



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

**Date:** 02/13/2023

**Time:** 03:10 PM

**Location:** CR 229 & Videoconference

**Committee:** Senate Education

**Department:** Education

**Person Testifying:** Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

**Title of Bill:** SB 0971 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes. Requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on city bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students. Requires an annual report to the Legislature.

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 971, which allows the continuation of the successful Expanding Ridership to Educate Students in School (EXPRESS) pilot program and expands it to include charter school high school students.

The school bus driver shortages continue to affect transportation options for students. Allowing high school students access to public transportation helps address the driver shortage while providing them with opportunities to improve their overall well-being and increase access to educational and social opportunities.

Usage of the HOLO card program on Oahu from October through December 2022 shows that students have tapped their EXPRESS cards between 38,000 – 43,000 times between Monday through Friday and 11,000 – 15,000 on the weekends. Students are riding most frequently at 7:00 a.m. and between 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m., which is consistent with most high school bell times.

If funding were provided to continue this program, the Department would have the means to include public charter schools. At the time of inception, the Student

Transportation Services branch utilized funds from their general fund allocation to support this program, so charter schools were not included in this initial pilot.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

JOSH GREEN. M.D.  
GOVERNOR



CATHY K. IKEDA  
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII  
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION  
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>  
1111 Bishop Street, Suite 516, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

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FOR: SB971 Relating to Student Transportation  
DATE: February 13, 2023  
TIME: 3:10 P.M.  
COMMITTEE: Committee on Education  
ROOM: Conference Room 229 & Videoconference  
FROM: Yvonne Lau, Interim Executive Director  
State Public Charter School Commission

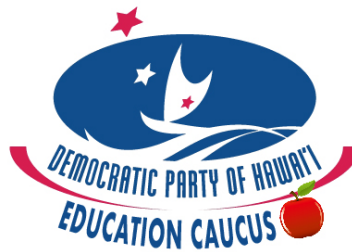
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Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Mercado Kim, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony in **SUPPORT of SB 971** which appropriates funds to the Department of Education (DOE) to provide public high school students and charter school students with bus passes. The measure also requires the DOE to collect data on city bus pass usage by public high school students and charter school students and requires an annual report from the DOE.

The Commission appreciates that this measure makes this program available to charter school students; the Commission will be available to assist the department as needed in effectuating the requirements of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



## **SENATE BILL 971, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION**

FEBRUARY 13, 2023 · SENATE EDUCATION  
COMMITTEE · CHAIR SEN. MICHELLE N. KIDANI

**POSITION:** Support.

**RATIONALE:** The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** SB 971, relating to student transportation, which appropriates funds to the Hawai'i Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes; requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on city bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students; and Requires an annual report to the Legislature.

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.

A nationwide shortage of bus drivers that is being experienced by 80 percent of school districts has caused route cancellations and transportation disruptions for many working families. Around 33,000 students across the islands the rely on DOE school buses to commute to and from school each day. Yet, **150 out of 700 bus driver positions were left vacant as of September of 2022,** despite efforts to increase pay and provide recruitment incentives.

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.**

Therefore, 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](mailto:kriscoffield@gmail.com)**



Email: [communications@ulupono.com](mailto:communications@ulupono.com)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Monday, February 13, 2023 — 3:10 p.m.

**Ulupono Initiative supports SB 971, Relating to Student Transportation.**

Dear Chair Kidani and Members of the Committee:

My name is Micah Munekata, and I am the Director of Government Affairs at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy and clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

**Ulupono supports SB 971**, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education (DOE) to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes and requires the DOE to collect certain data on city bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students.

In addition to the numerous educational benefits for students, this measure would help meet many community goals and make transportation choices more affordable across all islands. Specifically, these types of complementary and supportive programs from the State help us support our communities more effectively to:

- **Improve congestion**—Up to 20–30% of morning traffic can be generated by parents driving their children to school.<sup>1</sup>
- **Reduce our climate impacts**—It is not possible to rely exclusively on the electrification of the current system to meet our climate goal of carbon net neutrality by 2045.<sup>2</sup> We need those who want to walk, bike and bus to be able to do so as conveniently as possible. This also includes students and their families.
- **Lower the cost of living in Hawai'i**—If we can help our households' shed cars, we can help them save up to \$16,200 per year while reducing the indirect public costs associated with vehicle ownership that amount to \$11.2 billion per year in Hawai'i.<sup>3</sup> In addition, housing can become more affordable if we don't dedicate so much land and financial resources to expensive, space-intensive car dependency.

<sup>1</sup> <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2012/09/05/september-brings-back-to-school-jump-in-traffic-congestion/>

<sup>2</sup> Presentation at Hawaii Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission Meeting 4/6/2022  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqwhX8RI\\_IQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqwhX8RI_IQ)

<sup>3</sup> "The Costs of the Vehicle Economy in Hawai'i," <https://ulupono.com/news-listing/report-examines-hawaii-s-21-8-billion-vehicle-economy/>.

- **Make bus transit more family-friendly**—At the high end, a family of four on O‘ahu currently could pay up to \$18 per trip.<sup>4</sup> If one parent has a monthly pass and the kids now are free, that transit becomes a much more affordable option. Although not the intent of this bill, it is an additional benefit.

As Hawai‘i’s transportation needs are increasingly complex and challenging, we appreciate the state exploring and supporting the many different policies that help improve our transportation choices in our communities

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Micah Munekata  
Director of Government Affairs

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<sup>4</sup> Round-trip for 2 adults at \$3 per leg and 2 kids fares at \$1.50 per leg. No monthly pass discount assumed.



STATE OF HAWAII  
HAWAII CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION  
COMMISSION  
POST OFFICE BOX 621  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

**Co-Chairs:**  
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Director, OPSD

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Chairperson, DOE  
Director, C+C DPP  
Director, Maui DP  
Director, Hawai'i DP  
Director, Kaua'i DP  
The Adjutant General  
Manager, CZM

**Testimony of  
Leah Laramée  
Coordinator, Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission**

**Before the Senate Committee on  
EDUCATION**

**Monday, February 13, 2023  
3:10 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 229 & Videoconference**

**In consideration of  
SENATE BILL 971  
RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION**

Senate Bill 971 appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes. Requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on city bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. **The Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission (Commission) supports this bill.**

The Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission consists of a multi-jurisdictional effort between 20 different departments, committees, and counties. Emissions from ground transportation account for over half of energy emissions as noted in the 2017 Greenhouse Gas Inventory. Reducing emissions from ground transportation is one of the major focuses of the Commission and creating a free bus pass program would support this goal.

The average passenger car in the U.S. produces just under 1 pound of carbon dioxide per mile traveled. If just one driver per household switched to taking public transportation for a daily commute of 10 miles each way, this would save 4,627 pounds of carbon dioxide per household per year. In addition, as we are all aware, traffic significantly increases when schools are in session. Providing bus passes for public high school and charter school students could significantly reduce traffic during the school year.

For Hawai'i to achieve its goal of a net-negative carbon economy as soon as practicable but no later than 2045 it is essential that everyone is afforded the opportunity to participate in the net-negative carbon economy from an equity, economic, and technical perspective.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



**SB-971**

Submitted on: 2/10/2023 5:59:58 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/13/2023 3:10:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
cheryl B.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I SUPPORT this bill which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes. Requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on city bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students. Requires an annual report to the Legislature.

This is a great start to helping make sure that students have a way to get to school. I think it is limiting to not include younger students who may also need to use public transport.

FROM: Emily Warren, Individual  
TO: Senator Michelle Kidani, Chair, and Members of the Committee on Education  
RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 971, RELATING TO  
STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

Monday, February 13, 2023, 3:10 PM

I humbly request this legislative body face the realities of the transportation barriers our families are facing across the state and support strong solutions, like SB 971. As a previous Department of Education (DOE) employee working in student transportation I had the opportunity to talk to dozens of families regarding their transportation challenges and the impact that had on their students.

