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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: SCR 83 / SR 63 – URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO USE CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF, AND ECONOMIC SECURITY ACT AND CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE AND RELIEF SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT MONIES TO RETAIN TEACHERS AND PREVENT FURLOUGHS.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17, 2021

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Kidani and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** SCR 83/ SR 63, urging the Department of Education to use Coronavirus response and relief supplemental appropriations act monies to retain teachers and prevent furloughs.

Hawai'i continues to suffer from a shortage of licensed teachers with over 1000 vacancies each year. Adding furloughs or pay cuts to their already existing low salaries when adjusted for the cost of living in Hawaii, is an insult. **The Department of Education should be prioritizing, and using, any federal funds given to them during this epidemic, as allowed, to retain our teachers along with the other support staff and personnel needed at our public schools.**

IF the Department of Education concentrates on retaining our teachers, they would not have to focus so much on the recruitment of teachers. **To recruit and retain effective educators, policymakers must find ways to lessen the financial burden of being a public school teacher, suggesting furloughs or pay cuts adds insult to injury.** We need our teachers to stay!

The Hawaii State Teachers Association continues to not support the Department of Educations proposed use of \$63 million dollars of ESSER federal funds for private tutors and summer school, while at the same time firing teachers and other school staff. This was their plan. We do not know yet, how they will propose to spend the most recent federal funds yet. Hiring private tutors is a luxury we cannot afford, especially as the department proposes laying off more than 700 educators. Despite the DOE saying funds have been restored to prevent layoffs, many of our teachers are still awaiting being told their positions

will not be cut. Some educators have been told their positions have been saved, but others have not. **The recent federal stimulus money that has been allocated to the Department of Education should be returned to schools via the weighted student formula and special education funding, to allow principals to retain their current qualified teachers and other support staff at their schools, or to hire additional teachers to ensure smaller class sizes. Smaller class sizes are not only safer, but it is also one of best strategies for raising student achievement as students receive more individual instruction from their teacher when the class size is small. The department should not be proposing hiring private tutors over retaining our teachers and other support personnel needed for our students.**

To make ends meet, many teachers are already forced to pick up second and third jobs, live in cramped studio apartments, and cut back on necessities like medical and dental care. They should only need to have one job so they are able to devote their full attention to their students and the preparation of lessons and grading that they usually complete after school once their students have left for the day. Instead, they are rushing off to their second or even third jobs when they would much rather concentrate on their teaching duties and their students. Many of these second and third jobs have been lost during this pandemic as well, or their spouse has lost their job, making their financial struggle harder.

Previous HSTA surveys have found that a jarring 47 percent of teachers are spending between \$250 and \$500 per year on materials, with many spending \$1,000 or more. That's \$250 to \$1,000 that would be spent on their own family needs, food, bills, and other personal expenses in a fully-funded school system. Notably, most teachers do not earn enough to claim the benefits of tax itemization—they cannot, for example, take mortgage deductions for homes that they cannot afford to buy either.

To take care of the needs of Hawai'i's hardworking teachers, the Hawaii State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this resolution.