

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

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

Date: 02/20/2025

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0424, HD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

Purpose of Bill: Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements. Reduces the amount the Department of Education is authorized to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools to no more than one-quarter of the cost of preparing the meals. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) provides comments on HB 424, HD 1.

The school meal program operates in each of the Department's non-charter schools and offers meals to its students in elementary through high school. The Department understands the importance of child nutrition and its role in improving overall student health and agrees that children should have adequate meals provided to them, including breakfast and lunch. It supports free meals if the State can subsidize what is not received through Federal claim reimbursements.

Additionally, the Department supports maximizing opportunities for student access to school meals by examining appropriate meal service models, such as breakfast in the classroom or Grab and Go. Second-chance breakfast is presently implemented in the school meal program.

Currently, the Department is working to calculate what the potential cost might be of providing free school meals for those students that qualify for a reduced price breakfast and lunch.

The Department also supports reducing the requirement of minimum student meal payments from one half to one quarter. However, the Department would request that the one quarter requirement remain as a floor rather than a ceiling as is currently written.

Reducing the requirement of a minimum payment will allow for the Department to not have to raise the prices it charges families for school meals to meet statutory requirements. However, the rising cost of food and the push towards purchasing more locally-grown produce will increase the cost of preparing school meals and is something the Department will continue to monitor.

The Department appreciates this proposal and the inclusion of funding but asks that any additional funding does not affect the Governor's approved budget requests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



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Osa Tui, Jr.
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Ann Mahi
Executive Director

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TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Item: HB 424, HD1 – Relating to School Meals

Position: Comments

Hearing: Thursday, February 20, 2025, 10:00 am, Room 308

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

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) offers the following comments on HB 424, HD1 which aims to expand access to free school meals for Hawai'i's keiki. While we appreciate the intent of this bill, we believe that universal free school meals would be a more effective solution to address childhood hunger in our state.

Limiting free meals to students who qualify based on specific guidelines creates unnecessary barriers and may stigmatize those who rely on this essential program. A universal approach ensures that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to the nutrition they need to focus on learning.

We urge you to consider amending HB 424, HD1 to provide universal free school meals. This investment in our keiki will pay dividends in improved health, academic achievement, and overall well-being.

Mahalo.



HAWAI'I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

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Vonnell Ramos, President
Cyd Hoffeld, Vice President
Sione Ford Naeata, Treasurer
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Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

Access to Independence
Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i
Bobby Benson Center
Child and Family Service
Coalition for a Drug-Free Hawai'i
Domestic Violence Action Center
EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.
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
Hawaii Island Community'
Health Center
Ho'ola Na Pua
Ho'okele Coalition of Kaua'i
Ka Hale Pomaika'i
Kokua Kalihi Valley
Kaua'i Planning and Action
Alliance
Lines for Life Youth Line
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
Piha Wellness and Healing
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 1, 2025

To: Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Finance

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 424 HB 1 RELATING TO **SCHOOL MEALS**

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports HB 424 HB1 Relating to School Meals.

Across the islands, tens of thousands of local households make too much money to qualify for free or reduced-cost school meals, but are still struggling financially. Those households are considered asset-limited, income-constrained, and employed — also known as ALICE households.

One in three families in Hawai'i are experiencing hunger or food insecurity,

In 2023, one in ten Hawai'i households were going without food for a whole day, some or most months out of the year.

37% of all households felt anxious about running out of food.

Expanding free school meals will ensure that all public school students will have access to healthy food.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director



HIPHI Board

May Okihiro, MD, MS
Chair

John A. Burns School of Medicine,
Department of Pediatrics

Titiimaea Ta'ase, JD
Secretary

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Kaiser Permanente

Dina Shek, JD
Medical-Legal Partnership
For Children in Hawai'i

Garret Sugai
HMSA

JoAnn Tsark, MPH
John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native
Hawaiian Research Office

HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &
Evaluation

Community Health
Worker Initiatives

COVID-19 Response

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: February 18, 2025

To: Representative Kyle T. Yamashota, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

RE: Support for HB 424 HD1, Relating to School Meals

Hrg: Thursday, February 20, 2025, at 10:00 AM, Conference Room 308

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ **supports and suggests amendments for HB 424 HD1**, which beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education (DOE) to provide free breakfast and lunch to students who are eligible for reduced priced meals; and reduces the amount the DOE is authorized to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools to no more than one-quarter of the cost of preparing the meals.