I spoke with a grandmother on Kauai who was taking care of her 3 grandchildren while her daughter worked 2 jobs trying to support the family. She couldn't drive her grandchildren to and from school every day, which affected their ability to participate in sports and other after school activities. The children were missing school on a regular basis until the DOE launched the EXPRESS program, which allowed them access to free public transit (something they could not afford on their own).

I spoke with a couple in Ewa who both worked in the healthcare profession and needed school bus service to get their daughter to and from school due to their work schedules, however there was no room on the bus. The access to public transit allowed their daughter to get to and from school consistently and she was able to participate in an after school academic program that she had previously been unable to attend.

I spoke with a single mother on Maui who relied on school bus service for her daughter and son. When their bus route was suspended due to driver shortages, she had to take vacation hours to get to work late and leave early to drop off and pick her kids from school. Her vacation hours were running out and she was about to start having to take leave without pay when the EXPRESS program "threw her a lifeline" enabling her kids to take the public transit buses to and from school.

Additionally, as a Board of Directors appointee for the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, I can tell you with 100% confidence that the school bus driver shortage is going to continue to get worse until school bus driving is considered a full-time job with benefits (like most CDL professional driving careers).

As an average taxpayer, I would love to see my tax money go towards a program like this that enables and empowers our youth and by extension, our families. Allowing students access to free public transportation sends a strong message to our communities that you see and understand the foundational challenges to success, which most frequently starts with transportation barriers.

Lastly, while an appropriation to the DOE is needed for this bill, I strongly encourage you all to see the long game in this investment. The cost of an annual bus pass for youth is \$480 a year. The cost for school bus service per student per year is well over \$1,000. As public

transit services expand across all islands, it is highly likely that as time passes, more students would choose to utilize public transportation.

**SB-971**

Submitted on: 2/12/2023 11:28:41 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/13/2023 3:10:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Linda Morgan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a resident of Ka'u, I strongly support SB971. Our students have experienced long delays in getting to and from school, and missed instructional time due to the lack of school bus drivers. Being able to use public transportation to get to and from school will improve student attendance and achievement for middle and high school students at Ka'u High.

Please support SB971.

**SB-971**

Submitted on: 2/12/2023 2:53:47 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/13/2023 3:10:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Marion K A Kapuniai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**SUPPORT! ONLY IF STUDENTS OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS, UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE HAWAII STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION, ARE INCLUDED FOR THIS TRANSPORATION BENEFIT.**

Thank you, M Kapuniai

**CJ Johnson**  
chrisluttet@gmail.com

**2/14/2023**

**Senator Chris Lee and Transportation, Culture and the Arts Committee**

Dear Chair Lee and Committee Members,

I am writing to offer strong support of Senate Bill 971 (SB971).

I submit this testimony as a private citizen but I have a long resume as an advocate and organizer for safer, healthier transportation systems. I have led advocacy bike and pedestrian organizations and have served in state and local transportation and health agencies. Currently I am the lead organizer of the Hawaii Safe Routes Coalition. HSRC is an informal group of nonprofit, government, elected, and community representatives who are committed to working towards a Hawaii where all keiki have the infrastructure, confidence, skills and social support to bus, bike, walk or roll to school.

By most measures, including safety, congestion, emissions reduction, maintenance and level of service, the state's transportation system- like many across the US, is failing to make significant progress and- in many cases- is deteriorating year over year.

There is no viable pathway to solving these connected crises without curbing single occupancy vehicle trips and shifting them to active modes and transit. Policy that makes transit a more reliable option for more trips for more people is health policy and climate policy and public safety policy and economic vitality policy,

By normalizing and even prioritizing transit use for students we are forging a path towards a future with fewer traffic deaths, healthier, more connected communities, increased economic stability and opportunity, and less tax money poured into rapidly crumbling infrastructure. We have a collective, vested interest in converting every possible automobile mile traveled into a mile of sustainable mobility. This bill is an important step in that direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.

**CJ Johnson**

**Honolulu**