



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

Date: 02/15/2024

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB 2623 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to contract with a qualified nonprofit organization to establish an aquatic safety education program for elementary school students and to establish one full-time equivalent position (1.0 FTE) to administer the program.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) respectfully offers comments on HB 2623.

As an island state, the Department recognizes the important role of public education in addressing water safety education and, as such, is moving forward to address this issue. Currently, the Department requires ocean safety education in all elementary schools. It promotes ocean safety and stewardship awareness education through an annual memo that includes links to ocean safety videos, activity books, coloring books, and animated videos teaching ocean safety and stewardship principles. The Department also distributes Nā Kama Kai student activity booklets in English to all elementary schools and in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i to all Kaiapuni elementary schools. In addition, the Department is collaborating with Nā Kama Kai to offer a Professional Development credit course to provide additional training and professional development for school staff on this topic.

While aquatic safety is not an explicit standard or performance indicator in Health or Physical Education, it could be addressed under the broad topic of safety. Students will

require multiple lessons to learn and practice the requisite skills to achieve proficiency in water safety, personal survival skills, and water rescue. Given the limited amount of time dedicated to Health and Physical Education in the school setting, it will prove difficult to include this new content along with other skills and topic areas that are required based on the Content Standards and Performance Indicators for Health and Physical Education.

Additionally, an aquatic safety education program that includes practicing skills in the water presents additional challenges (e.g., transportation to pools, lifeguards, and instructors) that must be addressed.

If passed, this bill will place additional responsibilities on the Department, which will require personnel and resources to implement the program and to support the management and execution of a contract with a nonprofit organization. The Department appreciates the establishment of one full-time equivalent position to administer the aquatic safety education program as this position would need to conduct a needs assessment, execute the procurement contract process per state guidelines, manage funds, promote and implement the program. While the Department appreciates the initial appropriation in this bill to establish an aquatic safety education program, implementing and sustaining this program will require additional, sustained funding to ensure its longevity.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

Thursday, February 15, 2024 at 2:00 pm
Conference Room 309 & Videoconference

House Committee on Education

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

From: Michael Robinson
Vice President, Government Relations & Community Affairs

Re: **HB 2623 – Testimony In Support
RELATING TO EDUCATION**

My name is Michael Robinson, and I am the Vice President of Government Relations & Community Affairs for Hawai'i Pacific Health. Hawai'i Pacific Health is a not-for-profit health care system comprised of its four medical centers – Kapi'olani, Pali Momi, Straub and Wilcox and over 70 locations statewide with a mission of creating a healthier Hawai'i.

I write in support of HB 2623 which appropriates funds to the Department of Education (DOE) to contract with a qualified nonprofit organization to establish an aquatic safety education program for elementary school students.

In its *2018-2023 Hawai'i Injury Prevention Plan*, the Department of Health (DOH) identified drowning as the 5th leading cause of fatal injuries among Hawaii residents, with an average of nearly 40 deaths a year. Children under 5 years of age comprised 30% (6) of the 20 victims of fatal swimming pool drownings, making this the leading cause of injury mortality among 1 to 4 year-olds. The DOH's goal is to decrease the incidence of fatal and nonfatal drownings in the state.

Most drowning deaths could be prevented through deliberate government action. Specifically, the International Life Saving Federation's Position Statement for Swimming and Safety Education recommends that everyone have access to training in water safety, personal survival, and water rescue. Ideally, this training should commence at a young age and should be available regardless of ability and background. In addition, the International Life Saving Federation recommends that knowledge and understanding of water environments and their associated hazards should be taught to everyone at the earliest possible age. This measure would make a meaningful contribution toward teaching children about water safety and giving them the necessary aquatic skills to prevent drownings. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



HAWAI`I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

Honolulu, Hawai`i 96813

Phone: (808) 489-9549

Web site: <http://www.hysn.org> E-mail: info@hysn.org

Vonnell Ramos, President
Cyd Hoffeld, Vice President
Sione Ford Naeata, Treasurer
Greg Tjapkes, Secretary

Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai`i
Big Island Substance Abuse
Council
Bobby Benson Center
Child and Family Service
Coalition for a Drug-Free Hawai`i
Collins Consulting, LLC
Domestic Violence Action Center
EPIC `Ohana, Inc.
Family Programs Hawai`i
Family Support Hawai`i
Friends of the Children's Justice
Center of Maui
Get Ready Hawai`i
Hale Kipa, Inc.
Hale `Opio Kaua`i, Inc.
Hawai`i Children's Action
Network
Hawai`i Health & Harm
Reduction Center
Hawai Island Community`
Health Center
Ho`ola Na Pua
Ho`okele Coalition of Kaua`i
Ka Hale Pomaika`i
Kahi Mohala
Kokua Kalih Valley
Kaua`i Planning and Action
Alliance
Maui Youth and Family Services
Na Pu`uwai Molokai Native
Hawaiian Health Care
Systems
P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.
Parents and Children Together
PHOCUSED
PFLAG – Kona, Big Island
Planned Parenthood of the
Great Northwest, Hawaii
Alaska, Kentucky, Indiana
Residential Youth Services
& Empowerment (RYSE)
Salvation Army Family
Intervention Services
Sex Abuse Treatment Center
Susannah Wesley Community
Center
The Catalyst Group

February 13, 2024

Representative Justin Woodsoni, Chair
And members of the Committee on Education

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2623 RELATING TO BULLYING

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN) supports HB 2623 Relating to Bullying

For 9 out the last 15 years, bullying prevention and intervention has been a top concern of the youth who attend the Hawaii Children and Youth Summit. They tell us that teachers and other school staff do not respond effectively when they witness bullying or bullying is reported by students.