One in three families in Hawai'i face food insecurity, leaving many students to go hungry throughout the school day. One in ten keiki in Hawai'i skip meals due to food insecurity. **Please amend this bill to provide free school meals for all**, to ensure that every child has access to the nutrition they need.

Half of Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.²

This large assistance gap leaves behind many ALICE families who are struggling to make ends meet. As a result, countless students go hungry throughout the school day, impacting their health and ability to learn.

¹ Hawai'i Public Health Institute's mission is to advance health and wellness for the people and islands of Hawai'i. We do this through expanding our understanding of what creates health of people and place, fostering partnerships, and cultivating programs to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

² "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census.

<https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702&g=040XX00US15>



Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.³ By failing to ensure they have access to meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success.

Improved Academic Achievement

Hungry students can't learn. Providing healthy nutrition to our students will ensure they have the resources they need to thrive. Studies have shown that free school meal programs lead to improved student performance.⁴ This program is only estimated to cost around 1-2% of the Department of Education's total budget and provide a 15% increase in test scores, a 15:1 return on investment.⁵

Federal Funding Increases

Eight other states—California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont—have implemented free school meal programs, with data showing increases in their federal reimbursement funding. In California, free and reduced-price lunch enrollment rates have risen alongside the implementation of their program, further maximizing federal support for students.⁶ Hawai'i can follow the lead of these other states by implementing free school meals for all students while also increasing the federal funding we receive to support the program.

Thank you for considering increasing access to school meals for our keiki. Please support HB 424 HD1 to deliver free school meals for all students.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nate Hix".

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

³"Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7282962/>

⁴ "Universal free lunch is linked to better test scores in New York City, new report finds"

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2019/10/15/21121847/universal-free-lunch-is-linked-to-better-test-scores-in-new-york-city-new-report-finds/>

⁵ "Equity on the Menu". Hawai'i Applesed.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601374ae84e51e430a1829d8/t/65f390f60a673a7bf3cfeb89/1710461187562/Equity+on+the+Menu_FINAL.pdf

⁶"Free or Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data". California Department of Education.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filessp.asp>



HOUSE BILL 424, HD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

FEBRUARY 20, 2025 · FIN HEARING

POSITION: Support with amendments.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports and suggests amendments** for HB 424, HD1, relating to school meals, which, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements; and reduces the amount the Department of Education is authorized to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools to no more than one-quarter of the cost of preparing the meals.

Hungry children can't learn. **That is why we urge your committee to amend this bill to make school meals free for all public school students, not just those who are currently participating in the reduced price lunch program.**

A recent study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research focused on the federal National School Lunch Program's Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools where many students qualified for free or reduced-price meals to provide a free meal to all students. The study examined whether the provision of schoolwide free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision impacted school suspension rates and **estimated that the chances of being suspended multiple times fell in both elementary school and in middle school.**

Moreover, a 2021 study by the Brookings Institute found that schoolwide free meals improve math performance. This is further bolstered by research conducted by the Food Research and Action Center, which has noted that **students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and achievement.** Studies have clearly demonstrated the link between school meals and student success, which is especially important as schools and educators continue to strategize how to combat the lingering loss of opportunity to learn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, improving access to school meals will boost overall health outcomes, both now and in the future. Thirty million students rely on schools to provide them with breakfast and lunch every day in the United States. Those who participate in the school meal program consume breakfasts and lunches of higher nutritional quality than nonparticipants and are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables. Participation in the school breakfast program is associated with lower body mass index (BMI), lower probability of being overweight, and a lower likelihood of obesity. More Americans are sick than they are healthy: half of adults have diabetes or prediabetes; more than half of adults have cardiovascular disease; and 3 in 4 adults are overweight or obese. Healthcare costs account for 29 percent of state budgets and 28 percent of the federal budget.

As the National Education Association has stated, through universal free school meals programs, “We can grow generations of healthy eaters and save our country billions.” School meals cost less per student when more students participate in a free meal program. An article in *Nutrients* entitled “Universal Free Meals Associated with Lower Meal Costs While Maintaining Nutritional Quality” found that **schools that participated in a universal meal program spent 67 and 58 cents less per lunch and breakfast,** respectively, while maintaining the same nutritional quality.

Nutrition is essential to academic success. This bill will help to ensure that Hawai‘i’s keiki are healthy and ready to reach their full potential.

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 9:06:01 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ONeil Gardner	EPD Corp.	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha. My name is Dr. O'Neil Gardner and I support passing HB424 HD1. I was a child who grew up in underserved communities and school provided meals were essential to my overall nutritional health when I was young. Children don't get to choose where they live or even how they live, but we as a community can decide how we support our most vulnerable population.



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

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager
Sarielyn Curtis, External Affairs Specialist

Hearing: Thursday, February 20, 2025, 10:00 a.m., Conference Room 308

RE: **HB424 HD1 Relating to School Meals**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support with comments on HB424 HD1**. This measure requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year; appropriates funds.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 70,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 37 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

Proper nutrition is vital for keiki growth and development and may reduce the risk of health conditions like anemia, asthma, hyperactivity and anxiety.¹ According to the Hawai'i Foodbank, 1 in 4 keiki in Hawai'i may not know where they will get their next meal, and for more than 81,000 keiki, getting the energy they need to learn and grow can be a daily challenge.²

AlohaCare supports the intent of HB424, but we are aligned with our Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) Coalition partner in our **preference for HB757 HD1** which is also referred to the House Finance committee. Under HB424 HD1, many students may be denied meals due to inability to pay and their household's income being even slightly over the income requirements to participate in the free or reduced school meal program. Providing breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of household income, ensures they have a consistent source of nutritious food and can

¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>

² <https://hawaiiifoodbank.org/keiki/>



focus on learning, while also removing stigma for students accessing free or reduced meals.

By ensuring all students have access to free school meals, we are addressing immediate and basic nutritional needs, combating the numerous health risks that are associated with hunger, and giving kids the energy they need to learn and grow.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support with comments** on **HB424 HD1**.

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 12:35:29 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lourdes Vergara Marcelo	Lou's Quality Home Health Care Services, LLC	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Re: HB 424 : By Rep,. Trish La Chica

I support the HB introduce by Rep La Chica for teh Dept. of Eduction to provide free breakfast and free lunch to sturendts encrolled in public school ,who meet certain critreai,.It is a fact that a child that is hungry can not learn . Emptyt stomach, empty head . Well nourish children do better in shcool . There are a lot of children in marginalized background and they are the ones that need a lot of help . Someday some of these students will be doctors, engineers ,school teachers, nruses etc. Give a chance , Let us help the children as they are our future. I support the HB 424.

Thank you. By :Lourdes V. Maqrcele, RN 808 623 7109

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 2:06:24 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Fox	Malama Kaua'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

With potential federal funding cuts to school meal programs on the way, it's critical that we are able to step in and support our children in learning and being healthy contributors to our island. They cannot do either if they are hungry.

Many are likely sharing with you the unfortunate statistics on childhood hunger in their testimony, but seeing it every day in the work we do is beyond heartbreaking. Whether you support this effort because you care deeply about our most vulnerable community members, or because you understand the financial return on investment that provides returns in savings across healthcare and other industries - please support this.



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info@hawaiiifood.com

Executive Officers

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Kit Okimoto, Okimoto Corp., *Vice Chair*

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Derek Kurisu, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*

Toby Taniguchi, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*

Joe Carter, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, *Advisor*

Eddie Asato, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*

Gary Okimoto, Safeway, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Finance

FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 20, 2025

TIME: 10:00am

RE: HB424 HD1 Relating to School Meals

Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA supports free school meals for all keiki. Students' access to healthy meals is critical to academic success and achievement. Access to nutritious meals also promotes students' short term and long-term health, improves behavioral outcomes, and improves overall wellbeing.

Ensuring that all keiki have access to enough food should be a top priority of the State.

For some students, school meals may be their only consistent source of food.

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) provides reimbursement to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools. **These programs draw Federal funds into our state to help ensure Hawaii's children have access to healthy nutritious meals.**

We urge the Committee to pass this measure and we thank you for the opportunity to testify.



