and on our ongoing growth as educators, rather than spending excessive time and money on exams that do not truly reflect our abilities or our dedication.

I wholeheartedly support SB 819 and urge you to consider the positive impact this bill will have on both teachers and students across Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joana Marie G. Anonuevo

7th Grade Science Teacher, Chiefess Kamakahahelei Middle School, Kauai

Testimony to support SB819

My name is Reynosa Madlangbayan, and I am a Special Education Teacher with 13 years of experience in the field of special education. I am writing in strong support of SB819, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher. My experience has provided me with comprehensive understanding of the needs of students with diverse learning challenges.

I firmly believe that an International Visiting Teacher License would allow our students to learn firsthand from educators with diverse cultural backgrounds and teaching experiences. This exposure is invaluable in preparing students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. It fosters cultural understanding, empathy and appreciation for different perspectives, enriching the learning environment of the students. Also, addressing critical teacher shortages, like many other states facing on going teacher shortages particularly in Special Education. By supporting SB819 offers a potential solution by providing a streamlined pathway for qualified international teachers to contribute our expertise to our school. We would help fill critical vacancies and ensure that all students have access to high-quality institution. Thus, International teacher like me will bring them a wealth of knowledge and innovative teaching methodologies from our home countries. This exchange of best practices can benefit our existing teaching force, leading to improved instructional strategies and better outcomes for students. It allows us to learn from different educational systems and adopt successful approaches. This can also attract talented teachers from around the world, further enhancing the quality of our educational system and boosting our state's reputation.

I understand that some concerns may exist regarding licensure requirements and ensuring the quality of international teachers. I believe that these concerns can be addressed through carefully crafted regulations and vetting processes, similar to those used for other out-of-state teaching licenses. As a J1 teacher, we applied here in Hawaii with our Teaching license in the Philippines. I passed the General education Test and Methodologies as to your PLT praxis test, and also passed the special education core content license in the Philippines as to Special Ed 5354 Praxis test here in Hawaii. I was hired here as highly qualified teacher under emergency hired teacher. As part of our program we need to pass the praxis exam, they send me 7 praxis test to pass and it's expensive and too much. Those exams covers the one that I already passed in the Philippines and I have the teacher license in the Philippines that's why Hawaii Department of Education hired me. In terms of teaching experience, I taught for 13 years in special education self-contained class.

I urge the committee to favorably consider SB819. This legislation represents a significant investment in the future of our students and our state. This broaden their horizons, improve the quality of education and help critical teacher shortages.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Reynosa Madlangbayan
Special Education Teacher
Lihikai Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 11:01:06 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Jane Empalmado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HB439 - International Visiting Teacher License

My name is Mary Jane B. Empalmado, and I am currently a second-year J1 teacher at Solomon Elementary School here in Hawai'i. I teach in both general and special education settings. I am writing to strongly support HB439, a bill that seeks to create an International Visiting Teacher license.

As a teacher who has earned my teaching license in the Philippines, I am now facing significant challenges in extending my emergency hired-licensed status. To do so, I am required to pass five (5) Praxis tests, which is a daunting and anxiety-inducing task for many of us. While we are global educators with valuable teaching experience, the cultural and curriculum differences between countries often make it difficult for international teachers like myself to pass these exams.

Having a dual license has allowed me to be flexible in my teaching assignments, including both general and special education. Last school year (2023-2024), I had the privilege of teaching an inclusion kindergarten class, and this year, I am teaching first grade. I truly enjoy working with the diverse population of students at our school. Although many educators find it challenging to work with military families, I take great pride in nurturing and supporting these students, helping them thrive both academically and behaviorally. The school and staff have been incredibly supportive, especially during my first year, when I needed guidance the most.

Despite the challenges we face as educators, my passion for teaching remains unwavering. My resilience, adaptability, and genuine care for my students set me apart as an educator.

Hawai'i, like many other states, faces an ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved communities. It is critical that we provide international teachers with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure so that we can continue to serve our students and contribute to the educational system.

This bill will not only benefit the current J1 teachers, but it will also support the Department of Education by reducing the costs associated with bringing in new J1 teachers. By minimizing these expenses, the department can allocate resources more efficiently.

We are facing significant financial strain due to the Praxis test, especially considering the additional costs of living and travel. The risk of not passing the exam, combined with the upfront fees, creates a real challenge for teachers who are already managing tight budgets. Even with reimbursement, the financial burden can be discouraging, particularly when you're not guaranteed success because of cultural differences or unfamiliarity with certain curricula.

I strongly urge you to support this bill and help create a pathway for international teachers to gain a teaching license in Hawai'i. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Jane B. Empalmado

Second-Year J1 Teacher

Solomon Elementary School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 11:07:11 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Fretto-Girard	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support Bill 819 SB.

February 6, 2025

MICHELLE N. KIDANI

Chair

Senate District 18

Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 214

Aloha,

To the renowned chair and members of the Senate Committee on Education, my humility and respect. I am Raymond Escoto, one of the cultural exchange teachers who was hired at Konawaena High School, would like to express my strong support for the passing of SB819 which requires the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to reconstruct a licensing pathway for international educators like me.

Filipino educators are known to be passionate and goal-driven professionals. Thus, this is why a lot of countries hire teachers from the Philippines. It is true that the education system and culture here in America is totally different from the Philippines yet because of resilience and willingness to adapt to the new system, I am able to overcome the difficulties and grasp the new environment where I am in.

After fully adapting to the new system, I suddenly feel the "aloha spirit" that they call here in Hawai'i. My students not only the Filipinos but also other races like the Micronesians, Marshallese, Mexicans, and Hondurans show respect and love. I have some students, specifically, Filipinos who have just moved to the island. As they started schooling, they were frightened to move and felt unsafe which resulted in negligence of going to school. However, when one of their teachers introduced me to them, they started to feel comfortable and safe. Now, there are a bunch of students, not only Filipinos, who stay with me during breaktime.

In connection to this, with all humility, I could say that I am making my gains and small wins with my students. These gains happen because they can see the real purpose of me doing the work and the effort that I do for them to understand the lesson. Unfortunately, preparation is not easy. It will take time to fulfill it and make it an interesting yet valuable learning experience for the students.

These are just some of the good things that I observed since I started teaching. However, being required to pass the Praxis exam to be eligible to stay up to 5 years hinder this continued success. As a teacher, it requires a huge amount of planning time and production of instructional materials for all the lessons to achieve its desirable outcome. Having said this, there is no spare time to prepare for this exam which requires a huge amount of money. Moreover, this amount will not be for one time payment only. It must be paid every time you take the test. Instead of focusing on the core mission of why we are here, our attention is being divided to the preparation to pass the praxis exam which did not even exist before.

These are just some of the reasons why I support the passing of the bill and continuously support the future generation of this country within the next 5 years.

Hopefully, this testimony will greatly serve its purpose. Mahalo Nui Loa!

