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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SCR 71/SR 49 - URGING THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING TO EXAMINE AND CONSIDER A SLIDING SCALE TUITION OR FEE SCHEDULE FOR STATE PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3, 2019

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Dela Cruz, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association **opposes** SCR 71/SR 49, urging the Executive Office on Early Learning to examine and consider a sliding scale tuition or fee schedule for State Prekindergarten programs.

The Hawaii State Teachers Association believes that universal prekindergarten should be included in the State of Hawaii's public education system. As such it should not be only for those that can afford to pay for prekindergarten, as with other public education in our public schools, it should be free. SCR 71/SR 49 sets a horrible precedent if it is okay to charge for prekindergarten what is next a sliding scale for kindergarten through 12th? This would set a precedent for public education not being free and for all of our society, HSTA does not support charging a fee for public education, including pre-K.

As noted by an MIT working group on the topic, investments in early childhood education pay dividends for the formal preparation of children as learners and future citizens, while also benefiting taxpayers and boosting economic vitality. Research on the benefits of quality pre-kindergarten programs indicates that for every dollar invested in such opportunities, society saves four to eight dollars on remedial classes, special education, welfare programs, and criminal justice costs. Roughly 85 percent of a child's brain develops from birth to age five, according to modern neuroscience, emphasizing the importance of providing a quality learning environment during these formative years.

Preschool brings an approximately \$4.20 return on investment for every dollar spent on quality early childhood services, especially in terms of



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long-term life skills. At the national level, every dollar spent on early childhood education saves taxpayers up to \$13.00 in future costs, including lowered healthcare costs, reduced rates of educational remediation and prison incarceration, and higher productivity. Access to quality pre-kindergarten programs not only helps working parents fulfill their responsibilities, but is essential for building a 21st century labor force.

Early childhood education is especially important for at-risk students. According to the High Scopes/Perry Preschool longitudinal study, at-risk children with access to quality early learning programs were 20 percent more likely to graduate from high school, 14 percent more likely to be employed, and 24 percent less likely to have been incarcerated by age 40 than peers without such access. It is imperative that we do all we can to ensure our children are “classroom ready,” meaning that they are prepared to receive basic instruction and effectively socialize with peers upon entering elementary school, placing both our keiki and their teachers on the path to success.

These are the reasons the state needs to ensure that all our keiki should have access to free public pre-kindergarten, not just those that pay for it.

The Hawaii State Teachers Association asks that your committee to **oppose** SCR 71/SR 49.