February 19, 2025

To: Chair Kyle Yamashita, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and the House Committee on Finance

Subject: **HB424**, Relating to Free Breakfast and Lunches For Students

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi and the House Committee on Finance,

Hawaii Food+ Policy is writing to you in **strong support of HB424**, which ensures that all students have access to free school meals. Hunger is a reality for many children in Hawaii, not because of parental neglect but due to systemic economic challenges. No child should be expected to focus on learning while struggling with hunger.

This bill takes a necessary step in addressing the starving children in our public school systems by ensuring that students receive the nourishment they need to succeed in school and beyond. Studies consistently show that access to school meals improves academic performance, health outcomes, and long-term economic stability. While federal programs provide some support, state action is needed to close the gaps and ensure no child is left behind starving due to money.

Investing in school meals for our children is also an investment in Hawaii's future leaders. I urge you to **pass HB424** to promote both the physical and mental nourishment of students and to establish a more equitable future for our keiki.

Mahalo for considering more viable food security for the children of Hawaii and taking the time to read our testimony.

Mahalo,
The Food+ Policy Team
#FixOurFoodSystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2025, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for HB 424 – Relating to School Meals
House Committee on Finance
Thursday, February 20, 2025, at 10:00 AM

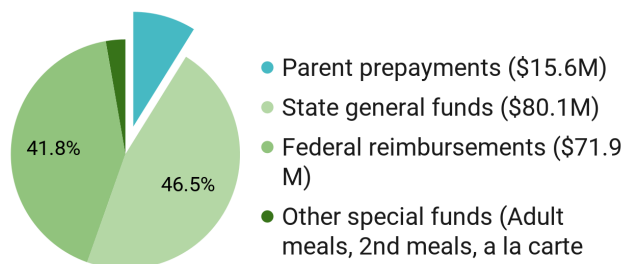
Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee:

Hawai‘i Appleseed supports HB 424, and provides suggested amendments. This bill would require the Department of Education (DOE) to eliminate the reduced-price meal copay, allowing students that qualify for reduced-price meals to eat for free.

Eliminating the reduced-price meal copay is a tested strategy that some states have used on their journey to achieving a universal free school meals program. While we wholeheartedly support any measure that would expand access to free school meals, we are hopeful that this is seen as an incremental step toward the ultimate goal of providing free meals to all students, as proposed by another bill, HB 757.

The actual cost of covering parent co-payments for all students—using SY2023-2024 participation rates for would only come to around \$15.6 million annually - around 8.9 percent of the current budget for the DOE school food services and only around 0.7 percent of the total DOE’s budget in the same year. Here is a breakdown:

DOE School Food Services: Revenue by source (FY2024)¹



Cost estimates: Reduced price students only²

	Current (2023-24 participation)	Projected (adds participation increase)
Lunch	\$13,872,568.20	\$22,621,313.73
Breakfast	\$1,384,463.70	\$3,655,846.04
Total cost	\$15,257,031.90	\$26,277,159.77

While covering all students does come at a higher cost than reduced price only, it also comes at a much higher benefit. To be eligible for reduced-price meals, a family of four must make between \$46,644 and \$66,378.³ However, Hawai‘i’s costs of living require that same family to make over \$107,000 to simply

¹ Hawai‘i Department of Education, Fiscal Year 2024 Report, School Food Services.

² Ibid.

³ Hawai‘i State Department of Education, “Free and Reduced Price Meals Program,” 2025.

<https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

survive.⁴ While eliminating the reduced-price copay is a start, there are still many families over this threshold who are still struggling. A cost estimate for this bill is also provided, for reference, below.

Cost estimates: Reduced price students only⁵

	Current (2023-24 participation)	Projected (adds participation increase)
Lunch	\$399,963.20	\$1,010,547.02
Breakfast	\$85,620.00	\$188,970.92
Total cost	\$485,583.20	\$1,199,517.95

In addition, income thresholds are not the only barrier to participation in the free or reduced-price lunch program. Challenges like language barriers, difficulty providing paperwork, and fear of disclosing information result in many children who are eligible simply falling through the cracks. One study found that 34 percent of students who were denied free or reduced-price meals were actually eligible to receive them.⁶

For these reasons, we would like to respectfully suggest that the committee consider amending this bill to require that the DOE eventually provide free breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of eligibility.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter. We are pleased that the Hawai‘i legislature is paying attention to this important issue and hope that it brings us closer to universal free school meals. Thank you for your consideration.