Respectfully yours,
Raymond Escoto
ESOL Teacher
Konawaena High School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 11:17:02 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Armida Baltero	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing this testimony as a support to our Filipino teachers working in our school, Lanai High and Elementary School. As a parent and as an office assistant working with them at the same school, I can say that they are globally competitive and highly qualified to the positions that they are right now. They are contributing a positive impact into our students' education and also in our community. Their dedication and commitment to giving our students the quality of education they needed, made me decide to support them and giving my testimony. Their hard work, discipline, and perseverance are some of the qualities teachers possess for our students. Please consider my testimony as a proof of my sincere trust and belief for our Filipino teachers.

Honorable members of the committee,

I am Marlyn Sotto, and I am writing in support of SB 819 which aims to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This legislation is crucial for teachers like myself, who have obtained rigorous training and teaching licenses in the Philippines but encounter additional challenges such as the Praxis examinations, in order to continue working with students in the Hawaii Department of Education.

J1 teachers contribute to the diversity of teaching and methodologies within schools. Our varied educational background and pedagogical approaches offer students a more comprehensive and enriching learning experience.

As a teacher from the Philippines, I am dedicated to understanding the Hawaii students' culture of learning, thus, offering quality education to my students. While I recognize the necessity of proving subject matter expertise, I feel that our experience, credentials, and commitment be recognized without the requirement of undergoing multiple standardized tests which we already had taken in the Philippines. Before we were given the Philippine license to teach in public schools, we took the Licensure Examination for Teachers which includes the categories such as General Education, Professional Education, and Specialization. These in my belief are equivalent to the Praxis' Core Examinations, Principles of Learning and Teaching, and the Content area of Specialization.

Given the training and examinations we received from our home country, I believe recognizing teachers' licenses encourages our professional growth and development. It allows us to fully integrate into the educational system, participate in professional development opportunities, and collaborate with fellow educators. This not only benefits the J1 teachers but also enriches the entire educational community through sharing of best practices and innovative teaching methods.

In conclusion, J1 teachers are a valuable asset to the United States educational system. By reciprocating and recognizing our home-country teaching licenses, the US Department of Education can ensure that we are able to fully contribute to the academic and cultural development of American students.

Thank you very much for considering this important matter.

Subject: Support for International Teachers and Reciprocity in Licensing

Dear Members of the Hawaii Legislature,

I am an international teacher who began my U.S. teaching experience in Florida before relocating to Hawaii to be closer to my relatives. I would like to share my positive experience in Florida regarding the certification process, which may serve as a helpful model for consideration in Hawaii.

In Florida, I encountered no issues obtaining my teaching certification, as the state honored my credentials. Florida's system allowed for the issuance of temporary teaching certificates for up to three years, with the option for renewal, as long as my school district endorsed my renewal and I maintained an effective teaching rating. Several of my friends, who are international teachers as well, are now in their 4th and 5th year of teaching, and their certifications continue to be acknowledged by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), as long as their renewals are endorsed by their school districts and they maintain effective ratings.

Additionally, Florida does not require international teachers to take expensive certification exams, which makes the process more accessible and fair for those of us who have already demonstrated our teaching effectiveness. The cost of these exams can be a significant barrier, and it would be helpful if Hawaii could adopt a similar approach, as Florida has done, to ensure that international teachers are not burdened by these additional financial challenges.

Given my positive experience in Florida, I kindly request that the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HSTB) consider offering a reciprocal or temporary certification for international teachers, similar to Florida's system. This would recognize our credentials, allow us to continue teaching effectively, and ensure that we are not required to incur additional expenses for exams. By following a system similar to Florida's, we can focus on our teaching roles while contributing to the educational community in Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope that the HSTB will take action to create a more flexible and supportive certification system for international teachers.

Sincerely,

M.B. ALVAREZ

BALDWIN HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Ruel M. Cabasa, and I strongly support SB 819, creating an International Visiting Teacher License. As a teacher licensed in the Philippines, I'm dedicated to serving Hawaii's students, but the current Praxis testing requirements create unnecessary obstacles. While I understand the need to demonstrate competency, these tests place a significant burden on international teachers. For example, each Praxis exam costs approximately \$150, and I need to take three exams amounting to \$450. This financial strain, coupled with the significant time commitment required for test preparation – often 10-15 hours a week – directly takes away from the time I can spend developing engaging lessons and providing individualized support for my students. Just last week, I had to postpone working with a struggling student because I needed to study for an upcoming exam. This is the kind of impact these requirements have. In addition it diverts valuable time and energy away from lesson planning, student engagement, and professional development. I spend countless hours studying for these exams, time that could be better spent collaborating with colleagues, creating innovative learning experiences, and addressing the individual needs of my students.

Our limited visas, typically three to five years, add further pressure. Extending our stay is often contingent on obtaining licensure, compounding the stress. I love Hawaii, its people, and my school community. I want to focus on what I do best: teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 819, allowing us to prioritize our students, not excessive testing.

I am committed to providing the best possible education for my students here in Hawaii, a place I have come to love. Passing SB 819 will allow international teachers like myself to focus on our passion: teaching. I respectfully urge you to support this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ruel M. Cabasa

February 5, 2025

Hawaii State Senate
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Bertania Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Honorable Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair
Committee on Education
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair & Members

Dear Chair Kidani and Members,

RE: SB819

Aloha! My name is Randall Francisco. I am writing in support of this legislation that recognizes J-1 teachers who have the qualifications and experiences to be considered in this pathway towards an international teacher license. On Kauai, during the past few years, 30+ J-1 teachers have demonstrated that they can indeed make a difference in the education of our youth from Pre-K -12. I have had the opportunity to get to know many of these Philippine-trained teachers especially, at the middle and high school levels. They not only have the experience, knowledge and high degree of professionalism, they are also very dedicated to their craft of educating our future members, professionals and contributors of our island and statewide communities.

What strikes me most is not only their commitment but, their extra efforts in order to insure students' success such as helping students after school, devoting extra time in their classrooms or at home to continue to focus on their students' success. They have also served as the bill states to be excellent role models and, especially, understand Filipino students who are able to culturally connect with them.

The criteria to provide the pathway towards an international license like its contemporaries in the states of Alaska, Nevada and North Carolina will also help to incentivize more foreign trained teachers to strongly consider Hawaii as a place where they can successfully continue their profession and contribute to the communities that they live, work, and contribute.

Mahalo for your consideration and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Aloha and Selamat Po,

Randall Francisco
Former President/CEO, Kauai Chamber of Commerce
Former President, Kauai Filipino Chamber of Commerce
Former Dean, University of Hawaii Community College System

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 12:16:35 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rose Cruz Churma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The J-1 teachers from the Philippines have positively impacted the education of our children and youth in the public schools, accepting positions that are difficult to fill. It is just right and fair for them to get equal pay for equal work and acknowledge their internationally recognized foreign credentials. Without the need for taking the expensive Praxis exams, they can focus on supporting their schools and students and utilize their income to find decent housing and afford the high cost of living in Hawai‘i.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 12:16:47 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannel Monel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Shannel Monel and I am writing in strong support of SB819, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is essential for teachers like me, who have already earned a teaching license in the Philippines but face additional barriers such as the Praxis which can hinder us to continue teaching the students in Hawaii.

As an international teachers, we also possess international qualifications such as number of years of teaching experiences, bachelor's degree in education, masters degree, and cultural competency. We took the Philippine Licensure Examinations for Teachers (LET) because we met the eligibility requirements. These are the areas of test for elementary level General Education (English, Filipino, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, etc.) Professional Education (Teaching Methods, Child Development, Curriculum Development, etc.), and for secondary level General Education, Professional Education, Specialization (based on the subject you will teach, e.g., English, Math, Science, etc.) which somehow similar to Praxis.

While I understand the importance of demonstrating subject knowledge, I believe that our experiences, qualifications, and dedication should be recognized without having to go another island to take the test, prepares for a multiple licensure exams which will only creates unnecessary stress and takes valuable time away from teaching responsibilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Shannel Monel

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 12:19:27 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Giovanna S Apostol	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Giovanni S. Apostol, a third grade teacher at Wailuku Elementary School.

Today, I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As an educator, I have demonstrated unwavering dedication to my students' academic success and personal growth. Teaching in a diverse and multicultural environment has strengthened my passion for inclusive education, cultural exchange, and student-centered learning.

I am committed to nurturing a supportive classroom environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to achieve their full potential. By integrating innovative teaching strategies, technology, and culturally relevant materials, I ensure that learning is both engaging and meaningful.

Beyond the classroom, I actively participate in school events, mentorship programs, and cultural activities that foster cross-cultural understanding between my home country, the Philippines, and my Hawaiian community. I take pride in sharing my Filipino heritage while embracing the rich traditions of Hawaii, strengthening the bond between our cultures.

Despite challenges such as financial adjustments and being away from family, my dedication to my students keeps me motivated. I believe that education is a powerful tool for transforming lives, and I am grateful for the opportunity to make a lasting impact on my students and school community.

It is essential to recognize educators like myself to promote quality education and acknowledge the Invaluable contributions of dedicated J1 teachers. I respectfully encourage you to support HB 439, allowing us to persist in our crucial roles of teaching, mentoring, and inspiring learners throughout Hawaii. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Giovanne S. Apostol

3rd Grade Teacher

Wailuku Elementary School, Maui

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 1:38:19 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joni	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in full support of SB819, the proposed bill which seeks to exempt J1 teachers from the Praxis exam and recognize their home country teaching license, aligning with similar policies in other states. The J-1 teachers among us should be allowed to complete their five-year teaching program in Hawaii without the added financial burden and logistical challenges associated with certification exams.

As a 32-year veteran teacher, I have seen the revolving door of transient mainland teachers– many who are in Hawaii to check off a bucket list item to live here. The J-1 teachers I am colleagues with now, have been a great addition to our campus and I am so pleased that our classes are staffed with competent teachers, willing to persevere through housing and transportation challenges.

The J1 teachers I work with at Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School are deserving of more benefits, and if education is a priority, please vote in favor of SB819.

Aloha,

Joni Funamura-Sasil

CKMS Teacher

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 1:40:30 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenelyn Atienza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819- International Visiting Teacher License

I'm Jenelyn Atienza 8th Grade Math and Science Inclusion Teacher at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. As a J-1 teacher at Kalama Intermediate School, I have been privileged to teach 8th grade math and science, as well as work with special education students. My significant contribution alongside my diverse experience as math and special education teacher. This opportunity has not only allowed me to share my knowledge but has also enriched my life in ways I never could have imagined. My time here has been filled with unforgettable moments, strong connections with students and school staff, and appreciation for the diverse culture and diversity of Maui.

My role as a special education teacher has been particularly fulfilling. I have witnessed the incredible progress of my students, who often face unique challenges. By using inclusive teaching strategies, I aim to create a supportive environment where every student feels valued and capable of achieving their goals. The smiles on their faces when they succeed, no matter how small the achievement, remind me of the importance of patience and encouragement in the learning process. It is a privilege to help them unlock their potential and witness their growth.

The experience I have as a J-1 teacher at Kalama Intermediate School has been nothing short of transformative. The great moments shared with my students and the support of the school admin and staff have made this journey a memorable one. I am deeply appreciative of the culture and diversity that Maui offers, which has enriched my teaching practice and personal growth. I look forward to continuing my journey here in Maui, making lasting connections and memories with the wonderful community of Kalama Intermediate School.

I express my heartfelt gratitude and strong support for SB819 – the International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is essential for us diverse educators from around the world, enriching our classrooms with diverse perspectives and teaching methodologies. My experience in the classroom has shown me the positive impact that international teachers have on student engagement and cultural appreciation. By passing this legislation, we can ensure that our schools continue to benefit from the expertise of qualified educators, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for all students. Thank you for considering this vital bill.

Testimony in Support of SB819

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lynette Fernandez, and I am a first-grade teacher at Naalehu Elementary School in Naalehu, Hawai'i (Big Island). I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, which proposes the creation of an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As an educator, my career has been centered around shaping young minds and ensuring my students receive a high-quality education. Since becoming part of the Naalehu Elementary School community, I have been dedicated to providing meaningful instruction, fostering a positive school environment, and supporting the academic and personal development of my students.

Despite my extensive experience and dedication, obtaining a full license in Hawai'i has been a significant challenge due to the financial and logistical barriers posed by the Praxis exams. These exams are not only costly, but they are also difficult to access across the islands, often requiring travel to O'ahu, which adds even more financial strain. In addition, while we are able to take exams online, it is still challenging for people like me to take tests by simply looking at a screen. I prefer the experience of a traditional paper exam. These obstacles fail to recognize the years of training, expertise, and foreign credentials that international teachers like myself already bring. HB439 acknowledges our qualifications and provides a fair, accessible path to licensure.

In addition to that, I want to express also my concern about the current situation regarding the relocation and salary packages for J1 teachers. As per the HTSB, we are required to take and pass the Praxis exam before we can receive the full amount of our relocation and salary benefits. Unfortunately, this had led to a delay in receiving exact compensation we were promised, which has created some financial strain for us as we navigate the process. It is important that this issue is addressed so that all teachers, including J1s, receive the full support they need without unnecessary delays or barriers.

Hawai'i is currently facing a teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved areas. By creating an international teacher license, this bill will help address the shortage by recognizing the qualifications of talented, committed educators who are already contributing to the state's educational system. Passing this bill would demonstrate Hawai'i's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and the recognition of international talent, ensuring our students continue to receive a quality education.

I strongly encourage you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, equitable, and reasonable pathway to licensure.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lynette Fernandez
First Grade Teacher
Naalehu Elementary School

Big Island, Hawai'i

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:01:41 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ivy Macawili	Testifying for Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am Ivy Macawili, a J1 Special Education Teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be a part of Hawaii’s educational system, where I have had the privilege of working with students who inspire me every day. As a J1 teacher, I bring years of experience and internationally recognized foreign credentials, which have been thoroughly evaluated and confirmed through the Foreign Credentials Evaluation process to meet U.S. educational standards.

However, as an emergency hire teacher, I currently earn a lower salary than fully licensed teachers, despite performing the same duties and responsibilities. It is vital that teachers like me are recognized for our contributions to the school community and treated equitably in terms of compensation. Equal pay for equal work is a principle that should be prioritized. I have witnessed firsthand how J1 teachers positively impact students, school culture, and the overall campus climate. The diverse perspectives we bring enrich the learning experience, and we are deeply committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for all students.

SB819’s proposal to create an international visiting teacher license is an essential step in ensuring that J1 teachers can continue contributing to Hawaii's education system for an extended period of time. By allowing us to remain for up to five years if licensed, this legislation provides stability for both students and teachers, enabling us to focus on what matters most—supporting our students, colleagues, and school communities.

Moreover, providing access to differentials for licensed teachers and recognizing foreign credentials as highly qualified will help eliminate unnecessary barriers for international educators. The elimination of costly and burdensome Praxis exams would allow us to focus on what we do best—teaching and supporting students—without the added financial strain.

I am honored to be part of this wonderful community and sincerely hope that SB819 will support the continued professional growth and recognition of J1 teachers in Hawaii, ensuring that we can fully contribute to the success of our students and schools. Thank you for considering this important issue.

Aloha,
Ivy Macawili

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 1:50:35 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abegail P Abarquez	Testifying for J1 Teacher	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Abegail Abarquez, and I am a J1 Teacher specializing in Special Education at Naalehu Elementary. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This legislation is vital for educators like myself who have obtained teaching licenses in the Philippines but encounter additional challenges, such as the Praxis tests, in our efforts to serve students within the Hawaii Department of Education.

As international teachers, we are deeply committed to delivering the highest quality of education for our students. However, the requirement to balance our teaching responsibilities with the preparation for multiple licensure examinations creates unnecessary stress and diverts valuable time from lesson planning and engaging with our students. While I recognize the importance of demonstrating subject knowledge, I believe our experience, qualifications, and dedication should be acknowledged without the burden of undergoing multiple standardized tests, which also impose financial and emotional strain.

Furthermore, the limited duration of our visas, typically ranging from three to five years, adds another layer of uncertainty to our situation. I have learned that the possibility of extending our stay to the full five years is contingent upon obtaining licensure, which intensifies the pressure we experience. The significant costs associated with the Praxis exams, combined with our limited time, make it increasingly challenging to concentrate fully on what truly matters—our students.

I have a profound appreciation for Hawaii, its people, its culture, and the welcoming school community that has embraced me. My aspiration is to continue inspiring and supporting my students without the burden of excessive testing requirements. Therefore, I respectfully urge you to pass SB 819, ensuring that international teachers can focus on what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii’s students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Abegail Abarquez

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:47:46 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raymart Jayson Fundal	Testifying for J1 Teacher in Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony Regarding J-1 Visa Extension Exception for Teaching License in Hawai'i

My name is Raymart Jayson M. Fundal, and I am a Special Education Teacher currently in Hawai'i on a J-1 visa. I am writing to express my sincere desire to extend my J-1 visa and to respectfully request an exception regarding the teaching license requirement for this extension.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Hawai'i and have developed a deep love for the islands and the community. This experience has been invaluable, both personally and professionally. I am passionate about making a positive impact on the lives of children with special needs, and I believe I have made significant contributions to the students I serve here in Hawai'i. I am eager to continue this important work.

My primary motivation for extending my J-1 visa is twofold. First and foremost, I am committed to supporting my family back in the Philippines. The opportunity to work in Hawai'i allows me to provide much-needed financial assistance to them. Secondly, I am deeply invested in building a legacy of positive change in the lives of the children I teach here in Hawai'i. I have formed strong bonds with my students and their families, and I am dedicated to continuing to provide them with the high-quality special education they deserve. Extending my visa would allow me to continue nurturing these relationships and further develop my skills as an educator within this unique and diverse environment.

I understand the requirements for extending a J-1 visa, including the teaching license requirement. I am respectfully requesting an exception to this requirement in my specific case. I know what's needed to stay, the teaching license, the rules. But I'm asking, pleading, for a chance, a break. The license...it's just out of reach right now. Too much, too many IEP meetings, too much on my plate at school. I'm drowning, and this deadline is another weight pulling me under.

I am confident that my skills and experience as a Special Education teacher, coupled with my dedication to my students, make me a valuable asset to the Hawaiian educational system. I am a responsible and committed individual, and I am confident that I will continue to uphold the highest professional standards.

Thank you for considering my request. I am hopeful that I will be granted the opportunity to continue my work here in Hawai'i and contribute to the well-being of its children.

Sincerely,

**Raymart Jayson M. Fundal
Special Education Teacher
Kainalu Elementary School**



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
Kainalu Elementary School
165 Kaiholu Street
Kailua, Hawaii 96734

February 6, 2025

The Honorable Michelle Kidani
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Strong Support for SB819 - Filipino Caucus; HTSB; International Teacher License; Criteria; Establishment

Dear Senator Kidani,

I am writing to strongly support SB819, a bill that promises to significantly benefit Hawaii's students by establishing an international teacher license. At Kainalu Elementary, we've seen firsthand the positive impact international educators, particularly those from the Philippines, bring to our classrooms and community.

These teachers, often participating in the J-1 visa program, enrich our schools with their diverse perspectives and expertise. They become integral members of our faculty, fostering a global understanding within our student body. One such teacher, Raymart Jason Fundal, our Special Education preschool teacher, exemplifies the dedication and talent these educators possess.

Raymart is an exceptional teacher. He cultivates strong relationships with his students and their families, creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment. His passion for special education is evident in his supportive teaching methods and unwavering commitment to each child's progress. Beyond his classroom, Raymart is a valuable asset to our entire special education team. He readily shares his knowledge and expertise with colleagues, offering support and partnership. He is also always willing to take on extra responsibilities, demonstrating his commitment to the overall

success of our students and school. Raymart's willingness to assist other teachers has strengthened our entire special education program, benefiting all of our students.

SB819 is vital for several reasons. It offers stability by allowing qualified international teachers like Raymart to remain in Hawaii for up to five years, provided they obtain licensure. This continuity is essential for our students, who thrive on consistent and supportive relationships with their teachers. The bill also promotes equity by ensuring these educators receive equal pay for equal work, including access to applicable differentials. These teachers arrive with internationally recognized credentials and experience, and SB819 appropriately acknowledges their qualifications.

Furthermore, streamlining the licensing process by forgoing redundant Praxis exams, when international licenses and degrees are already in hand, is a practical and efficient approach. It allows teachers to focus on what truly matters: teaching our children.

