



STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD

650 IWILEI ROAD, SUITE 268
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION & COMMERCE

PERSON TESTIFYING: Mitzie Higa, Licensing Specialist, on behalf of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board

DATE: February 20, 2025

TIME: 2:00 pm

LOCATION: Conference Room 329 and Video Conference

TITLE OF BILL: HB439HD1, RELATING TO EDUCATION

PURPOSE OF BILL: Requires the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders and the requirements to obtain the international teacher license. Requires a report to the Legislature.

POSITION: Comments w/suggested amendment

Chair Matayoshi, and Members of the Committee;

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) is providing comments on HB439 HD1, relating to education, with suggested amendment. The mission and vision of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) is to ensure that all public-school students in Hawai'i are taught by qualified teachers. This is achieved through the development of rigorous professional teacher licensing standards. HTSB holds all applicants to the same standards, regardless of whether their educational credentials come from a regionally accredited institution or a non-U.S. institution. HTSB also provides all applicants with access and opportunity to obtain licensure, if they meet the required standards.

We suggest amending this bill to state §302A-802, (7) Establish a visiting international teacher certificate license, and the requirements necessary to obtain the visiting international teacher certificate license, to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries.

This bill states that Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires". This statement is not correct. **J-1 teachers who possess the qualifications necessary for licensure have been issued licenses in their approved license field.** HTSB is statutorily responsible for setting the criteria for the requirements of each license. HTSB is a regulatory agency which is administrative attached to the Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE), but not under the HIDOE. HTSB became a separate entity by statute from HIDOE to ensure that there would be no conflict of interest or entanglement between employment and licensure HTSB receives their authority from Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) §302A-802 to determine licensing and certification standards which is expressed in detail in Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR).

HTSB knows this bill was well intentioned, but it is not the answer to the problem. What is more concerning is the fact that J-1 visa holders are being taken advantage of by loan sharks. These loan sharks are offering J-1 visa holders high interest loans to move to the U.S. and are offering super high-interest loans (around 50% interest annually!) to pay for their flights, moving expenses to move to the U.S. to work, relocation fees,

licensing, etc. to become a teacher in the U.S. At the National Conference for State Legislatures (NCSL) a few years back, there was a labor session and a resolution that specifically served to protect J-1 Visa holders. **The legislators decided to add language to the NCSL resolution to protect J-1 teachers from 3rd party "coyote" companies offering J-1 Visa holders these high-interest loans.** The 3rd party "coyote" companies even charged J-1 Visa holders a licensing fee even when states, such as ours, do not have licensing fees. NCSL brought it to the attention of members that they have had major problems in many other states before we even heard about it in Hawai'i, so they were letting us know. NCSL passed this resolution with protections for J-1 teachers. We should follow suit as NCSL did in protecting J-1 visa holders from these loan sharks.

Here are links to documents that explain more that were shared at NCSL. AFL-CIO [Use and Abuse of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Teacher Program — Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO](#) Note: Make sure you check out the articles they cite as well at the bottom of this report. Here is also a report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) [Importing Educators: Causes and Consequences of International Teacher Recruitment](#) who is more aware of this problem as it hit them first. [Start on page 17 to see the fraud and the 'coyote' recruiting tactics that are being used.]

At HTSB we only have 5 Licensing Specialists that are responsible for all teacher licensing and certification. Our licensing is free to all who apply, since we are now funded by the legislature for our operations. HTSB used to rely on licensing fees, but now we have ZERO licensing fees, since being funded by the legislature.

It has been brought to our attention that some principals have been covering the costs of the Praxis tests for some J-1 teachers, as well as other teachers who may need to take the Praxis tests. This is a commendable gesture, and it's possible they are utilizing Title II funds to do so. The Praxis Core is \$150, PLT is \$156, and content exams range from \$130 to \$180, depending on the specific test taken, the cost for all three is typically less than \$500.

While J-1 visa holders are responsible for covering the Praxis test fees, it's important to note the HTSB does not charge licensing or application fees beyond the tests cost. In contrast, other states, such as Alaska (as mentioned in the preamble) charge a licensing fee of approximately \$200 and an additional application fee of \$50, as do Nevada, and North Carolina. Alaska also requires passing scores from a basic competency exam for teachers with preparation outside the U.S. (See #8 [Alaska Teacher Certification FAQ](#)). These states also require applicants to complete additional coursework as part of their licensing requirements; Nevada requires a Family Engagement course and Alaska requires a Multicultural course.

In the most recent bargaining session, HSTA successfully negotiated an increase in pay for Emergency Hires as part of the 2024-2027 contract. Prior to this new agreement, salaries for individuals holding Emergency Hire Permits were set at \$45,593 per year. However, under the new contract, their salaries have been raised to \$50,325 for the 2023-2024 school year, \$51,835 for the 2024-25 school year, and \$53,649 for the 2026-27 school year.

Through these negotiations, HSTA has secured an addition \$6,242 for Emergency Hire teachers in the 2024-2025 school year, with further increases in the following year. Once applicants pass the Praxis tests, they can transition to a full teaching license and move onto the HDOE Licensed Teacher pay scale, that begins at \$53,390 per year in the 2024-25 school year, and rises to \$55, 250 per year in the 2026-27 school year.

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) requires teachers who have completed out-of-state educator preparation programs outside the U.S., including international teachers and those teachers with international

licenses, to pass three Praxis tests to gain licensure. This process is designed to ensure that these teachers have a thorough understanding of the content they will teach, the grade levels they will instruct, and the specific field and grade span of their degree. It is essential for our teachers to meet these standards to effectively address the needs of our students. **Additionally, it's important to note that special education laws in the U.S. differ from those in other countries,** and acceptable forms of discipline also vary. For instance, we've been informed by J-1 teachers from the Philippines that corporal punishment is allowed in their home country, but it is explicitly prohibited in our state. This is just once example of the differences international teachers may face when transitioning to teaching in the U.S.

The idea of creating an International License for the J-1 Visa Holders was previously presented to the board's committee responsible for teacher licensure. However, committee members strongly opposed this proposal, stating that they want international teachers to complete the three required Praxis exams, just as the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) mandates for teachers who obtain a teaching degree from out-of-state institutions, even if they are already within U.S.

As the state's official teacher licensing agency, HTSB is deeply familiar with the trends and best practices in teacher licensure. We are committed to ensuring that only qualified teachers are allowed to teach in Hawai'i. HTSB is also vigilant about preventing fraud and the actions of bad actors in this field. This is a critical part of our responsibility to protect the integrity of our licensing process, our educators, and our state. That is why the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board is entrusted with the authority to establish and enforce licensing requirements, as set in our Hawaii Administrative Rules.

Lastly, there are for-profit companies out there, even in the U.S., offering "International Teacher degrees", and some of them are BAD actors.

This bill is unnecessary, and HTSB wants to be able to license, renew licenses, and add-fields to licenses, at our agency, but this bill would dilute our licensing standards rigor and make us a license mill for international agencies who are bad actors in all of this.

We already license teachers from other countries, and we do require three tests for quality assurance from applicants with degrees from somewhere else in the U.S. or internationally. Even most in-state Educator Preparation Programs require Praxis tests, so it is not unusual at all.

Thank you for allowing us to testify on this bill.



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

Date: 02/20/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Consumer Protection &
Commerce

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0439, HD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders and the requirements to obtain the international teacher license. Requires a report to the Legislature. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) strongly supports the creation of an international visiting teacher license and respectfully request an amendment be made.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S. trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined / reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators

in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The Department respectfully requests that the following amendment be made:

Amending from page 6 line 12 to page 7 line 5 to instead read:

" . . . qualified to teach; provided that:

(A) International teachers hired by the department or public charter schools as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following:

(i) A valid and current J-1 visa;

(ii) The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;

(iii) Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;

(iv) A valid teaching license in the teacher's home country;

(v) Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting; and

(B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license shall be conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State."

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439, HD 1.



OAHU FILIPINO COMMUNITY COUNCIL
Honolulu, Hawaii

February 18, 2025

TO: Chair Scot Z. Matayoshi, Vice Chair Cory M. Chun, and Members of the Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce

Hearing Date: Thursday, February 20, 2025 **Time:** 2:00 p.m.