⁴ United for ALICE, “ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship in Hawai‘i,” 2024. <https://www.unitedforalice.org/Attachments/AllReports/2024-ALICE-Update-HI-FINAL-v2.pdf>

⁵ Hawai‘i Appleseed analysis, using DOE participation data and cost estimates, February 2025.

⁶ United States Department of Agriculture, Third Access, Participation, Eligibility, and Certification Study, September 2021.



House Committee on Finance

Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA) Supports: HB424 HD1

Thursday, February 20, 2025 at: 10:00 a.m.; Conference Room 308

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

HAPA supports HB424 HD1 which, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements. Reduces the amount the Department of Education is authorized to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools to no more than one-quarter of the cost of preparing the meals.

One in three households in Hawaii report food insecurity,¹ and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity². Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals³. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

Half of struggling families are currently ineligible for meal subsidies. The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.⁴ This large assistance gap leaves behind many ALICE families who are struggling to make ends meet. As a result, countless students go hungry throughout the school day, impacting their health, well-being, and ability to learn.

¹ <https://hawaiifoodbank.org/food-insecurity/>

² <https://www.auw.org/auw-alice-report-2024/>

³ <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/APECIII-Vol1.pdf>

⁴ "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census.
<https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702&g=040XX00US15>



Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai'i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai'i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch" programs, and also removes a huge burden from parents who will no longer have to worry about making sure their children are able to eat while at school.

Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB424 HD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Anne Frederick', is placed below the word 'Respectfully,'.

Anne Frederick
Executive Director



February 19, 2025

RE: Support for HB 424 Relating to School Meals

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for HB 424 Relating to School Meals. This bill, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements and appropriates funds.

Food insecurity is a growing crisis in Hawai'i. The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i report, released by Hawai'i Foodbank in May 2024, found that in 2023, 29% of households with children had one or multiple children facing food insecurity. Among these households with children, 9% had children skipping meals because there was not enough food. At the most extreme, 6% of these households had a child or children go a whole day without food because of a lack of money. Further, in households with children, food insecurity among adults was especially high at 38%, and those with young children found themselves most susceptible — indicative that parents and caregivers will sacrifice their own food security before letting their children go without food.

As the state's largest hunger-relief organization, Hawai'i Foodbank has been committed to ensuring no one in Hawai'i goes hungry since 1983. Last year, we worked with over 225 agency partners on O'ahu and Kaua'i to provide food for 17.7 million meals and serve an average of more than 150,000 people each month. As part of that work, we provide food to school pantries in every school on Kaua'i and Ni'ihau, as well as 38 schools on O'ahu, giving us a firsthand view of the challenges many families are facing to feed their children.

There are well-documented links between food insecurity and poor child health and behavioral outcomes, including physical, developmental, and cognitive impairments. Providing school meals to children is an important step in our collective effort to address food insecurity and care for our most vulnerable keiki. We urge you to consider this important measure.

Mahalo for your consideration.

With aloha,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Amy Miller', is positioned below the 'With aloha,' text.

Amy Miller
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank

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: House Committee on Finance
Re: **HB 424 HD1 – Relating to School Meals**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
February 20, 2025, 10:00 AM

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of HB 424 HD1**. This bill requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who qualify for reduced-priced meals, reduces the amount the Department of Education is authorized to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools to no more than one-quarter of the cost of preparing the meals, and appropriates funds.

Hawai'i public schools provide students with nutritious meals through the federal National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, which provides federal subsidies for every meal served through those programs. Students qualify for free meals if their families earn up to 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and for reduced-price meals if their income is between 130% and 185% of the FPL.

Especially with the FPL underestimating the true extent of poverty in Hawaii,¹ reduced-price lunch students and their families are not able to afford the basics. **While the income range for a family of four to qualify for reduced-price lunch is between about \$47,000 and \$66,000 per year,² the ALICE “household survival budget” for that same family is nearly \$108,000.³**

That family of four needs to pay about \$500 year out of their tight budget for their two children to have school meals. Relieving them of this financial burden can ensure that they're able to pay for other essentials, like rent or food at home, that the family needs.

In order to provide **free breakfast and lunch to only reduced-price students**, we estimate it would cost about **\$790,000 per year**. We base our calculations on the free, reduced-price and paid student participation in school meals in Hawai'i prior to the pandemic⁴ and current school meal prices.