As one concerned grandparent told me, "We are teaching our granddaughter about the issue. Last year she reported 3 kids to teacher because they were taunting a home less girl...{My granddaughter said the teacher just told them not to do again...the kids got nothing out of it."

According to the Hawaii Youth Behavioral Risk Survey, Hawaii has a low rate of youth violence in almost every area except bullying and a higher than average number of students who have suicidal ideation or have actually made a suicide attempt.. Young people who are bullied have increased risk of suicide.

HYSN strongly supports efforts to address bullying and suicide among our students.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark
Executive Director

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/12/2024 9:24:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Audrey Harrer	Water Safety Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Drowning has become a worldwide epidemic. It is the leading cause of death for children 1-4 years old. In Hawaii, drowning is the leading cause of death for children and teens 1-16 years old. Hawai'i has the second highest drowning rate in the nation. Just like it is mandatory for children to be in car seats and to wear helmets on bikes; it is essential to provide access to survival based swim programs in schools in order to put an end to childhood drowning here in Hawaii. Water Safety Hawaii (nonprofit) offers survival based swim programs specifically focusing on drowning prevention/self rescue swimming techniques. Please help us keep our children safe!

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 9:30:43 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ron Bregman	Hawaii Water Safety Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong support of House Bill 2623 to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15, and Hawaii ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning among residents. All children who grow up in the islands need access to learning life-saving aquatic safety skills, and providing this education through the schools is the most effective and equitable way to accomplish this.

Ron Bregman

Aquatics Director and Chief Lifeguard

Marine Corps Base Hawaii

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 6:40:08 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ctowniphone@gmail.com	Alaka'i O Kaua'i Charter School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To safeguard our children, it's crucial to allocate appropriate funds to the Department of Education, enabling collaboration with a qualified nonprofit organization. This partnership will establish an effective aquatic safety education program tailored for elementary school students. Additionally, creating one full-time equivalent position (1.0 FTE) to oversee and administer the program ensures its seamless operation and maximizes its impact on promoting water safety among our young learners.

Chris Town, retired DOE Principal, Charter School Board member, and grandparent

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 9:21:21 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Fairchild	Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to support HB2623, which would fund in-school DOE water safety lessons by a qualified non-profit and create a related DOE administrative position.

Drowning is the leading cause of death for Hawaii children 1-15 and Hawaii is second in the nation for rate of drowning among residents (Hawaii Department of Health statistics).

Hawaii has a rich heritage of watermen (and women) like Duke Kahanamoku, but these statistics make it clear that these water skills are not accessible to all our residents. A child growing up on an island **requires** life-saving aquatic skills and ocean safety knowledge. Public schools should deliver this critical knowledge to our keiki; it is far more important than anything else they would learn in P.E. class. In addition to saving lives, swimming education allows a person to be in relationship with the ocean, which can improve mental health, and, for Native Hawaiians, helps connect them with their culture. Children who become competent swimmers have access to an affordable and convenient cardio exercise that can practiced throughout their lives. Finally, swimming is the key that unlocks access to all the Hawaiian water sports such as canoe paddling and surfing, which are vital to our culture. Please open this door by supporting this bill.

Mahalo,

Sarah Fairchild

Executive Director

Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:19:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ben Komer	Leahi Swim School Inc.	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is unconscionable that Hawaii ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning of residence and that drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1-15. I can say without a doubt that this bill is crucial for the safety of the children of Hawaii. Having grown up in Hawaii, been in the water my entire life, and teaching swimming professionally for the last 30 years there has never been a bill that was easier to say yes to. Do your part and pass bill 2623 and establish an aquatic safety education program for public elementary school kids.

Mahalo,

Ben Komer

President

Leahi Swim School Inc.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:30:16 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LISA PUA FRAZER	Kumu at Kua O Ka La NCPCS	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm writing to you today to express my support of House Bill 2623, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to contract with a qualified nonprofit organization to establish an aquatic safety education program for elementary school students and to establish one full-time equivalent position (1.0 FTE) to administer the program. As a Kumu of students in grades 4-8, I see the importance of this program. Many students are not fully capable of swimming in the capacity needed to stay afloat and tread water for an extended period. Even more students lack basic water safety knowledge. I try my best and have created lessons incorporating Nā Kama Kai's curriculum around ocean safety and stewardship. I am currently earning PDE3 (professional development) credits through Nā Kama Kai Ocean Safety Clinic and Education Incubator's course, Ocean Intelligence and Ocean Safety for All. It would be amazing if House Bill 2623 would pass and establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15, and we Kumu are doing our best to prevent any more loss of our precious keiki. But, we NEED help! Mahalo for your consideration.

**Sincerely,
Lisa Pua Frazer**

4-8 grade Kumu

Kua O Ka Lā, New Century Public Charter School

Moku O Keawe

February 13, 2024

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Committee Members,

As a long time water safety advocate and founder of Ocean Safety 'Ohana, I am writing to submit testimony in strong support of HB 2623 that would fund in-school water safety lessons in our public schools so that ALL children have access to life-saving, lifetime skills.

Drowning is the leading cause of death for our keiki in Hawaii, and less than 2% of our second-graders currently have the basic skills to avoid or recover from a dangerous aquatic situation (including holding their breath, floating, turning around, swimming 25 yards). This model has proven to be very successful via a recent program with the Hawaii Aquatics Foundation based on National Health and Physical Education Standards. Water safety education is also a social equity issue with low-income keiki having even lower levels of water safety competencies. After-school lessons are financially out of reach for most families.

The US National Water Safety Plan and many other states support in-school lessons as the only model for providing water safety in an equitable, scalable way. Water safety lessons are not 'optional', they are foundational skills that allow for a lifetime of safer access to ocean and aquatic environments which is integral to our way of life here in Hawaii.

