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To: The Senate, 32nd Legislature, 2024, State of Hawai'i

S.R. NO. 178

March 25, 2024

IN SUPPORT



I am writing to express my **STRONG SUPPORT for S.R. 178**, recognizing the critical need to address educational gaps in Hawaii communities. My name is Talia Edmonds, a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, set to graduate this May from the Thompson School of Social Work with a specialization in Behavioral Mental Health. Currently, I am in the process of applying to PhD programs in Counseling Psychology.

Having closely collaborated with the Department of Education (DOE) throughout my academic journey, particularly as a Master's student of Social Work, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by both students and educators. I am a strong advocate for this bill because it identifies a significant shortage of qualified teachers in our communities and underscores the vital importance of accessible pathways to education.

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, S.R. 178 acknowledges the increasing demand for online educational programs, particularly to accommodate the needs of working adults aspiring to enter the teaching profession. The COVID-19 pandemic has unequivocally underscored the efficacy of digital learning, offering flexibility to individuals balancing full-time careers and familial responsibilities.

If the state of Hawai'i wishes to prioritize accessible education for all its residents, S.R. 178 stands as a beacon of progress. Every individual, especially those aspiring to mentor our youth, deserves equitable access to quality education. Teachers play an invaluable role in shaping the futures of our children, and it is imperative that we address the lack of qualified educators, especially in our rural communities.

Drawing from my personal experiences, I recently completed my MSW Generalist year internship with the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program under the Department of Education. Witnessing firsthand the transformative impact of dedicated teachers and positive role models on children from marginalized backgrounds has reinforced my conviction in the importance of quality education.

Moreover, the University of Hawaii Leeward Community College's accreditation to offer applied baccalaureate degree programs presents a unique opportunity to bridge this educational gap. By extending these programs to other University of Hawaii Community Colleges, Leeward Community College can serve as a catalyst for empowering adults across Hawaii to pursue careers in teaching. At the heart of S.R. 178 lies the emphasis on developing a baccalaureate degree program in education with an online option at Leeward Community College. This strategic initiative aligns with our collective vision for a more inclusive and accessible educational landscape in Hawaii.

In conclusion, I urge you to wholeheartedly support S.R. 178 as a vital step towards ensuring equitable access to education for all residents of Hawaii. Thank you for considering my perspective and for your dedication to advancing educational opportunities in our communities.

Sincerely,

Talia Edmonds