This bill also addresses **a problematic provision in current state law that the DOE cited to justify raising school meal prices for families that don't qualify for free or reduced-price meals** at a Board of Education meeting last month.⁵ While federal law sets a price limit for reduced-price school meals, there is NO federal mandate about the full price level for school meals.

¹ <https://hiappleseed.org/blog/official-poverty-data-obscures-reality-in-hawaii>

²

<https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

³ <https://www.auw.org/about/alice-initiative/alice-reports/>

⁴ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolMealsReport2022.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/01/hawaii%ca%bbi-families-could-face-big-price-hike-for-school-meals/>

Many families who have to pay the full price for school meals struggle to make ends meet. **A family of four that makes \$67,000 per year doesn't qualify for free or reduced-price school meals,**⁶ while if they have two students eating breakfast and lunch at school, they already need to pay about \$1,300 per year for those meals.

The current state law that is addressed in this bill sets school meal prices at not less than one half of the cost of preparing the meals. As a result of that provision, the DOE proposed raising school meals prices to levels that would put Hawai'i at or above the 90th percentile of school meal prices in the nation.⁷ **Rather than further burden students and their families with higher school meal prices, it makes sense to simply change that price mandate.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please pass this bill.

Thank you,

Nicole Woo
Director of Research and Economic Policy

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<https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

⁷ <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-Trends-Report.pdf>

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 12:13:35 PM

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

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

Comments:

As a teacher who once taught at Campbell High School, I saw students who financially did not qualify for free lunch and still could not afford lunch. I think all students deserve breakfast and lunch. They are better students when they are not distracted by an empty stomach.

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 12:38:28 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcia Kemble	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Greetings Committee Chair and Committee members,

I support HB 424, which would provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements, if the Legislature deems it too expensive to provide all students with free breakfast and lunch. Hungry kids can't learn well!

Mahalo,
Marcia Kemble
Makiki

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 4:08:25 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caroline Azelski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support. Thank you.

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 4:13:30 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Ball	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I write in strong support of HB424, which provides one of the foundations of a strong education to Hawaii's keiki: healthy meals. As a K-16 educator with a 25-year career, I have seen how nutrition can improve or stunt a young person's mind. The public schools are an essential bulwark to the future of our society, and this investment in future generations will be repaid manyfold in the educational attainment and success of future generations. Please lend your support to this necessary legislation.

Sincerely yours,

David Ball, Waialae-Kahala

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 4:29:01 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anton Avanozian	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a teacher at HP Baldwin high school and have directly seen how important free lunch is to the success to the students, both in school and outside of school. Multiple groups of students eat their school lunch in my classroom and the positive impact it has on them is clear. I directly spoke with another student whose family did not qualify for the free school lunch program because they were slightly outside the required income bracket. This student now does not have regular access to lunch. ALL students should be provided FREE lunch. This is not only relevant to education but to the general wellbeing of the students lives both in and out of school. I and other teachers in my cohort purchase bulk food/snacks for the students as we recognize the importance that having a full belly plays to success. The students are not receiving food from their parents - they are not receiving food from the school - so the teachers take the initiative to feed the students. I have seen without doubt that what these students eat during the day is only whatever snacks their teachers can provide them. This is heartbreaking. They should feel comfortable knowing they have regular access to healthy food regardless of their family's income.

Hawai'i State House Committee on Finance Hearing
Thursday, Feb. 20, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 308
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

RE: HB 424, HD1 - Relating to School Meals

Testimony in substantive SUPPORT

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

My name is Christine Andrews and I am from Wailuku, Maui. I submit this testimony today in substantive SUPPORT of H.B. 424, HD1, relating to school meals, though I humbly request that the provision of free breakfast and free lunch be extended to all students, regardless of ability to pay.

My children were born and raised on Maui, but we spent ten years in Saint Paul, Minnesota where they attended Saint Paul Senior High School, a large urban high school of over 2,000 students. The Saint Paul Public School system provides free school breakfast and lunch for all students. Even though our family was not income eligible, I saw the benefits of this program for my own children.