I strongly believe SB819 is a crucial step towards ensuring all Hawaii's keiki have access to highly qualified and dedicated teachers. I urge you to support this important legislation.

Me ka ha'aha'a (With Humility),

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Resha Ramolete". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "R" at the beginning.

Resha Ramolete
Principal
808-305-0300
resha.ramolete@k12.hi.us

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:14:13 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rowella Angeles	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Honorable Members of the Legislature,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the establishment of the International Visiting Teacher License in Hawai‘i. As a Math teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School in Kauai, I have dedicated my professional career to fostering a passion for mathematics in my students, helping them build critical thinking skills, and equipping them with the tools they need to succeed academically and in life. This bill represents a significant step toward recognizing the contributions that international teachers like myself make to the educational community, while also addressing the barriers we face in obtaining full licensure.

I earned my teaching credentials in Philippines, where I underwent rigorous training in pedagogical practices and mathematics instruction. Over the years, I have worked diligently to adapt and refine my approach to teaching, ensuring that I meet the diverse needs of my students. At Waimea Canyon Middle School, I strive to make Math both accessible and engaging. I recognize that for many students, Math can be a challenging subject, so I focus on creating a classroom environment that encourages collaboration, problem-solving, and perseverance. I work tirelessly to develop lessons that not only cover the content thoroughly but also ignite curiosity and allow students to see the relevance of Math in their everyday lives.

However, as much as I am committed to my students’ learning, I face significant challenges in pursuing licensure here in Hawai‘i. The exams required to obtain full certification are both financially burdensome and difficult to access. The time needed to prepare for these exams takes away from the time I could be spending creating meaningful, well-planned lessons for my students. The exams are demanding, requiring an in-depth review of material that I already know through my international experience. Instead of spending that time developing engaging lessons and assessments, I am compelled to dedicate significant time and energy to preparing for exams that, while important, do not always reflect the practical skills and expertise I have developed through years of teaching and international experience.

Moreover, the logistical challenges of taking these exams—such as the need to travel to Oahu for testing—add unnecessary strain. This process is exhausting, both mentally and financially. As a dedicated teacher, I would much rather invest the time I spend on preparing for exams into my classroom, where I can actively contribute to the academic growth and success of my students. This bill will alleviate these obstacles and provide an opportunity for teachers like me to focus more on the classroom and less on the complexities of the licensing process.

The International Visiting Teacher License will offer a much-needed pathway for teachers with international qualifications and experience to continue their work without unnecessary delays. It would recognize the knowledge and skills we bring to the table—skills that are the result of years of professional development and hands-on teaching experience. Rather than being consumed by the requirements of expensive, time-consuming exams, we would be empowered to channel our energy into lesson planning and innovative teaching strategies that benefit the students we serve.

At Waimea Canyon Middle School, my goal as a Math teacher is not just to teach concepts but to help students develop a deep understanding and appreciation of mathematics. I encourage my students to approach problems with confidence, to collaborate with peers, and to approach challenges with resilience. The ability to focus on these aspects of teaching—rather than the administrative hurdles tied to licensure—would enable me to make an even greater impact on my students' lives.

I firmly believe that passing the International Visiting Teacher License bill will not only support international teachers in navigating the licensing process but will also benefit students across Hawai'i. The education system will be strengthened by the continued contributions of educators who bring diverse perspectives, innovative teaching methods, and a passion for student success. This bill will honor our qualifications, enhance our ability to teach effectively, and ultimately create a better learning environment for all students in Hawai'i.

I respectfully urge you to consider the positive impact this legislation will have on teachers, students, and the broader community. Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Rowella J. Angeles

Teacher/Waimea Canyon Middle School

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:18:40 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arnilyn Purol	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Members of the Committee,

Have a great day, my name is Arnilyn Purol and I am writing in strong support of SB819, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is crucial for teachers like me, who are already licensed in the Philippines, but face additional hurdles, such as the Praxis exams, when trying to serve students in Hawaii's public schools. As international teachers, we are dedicated to giving our students the best possible education. However, the need to prepare for multiple licensure exams while also fulfilling our teaching duties creates undue stress and steals precious time from lesson planning and student interaction. While we appreciate the need to demonstrate subject matter expertise, we believe our experience, qualifications, and commitment should be given due consideration, lessening the burden of multiple standardized tests that create both financial and emotional hardship.

Furthermore, the short duration of our visas, only three to five years, creates additional instability. I understand that even reaching the full five-year limit is contingent upon obtaining licensure, which intensifies the pressure we already feel. The expense of the Praxis exams, coupled with our limited time, makes it difficult to prioritize what's most important: our students. I've truly fallen in love with Hawaii, its people, culture, and the welcoming school community. From the tranquil beaches to the verdant mountains, the stunning landscapes have offered countless opportunities for adventure and relaxation. Hiking trails and coastal views have become my weekend retreats, and the camaraderie of my Filipino teacher friends has enriched my experience here.

My goal is to continue inspiring and supporting students without the weight of excessive testing requirements. I respectfully urge you to pass SB819, allowing international teachers to focus on what we do best: teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students.

Mahalo,

Arnilyn Purol

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:33:12 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rosalie Ohayas	Testifying for DOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Rosalie L. Ohayas, and I teach at Wahiawa Middle School. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be part of Hawaii's educational system, which has allowed me to grow professionally and expand my knowledge as an educator. I fully support HB439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher program.

Taking a licensure exam in the state is a valuable step in our professional development. However, I would like to know if teaching licenses from the Philippines, along with our master's and doctoral degrees, could be considered in the certification process. Additionally, many teachers live far from Honolulu, where the nearest testing center is located, making travel for the exam challenging. The cost of each test is \$90, and as the primary provider for my family, the total expense of \$450 is a significant financial burden.

Given these challenges, it would be incredibly beneficial if reciprocity could be considered to support educators like myself. Mahalo and God bless.

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:24:11 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christine Favetta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Christine Favetta, and I'm writing to share my strong support for the continued presence of cultural exchange teachers in our schools. I've seen firsthand the incredible impact these educators have, and I believe their contributions are essential for enriching the educational experience for all students.

As an Instructional Coach at Waimea Canyon Middle School on Kauai, I've had the privilege of working with many J1 teachers. Each individual I've worked with is open to growth and expresses gratitude in doing so, wanting to do their very best while never taking this career opportunity for granted. What strikes me most is their work ethic, passion for teaching, and their unwavering dedication to our students. In Hawaii specifically, it is culturally a natural fit for them. The students connect with these teachers in ways that no other teacher at the middle school level has before. Our J1 teachers share their expertise with the staff, bring a positive attitude to work everyday, and build strong relationships with our students. You can often find these teachers volunteering their time in their community, participating in family nights on campus, or spending their break time interacting with students.

In short, cultural exchange teachers are not just filling a position; they are enriching our schools and our communities. I urge you to continue supporting programs that bring these valuable educators to our schools. They deserve to be compensated fairly and given the same benefits as other faculty members. Our students, and our society, are better for it.

Aloha, everyone!

