



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

Date: 02/08/2024

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 1797 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

Purpose of Bill: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services for Hawaii's public school system.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) provides comments on HB 1797. While the Department supports and appreciates the appropriation for these initiatives, the costs associated with their administration are not included in the Department's Board-approved budget.

The Department and its school bus contractors have taken several actions to ensure continued levels of student transportation in the face of the bus driver shortage. Along with increased compensation, hiring bonuses, and commercial driver's license training, the Department's bus contractors have seen success in offering differential pay to attract, retain, and ensure bus driver performance. Accordingly, the Department supports the allocation of funds towards this purpose.

However, the purchase of alternative vehicles for student transportation and the payment of educational staff or eligible community members to operate those vehicles must be done in compliance with federal and state law, to ensure student safety. Compliance with the applicable laws requires a considerable amount of effort, expense, and continued oversight, such as driver training and vehicle maintenance.

The Department thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony.

COUNTY COUNCIL

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Council Services Division
4396 Rice Street, Suite 209
Lihu'e, Kaua'i, Hawai'i 96766

February 6, 2024

TESTIMONY OF ADDISON BULOSAN
COUNCILMEMBER, KAUAI COUNTY COUNCIL
ON
HB 1797, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION
House Committee on Education
House Committee on Transportation
Thursday, February 8, 2024
2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309
Via Videoconference

Dear Chair Woodson, Chair Todd, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT of HB 1797, Relating to Student Transportation. My testimony is submitted in my individual capacity as a member of the Kaua'i County Council.

I wholeheartedly support the intent of HB 1797, which would greatly affect the Kaua'i community.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1797. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Council Services Staff at (808) 241-4188 or via email to cokcouncil@kauai.gov.

Sincerely,

ADDISON BULOSAN
Councilmember, Kaua'i County Council

AAO:ss



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TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAII HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: **HB1797 - Relating to student transportation**
Position: **Support**
Hearing: **February 8, 2024, 2:00 p.m., Conference Room 309**
Submitter: **Osa Tui, Jr. – President, Hawai'i State Teachers Association**

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

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association **supports** HB1797 which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services for Hawai'i's public school system.

One of the most important ways students can be successful in class is for them to actually be in class. When transportation fiascoes prevent students from making it to school, something is fundamentally wrong with our school system. Oftentimes, the most vulnerable students are left behind without any ability to get to school without transportation options. These barriers compound themselves when students are repeatedly deprived of the opportunity for success through no fault of their own. If we are truly concerned about reducing chronic absenteeism in our school, we need to do more to get and keep students in their seats and ready to learn.

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



HAWAI'I APPLESEED
CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony for Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for HB1797 - Relating to Student Transportation
House Committee on Education
February 8th, 2024

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to express **STRONG SUPPORT for HB1797** which appropriates funds to the Department of Education (DOE) to strengthen student transportation services for Hawai'i's public school system.

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice. Our organization works to build a Hawai'i where everyone has genuine opportunities to achieve economic security and fulfill their potential. Affordable, accessible, and safe transportation is crucial for fostering economic equality as it enables individuals of all backgrounds to access employment opportunities, education, and essential services.

This bill comes at a critical time. In July 2023, the DOE canceled/suspended school bus services for fourteen schools across the state, impacting nearly 1,400 students. Limited transportation for students has far reaching impacts, including:

- **Hindered Education Outcomes:** The absence of reliable transportation options for some DOE students has placed an undue burden on families, hindering access to education and exacerbating disparities in academic achievement. For many students, especially those in rural or underserved areas, the lack of reliable transportation poses a significant barrier to regular school attendance. This has proven to be the case in Hawai'i where chronic absenteeism rose by 15% between the 2020/2021 and the 2022/2023 school years. Restoring school bus services will not only alleviate the financial strain on families who struggle with transportation costs but also contribute to improved attendance rates and student performance.
- **Increased Private Vehicle Usage:** Increasingly, students are no longer relying on school buses or public transportation, but private vehicles to travel to/from school (for families who have access to a vehicle). According to the National Household Travel Survey, in 2023, 53 percent of U.S. students got dropped off at school or drove themselves to school.¹ This has led to the ever growing "school pickup line". This poses both environmental and safety concerns. For example, based on some studies, exhaust from school pickup lines can make its way into classrooms

¹ (2023). National Household Travel Survey.

within 35 minutes to 73 minutes.² Once inside, the exhaust can lower students' math and English performance, he found. Long-term exposure to these pollutants are also associated with childhood obesity, asthma, depression and anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and other conditions.³

- **Caregiving Transportation Burdens:** The growing reliance on personal vehicles to transport children to school also places a burden on caregivers. Women often bear the primary responsibility for childcare and household duties. Additional transportation duties can be particularly challenging for single-parent households where time and resources are limited.

HB1797 represents a vital first step in restoring critical school bus services in Hawai'i. This investment would not only promote educational equity but also foster the well-being of our keiki and their families.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.



Abbey Seitz

Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice

Director of Transportation Equity

² Mendoza, D.L., et. al. (2022). *Investigation of Indoor and Outdoor Fine Particulate Matter Concentrations in Schools in Salt Lake City, Utah*. *Pollutants*, 2(1):82-97. <https://doi.org/10.3390/pollutants2010009>.

³ Vam Damn, Andrew. (2024). *The school bus is disappearing. Welcome to the era of the school pickup line*. Washington Post. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/02/02/school-bus-era-ends/>



Testimony of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

Committee on Education

Date Time: February 8, 2024, 2:00PM

**Location: Conference Room 309 & via Videoconference
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street**

Measure HB1797

RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

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

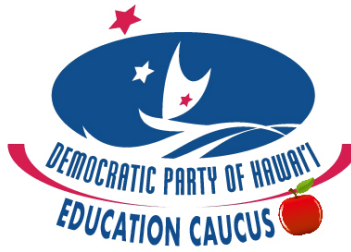
The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OahuMPO) **supports HB1797.**

There is a nationwide school bus driver shortage affecting Hawaii. Due to the continuing shortage of qualified school bus drivers in the State, student bus transportation services have been completely or partially suspended at ten Oahu's high schools. Absenteeism is a growing concern for Oahu schools and access to transportation is crucial for addressing this concern. Vulnerable populations are at a particular disadvantage and data shows rural and single parent households are disproportionately affected. That being said, it is essential to appropriate funds to strengthen student transportation services for Hawaii's public schools. These funds would be able to be used judiciously to establish differential pay increase for student bus drivers, purchase alternative vehicle for schools to transport students, pay educational staff or eligible community members to operate vehicles for student transportation, reimburse schools for the cost of providing additional services, establish other programs or initiatives that the DOE feels could appropriately improve student transportation services, among other things.

HB1797 aligns with the Vision and Goals of the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), by promoting an equitable and resilient transportation system.

The OahuMPO is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on the island of Oahu responsible for carrying out a multimodal transportation planning process, including the development of a long-range (25-year horizon) metropolitan transportation plan, referred to as the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP) that encourages and promotes a safe and efficient transportation system to serve the mobility needs of people and freight (including walkways, bicycles, and transit), fosters economic growth and development, and takes into consideration resiliency needs, while minimizing fuel consumption and air pollution ([23 CFR 450.300](#)).

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



HOUSE BILL 1797, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

FEBRUARY 8, 2024 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 1797, relating to student transportation, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services for Hawai'i's public school system.

The Department of Education currently provides regular bus service for qualified public school students to facilitate compliance with the state's compulsory attendance, as well as with federal law relating to the provision of a free and appropriate education. According to the DOE, there are approximately 12,000 student riders on O'ahu and 13,000 on the neighbor islands.

School bus service is essential for getting students to and from school, particularly for students who lack other transportation options or face hardship in obtaining school transportation services due to economic difficulty. Yet, chronic bus driver shortages have led to the cancellation or consolidation of many school bus routes, especially in West O'ahu and in rural and remote areas of the neighbor islands, reducing transportation options for local families. **At the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, department officials reported that they were short by roughly 225 drivers out of a total of nearly 650 positions, or over one-third of the total number of bus driver positions in existence statewide.**

In July 2023, the department cancelled or suspended school bus service for fourteen schools statewide, which impacted nearly 1,400 students across O'ahu and Kaua'i. Moreover, the bus driver shortage has severely impacted Hawai'i Island school communities, where county bus services do not operate as frequently as on O'ahu and where many students face commutes that can exceed one and a half hours each way.

A lack of adequate school bus transportation options exacerbates chronic absenteeism. Rates of chronic absenteeism are highest in rural, remote, and socioeconomically disadvantaged school communities. In the 2021-2022 school year, more than a third of Hawai'i students were chronically absent from school, meaning they missed fifteen or more days of class. That was a significant jump from the year before, when only eighteen per cent of students were counted as chronically absent. Numerous studies show that chronic absenteeism significantly worsens student achievement and lowers graduation rates.

Governor Josh Green announced an emergency proclamation related to the school bus shortage on August 17, 2023, which allows the department of transportation to grant exemptions for the use of vehicles other than school buses to transport students and allows commercial driver's license holders with a "P" endorsement for driving passenger vehicles to operate student transportation vehicles. More needs to be done, however, to sustain critical bus service programs for Hawai'i's public school students and their 'ohana.

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

HB-1797

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 3:20:11 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Scott Kidd	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support measures to increase school transportation needs being met so long as proper oversight is in place to ensure safety and training are enforced as well

HB-1797

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 5:38:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Will Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support HB1797.