Place: Conference Room 329 and Videoconference

FROM: Oahu Filipino Community Council

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of HB439 HD1 - Relating to Education

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

The Oahu Filipino Community Council strongly supports HB439 HD1, which requires the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders and outlines the requirements to obtain the international teacher license. Additionally, it mandates a report to the Legislature.

Key Points

- **Addressing Teacher Shortages:** This bill allows us to tap into a broader pool of qualified educators, helping to alleviate the current teacher shortage in Hawai'i.
- **Enhancing Cultural Diversity:** International teachers bring unique cultural insights and teaching methods that can enrich our students' learning experiences.
- **Maintaining High Standards:** The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board will establish rigorous requirements for obtaining the international teacher license, ensuring that only qualified and competent educators are licensed.

Arguments in Support

The establishment of an international teacher license is essential for addressing the current shortage of qualified educators in Hawai'i. This bill provides an opportunity for qualified international teachers to contribute their expertise and cultural diversity to our educational

system. By enabling certain visa holders to obtain an international teacher license, HB439 HD1 helps to ensure that our students receive high-quality education from diverse perspectives.

We commend the Committee for considering this important legislation and urge its passage. The Oahu Filipino Community Council stands ready to assist in any way possible to ensure the successful implementation of HB439 HD1.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill.

Mahalo nui loa,

Melodie Aduja

Chair, Social Action Committee

Director, Oahu Filipino Community Council

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:24:16 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
amy agbayani	hawaii friends of civil rights	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Testimony in support submitted by

Amy Agbayani, co-chair Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights.

I strongly support an international visiting teacher license for J-1 visa holders. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The bill will help Hawai'i address teacher shortages by providing competent teachers particularly in geographic and disciplines. In addition, J-1 visa holders with cultural and linguistic skills can work with students from these backgrounds. The Department of Education currently has over 200 J-1 visa teachers from the Philippines. My personal contact with some of the teachers and positive comments from principals and my community members makes me confident that these teachers and the students are well-served.

These J-1 visa teachers can serve at any of the public schools, including schools with high proportion of local and immigrant Filipino students. As noted, Filipino students are the largest ethnic group in the public schools and immigrants from the Philippines represent the largest country of origin group, making up nearly half—or 45.8 percent—of all immigrants in Hawai'i. Currently there are 32,044 (10%) English language students in the public schools. These students are native speakers of languages other than English and need assistance to learn English.

I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. I respectfully request your support this bill as it will benefit our schools and teachers by having international licenses for J-1 via teachers.

Mahalo

Amy Agbayani

ALLIANCE ABROAD

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Crystal Bunts, and I am the Vice President of Programs at Alliance Abroad Group. Alliance Abroad is a visa sponsor for several J-1 programs, including the J-1 Teach Program. We have sponsored the program since 2009, and during the past 15 years have brought thousands of international teachers into the country to share their culture and teaching methodologies with students in K-12 schools. We have partnered with the Department of Education in Hawaii since 2019, sponsoring over 200 teachers into the state, with another 100 hired for the 2025-2026 school year.

When I visited our teachers in Hawaii last May I was able to travel to several schools across islands to meet our international teachers, domestic teachers, principals, students, and community members. Overwhelmingly the feedback on the impact of the program was positive and covered an improvement in school culture, students seeing themselves and their culture in their teachers, and dedication to succeeding in the classroom. I want to see that positive impact continue; therefore I ask for your support in the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD 1 be amended to match SB 819, SD 1 – Relating to Education.

The current licensing process is cumbersome and creates barriers for international teachers to obtain certification. Those barriers are varied and include the stress of passing exams and of covering the associated costs, when they, in fact, are already certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S. trained educators. Also of note, until the teachers do pass these exams, they are not eligible for the salary differentials that others receive for being hired in a hard-to-staff location and in special education. In other words, the teachers are not appropriately paid for their experience or the location in which they are hired.

We have seen visiting international teaching licenses work well in numerous states. The most notable example we have is in the State of Texas, which is where our office is located. Similarly to Hawaii, the Texas Education Agency realized that the path to licensure was cumbersome and costly for their international teachers. The Texas Education Agency launched the VIT, allowing visa sponsors and districts to apply to sponsor and host international teachers on the program. Upon evidence that the sponsor is meeting Department of State eligibility requirements for their teachers, TEA approves the sponsor. Since Alliance Abroad is an approved sponsor, our teachers are able to apply for the VIT with a nominal application fee; this allows them to teach for the first three years. They can then apply for an extension for the additional two years once that extension is approved by the Department of State, allowing them to continue teaching for the district up to five years total. This is all without additional praxis exams being required.

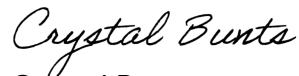
ALLIANCE ABROAD

Without the passing of this bill, I must impress upon you the difficulty we as the visa sponsor will face. Already we have teachers who choose to leave Hawaii and move to another state that offers an easier licensure path. Without a change to the current licensure situation, we will have no choice but to re-evaluate our ability to sponsor the number of teachers we currently do in Hawaii, quite possibly determining we cannot sponsor any additional teachers at all.

I ask you again for your support of HB 439, HD 1. Your support allows international teachers to continue coming to Hawaii on the J-1 visa and positively impacting students and communities. Your support allows teachers who are acclimating to a new home and a new culture to remove the worry of passing exams and paying for the associated costs. Your support allows equal pay for equal work by activating access to the differentials not currently available to international teachers prior to licensure. Your support for the international teachers is support for your communities and your children.

I would be happy to offer further information and support if you would like. You can reach me at the details below.

Warmly,



Crystal Bunts
Vice President of Programs
Alliance Abroad Group, Inc.
512-904-1134
cbunts@allianceabroad.com

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 1:56:29 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexis Navarro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

I am Alexis C. Navarro, a Science teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School, and I am writing in strong support of HB 439 HD1 , which seeks to establish an International Teacher Visiting License. As a teacher originally from the Philippines, I am deeply invested in the future of education in Hawaii, and I believe this bill will greatly benefit not only international teachers like myself but also the students and communities we serve here in Hawaii.

I would like to share my personal experience and perspective as a J1 teacher in Hawaii:

1. I have worked tirelessly to earn my degrees, including a master's and doctorate, in the Philippines. With many years of teaching experience, I've had the honor of leading a school as a school head. My educational background and professional journey have prepared me to contribute positively to the school communities I serve.
2. As a J1 teacher here in Hawaii, I am proud to share my knowledge and expertise with students, staff, and parents. The administration has expressed their appreciation for my talents, and I truly value being able to contribute to the educational environment. This kind of mutual respect and recognition motivates me to continue improving and supporting the success of all students.
3. I am dedicated to continually improving as an educator. I actively attend training sessions, conferences, and workshops to learn the most effective teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and other skills to better serve my students. This ongoing commitment to growth is a testament to my passion for teaching and my desire to be an effective educator here in Hawaii.
4. The proposed five-year stay under this bill would provide my family and me the stability we need to establish a strong foundation. The current three-year contract length is insufficient to cover the loans we took out in the Philippines before coming here. A five-year period would offer us the time needed to pay off these financial obligations and build a more secure future.
5. As international teachers, we already face the financial burden of paying for the Praxis exam, which is costly and time-consuming. Additionally, the preparation required for this exam takes away valuable time that could otherwise be spent planning lessons, creating educational innovations, and focusing on our students' needs. The proposed changes in this bill would reduce this burden and allow us to devote more energy to our teaching and professional development.
6. I firmly believe that the educational qualifications I hold, as well as my professional experience, are on par with the standards of teaching here in Hawaii. The reciprocity of our licenses from the Philippines, combined with the real-world experience we bring, ensures that we are equipped to contribute effectively to the local education system. We are fully capable of

meeting Hawaii's teaching standards, and this bill will help validate and streamline our contributions.

I strongly urge the committee to pass HB 439 HD1, as it will not only support international teachers but also improve the quality of education in Hawaii. It will foster a more stable, dedicated teaching force and ensure that educators can focus on what truly matters: the success and well-being of our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

ALEXIS C. NAVARRO
Science Teacher
Lahaina Intermediate School
Maui, Hawaii

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:05:54 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samson Bulanandi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Chair Matayoshi and Members of the Committee:

I'm Samson Garingan Bulanandi, an English Language Development teacher at Konawaena Middle School on the Big Island.

I'm writing to wholeheartedly support HB439, which proposes establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As a dedicated educator with a proven track record, I've faced unnecessary barriers to obtaining full licensure in Hawai'i due to the Praxis exams. These exams are cost-prohibitive and logistically challenging, requiring travel to O'ahu. This bill recognizes the value of international teachers like myself, who bring rigorous education, qualifications, and experience from our home countries. It provides a fair and reasonable pathway for us to continue making a meaningful impact in Hawai'i's schools.

By passing this bill, Hawai'i will address its ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved communities. It will also honor diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent, ensuring our keiki receive the best possible education.

I urge you to support this bill, providing international teachers with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Samson Garingan Bulanandi

Testimony to support HB439 HD1

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is **SARAH JEAN E. ALEGADO**, an English Language Development Coordinator and Teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School/I am writing to express my strong support for HB439 HD1, a critical piece of legislation aimed at improving the accessibility of teaching licenses for international educators, particularly those on J-1 visas. As a J-1 teacher who has undergone extensive preparation and holds qualifications that are equivalent to those required for the Praxis test, I believe this bill will make significant strides in alleviating the teacher shortage, especially in Hawaii's classrooms, and will provide equitable opportunities for skilled teachers to contribute to the educational system.

One of the key provisions of HB439 HD1 is the ability for international teachers, such as those holding a J-1 visa, to secure a teaching license in Hawaii without the need to pass the Praxis test. As a highly trained educator from the Philippines, I have already passed the **Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET)**, which is equivalent to the Praxis in the United States. The LET is a comprehensive examination that evaluates pedagogical skills, teaching practices, and content knowledge—exactly the same areas assessed by the Praxis exam.

Requiring international teachers like myself to take another exam, despite already holding a recognized teaching qualification, creates an unnecessary barrier. It delays the process for qualified educators to enter classrooms and contributes to the teacher shortage that we face today. By recognizing international qualifications, we can streamline the licensing process, allowing skilled teachers to begin their work in classrooms without redundant requirements.

Another critical point is the status of J-1 teachers as “emergency hires,” despite having qualifications and credentials that are comparable to those required by Hawaii's education system. The **LET**, which I passed in the Philippines, demonstrates my ability and preparedness to teach. Yet, because of the complexity and cost of taking additional exams like the Praxis, many J-1 teachers are hired under emergency status, despite their proven qualifications.

HB439 HD1 addresses this issue by allowing J-1 teachers to bypass unnecessary examinations, ensuring that qualified individuals can be recognized as full, professional educators without being relegated to the status of an “emergency hire.” This is essential

not only for the fair treatment of teachers but also for ensuring that students in Hawaii receive the highest quality of education from experienced, fully trained professionals.

To further emphasize the quality and validity of my qualifications, I hold the **National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH)** certification and have passed the **Career Executive Service Written Examination (CESWE)**. These certifications are prestigious credentials in the Philippines that demonstrate my leadership and expertise in the field of education.

The NQESH is designed for educators who seek leadership roles within schools, and the CESWE is for those aspiring to serve in executive positions in government, including educational management. These accomplishments, in addition to my teaching credentials, underscore the depth of my preparation as an educator. The skills and knowledge I gained through these examinations are highly transferable and directly contribute to my ability to teach and lead in the classroom.

The teacher shortage in Hawaii is a serious concern, and it is critical to recognize the importance of J-1 teachers in alleviating this issue. J-1 teachers bring diverse perspectives, international teaching experience, and a wealth of cultural knowledge that enriches the classroom environment. They are not just filling vacancies—they are contributing to a globalized education system, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring that Hawaii's students benefit from the world's best and brightest educators.

By allowing J-1 teachers to have their credentials recognized without the additional burden of passing exams that do not reflect their actual qualifications, we can attract and retain talented educators who are committed to the success of Hawaii's students. This will help address the ongoing teacher shortage and provide a solution to a growing educational crisis.

As an **English Language Development (ELD) coordinator and teacher** in Hawaii, I play an essential role in supporting English language learners (ELLs) and helping them succeed academically. The need for qualified ELD educators in Hawaii has never been more urgent, and I am proud to contribute to this important work. My background in teaching English as a second language (ESL) in the Philippines and my experience as an ELD coordinator allow me to implement effective strategies that support the diverse linguistic needs of students in Hawaii.

HB439 HD1 provides an opportunity for teachers like myself, who specialize in ELD, to continue our work without unnecessary barriers. The more streamlined process of licensing will enable us to dedicate our time and energy to helping students thrive, rather than navigating bureaucratic hurdles.

Thus, I wholeheartedly support HB439 HD1, as it addresses critical issues faced by international teachers, especially those on J-1 visas. By recognizing the qualifications of international educators, streamlining the licensing process, and allowing J-1 teachers to contribute fully to the education system, this bill will directly contribute to alleviating the teacher shortage in Hawaii.

I urge you to pass this bill, as it will not only benefit teachers like me but, more importantly, it will provide Hawaii's students with the high-quality education they deserve.

Aloha!

I am Maria Concepcion Campano, a Filipino J1 teacher, teaching Physical Science subject, of freshman students at King Kekaulike High School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB439.

As teachers, we have invested countless hours into perfecting our craft and meeting the needs of our students. We have worked hard to provide high-quality education, despite the many challenges we faced in our home country, and we are ready to continue our journey in the U.S., contributing to the growth of the American educational system.

However, the recent requirement by the Department of Education (DOE) to take the Praxis exam is placing a significant burden on educators like myself. The cost of the exam is extremely high, and many of us are already financially stretched after relocating to the U.S. and adjusting to a new environment. Additionally, this requirement feels redundant given the qualifications and experience we have already attained. We are not asking to bypass necessary assessments but to be recognized for the expertise we have gained through years of teaching and education.

It is important to remember that teachers are not just employees, but lifelong learners who continuously strive to better themselves and the students they serve. Filipino teachers, in particular, have a deep commitment to education and have consistently demonstrated the ability to adapt, innovate, and inspire. Our primary goal is not just to earn a paycheck, but to make a difference in the lives of students, both here in the U.S. and in the Philippines.

We want to continue serving as educators and contributing to the future of our students. Please consider alternative pathways that acknowledge our experience and qualifications, so we can continue to make meaningful contributions to education.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued support.

Sincerely yours,

Maria Concepcion Campano

Testimony in Support of HB 439 Relating to Education

To Whom It May Concern,

I am Maria Glenda Ventura, an 11th-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher and a 9th-grade adviser at King Kekaulike High School. I have been serving within the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) for the past seven months and am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the academic success of my students and the community.

Since my arrival, I have had the privilege to learn and share cultural knowledge, which had a positive impact on the school environment and the surrounding community. My students, in particular, have expressed their respect and appreciation for my participation in the Cultural Exchange Program. The program has allowed me to not only teach but also to actively engage in fostering cultural awareness, promoting diversity, and enhancing the global perspective within the classroom.

Moreover, I am a Professional Licensure for Teachers (PLT) passer from the Philippines, and my credentials have been verified and approved by the Foreign Credential Evaluation. I have attended numerous professional development training sessions, which have further enriched my teaching strategies and have helped me better cater to the needs of a diverse, multi-racial student body in Hawaii. These experiences have underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusion, enabling me to connect with my students on a deeper level and create an environment where all students feel valued and heard.

HB 439, which seeks to provide reciprocity for teacher licensure between the Philippines and Hawaii, is a critical step forward for educators like myself. This bill will not only allow me to strengthen my professional status here in Hawaii but, will also present a unique opportunity to share the rich cultural diversity of my home country with my students, their families, and the broader community.

The benefits of this bill extend beyond the recognition of our credentials—it opens doors for teachers to bring more diverse teaching strategies, cultural knowledge, and global perspectives into Hawaiian classrooms. For students, it broadens their understanding of the world around them and increases their appreciation for cultural differences, fostering a learning environment that truly reflects the diversity of the 21st century. Also, it will enhance the professional growth of international educators and provide significant benefits for the students, parents, and the community.

I fully and strongly support HB 439 and am hopeful for its passage. Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Glenda Ventura

ELA 11th Grade Teacher & 9th Grade Adviser

King Kekaulike High School

Hawaii Department of Education

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:19:55 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vernadeth Salas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I strongly support **HB439, HD1** as it addresses critical barriers that hinder the full participation of J-1 international teachers in Hawai‘i’s schools. We, teachers, play a vital role in addressing teacher shortages, especially in hard-to-staff areas and special education, while enriching students' learning experiences through cultural exchange.

Currently, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires," requiring them to take costly and time-consuming additional exams that are not imposed on other licensed teachers. This process places an unnecessary financial and professional burden on qualified educators, reducing the time we can dedicate to teaching and student engagement. Other states have streamlined licensing for international teachers—Hawai‘i should do the same to remain competitive and supportive of global educators.

By establishing a visiting international teacher license without burdensome exams, HB439, HD1 ensures that these skilled professionals can continue to provide consistent, high-quality instruction for up to five years. This stability benefits both students and schools while fostering a diverse and globally minded education system.

I urge you to pass **HB439, HD1** to strengthen Hawai‘i’s teaching workforce and provide greater equity for J-1 educators.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Vernadeth Salas

J1-Visa Teacher

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:20:20 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dianne Cabrera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Dianne Cabrera, and I am a 2nd grade teacher at Kahakai Elementary School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support to HB439, HD1.

As an. educator, my philosophy of teaching centers around fostering the holistic development of children in terms of academically, socially, emotionally, and morally. I believe that education should not merely be about imparting knowledge but should focus on shaping well rounded individuals. My goal is to create an environment where each child can thrive, feel valued, and develop the skills necessary for lifelong success. I intentionally provide engaging and effective instruction that was learner centered for each day. The bill acknowledge the qualifications and experience we bring from our home countries, and it provides a fair pathway for us to continuously making a significant impact in Hawaii DOE Schools.

I strongly urge you to support this bill, which will provide international teachers like myself with a fair path to licensure and extend our stay for five years.By supporting this bill, we can help foster a more inclusive and effective educational environment for all.

Respectfully,**Dianne A. Cabrera****Second Grade Teacher****Kahakai Elementary School**

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:21:47 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ma Therese Juan	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB439 HD1 is support of the J1 Teachers staying in Hawaii for 5 years without any practice exam.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:25:48 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Luke Ferda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to show my support for HB 439. It is vitally important that this bill is supported by our government. Across the country we have a shortage of teachers, especially high-quality teachers. HB 439 allows schools in the United States to have a much better opportunity to fill their vacant teaching positions. Many of these new teacher hires have experience in other countries. This is a great benefit to our local schools. At my current school we have over 8 teachers that were hired through this process. Without them, it is likely that all of those positions would still be empty.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:26:30 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I strongly support this bill HB439 HD1 creating an international teacher license. While the J-1 Visa Program brings valuable international educators to Hawai'i, our current "emergency hire" classification and burdensome testing requirements hinder its effectiveness, detracting from classroom preparation and unfairly denying teachers additional compensation. This bill streamlines the licensing process for J-1 visa holders, eliminating these obstacles and allowing qualified international teachers to stay in Hawai'i for up to five years. This will provide our keiki with consistent, high-quality instruction, valuable cultural exchange, and a more diverse teaching workforce, ultimately strengthening our educational system.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I support the intent of HB439, HD1, but recommend the following revisions to HB439, HD1 to ensure that a visiting international teacher license is created without burdensome examinations that other licensed teachers are not required to take:

(7) Establish a visiting international teacher license, and the requirements necessary to obtain the visiting international teacher license, to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries." The international teacher license shall provide teachers hired by the department or public charter schools the ability to teach all subjects and grade levels that the teacher is qualified to teach; provided that:

(A) International [educators] teachers hired by the department or public charter schools as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following:

(i) A valid and current J-1 visa;

(ii) The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;

(iii) Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;

(iv) A valid teaching license in the teacher's home country; and

(v) Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting; and

(B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license is conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Alaska, Nevada, Florida and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international educators,

Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Respectfully,

EMELYN M. BARBA
5th GRADE TEACHER
LIHIKAI SCHOOL

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:28:14 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
June Kenneth G. Roska	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I support the intent of HB439, HD1, but recommend the following revisions to HB439, HD1 to ensure that a visiting international teacher license is created without burdensome examinations that other licensed teachers are not required to take:

(7) Establish a visiting international teacher license, and the requirements necessary to obtain the visiting international teacher license, to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries." The international teacher license shall provide teachers hired by the department or public charter schools the ability to teach all subjects and grade levels that the teacher is qualified to teach; provided that:

(A) International [educators] teachers hired by the department or public charter schools as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following:

(i) A valid and current J-1 visa;

(ii) The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;

(iii) Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;

(iv) A valid teaching license in the teacher's home country; and

(v) Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting; and

(B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license is conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international educators, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

June Roska

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:28:27 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noralyn Suniga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Noralyn A. Suniga, and I am a Math Teacher from the Philippines currently teaching at Campbell High School. I strongly support the proposed International Visiting Teacher License. This bill would greatly benefit teachers like me, who have earned years of experience and eligibility in our home countries but are still required to undergo the current licensing process. Since arriving in Hawaii, I have dedicated myself to demonstrating my worth. Equipped with rigorous experiences from my previous school in the Philippines, I joined Campbell High School's Math Club. I volunteer my time after school hours, staying until 5 PM, to provide math tutorials for students needing extra help and enrichment. I also assist in preparing students for math competitions. My passion for teaching has positively impacted our school community, particularly my students. They have responded well to my care and dedication. In fact, most of my students are male, but surprisingly, some have opened up about their family problems. In the recent Panorama Education Student Perception Survey, my students rated me highly in key areas:

- Teacher-student relationship: 81% (significantly higher than the Hawaii Department of Education's average of 64%)
- Pedagogical effectiveness: 74% (higher than the state average of 72%)
- Classroom engagement: 47% (surpassing the state average of 45%)

These results reflect my commitment to creating a productive learning environment. However, as international teachers, we face unique challenges. We must prepare for licensure exams, such as the Praxis tests, which add to our financial burdens. Moreover, the uncertainty of visa renewal each year creates instability, making it harder for us to fully commit to our students' long-term success. A more efficient licensing procedure would provide us with greater job security, allowing us to focus on our teaching roles. This measure is necessary and advantageous, considering Hawaii's persistent teacher shortage. It ensures that schools continue to employ committed and highly skilled teachers. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, enabling skilled, experienced, and driven teachers like myself to continue improving Hawaii's schools without unnecessary obstacles.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

Noralyn A. Suniga

Math Teacher, Campbell High School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:29:45 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rica Gilbuena	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I am Rica Gilbuena, an international teacher currently working in Hawai'i through the J-1 Visa Program. I strongly support the intent of HB439, HD1, allowing the creation of a visiting international teacher license.

My own experience, and that of my colleagues, echoes the success of the J-1 Visa Program for Hawai'i's keiki. We've seen firsthand how international educators contribute to schools across the islands, particularly in hard-to-staff areas and special education. We bring not only our qualifications, comparable to those of U.S.-trained educators, but also a passion for sharing our cultures and enriching the learning environment. I understand that the Department plans to expand this program, which demonstrates its value to our students.

However, the current licensing system places undue burdens on international teachers. Unlike other states that have streamlined processes, Hawai'i's "emergency hire" designation requires us to take costly and time-consuming examinations. These numerous exams, often exceeding \$1,000, divert valuable time and energy away from what truly matters: preparing lessons, meeting with families, and analyzing student progress.

HB 439, HD 1 offers a crucial opportunity to rectify this situation. By creating a visiting international teacher license without the requirement for additional examinations, Hawai'i can fully embrace the potential of international educators. This will not only provide continuity for our students but also create a more diverse and globally representative teaching force, reflecting the rich tapestry of our communities. It will also allow us to focus on what we do best: teaching and inspiring Hawai'i's keiki.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:32:25 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aljhon Tamondong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I support the intent of HB439, HD1, but recommend the following revisions to HB439, HD1 to ensure that a visiting international teacher license is created without burdensome examinations that other licensed teachers are not required to take:

(7) Establish a visiting international teacher license, and the requirements necessary to obtain the visiting international teacher license, to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries." The international teacher license shall provide teachers hired by the department or public charter schools the ability to teach all subjects and grade levels that the teacher is qualified to teach; provided that:

(A) International [educators] teachers hired by the department or public charter schools as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following:

(i) A valid and current J-1 visa;

(ii) The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;

(iii) Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;

(iv) A valid teaching license in the teacher's home country; and

(v) Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting; and

(B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license is conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international educators, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:33:05 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Berly Ann G. Cular	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am Berly Ann G. Cular, a J-1 Cultural Exchange Teacher currently teaching 7th Grade Math at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. I am honored to testify in strong support of the International Visiting Teacher License Bill, which would provide much-needed recognition and stability for international educators like myself, who are dedicated to serving Hawaii's students.

I have been teaching for 18 years, with extensive experience in mathematics education in the Philippines. Through rigorous training, professional development, and classroom practice, I have developed effective teaching strategies that not only enhance students' mathematical skills but also foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and a growth mindset. Since arriving in Hawaii, I have worked hard to bridge learning gaps, build students' confidence in math, and create an inclusive, culturally responsive learning environment.

While I am fully willing to take the Praxis exam, I firmly believe that my credentials, training, and years of experience should also be valued. International teachers like me have already met high standards in our home countries, and we continue to demonstrate excellence in our teaching practices here in Hawaii. By supporting this bill, you acknowledge the contributions we bring and provide us with the opportunity to continue making a difference in our students' lives.

Additionally, extending the teaching period to a maximum of five years is a crucial step in supporting international educators. The impact we make does not happen overnight—it takes time to build relationships, adapt to the educational system, and contribute meaningfully to student learning. Allowing us to stay for up to five years means we can further strengthen our teaching, mentor students effectively, and contribute to the long-term success of Hawaii's schools.

Hawaii faces an ongoing teacher shortage, and international educators help fill this gap with dedicated, highly trained professionals who bring valuable perspectives to the classroom. By passing this bill, you are not only recognizing our commitment but also ensuring that students continue to receive high-quality instruction from passionate and experienced educators.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony. I urge you to support this bill, as it will not only benefit international teachers but also strengthen the entire education system in Hawaii. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

BERLY ANN G. CULAR

Math 7 Teacher

Kalama Intermediate School

Maui, Hawaii

Testimony in Support of HB439, HD1 – International Visiting Teacher License

Submitted by: Joana Marie G. Anonuevo

7th Grade Science Teacher, Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School, Kauai

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joana Marie G. Anonuevo, and I am a 7th-grade Science teacher at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School on the beautiful island of Kauai. I am writing to express my strong support for SB HB439, HD1 which would honor the experience and qualifications of teachers like myself who have earned teaching credentials in our home countries.

As a J1 teacher from abroad, I've had the privilege of teaching for nine years, and I am confident that my experience, skill set, and dedication to my students are what truly define my ability to provide quality education. However, I am also faced with significant challenges as I strive to meet the licensing requirements here in Hawaii, most notably the Praxis exams.

The cost of the Praxis exams is an ongoing burden. With fees totaling hundreds of dollars per exam, it places a financial strain on teachers like me who are already adjusting to a new culture and working hard to provide our students with the best education possible. Furthermore, access to these exams is not readily available. In some cases, I have to travel all the way to Oahu to take the exams, which not only involves additional costs but also time away from my classroom and students. These logistical and financial challenges make it even harder to focus on what truly matters: teaching and supporting my students.

In my nine years of experience, I have continually refined my craft, and I am certain that the knowledge and skills I bring to my classroom make me more than equipped to provide my students in Kauai with the high-quality education they deserve. I am fully committed to my students' growth and success, ensuring that they meet the necessary standards before advancing to the next grade level.

In addition to my teaching, I have also been fortunate to contribute to our community here in Kauai. I had the opportunity to perform with other J1 teachers at the Visayan Club Organization's fundraising event, which helped raise funds for Kumu's Cupboard, a nonprofit organization that provides free supplies to both students and teachers. This is just one example of how, as international educators, we bring more than our teaching expertise to the table—we bring our passion for community involvement and our commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of those we teach and work with.

I absolutely love teaching here in Hawaii. The connection I have with my students, the joy I feel when they grasp complex concepts, and the relationships I've built within the school and community are incredibly rewarding. The professional development opportunities we receive through monthly seminars and PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) have been invaluable, and I am continuously growing as an educator. These opportunities help me improve my practice, but they also make me feel supported and valued as a teacher.

It is my belief that SB HB439, HD1 will be an important step forward in allowing teachers like me to focus on what we do best—teaching. The requirements to pass the Praxis exams should not be an obstacle that prevents us from continuing our work, especially when we have already demonstrated a high level of competence and professionalism in our home countries. The International Visiting Teacher License will acknowledge the strengths we bring to our schools and communities, and will allow us to focus on our students and on our ongoing growth as educators, rather than spending excessive time and money on exams that do not truly reflect our abilities or our dedication.

I wholeheartedly support SB HB439, HD1 and urge you to consider the positive impact this bill will have on both teachers and students across Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joana Marie G. Anonuevo

7th Grade Science Teacher, Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School, Kauai

Testimony in Support of HB439, HD1

Aloha, my name is Lyra Bertillo, and I am a 7th-grade Home Economics teacher at Kapaa Middle School on the beautiful island of Kauai, Hawaii. I am here to express my strong support for HB439, HD1.

This bill is critical for teachers who are on J1 visas, like me, as it eliminates the need to take the PRAXIS exam. For many of us, the PRAXIS exam is a significant financial burden, costing hundreds of dollars, and in some cases, requiring travel to Oahu just to take the test. Given that many international teachers, including myself, hold degrees and professional licenses from our home countries, I believe that the PRAXIS exam is an unnecessary and inadequate measure of our teaching capabilities.

I have been teaching for eleven years and hold a master's degree from the Philippines, in addition to my teaching license from my home country. I am committed to continuously improving my skills, attending seminars, and participating in professional learning communities offered by my school and the Kauai District. I believe my experience and dedication as a teacher should be the focus, rather than a standardized exam that doesn't fully reflect my abilities or the value I bring to my students.

HB439, HD1 will not only benefit international teachers but also the communities we serve. It will allow us to focus on what truly matters—providing quality education to our students. I strongly urge you to support this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB439, a bill that seeks to grant international teachers a teaching license without unnecessary exams and ensure fair salary and benefits. As a J1 teacher currently teaching 2nd grade SPED/Inclusion at August Ahrens Elementary School in Hawaii, I have dedicated my skills, knowledge, and passion to positively impact my students and the school community.

International teachers play a crucial role in addressing teacher shortages, bringing diversity, expertise, and a global perspective to education. Many of us arrive highly qualified, with years of experience and credentials from our home countries, yet we face additional hurdles, such as redundant licensing exams that do not accurately reflect our abilities or experience. Removing these barriers would allow us to focus on what truly matters—supporting our students' learning and development.

Additionally, it is only fair that international teachers receive the same salary and benefits as our local counterparts. We contribute equally to the success of our schools, work tirelessly to meet the needs of our students, and deserve the same level of professional recognition and financial security. Equal pay and benefits would not only ensure stability for international teachers but also encourage more skilled educators to continue serving in Hawaii's schools.

Passing HB439 will strengthen Hawaii's education system by attracting and retaining highly qualified international educators, ultimately benefiting students and communities. I urge you to support this bill to create a more equitable and inclusive teaching environment for all.

For these reasons, passing HB439 is essential to ensuring fairness and stability for international teachers in Hawaii. By eliminating unnecessary exams, recognizing the validity of our home country licenses through reciprocity, and ensuring equal pay and benefits, this bill will create a more supportive and sustainable pathway for international educators.

Extending the opportunity for international teachers to work for at least five years will help address the ongoing teacher shortage. This stability ensures consistency for students who rely on our dedication and expertise.

Supporting HB439 means investing in the future of Hawaii's education system. It ensures that passionate, skilled international teachers can continue making a meaningful impact on students and communities for years to come. I urge you to stand with us in strengthening the foundation of quality education by passing this bill.

Sincerely,



LOVELLE PRIMELYN R. CAP-ATAN

J1 Teacher, 2nd Grade SPED/Inclusion

August Ahrens Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:42:35 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JOY HERMOSO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 18, 2025**Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:**

My name is Joy Hermoso, and I am currently a J1 teacher working in Solomon Elementary School at Oahu Hawaii. I am writing to express my strong support for HB439 HD1. As a J1 teacher, I have had the privilege of bringing diverse perspectives to the classroom, which has enriched the learning experiences of my students and contributed to a more globalized understanding of culture, language, and education.

HB439 HD1 is crucial in supporting the continued exchange of ideas and educational practices between nations. This bill acknowledges the invaluable contributions that international teachers like myself make to the Hawaiian education system, especially in schools that may face challenges in filling hard-to-recruit positions. By expanding opportunities for J1 teachers and ensuring more streamlined processes for their participation, this bill will strengthen the educational framework across our state.

Additionally, the opportunity to teach in Hawaii has allowed me to share my unique teaching methods and experiences with local educators and students, fostering a deeper sense of cultural exchange. This collaboration not only benefits students in the classroom but also broadens the professional development of all involved. By supporting HB439 HD1, you are not only advocating for J1 teachers but also advocating for the future of diverse and globally-conscious education.

Thank you for considering this important legislation. I am confident that passing this bill will enhance the educational experience for students, teachers, and communities alike.

**Sincerely,
JOY HERMOSO
J1 Teacher/SOLOMON ES**

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Anna Marie A. Monares, and I am writing to support HB439, HD1, with an important request for revision. As someone who values the contributions of international educators in our schools, I believe this bill is a step in the right direction. However, I urge the committee to ensure that visiting international teachers are not required to take burdensome examinations that other licensed teachers are not subjected to.

I have seen firsthand how international teachers bring fresh perspectives, diverse teaching methods, and cultural richness to our classrooms. They inspire students, broaden worldviews, and help prepare the next generation for an increasingly global society. Adding extra testing requirements could discourage highly qualified educators from coming to Hawai'i at a time when we need them the most.

If we truly want to attract and retain talented international teachers, we must make the licensing process fair and accessible. I respectfully ask the committee to amend HB439, HD1 to remove unnecessary examination barriers while maintaining high teaching standards.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Anna Marie Monares

Wailuku Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 2:45:44 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carlbhy Lou U. Singson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

e-Testimony in Support of HB439_HD1 - International Visiting Teacher License Hearing Date: February 20, 2025

Aloha to all the Members of the Committee,

My name is Carlbhy Lou Singson, a licensed professional teacher in the Philippines with over 8 years of teaching experience in a secondary public school and now teaching in a public high school in Oahu, Hawai'i through the BridgeUSA J-1 Visa Program or the Teacher Cultural Exchange Program. I am writing in strong support to the International Visiting Teacher License to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries like the Philippines.

I believe that the knowledge and skills I acquire from my professional teaching experiences and the professional teacher license from the Philippines are more than enough to qualify me as a public secondary teacher in Hawai'i. And I don't need to get another teaching license in Hawai'i but shall be given an equivalent international teaching license after having fulfilled the requirements for conversion of the license. Our stay in Hawai'i is just 3-5 years which is not enough to compensate us in our service and dedication in addressing the teacher shortage in Hawai'i. As we all know the first year or year and a half are for us to pay all our debts in the Philippines that we used in coming to Hawai'i. The remaining years is for saving a little. If we would be spending almost \$500 for the license that would be a very huge loss for us. So, it would be of great help for the many sacrificing Filipino teacher like me to save money from not taking anymore the Praxis Test or any Hawai'i Teaching License and just convert our Philippine Teacher License into an International Visiting Teacher License. It will be a win-win situation for both parties.

Also, it is known to many that Filipino teachers excel in any field of expertise. And that they are very dedicated and passionate in teaching diverse students. Their patience and utmost understanding to children help them give the quality of education the learners deserved. I definitely support the passing of HB439_HD1 to acknowledge the internationally recognized foreign credentials as highly qualified and experienced educators so that we can focus on supporting the school, students and community as a whole.

Mahalo nui,

Carlbhy Lou Singson
Secondary Mathematics Teacher
Roosevelt High School
1120 Nehoa St. Honolulu, HI 96822

Testimony in Support of SB 819 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 7, 2025, at 3:00 PM

Aloha!

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

A story of J1 Filipino teacher's journey in Hawaii
(My success, challenges and hope)
by *Melvin T. Osorno*

I am Melvin T. Osorno, a J1 Filipino teacher from Cebu City, Philippines and a Grade 10 Biology Science teacher of Maui High School. I graduated Cum Laude in 2008 with a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education, focusing on General Science, from Cebu Normal University. This institution is recognized as a leading university for teacher education in the Philippines, known for producing many top performers in the country's teacher board examinations. It is a world-class institution committed to human transformation, creating globally competitive, efficient, and effective educators who positively impact lives around the world, particularly in the United States. I have also completed the required 30 academic units for my Master of Arts in Education, with a major in Science Education, and I am currently working on my thesis for graduation.

I have passionately devoted 15 impactful years to the field of education. Graduating with top honors in March 2008, I was fortunate to secure a teaching position just two months later. My journey began at San Roque College de Cebu (formerly San Roque Child Development School Montessori), a prestigious private institution in Cordova, Cebu, Philippines, where I spent six transformative years. There, I served as the Academic Coordinator for four years and the High School Coordinator for one year, delivering instruction in various Science subjects to students in Grades 4 to 10, along with Social Studies and Computer Education in Grade 7. My role extended beyond the classroom, as I took on the responsibilities of an event host and choreographer for numerous institutional activities.

In 2014, I embraced a new challenge at Talamban National High School, a large, esteemed integrated school nestled in the heart of Cebu City. Known for producing globally competitive graduates and excelling in regional and national educational contests, this institution allowed me to teach Science in the Junior High School department for nine years, while also serving as the Special Science Class Coordinator for four years. My active participation in event hosting and significant contributions to various institutional activities underscored my commitment to fostering academic, professional, social, and cultural growth in our teaching environment.

My proudest achievement came during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. I took the initiative to create, compile, and author the Grade 7 Earth and Environmental Science learning modules. These comprehensive resources were employed by numerous schools across the Division of Cebu City, enabling effective distance learning during this critical time. My modules not only met the immediate educational needs but also underwent rigorous quality assurance procedures by Master Teachers in Science at the Division Office, ensuring their excellence and reliability.

In December 2023, my father underwent a major gastrectomy, a surgical procedure to remove part of his stomach. This event deeply affected our family and inspired me to pursue my American dream of becoming a teacher abroad. Prior to this, it had always been my aspiration to teach in the USA. This challenging experience motivated me to leave my teaching career in the Philippines and do everything possible to achieve my goal and support my family.

Through prayer, enthusiasm, and hard work, I am given the opportunity to teach at Maui High School as a Biology teacher teaching essential concepts with real-world applications while considering students' learning interests and styles without compromising the Next Generations Science Standards and its learning competencies. I have done my best to create an inclusive, student-centered learning environment that fosters curiosity, critical thinking and a love for learning. Beyond my responsibilities as a science teacher, I also serve as one of the advisers for the Filipino Cultural Club, which aims to promote Filipino culture among students at our school. We accomplish this through various activities, such as teaching traditional dances, integrating Filipino folktales into our lessons and encouraging students to share their personal stories about their heritage. Students can learn more about their roots and share their knowledge with others. Through this program, I have discovered that many students at Maui High School are Filipinos, particularly Ilocanos.