Sincerely,
Jessamy Town Hornor
Founder, Ocean Safety 'Ohana



February 13, 2024

Subject HB 2623 Water Safety Education Elementary Schools

Board of Directors

Kalani Vierra
President

Ricky Alvarez
Vice President

Bridget Velasco
Secretary

Chantal Zarbaugh
Treasurer

Directors
Cary Kayama
Jon Kaneshina
Bradley Young
Kleve Zarbaugh
John Titchen
Kurt Lager
Clark Abbey
Kekaulike Kealoha
Luke Evslin

Kirsten Hermstad
Executive Director

Honorary Legends

Ralph Goto
Brian Keaulana
Archie Kalepa
Mark Cunningham

On behalf of the Board and membership of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, whose membership includes all state and county lifeguards, I am in strong support of House Bill 2623 to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools.

Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15, and Hawaii ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning among residents.

All children who grow up in the islands need access to learning life-saving aquatic safety skills, and providing this education through the schools is the most effective and equitable way to accomplish this.

Please do all you can to see that this program is fully funded and put into action as soon as possible.

Mahalo

Kirsten Hermstad
Executive Director

Hawaiian Lifeguard Association
P.O. Box 844 Kapa'a, Hawai'i 96746
info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org



February 15, 2024
2:00 p.m.
Via Videoconference
Conference Room 309
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

To: Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

Aloha, my name is Lisa Dau representing Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition (KIPC) which is a non-profit agency with a mission to decrease childhood injuries. KIPC SUPPORTS HB2623, Relating to Education, DOE; Aquatic Safety Education; Positions; Expenditure Ceiling; Appropriation.

Drowning is a leading cause of death among school-aged children in Hawaii. Differences in swimming ability, access to pools and swim lessons, poor parental swimming skills, lower levels of education, and income and cultural differences are all possible contributing factors.

According to the American Red Cross, there are five essential steps for drowning prevention: 1) maintain close contact/supervision with children; 2) provide adequate fencing and barriers around pools and bodies of water; 3) children and inexperienced swimmers should wear life vests; 4) swim in lifeguarded areas; and 5) learn swimming and water safety survival skills.

Safe Kids Worldwide conducted research in 2016 and they reported that children in rural areas are less likely to participate in swim lessons, and that participation in formal swim lessons is related to household income, affordability, and accessibility. These findings have implications for organizations trying to increase the number of children enrolled in swim lessons, particularly those from underserved communities. (MacKay JM, Steel A, Dykstra H, Wheeler T, Samuel E, Green A. *Keeping Kids Safe In and Around Water: Exploring Misconceptions that Lead to Drowning*. Washington, D.C.: Safe Kids Worldwide, June 2016.)

HB2623 addresses issues related to providing swim lessons and water safety survival skills to a greater number of children while also reducing disparities. Please consider passing this bill.

Thank you,

Lisa Dau, RN, MBA, BSN
Injury Prevention Coordinator

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 7:34:53 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christopher Keith Gardner	North Shore Swim Series	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We support House Bill 2623. Our organization promotes ocean swimming on the North Shore & most of the kids that swim in our races participate in a swim team & are sufficiently trained for the ocean & pools. However, many Keiki are not part of a competitive environment & miss out on learning water skills. Lots of kids in Hawaii surf & rely on surf leashes that keep their surfboard or bodyboard close by if they ‘wipe out’. Leases break & this Keiki may not have the skills to swim for their board. Luckily, plenty of Aunties & Uncles surfing will help them; this is what we do as kanaka. But if there is no ‘unko’s’ around, the Keiki surfer may be unable to retrieve their board.

Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15. Keiki in Hawaii need access to life-saving aquatic safety skills, and providing this education through the schools is the best way to accomplish this.

Mahalo for the opportunity to participate in this process.

Chris Gardner

North Shore Swim Series

LATE

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 7:38:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hudson Slay	Ala Moana Beach Swim Club	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Ala Moana Beach Swim Club (AMBSC) express our full support of House Bill 2623, which seeks to appropriate funds to the Department of Education to establish an aquatic safety education program for elementary school students in Hawai'i.

The issue of aquatic education for our keiki is incredibly important in our island state. The lack of access to water safety training and swimming lessons in elementary schools has led to a decline in our children's swimming abilities, contributing to the alarming statistic that drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death for kids aged 1-15 in Hawai'i. Our organization, along with the North Shore Swim Series team, has witnessed the impact of this issue firsthand, and we are committed to finding meaningful solutions to prevent this tragic loss of life.

We urge the Committee to consider the significant benefits that implementing an aquatic safety education program in elementary schools could have on the well-being of our children. Drowning is preventable and by providing our children with the necessary skills and knowledge to stay safe in and around water, we can save precious young lives.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and for your dedication to the well-being of our keiki. We trust that House Bill 2623 will receive the support it deserves and that together, we will make a meaningful difference in the lives of our children.

LATE

To: House Committee on Education
RE: HB 2623 in strong support
Hawaii State Capitol, Conference Room 309
February 15, 2024; 2:00 pm

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the committee,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT of House Bill 2623** relating to Education. I strongly support House Bill 2623 to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawai'i public elementary schools.

Establishing a statewide aquatic safety education in public schools to teach children vital water safety skills is crucial in preventing tragic incidents. Drowning is the [leading cause of death](#) in Hawai'i for keiki ages 1-14, and Hawai'i ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning among residents. No statewide education program in schools exists to teach children this essential life skill.

Reaching children in schools fills the gap in resources. Some communities and after-school programs may have access to swimming lessons and water safety programs, but many others do not, leaving children vulnerable to drowning incidents. Swimming proficiency in multiple aquatic skills is a way to stay safe in the water and also a requirement of personal aquatic safety competency by the [American Red Cross](#). In-school lessons are the only equitable, scalable way to teach keiki the necessary skills to avoid drowning. We can ensure that all Hawai'i children can learn these water safety skills regardless of where they live or their socioeconomic status.

All children who grow up in Hawai'i need access to life-saving aquatic safety skills, and providing this education through the schools is the most effective and equitable way to accomplish this. This initiative is a vital step towards preventing drownings, saving lives, and protecting the well-being of our keiki. Mahalo for your support of this bill.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Mai Hall, M.Ed.
Children's Health Coordinator

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 4:44:54 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stepan Gurba	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

It is important

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:51:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Xiao Yi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Drowning has been the leading cause of accident death of children in Hawaii. It takes more children lives than motor vehicle and pedestrian accident combined. Early education of aquatic safety and swimming skills is critical step to prevent injury and death of our children. Please take action!

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 11:06:04 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather Kunz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Bill 2623 to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15, and Hawaii ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning among residents. All children who grow up in the islands need access to learning life-saving aquatic safety skills (including riptide management and awareness), and providing this education through the schools is the most effective and equitable way to accomplish this.

It's really hard to believe that in 2024, the Hawaiian islands still don't teach aquatic safety skills and water education through schools.

A drowning tragedy has affected me personally.

EVERY SINGLE SCHOOL and EVERY SINGLE CHILD needs to have mandatory lifesaving curriculum as early as Kindergarten, or even before. Please.

Mahalo for your kokua,
Heather Hiatt Kunz

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/12/2024 7:54:47 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chelsea Huang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Drowning is the number one cause of death for children ages 1-4, and second for children ages 5-14. It is unacceptable that there is little to no education on this. Hawaii has the opportunity to be a leader in aquatic safety given our unique location. Swimming and water safety should not only be for the kids who can afford it but to every kid and it should start with aquatic safety education in the school. This bill is so important because our children's lives depend on it, no more of our keiki have to drown to know that swim education and safety is a necessity.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:27:21 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malia Kamisugi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii is truly unique and surrounded by water.

That we have one of the highest rates of RESIDENT drownings in the nation is unacceptable. I am in support of HB2623 so that kids in school can learn proper water safety. This knowledge can help not only themselves, but allow them to help their kupuna, family and friends be more safe in and around water.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:19:27 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Roger Epstein	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is so important for our Keiki. Please give parents this help to avoid future tragedies.
Mahalo nui loa

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:14:23 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Oleksii	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to emphasize the critical importance of aquatic safety education in our communities. As an advocate for water safety and a proponent of preventive measures to reduce drowning incidents, I firmly believe that investing in comprehensive aquatic safety education programs is paramount to safeguarding lives and promoting well-being.

Drowning remains a significant global health concern, claiming countless lives each year, particularly among children and young adults. However, many of these tragedies are preventable with adequate education and awareness. Aquatic safety education equips individuals with essential skills, knowledge, and behaviors to navigate water environments safely and confidently.

One of the primary benefits of aquatic safety education is its role in preventing drowning incidents. By teaching individuals how to swim proficiently and recognize potential hazards, we empower them to make informed decisions and react effectively in emergency situations. Moreover, promoting water confidence through education encourages responsible behavior around water bodies, reducing the likelihood of risky behaviors that could lead to accidents.

Furthermore, aquatic safety education extends beyond drowning prevention. It encompasses a wide range of topics, including risk awareness, emergency preparedness, injury prevention, and environmental stewardship. By addressing these areas comprehensively, we not only enhance personal safety but also cultivate a culture of respect for our natural surroundings and promote physical fitness and well-being.

Aquatic safety education is a fundamental life skill that should be accessible to all individuals, regardless of age, background, or socioeconomic status. By providing inclusive and accessible programs, we can ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn and benefit from essential water safety knowledge.

In conclusion, I urge policymakers, educators, community leaders, and stakeholders to prioritize aquatic safety education as a key component of public health and safety initiatives. By investing in comprehensive and sustainable programs, we can empower individuals, save lives, and foster healthier, safer communities for generations to come.

Thank you for considering the importance of aquatic safety education in our society.

Sincerely,
Oleksii

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:05:27 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
L Chinn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support the intent of this measure as swimming lessons should be part of the core curriculum of elementary schools in a state surrounded by water. Some families are unable to purchase private or group lessons so this is one way for our children to learn this very important and life saving skill early on. One FTE may not be enough to administer such a program but hopefully that is enough to get the program running and to oversee the nonprofit organization(s) to safely provide the volume of classes for children across the state.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:12:10 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christina Laney Mitre	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We live on an island surrounded by water and strong currents. Every child should learn about water safety and how to swim. If children were taught early on and cost wasn't a factor, we would save more lives and avoid tragic accidents.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:53:56 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
naomi yoshida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support bill HB2623. This bill uplifts the safety of our people and encourages positive perpetuation of our water culture.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 11:24:40 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jerald Dolak	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 2623, which aims to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. As the Director of Safety & Security at a beachfront resort in Hawaii, I have witnessed firsthand the alarming rate of water-related incidents, particularly among individuals without proper aquatic safety skills. Moreover, as a resident of Hawaii, I am deeply concerned about the high incidence of drowning, especially among our keiki aged 1-15, making it the leading cause of death in this age group.

Hawaii ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning among residents. These statistics underscore the urgent need for comprehensive aquatic safety education, particularly targeting our youngest residents. It is imperative that all children growing up in the islands have access to learning life-saving aquatic safety skills. By implementing an aquatic safety education program in public elementary schools, we can ensure that every child receives essential instruction in water safety, swimming skills, and rescue techniques.