Greetings of peace and light.

I am writing this testimony in support of SB819. As a Filipino J-1 Exchange Teacher in Hawai'i, I have faced immense pressure and exhaustion—not only in fulfilling my responsibilities as a teacher but also in adjusting to a new culture, a new work environment, and the rigorous process of acquiring a Hawai'i professional teaching license. This journey demands significant time, effort, and financial resources.

Financial Burden:

Even before arriving in the U.S., Filipino teachers face heavy financial obligations, including application fees, document processing, and visa expenses. Upon arrival, we are further burdened by the high cost of living in Hawai'i, all while repaying debts to agencies and visa sponsors. The additional cost of taking licensure exams, such as the Praxis, adds to this financial strain. While I have not yet failed a Praxis exam, many of my co-teachers have had to pay again to retake the test after an unsuccessful attempt. This not only affects their finances but also takes an emotional toll—facing both the setback of failure and the financial cost of trying again.

Professional and Academic Challenges:

As cultural exchange teachers, we are expected to assimilate into the U.S. educational system while simultaneously meeting the demands of our students, schools, and communities. Every day presents new challenges, from adapting to different curricula and teaching standards to managing classrooms with diverse learning needs. On top of this, we are required to prepare for and pass up to five Praxis exams—a process that takes valuable time away from lesson planning, classroom instruction, and professional growth.

Additionally, Hawai'i is already experiencing a teacher shortage. Every time an exchange teacher has to be absent to take a Praxis exam, schools struggle to find substitutes, and students lose valuable instructional time. This not only burdens the teachers but also disrupts learning for the very students we are here to serve.

Lack of Fairness Across States:

What makes this requirement even more concerning is the lack of consistency across different states. Many U.S. states do not require J-1 Filipino teachers to take additional licensure exams beyond what they have already completed in their home country. It is deeply unfair that Hawai'i—one of the most culturally diverse states, with a significant Filipino population—imposes stricter requirements on Filipino teachers compared to states with far fewer Filipino educators.

This raises important questions about equity and fairness in the J-1 Teacher Exchange Program. Are these state-imposed standards aligned with federal guidelines? Do they truly support the goal of providing a positive and meaningful exchange experience for international

teachers? Unfortunately, for many of us, the additional requirements make the experience feel more like an uphill battle rather than a professional and cultural exchange.

Conclusion:

Overall, the requirement to take additional licensure exams exclusively for Hawai'i has left me feeling pressured, overwhelmed, and financially burdened. While we came here to share our expertise and help fill the critical teacher shortage, the system should also support us in return by ensuring fair, reasonable, and consistent requirements.

For these reasons, I strongly urge lawmakers to pass SB819 and reconsider the licensure demands placed on J-1 exchange teachers in Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Testimony in Support of SB 819 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 7, 2025, at 3:00 PM

Aloha!

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

A story of J1 Filipino teacher's journey in Hawaii
(My success, challenges and hope)
by *Melvin T. Osorno*

I am Melvin T. Osorno, a J1 Filipino teacher from Cebu City, Philippines and a Grade 10 Biology Science teacher of Maui High School. I graduated Cum Laude in 2008 with a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education, focusing on General Science, from Cebu Normal University. This institution is recognized as a leading university for teacher education in the Philippines, known for producing many top performers in the country's teacher board examinations. It is a world-class institution committed to human transformation, creating globally competitive, efficient, and effective educators who positively impact lives around the world, particularly in the United States. I have also completed the required 30 academic units for my Master of Arts in Education, with a major in Science Education, and I am currently working on my thesis for graduation.

I have passionately devoted 15 impactful years to the field of education. Graduating with top honors in March 2008, I was fortunate to secure a teaching position just two months later. My journey began at San Roque College de Cebu (formerly San Roque Child Development School Montessori), a prestigious private institution in Cordova, Cebu, Philippines, where I spent six transformative years. There, I served as the Academic Coordinator for four years and the High School Coordinator for one year, delivering instruction in various Science subjects to students in Grades 4 to 10, along with Social Studies and Computer Education in Grade 7. My role extended beyond the classroom, as I took on the responsibilities of an event host and choreographer for numerous institutional activities.

In 2014, I embraced a new challenge at Talamban National High School, a large, esteemed integrated school nestled in the heart of Cebu City. Known for producing globally competitive graduates and excelling in regional and national educational contests, this institution allowed me to teach Science in the Junior High School department for nine years, while also serving as the Special Science Class Coordinator for four years. My active participation in event hosting and significant contributions to various institutional activities underscored my commitment to fostering academic, professional, social, and cultural growth in our teaching environment.

My proudest achievement came during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. I took the initiative to create, compile, and author the Grade 7 Earth and Environmental Science learning modules. These comprehensive resources were employed by numerous schools across the Division of Cebu City, enabling effective distance learning during this critical time. My modules not only met the immediate educational needs but also underwent rigorous quality assurance procedures by Master Teachers in Science at the Division Office, ensuring their excellence and reliability.

In December 2023, my father underwent a major gastrectomy, a surgical procedure to remove part of his stomach. This event deeply affected our family and inspired me to pursue my American dream of becoming a teacher abroad. Prior to this, it had always been my aspiration to teach in the USA. This challenging experience motivated me to leave my teaching career in the Philippines and do everything possible to achieve my goal and support my family.

Through prayer, enthusiasm, and hard work, I am given the opportunity to teach at Maui High School as a Biology teacher teaching essential concepts with real-world applications while considering students' learning interests and styles without compromising the Next Generations Science Standards and its learning competencies. I have done my best to create an inclusive, student-centered learning environment that fosters curiosity, critical thinking and a love for learning. Beyond my responsibilities as a science teacher, I also serve as one of the advisers for the Filipino Cultural Club, which aims to promote Filipino culture among students at our school. We accomplish this through various activities, such as teaching traditional dances, integrating Filipino folktales into our lessons and encouraging students to share their personal stories about their heritage. Students can learn more about their roots and share their knowledge with others. Through this program, I have discovered that many students at Maui High School are Filipinos, particularly Ilocanos.

With my academic credentials, accomplishments, and 15 years of teaching experience in the Philippines, as well as a year-long position as a science teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School in Kihei, Maui, I am currently a Biology teacher at Maui High School in Kahului, Maui. I feel honored and grateful to have served with commitment and dedication in both my home country, the Philippines, and the United States of America.

I am writing this testimony to strongly advocate for the passage of HB 439. This bill stands to make a profound and positive difference for Filipino teachers who aspire to join the Cross-Cultural Exchange Program for five years here in Hawaii. By facilitating their participation, it not only enhances educational exchange but also ensures that these dedicated teachers can secure equivalent international teaching licenses, similar to those obtained by Filipino teachers in states like Nevada and New Mexico.

