

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

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

Date: 02/23/2023

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB 0828, HD1 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the department of education to establish a student bus fare rate system to include free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program. Appropriates funds. Effective 6/30/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) provides comments and raises some concerns relating to HB 828, HD1. The Department supports the goal to provide free bus passes for students whose household qualifies for free or reduced lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program.

One concern is due to the limited resources, the timing of reviewing and processing the applications, approvals, and distribution of passes may be delayed. Streamlining and automating the information in one central system may alleviate some of these issues.

The Department is appreciative of an appropriation in this measure provided it does not adversely affect the priorities in the Department's Board of Education approved budget.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony for this measure.



Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501c4 nonprofit committed to advocating for children and their families. Our core issues are safety, health, and education.

To: House Committee on Finance
Re: **HB 828, HD1 - Relating to Student Transportation**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
February 23, 2023, 10:00 AM

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Committee Members,

On behalf of HCAN Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of HB 828, HD1**. This bill requires the department of education (DOE) to establish a student bus fare rate system to include free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program.

Currently, DOE students who qualify for free lunch in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) – their families earn up to 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) – are eligible for free bus passes. However, those that qualify for reduced-price lunch – between 130% and 185% of the FPL – are NOT.

Especially with the FPL underestimating the true extent of poverty in Hawaii,¹ reduced-price lunch students and their families are not able to afford the basics. While the income eligibility limit for reduced-price lunch is about \$59,000 for a family of four,² the “bare-minimum costs of basic necessities” for that same family is more than \$100,000, according to the *ALICE in Hawai'i* report.³

In other words, a single mom with two children who makes \$35,000 a year qualifies for reduced-price school meals, but currently she must pay \$72 per quarter per child for bus passes, or \$576 per school year. That is a major expense for a family that is already struggling to make ends meet.

The pandemic has exacerbated a long-standing problem of chronic absenteeism among DOE students.⁴ Those absences have been concentrated in rural areas and among historically marginalized populations.⁵ Not surprisingly, research shows that access to school bus rides helps vulnerable student populations reduce their absences.⁶

Mahalo for this opportunity to provide testimony. Please pass this bill.

Thank you,

Nicole Woo
Director of Research and Economic Policy

HCAN Speaks! Board of Directors

Liza Ryan Gill
President

Nick Kacprowski, J.D.
Treasurer

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Secretary

Teri Keliipuleole
Jasmine Slovak
Erica Yamauchi

¹ <https://hiappleseed.org/blog/official-poverty-data-obscures-reality-in-hawaii>

²

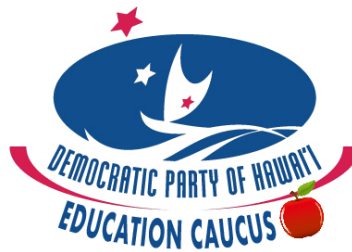
<https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

³ <https://www.auw.org/sites/default/files/pictures/ALICE%20in%20Hawaii%20-%202022%20Facts%20and%20Figures%20Full%20Report.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/ConnectWithUs/MediaRoom/PressReleases/Pages/2021-22-Strive-HI-performance-data-reflect-positive-progress-in-HIDOE-student-academic-recovery-and-acceleration.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.civilbeat.org/2022/01/student-absences-soared-above-30-in-some-hawaii-schools/>

⁶ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED622132.pdf>



HOUSE BILL 828, HD 1, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

FEBRUARY 23, 2023 · HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
· CHAIR REP. KYLE YAMASHITA

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports HB 828, HD 1, relating to student transportation, which requires the department of education to establish a student bus fare rate system to include free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program.

Currently, the Hawai'i Department of Education provides regular bus service to meet school transportation requirements and ensure adequate attendance for children. According to HIDOE, an average of 35,090 regular education students ride the bus each day, along with 3,359 special education students. Bus service is essential for students who lack other transportation options, especially those who live in remote communities or face financial hardship.

To qualify for regular bus service, students in grades kindergarten through five must reside a mile or more, and students in grades six through twelve must reside 1.5 miles or more, from the school within their geographic area in which they are enrolled. Students who qualify for bus service may receive a free bus pass if they meet eligibility requirements or pay \$36.00 for quarterly one-way trips, \$72.00 for quarterly round trips, or \$10.00 for ten coupons. A student who qualifies for *free*

lunch under the free and reduced-price lunch program is eligible for a free bus pass. **Yet, free bus passes are not given to students who qualify for reduced price lunch.**

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, bus service has become a tremendous challenge for remote communities. On Hawai'i Island, for instance, bus routes have been routinely cancelled because of a lack of drivers in areas that are already exceedingly large and that require lengthy travel times for students—in some cases, students must travel over 1.5 hours to reach their schools. These areas also tend to be some of the most impoverished districts in our state.

Families of students at Ka'u High School and Pahala Elementary (one campus), for instance, have a median annual income of \$39,751, less than half of the state average of \$83,173 for families of public school students. According to the most recent STRIVE HI report, 63 percent of students at Ka'u High and Pahala Elementary missed fifteen or more school days. **This data shows the strong correlation between poverty and chronic absenteeism, a problem that is exacerbated by the lack of affordable transportation options for working families.** Passage of this measure would assist many impoverished families in obtaining transportation for their keiki and, thus, reduce the chronic absenteeism that prevents children from reaching their full potential.

Kris Coffield · Chairperson, DPH Education Caucus · (808) 679-7454 · kriscoffield@gmail.com

HB-828-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/21/2023 8:59:46 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2023 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katie Curtis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of House Bill 828: Relating to Student Transportation. While I have only lived on the island for a few years, it is quite clear that it is expensive and the cost of living is high. At HPU we are given a bus pass for each semester, which is included in our tuition. In this way the school makes living here more affordable and convenient for their students. This is being done for people who can afford to pay thousands of dollars of tuition and housing. If Public school is known for being “free” and available to everyone they should take into consideration all of the aspects going into it. There are many factors that can cause students to struggle to get an education, transportation should not be one of them. I think that students who qualify for free or reduced lunch should also receive the reduced fares mentioned in this bill.

HB-828-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/22/2023 7:56:54 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2023 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry SUPPORT HB 828 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION