

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>
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1100, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
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FOR: HB 1651 HD2 Relating to the Safety of Educational Workers
DATE: February 23, 2024
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Finance
ROOM: Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

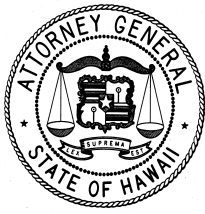
Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to offer **SUPPORT of HB 1651 HD2** which provides increased protection for educational workers by requiring the department of education and public charter schools to take certain steps to better address harassment of educational workers.

The Commission appreciates the inclusion of public charter schools in this measure as it affords public charter school educational workers the same protections as their department counterparts.

The Commission is available to work with the Legislature, the DOE, and our public charter schools in moving this legislation forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE, 2024**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 1651, H.D. 2, RELATING TO THE SAFETY OF EDUCATIONAL WORKERS.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

DATE: Friday, February 23, 2024 **TIME:** 1:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 308 and Videoconference

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Yamashita and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

The bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) and public charter schools to take certain steps to report incidents of harassment of educational workers and implement procedures for handling harassment of educational workers.

The proposed sections 302A-__(d)(6), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), added by section 2 of the bill on page 4, lines 9-13, and 302D-__(d)(6), HRS, added by section 3 of the bill on page 7, lines 11-15, provide that the DOE and charter schools shall "[a]ssist educational workers with any legal actions that may arise from harassment, as provided in section 711-__, including covering the costs incurred from serving temporary restraining orders related to the harassment[.]" For clarity, the Department recommends revising the last phrase to state: "including [covering] reimbursing the educational worker for the costs incurred from serving temporary restraining orders related to the harassment, but shall not include the payment of other attorney's fees or court costs."

Additionally, the wording that would have established the criminal offense of harassment of an educational worker in the original draft and H.D. 1 of the bill has been removed in H.D. 2, but sections 2 and 3 of the bill still contain references to the proposed section 711-__, HRS. See page 2, lines 5 and 8; page 4, line 10-11; page 5,

lines 10 and 13; and page 7, line 12-13. To address this inconsistency, the Department suggests replacing the references to "section 711-__" with the following wording: "section 711-1106 because of the educational worker's position as an educational worker."

The proposed sections 302A-__(c) and 302D-__(c) provide that an educational worker seeking judicial protection from harassment, "including obtaining a temporary restraining order, shall be entitled to a leave of absence with pay to attend court proceedings related to such protection." Page 2, lines 12-18 (section 2), and page 5, line 17, through page 6, line 2 (section 3). To clarify that such paid leave is appropriate when the educational worker is seeking judicial protection from harassment due to the person's status as an educational worker, the Department recommends amending sections 302A-__(c) on page 2, lines 12-18, and 302D-__(c) on page 5, line 17, through page 6, line 2, as follows:

(c) An educational worker who seeks judicial protection from harassment, as provided for in section 711-1106 because of the educational worker's position as an educational worker, including obtaining a temporary restraining order, shall be entitled to a leave of absence with pay to attend court proceedings related to the protection. The duration of the leave of absence with pay shall be reasonable and sufficient to allow the educational worker to fulfill their court-related obligations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this bill.

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: 02/23/2024

Time: 01:00 PM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB 1651, HD2 RELATING TO THE SAFETY OF EDUCATIONAL WORKERS.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education and public charter schools to take certain steps to report incidents of harassment and implement procedures for handling harassment of educational workers. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD2)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) respectfully provides comments on HB1651 HD 2.

The Department is fully supportive of protecting our school, district, and state office staff and administrators. Previous versions of this measure that deemed harassment of an educational worker as a misdemeanor mirrored efforts the Department has made in the past to increase the protections for our administrators, teachers, counselors, and Department employees. By increasing these protections it has always been our hope that this would deter the type of aggressive behavior being leveled at our employees.

The Department is open to working with the legislature to create a process to provide additional protections for our employees. Our principals are provided training to deal with situations around threatening and intimidating behavior from non-Department individuals but ultimately the safest course of action in these situations is to involve law enforcement. Currently, when our Department is alerted of aggressive or threatening behavior that results in the involvement of law enforcement, our Safety, Security, and Emergency Preparedness Branch works to assess the situation and provide an appropriate response. This could include developing a safety plan, providing additional campus security, installation of video surveillance cameras, and have an

additional threat assessment by Threat Team Hawaii, an organization of threat assessment experts from county, state and federal agencies.

The Department is concerned that some of the processes identified in the bill fall outside the scope of the Department's control. For example, the Department is not familiar with the time required to pursue judicial protection and so determining a reasonable and sufficient time to allow for a leave of absence while pursuing judicial protection would be difficult. Additionally, no funding is being provided to cover the costs to provide a leave of absence or the costs of serving a temporary restraining order.

The Department is committed to supporting its employees. In the past, when the Department determined it was appropriate, a Department representative along with a Deputy Attorney General has attended hearings where an employee was seeking a temporary restraining order due to threatening or intimidating behaviors by non-Department individuals relating to the employee's work with the Department. The Department submits that having the Department of the Attorney General represent the Department's representative in such hearings not only provides support for its Department employees, but also ensures the State's interest will be addressed and protected.

Should this bill continue to move forward, the Department is requesting resources to carry out the mandates of this bill. While the measure requires the assignment of one full-time employee to carry out this work, the measure does not provide this position nor funding.

To conclude, the Department is open to having a continued dialogue with the legislature as to how to best move forward with this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



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Logan Okita
Vice President

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Secretary-Treasurer

Ann Mahi
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAII HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Item: **HB1651 HD2 - Relating to the safety of educational workers**

Position: **Support**

Hearing: **February 23, 2024, 1:00 p.m., Conference Room 308**

Submitter: **Osa Tui, Jr. – President, Hawai'i State Teachers Association**

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association **supports** HB1651 HD2 which requires the Department of Education and public charter schools to take certain steps to report incidents of harassment and implement procedures for handling harassment of educational workers.

Educators in the public schools of Hawai'i often are subject to harassment, especially in this age of social media. As it becomes increasingly difficult to find and retain quality employees in our public schools, more protections must be afforded to educational workers ultimately for the sake of our keiki.

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.

To the Honorable Chairpersons of the House Education and House Finance Committees and its members:

Re: HD 1651 HD2 – Relating to the Safety of Educational Workers
Hearing: Friday 2/23/2024 – Hawaii State Legislature

IN SUPPORT

I am Diana Oshiro, Principal of Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA). I have over 50 years of experience in the Hawaii state public school system as a teacher, administrator and HDOE Assistant Superintendent. I understand the challenges and responsibilities of school personnel at all levels and have often been in extremely difficult and contentious situations with parents, community and even state department personnel. These situations have always been part of the job of an administrator. However, in the past decade these situations have increased exponentially.

I am testifying in favor of HD 1651 HD2 because of the significant increase in the amount and frequency of situations where individuals (oftentimes parents and community personnel) feel it is their right to bully and harass school personnel with whom they disagree. They often want to determine their child's programming needs and school support even if it is contrary to the school's vision/mission or the professional decisions made collectively by all school community members' determined policies and procedures. Many of these individuals will resort to behavior and verbal abuse of school faculty and staff. These behaviors are what I would label as "terroristic threatening" which has led my staff to worry, seek counseling and consider police/legal protection.

We have created procedures and protocols which currently safeguard faculty and staff from further verbal abuse. However, this is an interim remedy and will not be able to serve as a long-term solution. HD1651 will help many schools. I respectfully request your collective support and help.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am confident that you will be able to recognize our desire to continue to teach and support all students without fear and worry.

Diana Oshiro, Principal of Myron B. Thompson Academy



UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THE THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2024**

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Rep. Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Friday, February 23, 2024, 1:00 PM
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony on HB1651, HD2 – RELATING TO THE SAFETY OF EDUCATIONAL WORKERS

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

The United Public Workers, AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO (“UPW”) is the exclusive bargaining representative for approximately 14,000 public employees, which includes blue collar, non-supervisory employees in Bargaining Unit 1 and institutional, health, and correctional employees in Bargaining Unit 10, in the State of Hawaii and various counties.

UPW **supports** HB1651, HD2, which requires the Department of Education (“DOE”) and public charter schools to take certain steps to report incidents of harassment and implement procedures for handling harassment of educational workers.

We strongly believe that educational workers should feel assured that the DOE and public charter schools are committed to taking effective action against harassment in order to protect the rights and dignity of the hard-working public employees who are tasked with maintaining a positive learning environment for Hawaii’s students.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kalani Werner', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Kalani Werner
State Director

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AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

RANDY PERREIRA, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

The Thirty-Second Legislature, State of Hawaii
House of Representatives
Committee on Finance

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 23, 2024

H.B. 1651, H.D. 2 — RELATING TO THE SAFETY
OF EDUCATIONAL WORKERS

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO fully supports H.B. 1651, H.D. 1, which requires the Department of Education and public charter schools to take certain steps to report incidents of harassment and implement procedures for handling harassment of educational workers.

Each school year, we are contacted by multiple members who work at public schools and who have experienced threats made directly at them or witnessed by them in the course of their employment and within the scope of their duties and responsibilities. These threats occur in school offices, at meetings, over the phone, via email, and more recently, through social media.

We strongly support any efforts to increase protection for our educational workers. They should feel assured that the Department is committed to taking prompt and effective action against harassing conduct and those who engage in harassing behavior should be held accountable.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 1651, H.D. 2.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira
Executive Director

My name is Lindsay Chambers and I'm submitting testimony in **support** of HB1651. Co-authored by myself and two educational workers who endured harassment through the course of our employment at the Department of Education (DOE), this bill addresses the consequences of years of inaction.

During my tenure at the DOE, I encountered an individual who persistently harassed educational workers for more than a decade. This person had accumulated numerous Temporary Restraining Orders (TROs) from DOE employees, leading to directives from the Board of Education (BOE) and Superintendent offices to avoid transferring his calls to their phone lines.

When this individual made threats of physical violence against someone on my team, the DOE instructed me to obtain a TRO to shield those under my supervision. However, this directive put a target on my back, with insufficient support leaving me exposed and vulnerable. I faced relentless harassment, incessant calls and voicemails filled with intimidation and racial slurs, leaving me deeply worried about my safety.

I was forced to seek my own legal counsel in order to obtain the TRO, as directed by the DOE. Despite this directive, I faced a lack of support from both the DOE and Attorney General, who dismissed TROs as "personal matters." Following this, having become a target due to the initial TRO pursuit to protect my team, I successfully obtained an injunction against harassment from the Court for my own protection. Throughout this traumatic ordeal, I felt abandoned and unsupported by the State, which failed to provide the necessary protection and assistance.

My experience is not unique, mirroring the struggles of countless educators who face threats, abuse and harassment simply for doing their jobs. This not only takes an emotional toll but also poses a profound threat to our well-being and community safety.

In considering the financial implications of HB1651, it is crucial to note that the impact on the DOE's budget should be minimal. The Department maintains a dedicated Safety, Security and Emergency Preparedness Branch (SSEP) and possesses the flexibility to reallocate personnel as necessary. For instance, I myself experienced a temporary reassignment to provide full-time assistance in coordinating the DOE's COVID response efforts.

Amidst legislative discussions such as SB 3207, aimed at raising the pay cap for the Superintendent, and the addition of new high-salaried deputy positions to the DOE's cabinet in recent years, it is evident that the Department possesses the financial resources to implement long overdue safeguards and tracking systems for employees facing harassment from community members. HB1651 merely requests one full-time employee to support more than 20,000 employees.

During the recent House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs (JHA) hearing about HB1651, the DOE testified that they are not a law enforcement agency, using this as an excuse to evade responsibility for the safety of their employees. It is crucial to note that the DOE oversees a wide range of services beyond education, including construction, food service, and transportation. Currently, SB 3328 is progressing through the legislature, aiming to return construction and real estate strategy oversight to the DOE. This initiative has garnered significant backing from both the BOE and DOE, as evidenced by their testimony.

The Department cannot cherry-pick its responsibilities and what's in their "wheelhouse" or not, particularly concerning employee safety - a fundamental obligation for any employer, especially one as significant as the state's largest employer. It is imperative that we put an end to the excuses and misleading assertions from the DOE regarding their inability to fulfill this vital obligation.

In testimony submitted to the JHA committee, the DOE said:

"Currently, when our Department is alerted of aggressive or threatening behavior that results in the involvement of law enforcement, our Safety, Security, and Emergency Preparedness Branch works to assess the situation and provide an appropriate response. This could include developing a safety plan, providing additional campus security, installation of video surveillance cameras, and have an additional threat assessment by Threat Team Hawaii, an organization of threat assessment experts from county, state and federal agencies."

Despite the DOE's claims that safety plans are developed, and threats are evaluated by external agencies, this is not consistently the case.

The truth is the creation and implementation of safety plans currently rely solely on the discretion of an educational worker's immediate supervisor. The lack of standardized protocols across the system leads to disparities and inequities in ensuring the safety of all educational workers. Although I collaborated with SSEPB to draft a safety plan, it was never approved or put into action by my immediate supervisor or the assistant superintendent of facilities at the time. There have been instances, including in my situation, where leadership at the DOE has refused to follow recommendations from law enforcement teams and SSEPB.

My own experience, emblematic of the struggles faced by countless educators, underscores the urgent need to establish clear safety protocols for the DOE since they have been unable to do it themselves. Let us send a clear message that harassment will not be tolerated and let us hold the Department accountable for fulfilling its fundamental obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of its employees.

HB-1651-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 10:48:27 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacey Waterhouse	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Jacey Waterhouse, fully support HB1651 as it seeks to safeguard and protect the well-being of educators employed by the Department of Education or a Public Charter School, as well as the students and families who are part of these educational institutions. As an employee of Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA), a New Century Charter School, I have personally witnessed and experienced the detrimental effects of persistent and severe harassment in various aspects of our professional and personal lives, both within and outside the classroom environment. Here are some of the challenges we face:

- 1. Maintaining a Professional Environment:** Despite our efforts to maintain professionalism, verbal harassment persists in various forms such as during meetings, through voice messages, phone calls, and email communications.
- 2. Ensuring a Safe Learning Environment:** MBTA, being a hybrid school, must address safety concerns both in-person and virtually. Unscheduled parent interruptions, outbursts, and harassment during virtual classes via Zoom pose significant risks to the safety and well-being of students, staff, and other stakeholders.
- 3. Supporting Students:** Students who witness verbal harassment and disruptions during virtual classes or on-campus incidents require support to navigate these challenging situations. Additionally, addressing the social and academic impact on the children of harassing parents is crucial.
- 4. Mental and Psychological Impact:** The constant exposure to extreme swearing, name-calling, threats, ranting, and intimidation takes a toll on our mental and psychological well-being, leading to anxiety and other concerns.
- 5. Physical Safety Concerns:** There is genuine worry about the physical safety of everyone associated with MBTA, including staff, students, families, and myself, due to threats of physical harm.

Failure to address these escalating concerns and provide adequate protection for educators in Hawaii's educational system will undermine the integrity of the Department of Education and the Public Charter School Commission. Moreover, it sends the wrong message to students and families about acceptable behavior in an educational setting.

I urge the legislature to prioritize the passage of HB 1651. By doing so, educational workers can fulfill their duties without fear of harassment or intimidation, ultimately contributing to a safer and more conducive learning environment for our community as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB-1651-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 10:58:54 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
NOELLE TAVARES-SUMIYE	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Noelle Tavares-Sumiye, fully support HB1651 as it seeks to safeguard and protect the well-being of educators employed by the Department of Education or a Public Charter School, as well as the students and families who are part of these educational institutions. As an employee of Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA), a New Century Charter School, I have personally witnessed and experienced the detrimental effects of persistent and severe harassment in various aspects of our professional and personal lives, both within and outside the classroom environment. Here are some of the challenges we face:

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Failure to address these escalating concerns and provide adequate protection for educators in Hawaii's educational system will undermine the integrity of the Department of Education and the Public Charter School Commission. Moreover, it sends the wrong message to students and families about acceptable behavior in an educational setting.

I urge the legislature to prioritize the passage of HB 1651. By doing so, educational workers can fulfill their duties without fear of harassment or intimidation, ultimately contributing to a safer and more conducive learning environment for our community as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB-1651-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 11:36:26 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kim Uyeda-Young	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Kim Uyeda-Young, fully support HB1651 as it seeks to safeguard and protect the well-being of educators employed by the Department of Education or a Public Charter School, as well as the students and families who are part of these educational institutions. As an employee of Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA), a New Century Charter School, I have personally witnessed and experienced the detrimental effects of persistent and severe harassment in various aspects of our professional and personal lives, both within and outside the classroom environment. Here are some of the challenges we face:

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3. **Supporting Students:** Students who witness verbal harassment and disruptions during virtual classes or on-campus incidents require support to navigate these challenging situations. Additionally, addressing the social and academic impact on the children of harassing parents is crucial.
4. **Mental and Psychological Impact:** The constant exposure to extreme swearing, name-calling, threats, ranting, and intimidation takes a toll on our mental and psychological well-being, leading to anxiety and other concerns.
5. **Physical Safety Concerns:** There is genuine worry about the physical safety of everyone associated with MBTA, including staff, students, families, and myself, due to threats of physical harm.

Failure to address these escalating concerns and provide adequate protection for educators in Hawai'i's educational system will undermine the integrity of the Department of Education and

the Public Charter School Commission. Moreover, it sends the wrong message to students and families about acceptable behavior in an educational setting.

I urge the legislature to prioritize the passage of HB 1651. By doing so, educational workers can fulfill their duties without fear of harassment or intimidation, ultimately contributing to a safer and more conducive learning environment for our community as a whole.

Thank you.

HB-1651-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 11:40:29 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aimee Takaki	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Aimee Takaki, fully support HB1651 as it seeks to safeguard and protect the well-being of educators employed by the Department of Education or a Public Charter School, as well as the students and families who are part of these educational institutions. As an employee of Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA), a New Century Charter School, I have personally witnessed and experienced the detrimental effects of persistent and severe harassment in various aspects of our professional and personal lives, both within and outside the classroom environment. Here are some of the challenges we face:

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- 4. Mental and Psychological Impact:** The constant exposure to extreme swearing, name-calling, threats, ranting, and intimidation takes a toll on our mental and psychological well-being, leading to anxiety and other concerns.
- 5. Physical Safety Concerns:** There is genuine worry about the physical safety of everyone associated with MBTA, including staff, students, families, and myself, due to threats of physical harm.

Failure to address these escalating concerns and provide adequate protection for educators in Hawai'i's educational system will undermine the integrity of the Department of Education and the Public Charter School Commission. Moreover, it sends the wrong message to students and families about acceptable behavior in an educational setting.

I urge the legislature to prioritize the passage of HB 1651. By doing so, educational workers can fulfill their duties without fear of harassment or intimidation, ultimately contributing to a safer and more conducive learning environment for our community as a whole.

HB-1651-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 11:44:23 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kris Leahy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Kris Leahy, fully support HB1651 as it seeks to safeguard and protect the well-being of educators employed by the Department of Education or a Public Charter School, as well as the students and families who are part of these educational institutions. As an employee of Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA), a New Century Charter School, I have personally witnessed and experienced the detrimental effects of persistent and severe harassment in various aspects of our professional and personal lives, both within and outside the classroom environment. Here are some of the challenges we face:

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3. **Supporting Students:** Students who witness verbal harassment and disruptions during virtual classes or on-campus incidents require support to navigate these challenging situations. Additionally, addressing the social and academic impact on the children of harassing parents is crucial.

4. **Mental and Psychological Impact:** The constant exposure to extreme swearing, name-calling, threats, ranting, and intimidation takes a toll on our mental and psychological well-being, leading to anxiety and other concerns.

5. Physical Safety Concerns: There is genuine worry about the physical safety of everyone associated with MBTA, including staff, students, families, and myself, due to threats of physical harm.

Failure to address these escalating concerns and provide adequate protection for educators in Hawaii's educational system will undermine the integrity of the Department of Education and the Public Charter School Commission. Moreover, it sends the wrong message to students and families about acceptable behavior in an educational setting.

I urge the legislature to prioritize the passage of HB 1651. By doing so, educational workers can fulfill their duties without fear of harassment or intimidation, ultimately contributing to a safer and more conducive learning environment for our community as a whole.

HB-1651-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 11:56:40 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Inger Stonehill	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Inger Stonehill, and I am a dedicated Department of Education teacher. Unfortunately, my experience in the education field has been marred by trauma and harassment, particularly from one parent. After some light research, I found some disturbing statistics that I wanted to share as evidence of a significant issue in our nation. According to former Attorney General Merrick B. Garland and the website JUSTICE.GOV, "Those who dedicate their time and energy to ensuring that our children receive a proper education in a safe environment deserve to be able to do their work without fear for their safety." It was also written that "threats against public servants are not only illegal, they run counter to our nation's core values." (DOJ). Even our Justice department recognizes the extreme need for some action. According to a prominent Human Resource company, TASB.org, it has been said, "forty percent of administrators and one-third of teachers reported being threatened by parents...according to a recently released national survey report by the American Psychological Association." Are we to ignore these credible sources that harassment and threats are not a problem?

My own situation became so severe that I had to file a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) to feel safe at my workplace. What was even more disheartening was the lack of support I received from both the Department of Education (DOE) and the Attorney General (AG), who disregarded the need of TROs as a "personal matter." Throughout this challenging ordeal, I felt neglected and unassisted by the state, which failed to provide the necessary protection and assistance. Regrettably, my experience is not unique and reflects the struggles of numerous educators who face threats, abuse, and harassment while simply trying to do their jobs. This not only takes an emotional toll but also presents a significant danger to our well-being and community safety.

House Bill 1651 (HB1651) is more than just a proposed law; it is an essential support for educators like me. By establishing clear protections and support mechanisms, HB1651 sends a resounding message: harassment will not be tolerated, and those shaping the future of our children deserve to act without fear.

When considering the economic ramifications of HB1651, it is essential to note that the impact on the DOE's budget should be insignificant. The Department already maintains a dedicated Safety and Security Branch and has the flexibility to redistribute employees as required. For example, I personally requested a transfer to another school, which significantly improved my health and well-being.

During the recent House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs (JHA) hearing on HB1651, the DOE endeavored to dodge obligations for the safety of its employees by maintaining they are not a law enforcement agency. However, it is crucial to recognize that the DOE oversees a wide range of services beyond education. One would think guaranteeing staff safety is a core duty. As well as securing employee well-being is a primary responsibility. We must put an end to the excuses and misleading assertions from the DOE regarding their inability to fulfill this vital obligation. While the DOE claims to develop safety plans and evaluate threats through external agencies, the reality is that the creation and implementation of these plans rely solely on the discretion of an educational worker's immediate supervisor. In my experience, my supervisors did not help in any way. This lack of standardized protocols leads to discrepancies and imbalances when faced with ensuring the safety of all educational workers.

My own experience, along with the struggles faced by countless educators, emphasizes and highlights the critical requirement for robust protections and support mechanisms. Let us send a clear message that harassment will not be tolerated, and let us hold the DOE accountable for fulfilling its duty to safeguard the welfare of educational workers. It is a central and crucial obligation for all state employees. Shouldn't we acknowledge this as a significant concern and collaborate to find solutions, within the supposed perceived limitations of financial constraints?

HB-1651-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 12:17:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robert Cacace	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Robert Cacace, fully support HB1651 as it seeks to safeguard and protect the well-being of educators employed by the Department of Education or a Public Charter School, as well as the students and families who are part of these educational institutions. As an employee of Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA), a New Century Charter School, I have personally witnessed and experienced the detrimental effects of persistent and severe harassment in various aspects of our professional and personal lives, both within and outside the classroom environment. Here are some of the challenges we face:

1. **Maintaining a Professional Environment:** Despite our efforts to maintain professionalism, verbal harassment persists in various forms such as during meetings, through voice messages, phone calls, and email communications.

2. **Ensuring a Safe Learning Environment:** MBTA, being a hybrid school, must address safety concerns both in-person and virtually. Unscheduled parent interruptions, outbursts, and harassment during virtual classes via Zoom pose significant risks to the safety and well-being of students, staff, and other stakeholders.

3. **Supporting Students:** Students who witness verbal harassment and disruptions during virtual classes or on-campus incidents require support to navigate these challenging situations. Additionally, addressing the social and academic impact on the children of harassing parents is crucial.

4. **Mental and Psychological Impact:** The constant exposure to extreme swearing, name-calling, threats, ranting, and intimidation takes a toll on our mental and psychological well-being, leading to anxiety and other concerns.

5. **Physical Safety Concerns:** There is genuine worry about the physical safety of everyone associated with MBTA, including staff, students, families, and myself, due to threats of physical harm.

Failure to address these escalating concerns and provide adequate protection for educators in Hawaii's educational system will undermine the integrity of the Department of Education and the Public Charter School Commission. Moreover, it sends the wrong message to students and families about acceptable behavior in an educational setting.

I urge the legislature to prioritize the passage of HB 1651. By doing so, educational workers can fulfill their duties without fear of harassment or intimidation, ultimately contributing to a safer and more conducive learning environment for our community as a whole.

HB-1651-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 12:50:21 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Connie Nakasone	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Connie Nakasone, fully support HB1651 as it seeks to safeguard and protect the well-being of educators employed by the Department of Education or a Public Charter School, as well as the students and families who are part of these educational institutions. As an employee of Myron B. Thompson Academy (MBTA), a New Century Charter School, I have personally witnessed and experienced the detrimental effects of persistent and severe harassment in various aspects of our professional and personal lives, both within and outside the classroom environment. Here are some of the challenges we face:

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Failure to address these escalating concerns and provide adequate protection for educators in Hawaii's educational system will undermine the integrity of the Department of Education and the Public Charter School Commission. Moreover, it sends the wrong message to students and families about acceptable behavior in an educational setting.

I urge the legislature to prioritize the passage of HB 1651. By doing so, educational workers can fulfill their duties without fear of harassment or intimidation, ultimately contributing to a safer and more conducive learning environment for our community as a whole.