These teachers have already demonstrated their capability by successfully acquiring their equivalent teaching licenses through authenticated Philippine teaching

licenses issued by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), as well as their undergraduate and master's Transcripts of Records (TORs) and Foreign Credential Evaluation (FCE) documents from reputable and reliable foreign credential evaluators such as WES, SpanTran, CAREE, and others. HB 439 will remove barriers and create opportunities, allowing these educators to flourish in a global environment and contribute even more richly to the educational landscape.

Despite possessing the necessary credentials, accomplishments, and teaching experiences essential for professional growth and development, achieving full licensure in Hawai'i by passing all five learning areas—major and core subjects—poses significant challenges. These challenges stem from factors such as inadequate preparation time, the complexity of test content, and cultural considerations. Furthermore, the process is not only costly but also inequitable, highlighting the urgent need for reform in the licensure system.

Before I received my job offer to teach in America, I diligently submitted a range of essential documents to demonstrate my qualifications and capabilities. These included my Philippine teaching license with comprehensive test scores from the examination for teachers conducted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), as well as my undergraduate and master's degree transcripts (TOR) from a prestigious university in the Philippines. Additionally, I provided foreign credential evaluation (FCE) documents from an internationally recognized evaluator which specializes in verifying academic and professional credentials and converting them into their U.S. equivalents based on established guidelines. Based solely on these authenticated documents, I firmly believe I am fully deserving of an equivalent U.S. teaching license. If teachers in states like Nevada and New Mexico have successfully obtained their equivalent teaching licenses as J-1 Filipino educators, then I am hopeful that the same opportunity exists for me here in Hawaii. It is crucial to recognize that teachers across these states, including Hawaii, share a common background. We all come from the Philippines, have taken the same rigorous teaching examination administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), and possess diverse teaching experiences and credentials. Furthermore, we submitted identical documentation, which was meticulously verified by the same reputable credential evaluator, and we underwent the same rigorous screening processes, including interviews and teaching demonstrations. In light of these facts, I passionately advocate for my peers and myself, who are equally qualified, to be granted equivalent teaching licenses here in Hawaii. It is not just a matter of fairness; it is about recognizing the dedication and expertise of educators who have committed to teaching and shaping the futures of students, regardless of where they come from.

As I delved into the relevant literature on the impacts of international examinations required for placement, I discovered a wealth of insights that underscore their significance and implications. I have encountered and realized something and that is cultural considerations. Cultural considerations play a significant, though often overlooked, role in the success of test-takers in international examinations like the Praxis. These considerations encompass a broad range of factors that can create

systematic disadvantages for individuals whose cultural backgrounds differ from the dominant culture assumed by the test. Here's a breakdown of these factors:

1. Language and Communication Styles:

- **Language Proficiency:** Even if the test is offered in multiple languages, nuances in language can pose challenges. Test questions often use complex sentence structures, idioms, and vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to non-native speakers, even those who are otherwise proficient. Translation inaccuracies can also occur.
- **Communication Styles:** Different cultures have different communication norms. Some cultures are more direct, while others are more indirect. Test questions may assume a specific communication style, potentially confusing test-takers from cultures that favor a different approach. For example, a question might require inferential reasoning that is not commonly used in some educational settings.
- **Test-Wiseness:** Test-wiseness refers to strategies for approaching and answering test questions. These strategies are often culturally specific and may not be universally understood. Test-takers from some cultures may be less familiar with multiple-choice formats, time management strategies for standardized tests, or the process of eliminating incorrect answers.

2. Educational Background and Pedagogical Approaches:

- **Curriculum Alignment:** International test-takers may have studied different curricula that do not align perfectly with the content covered by the Praxis. Even if the core concepts are similar, the specific examples, applications, and emphasis may differ, putting some test-takers at a disadvantage.
- **Teaching Styles:** Educational systems vary significantly across cultures. Some cultures emphasize rote memorization, while others focus on critical thinking and problem-solving. If the Praxis emphasizes skills that are not emphasized in a test-taker's educational background, they may struggle, even if they possess the underlying knowledge.
- **Test Familiarity:** Test-takers who are unfamiliar with standardized testing formats may experience anxiety and perform poorly, even if they are well-prepared in terms of content knowledge. This is particularly relevant for individuals from cultures where standardized testing is less common.

3. Cultural Values and Beliefs:

- **Time Orientation:** Different cultures have different perceptions of time. Some cultures are more punctual and time-conscious, while others are more flexible. Test-takers from cultures with a more flexible approach to time may struggle with the time constraints of the Praxis, even if they know the material.
- **Individualism vs. Collectivism:** Some cultures emphasize individual achievement, while others prioritize group harmony. Test-takers from collectivist cultures may be less accustomed to the competitive nature of standardized testing and may feel uncomfortable with the focus on individual performance.
- **Test Anxiety:** Test anxiety can be exacerbated by cultural factors. For example, in some cultures, failure on a high-stakes exam can be seen as a reflection on the entire family, leading to increased pressure and anxiety.

4. Socioeconomic Factors:

- **Access to Resources:** Test preparation resources, such as study guides, practice tests, and tutoring, may not be equally accessible to all test-takers. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be at a disadvantage due to limited access to these resources.
- **Test Fees:** The cost of taking the Praxis can be a barrier for some individuals, particularly those from developing countries.
- **Environmental Factors:** Factors such as noise levels, temperature, and access to a quiet study space can impact test performance. These factors may be more challenging for individuals from certain cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds.

5. Cultural Bias in Test Content:

- **Contextual Relevance:** Test questions may use examples, scenarios, or references that are more familiar to individuals from certain cultural backgrounds. This can inadvertently create bias against test-takers from other cultures.
- **Stereotypes:** While efforts are made to avoid stereotypes, they can sometimes unintentionally creep into test questions or answer choices, potentially disadvantaging certain groups.

Addressing Cultural Considerations:

Addressing these cultural considerations requires a multi-faceted approach:

- **Sensitivity Review:** Thorough review of test content by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to identify and eliminate potential biases.
- **Test Preparation Resources:** Development of culturally sensitive test preparation materials that address the specific needs of diverse test-takers.
- **Accommodations:** Consideration of appropriate accommodations for test-takers with diverse needs, such as extended time or the use of assistive technologies.
- **Research:** Ongoing research to identify and address cultural factors that may be impacting test performance.
- **Educator Training:** Training educators to be aware of cultural considerations in testing and to provide appropriate support to their students.

The Praxis exam is a standardized test used by many states to assess the knowledge and skills of aspiring educators. While it can provide valuable information about a test-taker's readiness for the classroom, it's important to understand that it offers a limited snapshot of an individual's overall capability as an educator. Here's a breakdown of what the Praxis can and cannot tell you:

What the Praxis CANNOT show:

- **Classroom Management Skills:** The Praxis cannot directly assess your ability to manage a classroom, build relationships with students, or create a positive learning environment. These skills are best demonstrated through real-world teaching experience.
- **Instructional Creativity:** The Praxis primarily focuses on assessing knowledge and understanding. It does not fully capture your ability to be creative and innovative in your teaching methods.
- **Adaptability:** The Praxis cannot measure your ability to adapt your teaching to meet the diverse needs of all learners, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students from different cultural backgrounds.