With my academic credentials, accomplishments, and 15 years of teaching experience in the Philippines, as well as a year-long position as a science teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School in Kihei, Maui, I am currently a Biology teacher at Maui High School in Kahului, Maui. I feel honored and grateful to have served with commitment and dedication in both my home country, the Philippines, and the United States of America.

I am writing this testimony to strongly advocate for the passage of HB 439. This bill stands to make a profound and positive difference for Filipino teachers who aspire to join the Cross-Cultural Exchange Program for five years here in Hawaii. By facilitating their participation, it not only enhances educational exchange but also ensures that these dedicated teachers can secure equivalent international teaching licenses, similar to those obtained by Filipino teachers in states like Nevada and New Mexico.

These teachers have already demonstrated their capability by successfully acquiring their equivalent teaching licenses through authenticated Philippine teaching licenses issued by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), as well as their undergraduate and master's Transcripts of Records (TORs) and Foreign Credential

Evaluation (FCE) documents from reputable and reliable foreign credential evaluators such as WES, SpanTran, CAREE, and others. HB 439 will remove barriers and create opportunities, allowing these educators to flourish in a global environment and contribute even more richly to the educational landscape.

Despite possessing the necessary credentials, accomplishments, and teaching experiences essential for professional growth and development, achieving full licensure in Hawai'i by passing all five learning areas—major and core subjects—poses significant challenges. These challenges stem from factors such as inadequate preparation time, the complexity of test content, and cultural considerations. Furthermore, the process is not only costly but also inequitable, highlighting the urgent need for reform in the licensure system.

Before I received my job offer to teach in America, I diligently submitted a range of essential documents to demonstrate my qualifications and capabilities. These included my Philippine teaching license with comprehensive test scores from the examination for teachers conducted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), as well as my undergraduate and master's degree transcripts (TOR) from a prestigious university in the Philippines. Additionally, I provided foreign credential evaluation (FCE) documents from an internationally recognized evaluator which specializes in verifying academic and professional credentials and converting them into their U.S. equivalents based on established guidelines. Based solely on these authenticated documents, I firmly believe I am fully deserving of an equivalent U.S. teaching license. If teachers in states like Nevada and New Mexico have successfully obtained their equivalent teaching licenses as J-1 Filipino educators, then I am hopeful that the same opportunity exists for me here in Hawaii. It is crucial to recognize that teachers across these states, including Hawaii, share a common background. We all come from the Philippines, have taken the same rigorous teaching examination administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), and possess diverse teaching experiences and credentials. Furthermore, we submitted identical documentation, which was meticulously verified by the same reputable credential evaluator, and we underwent the same rigorous screening processes, including interviews and teaching demonstrations. In light of these facts, I passionately advocate for my peers and myself, who are equally qualified, to be granted equivalent teaching licenses here in Hawaii. It is not just a matter of fairness; it is about recognizing the dedication and expertise of educators who have committed to teaching and shaping the futures of students, regardless of where they come from.

As I delved into the relevant literature on the impacts of international examinations required for placement, I discovered a wealth of insights that underscore their significance and implications. I have encountered and realized something and that is cultural considerations. Cultural considerations play a significant, though often overlooked, role in the success of test-takers in international examinations like the Praxis. These considerations encompass a broad range of factors that can create systematic disadvantages for individuals whose cultural backgrounds differ from the dominant culture assumed by the test. Here's a breakdown of these factors:

1. Language and Communication Styles:

- **Language Proficiency:** Even if the test is offered in multiple languages, nuances in language can pose challenges. Test questions often use complex sentence structures, idioms, and vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to non-native speakers, even those who are otherwise proficient. Translation inaccuracies can also occur.
- **Communication Styles:** Different cultures have different communication norms. Some cultures are more direct, while others are more indirect. Test questions may assume a specific communication style, potentially confusing test-takers from cultures that favor a different approach. For example, a question might require inferential reasoning that is not commonly used in some educational settings.
- **Test-Wiseness:** Test-wiseness refers to strategies for approaching and answering test questions. These strategies are often culturally specific and may not be universally understood. Test-takers from some cultures may be less familiar with multiple-choice formats, time management strategies for standardized tests, or the process of eliminating incorrect answers.

2. Educational Background and Pedagogical Approaches:

- **Curriculum Alignment:** International test-takers may have studied different curricula that do not align perfectly with the content covered by the Praxis. Even if the core concepts are similar, the specific examples, applications, and emphasis may differ, putting some test-takers at a disadvantage.
- **Teaching Styles:** Educational systems vary significantly across cultures. Some cultures emphasize rote memorization, while others focus on critical thinking and problem-solving. If the Praxis emphasizes skills that are not emphasized in a test-taker's educational background, they may struggle, even if they possess the underlying knowledge.
- **Test Familiarity:** Test-takers who are unfamiliar with standardized testing formats may experience anxiety and perform poorly, even if they are well-prepared in terms of content knowledge. This is particularly relevant for individuals from cultures where standardized testing is less common.

3. Cultural Values and Beliefs:

- **Time Orientation:** Different cultures have different perceptions of time. Some cultures are more punctual and time-conscious, while others are more flexible. Test-takers from cultures with a more flexible approach to time may struggle with the time constraints of the Praxis, even if they know the material.
- **Individualism vs. Collectivism:** Some cultures emphasize individual achievement, while others prioritize group harmony. Test-takers from collectivist cultures may be less accustomed to the competitive nature of standardized testing and may feel uncomfortable with the focus on individual performance.
- **Test Anxiety:** Test anxiety can be exacerbated by cultural factors. For example, in some cultures, failure on a high-stakes exam can be seen as a reflection on the entire family, leading to increased pressure and anxiety.

4. Socioeconomic Factors:

- **Access to Resources:** Test preparation resources, such as study guides, practice tests, and tutoring, may not be equally accessible to all test-takers. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be at a disadvantage due to limited access to these resources.

- **Test Fees:** The cost of taking the Praxis can be a barrier for some individuals, particularly those from developing countries.
- **Environmental Factors:** Factors such as noise levels, temperature, and access to a quiet study space can impact test performance. These factors may be more challenging for individuals from certain cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds.

5. Cultural Bias in Test Content:

- **Contextual Relevance:** Test questions may use examples, scenarios, or references that are more familiar to individuals from certain cultural backgrounds. This can inadvertently create bias against test-takers from other cultures.
- **Stereotypes:** While efforts are made to avoid stereotypes, they can sometimes unintentionally creep into test questions or answer choices, potentially disadvantaging certain groups.

Addressing Cultural Considerations:

Addressing these cultural considerations requires a multi-faceted approach:

- **Sensitivity Review:** Thorough review of test content by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to identify and eliminate potential biases.
- **Test Preparation Resources:** Development of culturally sensitive test preparation materials that address the specific needs of diverse test-takers.
- **Accommodations:** Consideration of appropriate accommodations for test-takers with diverse needs, such as extended time or the use of assistive technologies.
- **Research:** Ongoing research to identify and address cultural factors that may be impacting test performance.
- **Educator Training:** Training educators to be aware of cultural considerations in testing and to provide appropriate support to their students.

The Praxis exam is a standardized test used by many states to assess the knowledge and skills of aspiring educators. While it can provide valuable information about a test-taker's readiness for the classroom, it's important to understand that it offers a limited snapshot of an individual's overall capability as an educator. Here's a breakdown of what the Praxis can and cannot tell you:

What the Praxis CANNOT show:

- **Classroom Management Skills:** The Praxis cannot directly assess your ability to manage a classroom, build relationships with students, or create a positive learning environment. These skills are best demonstrated through real-world teaching experience.
- **Instructional Creativity:** The Praxis primarily focuses on assessing knowledge and understanding. It does not fully capture your ability to be creative and innovative in your teaching methods.
- **Adaptability:** The Praxis cannot measure your ability to adapt your teaching to meet the diverse needs of all learners, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students from different cultural backgrounds.
- **Passion and Dedication:** The Praxis cannot quantify your passion for teaching, your commitment to student success, or your ability to inspire and motivate students. These qualities are crucial for effective teaching but are not easily measured by a standardized test.