My personal connection to this issue further reinforces the importance of HB 2623. Despite growing up on Oahu, my wife never learned how to swim, highlighting a significant gap in our existing educational system regarding aquatic safety. It is unacceptable that essential life skills such as swimming are not universally taught in Hawaii's schools. By passing HB 2623, we can address this deficiency and empower our children with the knowledge and skills necessary to enjoy Hawaii's aquatic environments safely.

I urge you to support House Bill 2623 and prioritize the implementation of an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in reducing the incidence of drowning and ensuring the safety and well-being of our keiki.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 11:29:48 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melody Heidel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I stand in strong support of this bill. It is imperative that Hawaii's keiki be provided this critical safety knowledge as part of their overall education. The State has a duty to provide this foundational skill, and lives will be saved.

Mahalo,

Melody Heidel

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 11:44:37 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael A. Town	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support for safety and cultural reasons! We are an island state!

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 12:37:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Miller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have worked at Kapiolani Medical Center for Women and Children in the Emergency Room for over 12 years. Some of the hardest days, are the days a child dies from drowning. I have been part of multiple deaths due to drowning, and countless number of kids who were rescued from drowning. We live on an island surrounded by water, the access to pools is high as well. Water safety needs to be the number 1 subject taught! It literally will save lives! Education needs to include being safe around our surroundings (WATER!)! This bill just scratches the surface of what needs to be done. I fully support this bill! There have been 1 too many drownings amongst our keiki!

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 12:43:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pamela Clifford	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing as a parent, an educator, and a kamaina. I was born and raised in Hawaii and have had a wonderful education and life around the water. I was taught to swim at a young age, taught to respect the water and to understand both its beauty and its strength. We are surrounded by water and it is vital that our youth all learn to swim and understand the ocean. As an educator, I was so passionate about it that I created a program to teach everyone of my students by the time they left our school at 5th grade to know how to swim. I believe it is an absolute necessity to have the DOE teach swimming to our youth. It is a disservice to them to not be taught a lifesaving skill at a young age. Please don't hide behind the litigious nature of our society and the fears of what could go wrong. It is worse to know the fears of what can happen to our youth if they aren't taught to swim at a young age. Do not deprive our youth from the experiences and knowledge of the ocean and knowing how to swim.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 1:36:25 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Curt colby	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I am Curt Colby. I have been a swim coach for Kauai high School and Swim Kauai Aquatics for 8 1/2 years. I have also been a swim instructor for the Hawaii Swimming Foundation for 2 years until covid. I was the Head of the program for Kauai and we served 1000 2nd grade children teaching them water safety and swimming skills. I hope to start this program again and would be glad to support any program that is approved.

I have been a swim coach for 27 years, swim instructor for 10 years and an Ocean Guard for 4 years. I feel it is very important to teach children swimming and water safety skills especially in these islands where the waters can be so treacherous. Please consider this bill, it is essential to insure your child's safety.

Mahalo

Curt Colby 808-353-1327 curtcolby@hotmail.com

Head Coach Swim Kauai Aquatics

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 2:01:42 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
jaime arreola	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I absolutely support Bill 2623 to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. Drowning is th leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15. All childern who grow up in the islands should know how to swim and have the opportunity to learn life-saving skills.

Thank you.

Jaime Arreola

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 2:20:01 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mo Radke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Mo Radke. I'm the chair of the Kaneohe Neighborhood Board for the past 13 years, a 30-year U.S. Navy veteran, and an advocate for the restoration and reopening of the Waikiki Natatorium. I am submitting this testimony as an individual who knows the value of health, fitness, and safety.

I am in **STRONG SUPPORT** of HB 2623. The keiki, who are now adults and the new generation of keiki, have been neglected for far too long. The days of students making the trip to the Waikiki Natatorium for school-sponsored swimming training is a distant memory. This is something that can be remedied very easily with a little proactive effort and will.

This is an excellent idea because the newly-created entity can provide:

1. Personal lifesaving skills
2. Community lifesaving skills (saving others in distress)
3. Teaching a lifelong athletic activity that promotes fitness and well-being

There are always reasons to the contrary, but to give these kinds of opportunities to new swimmers, whether competitive or casual, has the wonderful by-product of developing lifelong skills, health, and friendship. Be a part of the change.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 5:03:33 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Izzy Horio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Drowning is the leading cause of death in kids under fifteen in Hawai'i. There is absolutely no reason that children born and raised (and everyone else here, for that matter) on an island should not know how to swim. I learned to swim when I was a baby, because my mom believed that if I was going to grow up on an island, being able to swim is a non-negotiable. Swimming has brought me joy my whole life (minus killer swim practices), and it's how I discovered I loved water polo. The state does all children in Hawai'i a disservice if there is no aquatic safety education program. How can you say you want to protect the keiki, if we live on an island and you deny them the opportunity to learn to swim? I had the privilege of attending private school and being able to afford private swim lessons, but not everyone is able to do that. Please take care of the keiki and improve public schools through this bill.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 5:14:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Ching	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 5:47:21 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicole C Powell-Dunford	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a former lifeguard and water safety instructor I strongly support legislation that will safe guard our keiki. Living on an island makes swimming ability invaluable. A child who does not know how to swim is at high risk of drowning in many areas even after a brief period of unsupervised time. In many cases the parent was distracted by the needs of another child and that family can never forgive themselves after a senseless drowning of a cherished child. Purposely omitting swimming instruction from the keiki is a terrible mistake. The lives lost each year to preventable drowning are invaluable. Nothing can put a price on a child's life. Swimming is the birthright of our keiki. We need to incorporate swimming instruction in our schools now before another life is lost.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 5:57:21 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Madonna Sisson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Drowning is the leading cause of death for kids aged 1-15 in Hawaii. We need funds to the Department of Education to establish an aquatic safety education program for elementary school students. Mahalo!

