



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

**Date:** 02/20/2025

**Time:** 10:00 AM

**Location:** 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**Committee:** House Finance

**Department:** Education

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

**Bill Title:** HB 1234, HD1 RELATING TO WATER SAFETY.

**Purpose of Bill:** Requires, and appropriates funds for, the Department of Education to establish a standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of HB 1234 HD1, and respectfully offers comments.

In recognition of the importance of water safety, the Department has required for three years, all elementary schools to provide water safety education for at least one grade level of students in any of grades K-5. Schools may select the grade level and program most suitable for implementation based on their students and community.

Nā Kama Kai, a non-profit partner that supports ocean activities for Hawai'i's youth, has developed ocean safety videos, activity books, coloring books, and an animated video series teaching ocean safety and stewardship principles. These resources describe how students can be safe in the ocean and provide information about Hawaiian cultural values related to the sea and stewardship. The Department has provided and distributed sufficient printed color copies of the Nā Kama Kai Activity Book to all Department elementary schools based on Department fourth-grade student enrollment numbers to ease implementation at schools and support water safety efforts.

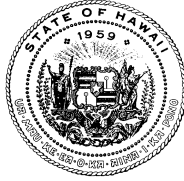
Additionally, The Department is currently partnering with a community organization to implement a pilot with at least two elementary schools within walking distance to a pool, addressing the 15 competencies referenced in this bill. The Department concurs that water safety is very important, as is valuable instructional time given that the Department's primary role is to focus on academics. While providing swimming lessons during school hours may be one mechanism

to reach students who have not learned how to swim, there may be students who already have taken swimming lessons, and could benefit instead from the instructional time that may be missed. Respectfully, consideration of other options such as afterschool programs or programs provided by other agencies may also be possible choices. Upon completion of this pilot in the spring, the Department is expecting a report to assess benefits and challenges to inform any future actions.

The Department respectfully recommends not starting another pilot which may be duplicative at this time, but instead to wait for the report from the current pilot in order to design an informed and appropriate choice for schools that are within walking distance from a pool.

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

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII  
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'



KENNETH S. FINK, M.D., M.G.A, M.P.H  
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH  
KA LUNA HO'OLELE

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**Testimony COMMENTING on HB1234  
RELATING TO WATER SAFETY**

REPRESENTATIVE KYLE YAMASHITA, CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FIN

Hearing Date, Time and Room Number: FIN on Thursday, 02-20-25 10:00AM in House conference room 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

1 **Department Position:** The Department of Health ("Department") appreciates the intent of this  
2 measure and defers to the Department of Education for fiscal, operational, and educational  
3 impacts.

4 **Department Testimony:** The Health Resources Administration Division (HRA) provides the  
5 following testimony on behalf of the Department.

6 **Significance of Drowning Prevention:** Drowning represents a significant public health concern  
7 and underscores the urgent need for action to address water safety in Hawaii. DOH EMS IPSB  
8 data in the 2025 Hawaii Water Safety Plan is as follows:

- 9 • Drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1-15
- 10 • Hawaii's resident drowning rate is the second highest in the nation
- 11 • The percentage of drowning deaths for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children is  
12 more than three times higher than the percentage for all other ethnicities in the same  
13 age group (16% vs. 5%)

14 This data highlights a critical gap in water safety education and resources. Teaching water  
15 safety competencies as early as possible and overcoming barriers to access in the area of

drowning prevention and water safety education is recommended by the [CDC](#) and the [US National Water Safety Action Plan](#). In-school lessons are recognized as best practice in overcoming barriers to access due to the prohibitive cost and logistical challenges of after-school lessons for most families.

In-school water safety lessons as a public health intervention have been offered successfully in Hawaii schools before. An [Aquatic Safety Skill Student Assessment Report](#) by the Hawaii Aquatics Foundation from the 2018-2019 school year covering 564 students from 5 different school districts on Oahu, Maui, and Kauai provided an evaluation of standards-based assessments for student proficiency before and after instruction in three aquatic motor skills identified as essential components of personal aquatic safety competency. **It showed that prior to the program less than 2% of Hawaii's second graders had the basic skills to avoid or recover from drowning.** However, the multi-skill evaluation of post-instruction assessments, when compared to pre-instruction assessments, demonstrates that measurable progress can be achieved toward the development of personal aquatic safety competence through formal aquatic safety education during school hours. This organization had to pause operations due to lack of state funding in 2023, but during its tenure it reached more than 2500 students, and its model and standards-based curriculum are available as a resource for a pilot program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



## **Written Testimony in Support of HB1234 HD1 (HSCR757) Relating to Water Safety**

**Lisa Dau, RN, MBA, BSN, CPSTI**

**Injury Prevention Coordinator, Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition**

**February 20, 2025**

Chair Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee on Finance

My name is Lisa Dau, and I represent the Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition (KIPC) submitting testimony in strong support of HB1234 HD1, which mandates and funds the Department of Education to establish a standards-based water safety education pilot program. This initiative is essential to ensuring the safety and well-being of our students by equipping them with essential water safety knowledge and skills.

Drowning continues to be one of the leading causes of unintentional injury-related deaths among children, especially in Hawaii (2<sup>nd</sup> in the Nation behind Alaska). Many young students do not receive formal instruction in water safety, which makes them vulnerable to drowning. A structured educational approach can greatly reduce drowning risks by teaching key safety principles, raising awareness of potential hazards, and developing essential swimming skills.

A comprehensive, standards-based curriculum ensures that all students receive consistent and age-appropriate water safety education.

Investing in water safety education can lead to long-term cost savings by reducing emergency medical expenses and resources associated with drowning incidents. The appropriation of funds will support curriculum development, teacher training, and facility access, ensuring equitable implementation across participating schools.

I urge the committee to pass HB1234 HD1 to protect our students and foster a culture of water safety awareness. By implementing this pilot program, we take a significant step toward preventing tragedies and empowering future generations with lifesaving skills.

Thank you,  
Lisa Dau, RN, MBA, BSN, CPSTI

The Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition's (KIPC) mission is to prevent and reduce injuries to children in Hawaii. <https://kipchawaii.org/>

**HB-1234-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:00:45 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jillian Anderson	Waikiki Neighborhood Board	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**WAIKIKI NEIGHBORHOOD BOARD**

*LEGISLATIVE PERMITTED INTERACTION GROUP*

The Waikiki Neighborhood Board stands in **unanimous support** of HB1234 HD1.

Like is stated in the measure’s preamble, Hawaii has the nation’s second highest drowning rate. As an island-state, it is paramount we prioritize water safety to prevent drownings. This measure starts with our keiki, who are most susceptible to the dangers posed by water when not equipped with the skills and knowledge to prevent drowning incidents.



February 19, 2025

Hawai'i State House of Representatives  
Finance Committee

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Dear Chair Yamashita and committee members,

I am writing on behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association (HLA) to express our support for House Bill 1234 relating to water safety education. We believe that this bill is a significant step towards enhancing water safety education and drowning prevention in our community. However, we would like to propose an amendment to further strengthen the bill.

We request that the bill specifically require pre- and post-instruction skills assessments. This would yield valuable proof-of-concept data for future program development.

The HLA is a statewide non-profit that provides community-based water safety education to all ages and demographics.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to the positive impact that House Bill 1234 will have on our community. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Hermstad  
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

Hawaiian Lifeguard Association  
P.O. Box 844  
Kapa'a, Hawaii 96746  
Tax Id 99-0308213  
[hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org](http://hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org)

The mission of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association (HLA) is to contribute to and advocate for the professional advancement of lifeguards in the State of Hawaii by supporting their efforts to reduce the incidence of drownings and aquatic injuries.

It accomplishes this by: Establishing and maintaining the highest standards of professional surf and open water lifesaving to maximize public safety in Hawaiian aquatic environments. Developing, supporting, and participating in programs that address drowning and aquatic injury prevention strategies. **Serving as a primary resource for aquatic safety education in the State of Hawaii.** Raising funds for water safety programs through available grants and sponsorship agreements. Continuing to actively support the Statewide Junior Lifeguard Program by providing funding for standardized curriculum development, instructor recruitment and training, uniforms and equipment, awards, and travel expenses. Actively supporting the improvement of lifesaving and humanitarian causes, locally, nationally (USLA), and internationally (ILS).

**HB-1234-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:40:29 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dan Worden	Hawaii Water Safety Coalition	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi and members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Hawaii Water Safety Coalition in support of HB1234. Among coalition members, there is strong support for standards-based water safety education provided during school hours for elementary school students. The National Water Safety Action Plan, as well as the recently released Hawaii Water Safety Plan, both recommend providing greater access to water safety lessons as key to reducing drownings. But various factors limit the effectiveness of existing extracurricular options: public programs lack the resources to meet demand, the cost of private lessons is prohibitive, the time and transportation commitment is a burden, after-school and weekend programs tend to emphasize competitive swimming strokes as opposed to aquatic safety competencies, and parents own fearfulness of the water or an overconfidence in the protective nature of their child's swim skill abilities influence their decision to enroll. The best way to reach the broadest number of children is to provide formal aquatic safety education to students during school hours.