My kids, like most high schoolers I know, would leave for school late or forget to eat breakfast. Fortunately for them, at all entrances to their school, there were carts that had little containers of milk, containers of yogurt, and fresh fruit. I had the opportunity when volunteering at the school to watch students walking into the school, almost all of them grabbing a milk and, my eyes did not deceive, a fruit on the way to class. As a parent who would nag my kids to eat before school or to eat their fruit, and be responded to with an eye-roll, there was something supremely comforting in feeling like my kids' school had their back. That they might not stop for breakfast if I reminded them, but that they would grab something from the cart under the warm gaze of the school cafeteria workers. My daughters both had very bad social anxiety, and also had almost daily after school activities. I am very certain that they would not have felt comfortable bringing a packed lunch to school. They never would or did. I do feel like the free lunch, the communal experience that all students shared in equally at the cafeteria, made it possible for my girls to eat at school when they otherwise would not have. So, even as a family that would not have qualified for free school meals, I know that having free school meals made a significant difference in my kids' lives.

You don't have to take my word for it. I know that the cost of these meals, especially if provided to children who would not otherwise qualify, seems like a big investment. Yet, the benefits of these programs have been well documented. Heck, the benefits of them in Minnesota were so

substantial that Gov. Tim Walz was tapped as a candidate for Vice President and spent a good part of last summer and fall boasting about them. According to the Rockefeller Foundation's True Cost of Food: School Meals Case Study, "Research and practice suggest that providing this benefit without the burden of income eligibility to all students would: enable students that may hover at or slightly above the income threshold to receive the financial and health benefits of free, healthy meals; mitigate problems of stigmatization; eliminate the administrative burdens of meal applications and lunch debt on students, families, and administrators; and translate into better academic performance and lasting improved health outcomes. Additionally, an increase in economies of scale for school meals may allow many schools to provide better food at the reimbursement rate, and have an even greater beneficial impact on local economies and the environment".

The foreword of the Case Study notes, "This case study shows that school meals are essential for the health and economic stability of communities. **We learned that while school meal programs cost \$18.7 billion per year to run, they provide nearly \$40 billion in human health and economic benefits, providing at least \$21 billion in net benefit to society even when we measure only their benefits to human health and economic equity.**

Enhancements to school meal programs can increase their net value even more as they expand their benefits to additional impact areas. **We analyze investments to maximize student participation, improve dietary composition, and optimize food purchasing policies, which together would produce an additional \$10 billion worth of net-positive health, equity, environmental, and economic impacts.**" [emphasize added].

I encourage the members of the Committee to read the report, (available for download at <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/reports/true-cost-of-food-school-meals-case-study/>) in its entirety so that they can fully appreciate that, while the costs of providing free school meals (breakfast and lunch) to ALL Hawai'i students, without regard to income eligibility, has a net benefit to health, academic performance, local food producers, and the economy, that makes the investment in our children a wise one.

I thank the members of the Committee for their time and humbly request that they PASS H.B. 424, HD1 with the amendment that free breakfast and lunch be provided to all children, regardless of income.

Mahalo,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.
Wailuku, Maui

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 8:16:59 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April Arroyo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB424 HD1

To the Honorable Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I, April Arroyom am writing to express my strong support for HB424 HD1, a bill that addresses the crucial issue of access to nutritious meals for public school students. This bill would require the Department of Education (DOE) to provide free breakfast and lunch to students who meet certain eligibility requirements, beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. Additionally, it would limit the cost of school meals for all students to no more than one-quarter of the cost of preparing the meals.

Access to nutritious food is a fundamental aspect of student well-being and academic success. Research has consistently shown that students who are well-nourished are more likely to perform better academically, have improved attendance, and develop healthier long-term habits. By providing free school meals to eligible students, this bill ensures that no student goes without the fuel they need to succeed in the classroom, regardless of their family's financial situation.

Furthermore, reducing the amount the DOE can charge for school meals to no more than one-quarter of the cost of preparation is a vital step in ensuring that every child can access affordable meals. This will relieve financial stress on families and remove barriers to participation in school meal programs, particularly for those who may still struggle to cover the cost of meals despite not qualifying for free or reduced-price meal programs.

The appropriation of funds to support this measure is essential to its success, as it ensures that schools have the resources they need to implement the policy effectively. By investing in the health and education of our children today, we are building a stronger and healthier workforce for tomorrow.

I wholeheartedly support HB424 HD1, as it is an important step toward ensuring that all students in Hawaii have access to healthy, affordable meals, which is a critical component of their overall success. I urge you to support this bill to promote the well-being and academic achievement of our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
April Arroyo
86 Poloahilani Place
Makawao, HI 96768
808-757-8176
aearroyo@hawaii.edu

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 9:26:55 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherry Pollack	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I appreciate the intent of HB424 HD1 but prefer HB757. Under HB424 HD1, many students may be denied meals due to inability to pay and their household's income being even slightly over the income requirements to participate in the free or reduced school meal program. Providing breakfast and lunch for **all** students, regardless of household income, ensures they have a consistent source of nutritious food and can focus on learning, while also removing the stigma for students accessing free or reduced meals.

Bottom line: **No kid should go hungry.**

I urge the committee to amend this measure to be aligned with HB757. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:41:24 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
George Tsuchida	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I fully support HB424 because I believe that more than half of our students do not get an adequate and nutritious breakfast and/or lunch without the stigma of being singled out as financially poor. As unbelievable as it is, it is difficult to understand the depth of poverty in Paradise. No student should go to school on an empty stomach that is growling while trying to concentrate on what the teacher is saying. It is very unfortunate that Hawaii's very high cost of living makes this a daily occurrence. We need to give our precious keiki an opportunity to excel in the classroom and be allowed to focus on his (or her) classroom instruction as their first priority without the distraction of being hungry in class. Please approve HB424 for our present and future generation of Hawaii's future leaders! Mahalo nui loa

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:11:01 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Kern	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 19, 2025

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

My name is Sarah Kern and I am a resident of Lihue, Kauai and a teacher at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School. I am testifying in support of HB424 to provide free breakfast and lunch to students who qualify, although **I strongly believe that providing universal free meals for our keiki would be a more effective approach to addressing child hunger across the state.** When free meals are only provided to students who “meet certain requirements,” it increases access to food while also increasing the number of students who may be stigmatized for meeting said requirements. While I support the expansion of access to free meals, I wish this bill had no requirements to be met which are extra hoops for families, students, and schools to jump through. As a middle school teacher, I have seen first hand how cruel students can be to each other, even when they claim to be joking. We already have students who qualify for free meals but don’t eat them because their peers treat them differently based on their socioeconomic status; we don’t need any more.

Students should not have to worry about whether they have money in their lunch accounts each day. Teachers, administrators, and other school staff should not have to spend our own money providing meals for students when they don’t have funds in their accounts. All students should have access to healthy meals at school every day so that they can have the nourishment they need to focus on their academic and personal growth. Access to quality nutrition is essential to brain growth and function, and should not be a barrier that stands in the way of our students’ learning. I would love to see this bill amended to provide free meals to all students, but at the end of the day I do support the intention of feeding more of our keiki, even considering some of the unintended consequences that will come to pass. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Mahalo nui loa,

Sarah Kern

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:51:24 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elena Arinaga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this very important bill.

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:30:31 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chloe Amos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support HB424! Ensuring that all children are fed should be one of our top priorities as a society!

Thank you,

Chloe Amos

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:55:17 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
zoe finn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 19, 2025

Aloha kākou,

I am writing in SUPPORT of HB424. As a mother, I understand the importance of meeting children's basic needs in order to properly prepare them for success. As a tax payer, this is exactly what I want my taxes funding.

In truth, I believe schools should pay 100% the cost to feed ALL children a healthy balanced school lunch as it is not the children's fault for their parents economic status and/or inability to fill out the forms necessary to receive free lunch.

If our keiki are worrying about their next meal or going hungry due to not wanting to be stereotyped, then they are not able to learn and grow to their full potential. We as a society, whether you have children or not, all benefit from educated (and well fed) children.

Although this bill doesnt directly affect my children (both are in private school), I still believe wholeheartedly in the goal and SUPPORT HB424.

Mahalo for your time,

Zoe Finn

(mother and resident of Kaimukī)

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 2:35:09 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Richard Collins	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this important legislation!

HB-424-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 5:10:08 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April Bautista	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

HB424 HD1 makes sense. I kindly ask that you support and pass HB424 HD1.

Mahalo,

April

April Kamilah Bagasao Bautista

Kalihi-Pālama