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 6:00:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Richards	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill is long over due. School budgets continue to decrease and Citicard programs are cut. A program like this saves lives, pure and simple. Pass it.

sincerely,

mark richards

ewa Beach resident, swimmer and concerned citizen .

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 6:15:40 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
donn viviani	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Donn Viviani. I live in Kailua. Drowning is the **third-leading cause of death in Hawaii for all children under the age of 18**, behind sudden infant death and suicide. For every fatal drowning, it is estimated that 13 non-fatal drownings occur, some of which may be associated with long term disability. I support HB2623 to help prevent child mortality and morbidity from drowning because of the lack of safe swimming skills. Mahola

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 6:03:27 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bill Quinlan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Drowning is the number one cause of death in Hawaii for children 1 to 15.

It is vital that we provide aquatic safety education for elementary school students.

This bill MUST pass.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 6:55:10 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Niki Stepanek	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I firmly believe that relying on 'one qualified nonprofit' is insufficient for successfully accomplishing this task. Consequently, without a change in the wording, I am unable to lend my support to this bill.

In my capacity as the President and CEO of a thriving water safety nonprofit dedicated to addressing freediving and spearfishing-related fatalities in Hawaii, I have firsthand experience in navigating county access to pools, engaging with the community and state officials, and collaborating with teachers and community leaders. Given the abundance of swim lesson schools, there is no reason why we cannot tap into this vast existing resource to ensure accessibility for keiki statewide. Beyond immediate and increased accessibility, such an approach also bolsters small businesses throughout the state that are already providing invaluable resources to the community.

Stating that this bill will serve only one nonprofit raises questions about the motivation behind its formulation. One I am not aware of (hence the issue); therefore, the bill must be self-serving to a newly formed nonprofit with intentions of swim lessons.

Fair and accessible service to the community (all members) is critical. One singular nonprofit cannot effectively serve the state on such a crucial bill unless it has a long-standing proven and hugely successful track record of serving the state.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 7:24:59 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Barrand	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a father of 9 children. I have worked as a lifeguard for over 6 years. I have coached swimming at the club, high school, and college level. Safety is paramount for all children whether they are an athlete or just like to recreate in the water. I have witnessed many rescues of children who were unable to swim. That is needless danger for our youth. We are on an island surrounded by water and it is imparative that every child should be able to swim and survive in the water. Please pass this bill for the safety of our children. Thank you.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 7:54:16 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
glenn pang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello, my name is Glenn Pang, I'm in support of HB 2623 to help promote water safety education in our public school system. Every child should have the opportunity to participate in some sort of water safety education from pre-k to 12 grade; this position would help move the goal of the Hawaii Water Safety Coalition in promoting a National initiative in developing Water Safety Education Strategies in all 50 states (reference the National Drowning Prevention Alliance)

The following is just my personal goal as a water safety educator and member of the HWSC I would like to see as part of our public school water safety curriculum

Goals for teaching water safety skills may include:

- Intro to aquatic (water) activities
- How to be safe around aquatic
- How to become comfortable around aquatic
 - Developing personal skills - Swimming Competency Skills
 - Learn how to help (assist) someone in trouble - Basic Water Rescue Skills
 - Developing swimming stroke - Learn To Swim Skills
 - Introduction to other aquatic activities -

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in writing

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 8:16:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Soo Sun Choe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a mom, I think this is a very timely and important idea. Learning aquatic safety, just like bicycle safety is another critical skill for elementary age keiki to acquire before they reach middle school.

Mahalo for your attention,

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 8:32:11 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lea Minton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong support of HB2623 to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15, and Hawaii ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning among residents. All children who grow up in the islands need access to learning life-saving aquatic safety skills, and providing this education through the schools is the most effective and equitable way to accomplish this. It is our kuleana to ensure children learn how to be in and around the water.

Please pass HB2623.

Mahalo,

Le'a Minton

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 8:34:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emily McNulty	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In 2021, my husband got assigned to Pearl Harbor-Hickam and we moved here with our two toddlers. Knowing we'd be spending plenty of time enjoying the beautiful beaches, we wanted to get our kids in swim lessons as soon as possible. That proved to be quite difficult. We spent months on wait lists. We tried three different swim schools with varying success, but they were all expensive and exclusive. Three years later, my kids are comfortable in the water, but that is a privilege that comes with our relative wealth and lifestyle (I'm a stay-at-home mom with free time to spend bringing my kids to swim class). If we didn't have a good military salary, and if both of us parents were working, our children would not know how to swim. How incredibly unfair is it that a child's chance of surviving falling into a pool or going out a little too far in the ocean comes down to socioeconomic status? Government of Hawaii, do the right thing, teach your keiki how to swim.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 10:23:21 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Donna L. Ching	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii desperately needs to return to ensuring all our keiki are water safe. Swimming proficiency is a basic life skill. We used to have "Learn to Swim" at the Natatorium in the 1950s and 1960's. It was a beloved and important program. An island state has no excuse for allowing ANY child to drown. It is our duty to make sure everyone is water-safe. This bill is a good step in that direction. Mahalo for your support of HB 2623. Donna L Ching

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 3:32:37 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Stott	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I moved away from Hawaii 16 years ago but visit 3 to 4 times a year. I raised 5 children there and know how important it is for children to be drown-proofed and taught to swim. As a former Scout Leader for 26 years I was the lifeguard for our outings and Swim Merit Badge counselor and enjoyed teaching these skills to children. Please pass this bill to keep the keiki safe and to teach them how to have fun in our waters.

Mike Stott

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 1:15:33 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jaime Ubongen Jr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Jaime Ubongen
2/14/2024

Chairperson, House Committee on Education

Subject: Testimony on House Bill 2623 - Establishment of Aquatic Safety Program in Hawaii Public Elementary Schools

Dear Chairperson,

I am writing to submit testimony in strong support of House Bill 2623, which seeks to establish an aquatic safety program in Hawaii public elementary schools. As a concerned citizen and advocate for child safety, I believe this legislation is crucial for addressing a significant issue facing our community: drowning, which remains the leading cause of death among keiki aged 1 to 15 in Hawaii.

It is imperative that we take proactive measures to ensure the safety of our children, especially in a state where water-related activities are an integral part of our culture and lifestyle. Many keiki rely on surf leashes while engaging in water sports such as surfing. However, these leashes can break, leading to potentially dangerous situations, particularly for children with limited swimming skills. By providing comprehensive swimming lessons as part of the elementary school curriculum, we can equip our youngsters with the essential skills and knowledge needed to navigate water safely.

Implementing an aquatic safety program in Hawaii public elementary schools would not only address the immediate need for drowning prevention but also foster a culture of water safety and awareness from a young age. By integrating swimming lessons into the school curriculum, we can ensure that all children have access to quality instruction, regardless of their socioeconomic background or geographic location.

Moreover, investing in aquatic safety education will yield long-term benefits for our community by reducing the incidence of water-related accidents and fatalities. By empowering our keiki

with essential swimming skills, we can help prevent tragedies and promote healthier, more active lifestyles.

In conclusion, I urge the members of the House Committee on Education to support House Bill 2623 and take decisive action to establish an aquatic safety program in Hawaii public elementary schools. By prioritizing the safety and well-being of our children, we can build a safer and more resilient community for generations to come.

Thank you for considering my testimony on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Jaime Ubongen Jr.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 7:29:15 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Gleeson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 2623, which addresses the critical issue of water safety in Hawai'i's public schools. As an integral part of Hawai'i's community and culture, water safety is paramount to ensuring the well-being of our keiki and future generations.

Water is not just a resource in Hawai'i; it is a cornerstone of our identity and way of life. Our islands' pristine beaches, crystal-clear waters, and rich marine ecosystems attract visitors from around the world and provide endless opportunities for recreation and education. However, with this beauty comes inherent risks, particularly for our youth.

Drowning is a sobering reality in Hawai'i, and tragically, it is the leading cause of death for children aged 1 to 5 in our state. This statistic is not just a number; it represents lives lost, families devastated, and communities impacted. It is imperative that we take proactive measures to address this issue and ensure the safety of our children, both in and out of the water.

House Bill 2623 is a crucial step forward in enhancing water safety education and resources in Hawai'i's public schools. By implementing comprehensive water safety programs, providing adequate training for educators, and ensuring access to lifesaving equipment, we can empower our keiki with the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe in and around the water.

Furthermore, this bill aligns with Hawai'i's commitment to promoting cultural and environmental stewardship. Water is not only a source of recreation but also a sacred element deeply intertwined with our cultural traditions and values. By instilling a respect for water and teaching responsible stewardship from a young age, we can cultivate a generation of informed and conscientious citizens who will preserve and protect our precious natural resources for future generations.

In conclusion, I urge you to support House Bill 2623 and prioritize the safety and well-being of Hawai'i's children. By investing in water safety education and resources in our public schools, we can prevent tragedies, promote healthy lifestyles, and uphold the cultural heritage that defines our island home.

Mahalo for your attention to this important issue, and I respectfully request your favorable consideration of House Bill 2623.

Sincerely,

John Gleeson

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 7:58:20 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Aimee Malia Grace, MD, MPH, FAAP, and I am a pediatrician and a public health/health policy professional. I am writing in my individual capacity.

I serve on the national American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention. Drowning is a critical challenge for us here in Hawai'i as well as across the nation. We need to support efforts to increase layers of protection for students and all youth.

This bill would support these efforts by establishing needed resources in our local schools.

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 9:40:07 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eren Avegalio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong support of House Bill 2623 to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15, and Hawaii ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning among residents. All children who grow up in the islands need access to learning life-saving aquatic safety skills, and providing this education through the schools is the most effective and equitable way to accomplish this.

Swimming skills have help my children and kept them safe around water. Several times they have used the skills learned in ISR class to stay safe in and around the water.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 11:10:24 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Wendy Kuntz Hood	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm fully behind House Bill 2623, which aims to set up an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii's public elementary schools. It's crucial because, sadly, drowning is the number one cause of death among keiki aged 1-15 here, and our state ranks second in the nation for drowning rates among residents. It's a stark reality we need to address. Every child in Hawaii deserves the chance to learn vital aquatic safety skills, considering our island environment. Bringing this education into schools ensures that it reaches every child, regardless of background, making it the fairest and most effective approach.

Mahalo for your kokua,

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 12:09:08 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Meredith Novack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Swim Safety in schools is critical and must be taken seriously! This is not only an issue regarding drowning but also about providing future lifeguards, swim instructors and swimming professionals on an island that thrives on water sports and aquatic tourism! Lifeguard numbers are dwindling! Less and less children are going to the beach!

Learning how to swim teaches so much more than drowning prevention - it teaches healthy respect for the water, confidence, listening skills and gives so much joy! We want kids to grow up safe and to love and enjoy everything Hawai'i has to offer! You are limiting future employment and endangering the population by not offering more swim lessons.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 1:20:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeffrey Temple Stabile, Jr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jeff Stabile, teacher at Hawaii School for the Deaf and the Blind, Diving Coach, Tropic Lightning Diving Team, and Chair of the Hawaii Diving Association.

As a lifelong participant in aquatic and marine activities, I know firsthand the physical, educational, spiritual, and social benefits that come from feeling comfortable in the water. As an educator, I have seen many students at HSDB who did not know how to swim, but benefitted from the swimming lessons taught by school personael back when the school had a pool, and also when the school scheduled PE classes to local Parks and Rec pools for the purposes of teaching and practicing swimming.

Some of these students went on to participate in Hawaii's interscholastic diving scene - notably, Michael McRae, OIA bronze medalist in 2001; Brandon Johnson, OIA Champion, HHSAA Silver Medalist, and NISCA All-American in 2010; and more recently, Leilani Silva-Ewan and Jesse Pascua, OIA JV Championships bronze medalists in 2023. Many others have become active in the Hawaii Deaf Surfriders Association, and one, Trey Balding, has twice made the crossing to Molokai on a paddleboard.

As a diving coach, I have seen the great confidence and courage youngsters gain when they learn how to navigate deep waters safely and comfortably, as well as how to control their bodies in new ways to create spectacular movement patterns through the air and into the water. Additionally, they gain not only physical skill, but improve their understanding of rhythm, timing, physics, biomechanics, and planning. They further benefit from being part of a "team" environment and learning to support others and be supported in return, to overcome adversity, to develop and demonstrate perseverance and grit.

All of this starts with basic aquatic literacy and comfort in the water, which surrounds our aina. Water safety and aquatic literacy ought to be a priority for every resident of our islands, and Hawaii's school children should have access to aquatics skills development as a part of the state's free and appropriate public education.

Thank you for your time and consideration to help our keiki grow into the best versions of themselves possible.

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 1:35:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Debra Pyrek	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong support of House Bill 2623 to establish an aquatic safety education program in Hawaii public elementary schools. Drowning is the leading cause of death in Hawaii for keiki ages 1-15, and Hawaii ranks second in the nation for the rate of drowning among residents. All children who grow up in the islands need access to learning life-saving aquatic safety skills, and providing this education through the schools is the most effective and equitable way to accomplish this.

I have witnessed the impact to parents, siblings, and the community when a child drowns. I have also witnessed the positive outcomes when a child is equipped with critical lifesaving skills. Drowning is preventable. Please consider this bill so that all children have access to aquatic safety lessons. It is our kuleana to keep our keiki safe.

Mahalo,
Deb Pyrek

LATE

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 2:00:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leigh Wai Doo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Full support of HB 2623. Re: aquatic Safety in schools: Questions: how much is a child's life worth if his death could be prevented by education? How much is it worth to remove the fear of drowning if millions know how to drown proof themselves, simply by being calm and doing the dead man float? Hawaii must become a leader worldwide in educating Ocean water safety of all youth.

Mandatory as we advertise, promote Aloha Aina activities and the harmonizing with Nature , Our beloved Pacific Ocean. Respectfully submitted by Leigh -Wai Doo, Chair foundation for islands of harmony, 501 (c)3 lwdoo4@icloud.com tel. 808 721-0006 Mahalo-

LATE

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 6:04:18 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Satoe Guzman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support to appropriate funds to the Department of Education to establish an aquatic safety education program for elementary school students.

We are surrounded by ocean and it is crucial for our children to know how to swim.

LATE

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 7:42:13 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katrina Orthmann	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I grew up swimming in my grandparents' pool for fun. I joined a swim team in elementary school because my friends were doing it. My first job when I turned 15 was as a swim instructor and lifeguard. I'm now a dive instructor and open water swimmer here in beautiful Hawai'i. Swimming and being in the water is a huge part of my life and who I am, and it's a skill I took for granted for most of my life. I never imagined people could grow up and still not know how to swim. I didn't expect everyone to have perfect technique or be fast, but certainly everyone could at least float? Stay alive if they fell in the water?

For my first "real" full-time job I worked in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Part of my position involved coordinating swim lessons for local children. These kids, growing up on an 8-square-mile island surrounded by beautiful turquoise waters, had no idea how to swim. I even started an adult swim lesson program because so many adults in the community never had the opportunity to learn as kids. In my experience, kids who don't learn to swim, especially on an island, grow up to either be terrified of the water because they have friends who have drowned, or be blissfully ignorant that the water can kill them and drown themselves. They become adults who are at risk of harm, and adults who are oftentimes too traumatized to be willing to learn to swim.

I have close friends who can't swim as adults, and especially in a place like Hawaii that is unfathomable to me. It's almost like not knowing how to walk. It's the equivalent of not knowing how to use a fire extinguisher in a building that regularly catches fire. Water is everywhere, and swimming is not only a beautiful lifelong recreational activity but a critical life saving skill. I may be biased as a swimmer myself but I strongly believe it is so enormously important that kids are given the opportunity to learn to swim. It may save their life one day, or they might even grow to be as great in the water as Duke Kahanamoku or Carissa Moore. Take care of our keiki. Teach them how to save their lives. Teach them to swim.

LATE

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/14/2024 8:16:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carly Killam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Living on an island, it is IMPERITIVE that you know how to swim. Private swim lessons are very very expensive and most familes are not able to afford them so it is up to the school system to provide this necessary skill for it's citizens. Drowning is the number 1 cause of death for kids aged 1-15 so by providing this essential skill it will save the lives of many. Please reenstate the keiki aquatic education.

LATE

HB-2623

Submitted on: 2/15/2024 8:51:57 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cardenas Pintor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this bill.

Mahalo nui,

Cardenas Pintor