- **Passion and Dedication:** The Praxis cannot quantify your passion for teaching, your commitment to student success, or your ability to inspire and motivate students. These qualities are crucial for effective teaching but are not easily measured by a standardized test.
- **Experience:** The Praxis is a test of knowledge and skills, not experience. It cannot replace the valuable learning and growth that comes from actual teaching experience in a classroom setting.

(Sources: <https://tinyurl.com/w3ct3zs7>, <https://tinyurl.com/jmm2kuh5>, and <https://tinyurl.com/bdf69hrv>)

The Praxis exam can be a useful tool for evaluating a prospective teacher's foundational knowledge and skills. It can help ensure that individuals entering the teaching profession have a solid understanding of their subject matter and basic teaching principles. However, it's crucial to recognize that the Praxis is just one measure of a teacher's potential. Many other factors, such as classroom management skills, instructional creativity, adaptability, passion, and experience, play a significant role in determining a teacher's overall effectiveness.

Therefore, while a good score on the Praxis can be a positive indicator, it should not be the sole factor used to evaluate a person's capability as an educator. It's essential to consider a range of factors, including observations of teaching, student feedback, and other measures of professional growth, to get a more complete picture of an individual's potential as an educator.

(Source: <https://tinyurl.com/yckbtt97>)

The high cost of living in Hawaii presents an enormous challenge to me. As an emergency hire teacher, my salary falls significantly short of what fully licensed teachers earn, and this disparity exacerbates our financial struggles. With housing costs skyrocketing, a substantial portion of our income is consumed, leaving me with scant resources to support myself during the program. I find myself constantly grappling with the obligation to provide for my family while striving for a stable future.

It has the potential to revolutionize our education system. If passed, this critical legislation would grant international teachers full teaching licenses, thereby eliminating the restrictive exam requirements that currently impede our ability to serve our students effectively. It would ensure that we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, allowing us to properly support our families and uplift our communities. Furthermore, it would extend our work permits for five years, offering essential stability for our students' learning and enabling us to commit fully to our schools. This change is not just an improvement for educators; it's a vital investment in the future of our students and the entire educational landscape.

Hawaii truly needs highly proficient, efficient, and effective teachers. I am immensely grateful that I am here in Hawaii fueled by passion, commitment, and dedication to create positive and lasting impacts on the lives of our keikis, preparing them for a constantly changing world. I sincerely pray and hope that you will support the passage of SB 819, which encourages and motivates our J1 Filipino teachers to contribute positively to the educational success of diverse learners in Hawaii.

"Mahalo nui loa no kou manawa a me kou no'ono'o".

Melvin T. Osorno

Grade 10 Biology teacher

Maui High School

"Those who love to learn must never cease to learn,"

My name is Desiree B. Roble and I am a Preschool Special Education Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School, with a heart full of love and a passion that knows no bounds.

For years, I have dedicated my career to providing inclusive, supportive, and nurturing educational environments for preschoolers with diverse abilities. These tiny humans, with their curious minds, bright smiles, and resilient spirits, have taught me the true meaning of courage, adaptability, and joy.

As a Preschool Special Education Teacher here in Hawaii, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of early intervention and inclusive education. I've seen children who were once hesitant to communicate blossom into confident storytellers. I've watched children who struggled to navigate their surroundings learn to explore, create, and thrive in a world full of wonder.

But my role goes beyond academics; it's about empowering families, fostering friendships, and creating a sense of belonging for every child. It's about recognizing the unique strengths, needs, and personalities of each young learner and tailoring my approach to meet them where they are.

That's why I am deeply committed to supporting initiatives that promote inclusive education, provide resources for families, and recognize the critical role that Preschool Special Education Teachers play in shaping the futures of our youngest citizens.

By investing in our earliest learners, we are investing in the future of our communities, our society, and our world. We are giving children the foundation they need to succeed, to grow, and to thrive. We are empowering them to become compassionate leaders, creative problem-solvers, and curious lifelong learners.

I fully support SB 819 for me to continue my advocacy for the rights, needs, and potential of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. Let us work together to create a world where every child, regardless of their abilities or challenges, has access to high-quality, inclusive education that honors their unique spirit and nurtures their growth.

DESIREE B. ROBLE
Preschool Special Education Teacher
(Fully Self Contained Classroom)
Kahakai Elementary School
Kailua Kona, Hawaii

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:32:35 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Kern	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 6, 2025

Aloha Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Mercado Kim, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sarah Kern and I am a resident of Līhu‘e, Kaua‘i and an instructional coach at Chiefess Kamakāhelei Middle School (CKMS). I am testifying in strong support of HB439 to recognize the teaching experiences and qualifications of international teachers who are helping to educate our keiki. CKMS currently has eight teachers who are on a J-1 visa. These teachers make up more than 10% of our faculty and are crucial members of our school’s community. They are team players who are incredibly dedicated to their teaching and can often build relationships with our Filipino students in ways that other teachers cannot.

As a coach, I am often asked to support teachers as they pursue a teaching license in Hawai‘i, and have been shocked to learn that our J-1 visa teachers are having to jump through multiple hoops and take extra Praxis exams in order to earn a Hawai‘i teaching license when they are already licensed to teach in the Philippines. These teachers are already facing challenges upon arriving in Hawai‘i, including finding housing, adapting to a new society and culture, and navigating the ins and outs of teaching at a new school within the Hawai‘i DOE which is a challenge in and of itself. One of our J-1 visa teachers has decades of experience in education and was even a principal in the Philippines. Shouldn’t his credentials be recognized here as well? Instead of forcing these teachers to study and pay for multiple Praxis exams, jumping through extra hoops while helping us fill our vacant positions, let’s support them and allow them to focus on what they came here to do – help to educate our keiki.

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

Mahalo nui loa,

Sarah Kern

SB-819

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:33:18 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:08:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dyan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, which seeks to allow teachers from the Philippines to reciprocate their teaching licenses in Hawaii.

As a J-1 teacher from the Philippines currently working in Hawaii, I have had the privilege of bringing my skills and cultural experiences into the classroom, enriching the lives of my students and contributing to Hawaii's diverse educational landscape. Teaching in Hawaii has been a rewarding and transformative experience, not only for me but also for my students who benefit from the global perspectives I bring.

Reciprocating teaching licenses between the Philippines and Hawaii would significantly enhance the ability of experienced educators like myself to continue contributing to the state's education system. It would reduce barriers for qualified teachers and foster a more inclusive and diverse workforce, ultimately benefiting the students of Hawaii.

I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to teach in Hawaii and to be welcomed by this community. The Aloha spirit and the value placed on education here have made a lasting impact on me. By supporting SB819, we can ensure that more educators from the Philippines can share their expertise and cultural richness with Hawaii's students.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB819 for the benefit of Hawaii's educators and students alike.

Mahalo nui loa,

DYAN FERRER

SOLOMON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL