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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2867 - RELATING TO EDUCATION.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2016

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Tokuda and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association **opposes SB 2867**, relating to education.

Since 1996, Hawaii state law has recognized that teachers deserve annual step raises. In 1996, the State Legislature passed Act 89, which comprehensively transformed the state's public education system. Among other changes, the bill stated that "teachers and educational officers who have completed a year's satisfactory service...shall be entitled to an annual increment." Yet, for too long, many of Hawai'i's educators have been paid far below their increment level, exacerbating recruitment and retention problems plaguing local schools.

Approximately 10 percent of the state's teachers switch schools, relocate, or leave the profession each year, with only 50 to 60 percent of current teachers having worked at their school for five years or more. Chronic teacher turnover forces the department of education to rely on emergency hires and long-term substitute teachers to fill vacancies. Teacher turnover is especially high and impacting on hard-to-staff, largely rural or impoverished, schools, where as few as 56 percent of teachers have obtained full state certification and a minimum of a bachelor's degree, compared to 93 percent statewide. Recruitment and retention is additionally worsened by Hawai'i's high cost of living. According to a WalletHub study, the islands ranked fifty-first out of fifty states and the District of Columbia for starting and median teacher salary adjusted for cost of living.

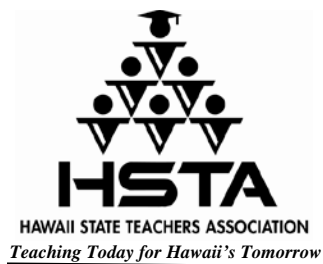
To recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, we must pay teachers professionally. A good first step toward accomplishing that goal is "truing up" our

state's educators to be paid commensurate with the increment level at which they are currently classified. Veteran educators, such as those who have been teaching for longer than 10 years, are being paid as many as eight "steps" below their classification level, resulting in potential pay gaps of over \$10,000. HSTA has sought clarification from the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board on this issue because, in our view, the failure to pay teachers commensurate with their classification status runs afoul of state law, specifically §302A-626. The executive and department of education have consistently failed to seek and provide funding for "trued up" steps, thereby violating state law. Notably, step increases are acquired when teachers complete a year's worth of work or reclassify based on various pathways for professional development. Put simply, they are raises earned for work that has already been performed.

This cannot continue. Accordingly, rather than repeal §302A-626, we encourage you to replace the contents of this bill with language expressly clarifying that the payment of steps shall be mandatory annually for all teachers. We suggest using the following language to implement our requested amendment: **"302A-626 Salary increases; annual, longevity.** (a) Teachers and educational officers who have completed a year's [~~satisfactory~~] service and who have complied with the other requirements of sections 302A-602 [~~to 302A-639, and 302A-701,~~] and 302A-605 shall be [~~entitled~~] receive [to] an annual [~~increment~~] step increase. No teacher at the highest step within the teacher's classification shall be entitled to receive an annual step increase pursuant to this section.

(b) Teachers and educational officers who have served [~~satisfactorily~~] for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step and who have complied with the other requirements of sections 302A-602 [~~to 302A-639, and 302A-701,~~] and 302A-605 shall receive longevity step increases; provided that the board may grant principals and vice-principals longevity step increases more frequently than once every three years pursuant to section 302A-625." We note that our requested amendment does not interfere with collective bargaining because the *monetary amount* of step increases would remain subject to negotiation.

Alternatively, if this measure's repeal of HRS §302A-626 is to move forward, we urge you insert an appropriation section into the bill providing funds to align teacher salaries with their current classification levels (steps). Such funding has never been provided by lawmakers and would be a boon to our state's hardworking educators, in some cases hiking pay by over \$10,000 annually.



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If we expect teachers to elevate their professional practice, we must provide them with professional pay. The Hawaii State Teachers Association asks your committee to **oppose** the current version of this bill, therefore, and **pass either of our suggested amendments** instead, giving teachers the pay increases for which they've been waiting.