According to the The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Most drowning deaths and injuries are predictable and preventable,” and data shows that a majority of children in Hawaii lack the basic skills to avoid or recover from drowning. The urgency to provide aquatic safety education is clear, the knowledge and skills learned today could save a student tomorrow. Appropriating funding to provide this vital safety education for upcoming school years is necessary to ensure that current efforts being undertaken by a variety of community and state partners continues toward building an equitable and scalable solution that will make a lasting impact across the state.

We appreciate your consideration of this bill, and for the opportunity to testify in support.

Mahalo,

Dan Worden

Education working group for the Hawaii Water Safety Coalition





**OUTRIGGER  
DUKE KAHANAMOKU  
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Dear Chair Yamashita and the Committee on Finance:

I'm writing in support of HB 1234 to establish a DOE Standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program leading to a system-wide program to teach water safety and swim competency in our public schools.

According to Department of Health data, drowning is the leading cause of death for Hawaii's keiki ages 1-15. Drownings are preventable with knowledge and skills. With Hawaii's prominent waterman culture and history, we have the communal knowledge to access and enjoy the ocean, but we clearly aren't passing this down to all of our keiki. At the least, all kids in our island state should have the opportunity to learn the 15 cognitive and physical skills to save themselves if they should fall into a body of water. At best, this may open up access to a variety of Hawaiian water sports, along with all the physical and mental benefits they offer.

To accomplish the objective of statewide standards-based water safety education, I imagine the DOE will also need to partner with county pools on all islands to utilize the pools and pool staff already in existence. This is already being done to some degree in Kona by the County of Hawai'i Parks and Recreation, at no extra cost to the DOE nor the County. If we could replicate that system to all the schools within walking distance of a county pool, and meanwhile build this pilot, to supplement that system with various nonprofits at private or semi-private pools, we could soon reach kids all over the state. I urge the legislature to pass this bill and encourage the DOE to start building these partnerships with the Counties at the same time.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Fairchild".

Sarah Fairchild  
Executive Director

**DUKE'S CREED:**

*"In Hawai'i, we greet friends, loved ones or strangers with Aloha, which means with love. Aloha is the key word to the universal spirit of real hospitality, which makes Hawai'i renowned as the world's center of understanding and fellowship. Try meeting or leaving people with Aloha. You'll be surprised by their reaction. I believe it and it is my creed. Aloha to you."*

**DUKE PAOA KAHANAMOKU**

*Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501c4 nonprofit committed to advocating for children and their families. Our core issues are safety, health, and education.*

To: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Finance

From: Chevelle Davis, Director of Early Childhood & Health Policy  
Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!

Subject: Measure H.B. No. 1234 H.D. 1 – Relating to Water Safety

Hearing: Tuesday, February 20, 2025, at 10:00 AM, Conference Room 308

**POSITION: STRONG SUPPORT**

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of H.B. No. 1234 H.D. 1, which requires and appropriates funds for the Department of Education to establish a standards-based Water Safety Education Pilot Program.

Drowning is one of the leading causes of unintentional injury-related deaths among children in Hawai'i. Given our state's unique island geography, ensuring that all keiki have access to structured water safety education is essential to their well-being. This bill takes a critical step in addressing this urgent public health issue by integrating evidence-based water safety education into our schools.

The benefits of water safety education are well-documented. Studies show that water safety programs significantly reduce the risk of drowning, increase children's confidence and skills in aquatic environments, and promote lifelong safety habits. By implementing a pilot program in our public schools, we can create a proactive, preventative approach that will save lives.

Furthermore, equitable access to water safety education is crucial. Many children in underserved communities lack opportunities for formal swimming instruction. This program would help bridge that gap and ensure that all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, receive essential life-saving education.

We strongly urge the committee to pass this bill and invest in the safety and well-being of Hawai'i's keiki.

Mahalo nui for your consideration of this critical issue.

**HB-1234-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 10:36:44 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allison Schaefer	Individual	Support	In Person

## Comments:

I am in strong support of HB1234 which relates to establishing a standards-based water safety education pilot program within the Department of Education to include a survey to get data on the results so that there is a mechanism to scale-up in-school swimming lessons.

The Hawaii Water Safety Coalition on Thursday released the first Hawaii Water Safety Plan countering Hawai'i's drowning crisis by ensuring that everyone is safe on, in, and around the water. The statistics from the DOH show that we are in a drowning crisis, and we are not doing enough to protect our children.

1. Drowning is now the number one cause of death for children in Hawai'i, ages 1–15.
2. Less than 2% of Hawai'i's second graders have the basic skills to avoid or recover from drowning.

While the plan includes big recommendations, one of the most important to countering our shortcomings when it comes to water safety is making sure that swimming lessons are available to all of our children.

Hawaii has some of the best watermen and waterwomen in the world, but these skills are not getting passed down in the current climate where many parents are working two and three jobs and have neither the time nor the money or transportation to get their children to lessons, which are often expensive. Drowning across the world is increasingly an equity issue, and one place we can more easily address this is by offering swim lessons in our public and charter schools.

Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are about 27% of Hawai'i s population yet make up 36% of resident drowning deaths.

Drowning death rates for Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders are 1.5x higher than the rate for all other ethnicities, and the disparities are especially heart-tugging when it comes to Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander children ages 1-17, whose percentage of drowning deaths was more than 3X higher than the percentage for all other ethnicities in the same age group.

The most equitable way to address teaching our keiki to swim is through in-school lessons in the DOE's public and charter schools. After school programs and parks and recreation programs, often require that parents or guardians expend time that they do not have. Also, not all students' families are able to provide transportation or pay for lessons.

While there are a few great free swimming programs are provided through nonprofits and the city and county, enrollment is limited, and again the transportation requirement to get to these programs will exclude our poorest students.

My five-year-old daughter Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer drowned on Feb. 28, 2004, saving a childhood friend, who could not swim who was struggling in an improperly flooded detention pond. While Sharkey had taken swimming classes, her friend did not know how to swim. the poorly maintained detention pond was not a normal water environment, but her friend's lack of swimming skills and his struggles made the environment even more dangerous for my daughter.

I understand that the DOE might be working on a one-time effort with Palama Settlement to provide swim classes for a quarter to 200 students. That’s a great start, but it barely scratches the surface of the need of the thousands of second grade students in Hawaii.

The biggest difference between this one-time effort and the pilot proposed in the bill is that the bill requires feedback that would go to legislators rather than just the DOE so that together we can find a scalable, equitable solution that reaches far more than just 200 students.

Our kids deserve more. Let’s give them the tools that they need to be safe in, on and around the water in our island state.

Sincerely,

Allison Schaefer

Hawaii Water Safety Coalition bereaved parent volunteer

**HB-1234-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:44:27 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Myriam Saboui	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

My name is Myriam Saboui and I am in strong support of HB1234. As a parent who proactively tries to register their child into swimming lessons offered by the county of Honolulu, I would like to share my experience. On registration day, I am logged into my county of Honolulu's online portal account with my phone and computer ready to hit the registration button at 5pm sharp. I even take time off work to make sure I don't miss my chance. I say chance because the spots fill up within seconds, with the online platform often crashing quickly after opening. I started to wonder how big the gap might be between the offer and the demand. The population of kids aged 5-14 years in the county of Honolulu is 114, 811 based on the latest census data. In contrast, there were approximately 486 spots available for kids aged 5-12 years through county of Honolulu's learn to swim program for Spring 2025 which represents less than 1% of the county's population for that age group. Swimming is the only sport that saves lives. Swimming is a life skill. I urge you to consider supporting this bill which will not only save lives but make water safety education accessible in an equitable way to all keikis in Hawai'i.

**HB-1234-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:25:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jan K Baldado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I SUPPORT HB 1234.

Mahalo nui.

**HB-1234-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 10:06:18 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ruth Love	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

1)It is also important to educate the parents of small children to limit or eliminate 5 gallon buckets with water on their properties as small children are top heavy and curious. Once they are headfirst into a bucket they have no capacity to get themselves out and drown.

2) Another factor in young child drownings is family get-togethers at beaches, waterways and poolsides. Unfortunately, at my work in ERs over 35 years, I have repeatedly seen families torn apart by child death because each family member thought the other family members were watching the small child. This type of issue can be addressed by parental/family education to always have an assigned adult watching their child at any family get-together. If the assigned adult needs to use a restroom they must turn over the child to another responsible adult.

Thank you

Mrs Ruth Love