- **Experience:** The Praxis is a test of knowledge and skills, not experience. It cannot replace the valuable learning and growth that comes from actual teaching experience in a classroom setting.

(Sources: <https://tinyurl.com/w3ct3zs7>, <https://tinyurl.com/jmm2kuh5>, and <https://tinyurl.com/bdf69hrv>)

The Praxis exam can be a useful tool for evaluating a prospective teacher's foundational knowledge and skills. It can help ensure that individuals entering the teaching profession have a solid understanding of their subject matter and basic teaching principles. However, it's crucial to recognize that the Praxis is just one measure of a teacher's potential. Many other factors, such as classroom management skills, instructional creativity, adaptability, passion, and experience, play a significant role in determining a teacher's overall effectiveness.

Therefore, while a good score on the Praxis can be a positive indicator, it should not be the sole factor used to evaluate a person's capability as an educator. It's essential to consider a range of factors, including observations of teaching, student feedback, and other measures of professional growth, to get a more complete picture of an individual's potential as an educator.

(Source: <https://tinyurl.com/yckbtt97>)

The high cost of living in Hawaii presents an enormous challenge to me. As an emergency hire teacher, my salary falls significantly short of what fully licensed teachers earn, and this disparity exacerbates our financial struggles. With housing costs skyrocketing, a substantial portion of our income is consumed, leaving me with scant resources to support myself during the program. I find myself constantly grappling with the obligation to provide for my family while striving for a stable future.

It has the potential to revolutionize our education system. If passed, this critical legislation would grant international teachers full teaching licenses, thereby eliminating the restrictive exam requirements that currently impede our ability to serve our students effectively. It would ensure that we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, allowing us to properly support our families and uplift our communities. Furthermore, it would extend our work permits for five years, offering essential stability for our students' learning and enabling us to commit fully to our schools. This change is not just an improvement for educators; it's a vital investment in the future of our students and the entire educational landscape.

Hawaii truly needs highly proficient, efficient, and effective teachers. I am immensely grateful that I am here in Hawaii fueled by passion, commitment, and dedication to create positive and lasting impacts on the lives of our keikis, preparing them for a constantly changing world.

I support the intent of HB439, HD1, but recommend the following revisions to HB439, HD1 to ensure that a visiting international teacher license is created without burdensome examinations that other licensed teachers are not required to take.

I sincerely pray and hope that you will support the passage of HB439, HD1, which encourages and motivates our J1 Filipino teachers to contribute positively to the educational success of diverse learners in Hawaii.

"Mahalo nui loa no kou manawa a me kou no'ono'o".

Melvin T. Osorno

Grade 10 Biology teacher

Maui High School

"Those who love to learn must never cease to learn,"

Testimony in Support the intent of HB439, HD1

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer A. Raval, and I am a special education teacher. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, HD1 that acknowledges the dedication and contributions of educators like myself.

As an educator, I have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to my students' academic and personal growth. I create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where every child feels valued and empowered to succeed. My ability to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students is commendable, ensuring that each learner receives the necessary support and encouragement to reach their full potential. Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom, I actively engage in the school community, collaborating with colleagues, parents, and stakeholders to foster a culture of excellence. I consistently go above and beyond to develop innovative teaching strategies, integrate technology into instruction, and provide meaningful learning experiences tailored to my students' abilities.

Despite the challenges that come with being a special education teacher, I remain dedicated and passionate about my profession. My resilience, adaptability, and genuine care for my students set me apart as an educator. The impact of my work extends beyond academics—I nurture confidence, instill values, and prepare my students for lifelong success.

Recognizing educators like myself is essential in promoting quality education and acknowledging the invaluable contributions of dedicated teachers. I strongly support any initiative that ensures teachers like me receive the recognition, resources, and opportunities we deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jennifer A. Raval

SPED Teacher

Holualoa Elementary School

Big Island, Hawaii

My name is Jun Lester C. Paunel, and I am an ELA teacher who is currently assigned at Waianae Intermediate School. I made this testimony to support HB439 Bill that emphasized the hard work , potential, and dedication of all educators including myself.

My roles and responsibilities as an educator are as follow: delivering curriculum content to students, creating engaging learning environments, assessing student progress, providing individualized support, fostering critical thinking skills, promoting students growth and development, maintaining classroom management, collaborating with colleagues, and staying updated on educational practices; all while ensuring a safe and inclusive learning space for every students. to value, enhance, empower, hone, ignite, and unleash the students' potentials and interest in education in which I believe these are the main and top priority of the teacher/ educator.

In addition, licensing or obtaining a state license is quite challenging because of the hectic schedule and monetary aspects, but considerably important to acquire, but hoping that the state will no longer need us (under J1 Program teachers) to obtain the additional license, since I do only have limited time to share and impart cultural attributes with the students, families and communities here in Hawaii.

Furthermore, I love being here, the Aloha and Ohana spirit, the people, school and most importantly families that made me inspired every single day to continue my goal and serve with a purpose to be a role model for their children in honing and shaping their interest in education as a globally competitive citizen of Hawaii.

In this manner, I am hoping that the “ Members of the Committee and the entire legislature” can hear all of the J1 teachers' voices to pass the HB 439 Bill.

Sincerely,

JUN LESTER C. PAUNEL
J1 Teacher Waianae IS

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 3:09:36 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenelyn Atienza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB439, HD1

I'm Jenelyn Atienza 8th Grade Math and Science Inclusion Teacher at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. As a J-1 teacher at Kalama Intermediate School, I have been privileged to teach 8th grade math and science, as well as work with special education students. My significant contribution alongside my diverse experience as math and special education teacher. This opportunity has not only allowed me to share my knowledge but has also enriched my life in ways I never could have imagined. My time here has been filled with unforgettable moments, strong connections with students and school staff, and appreciation for the diverse culture and diversity of Maui.

My role as a special education teacher has been particularly fulfilling. I have witnessed the incredible progress of my students, who often face unique challenges. By using inclusive teaching strategies, I aim to create a supportive environment where every student feels valued and capable of achieving their goals. The smiles on their faces when they succeed, no matter how small the achievement, remind me of the importance of patience and encouragement in the learning process. It is a privilege to help them unlock their potential and witness their growth.

The experience I have as a J-1 teacher at Kalama Intermediate School has been nothing short of transformative. The great moments shared with my students and the support of the school admin and staff have made this journey a memorable one. I am deeply appreciative of the culture and diversity that Maui offers, which has enriched my teaching practice and personal growth. I look forward to continuing my journey here in Maui, making lasting connections and memories with the wonderful community of Kalama Intermediate School.

I express my heartfelt gratitude and strong support for HB439, HD1. This bill is essential for us diverse educators from around the world, enriching our classrooms with diverse perspectives and teaching methodologies. My experience in the classroom has shown me the positive impact that international teachers have on student engagement and cultural appreciation. By passing this legislation, we can ensure that our schools continue to benefit from the expertise of qualified educators, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for all students. Thank you for considering this vital bill.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 3:10:34 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennelyn Cornelio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB439

Hearing Date: February 19, 2025, at 3:00 PM

Honorable members of the committee, I am Jennelyn G. Cornelio, a High School teacher at HP Baldwin in Maui, Hawaii, representing international teachers, and I am here today to express my strong support for exempting J-1 visa teachers from state-mandated standardized testing (Praxis) requirements to continue serving the students in Hawaii Department of Education for 5 consecutive years. Before being a qualified international teacher, we have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines and did an equivalent evaluation of our Transcript of Records (TOR) to identify if we are qualified to teach in the United States of America.

I would say that the state of Hawaii benefits immensely from the presence of J-1 teachers in our classrooms. We bring diverse cultural perspectives, enrich our students' understanding of the world, and often fill critical teaching shortages, particularly in STEM fields, foreign languages, and special education. We, as dedicated educators, invest our time, energy, and passion in shaping the minds of our future generations. However, requiring us, J-1 teachers, to undergo state standardized testing within our initial years of service places an unnecessary burden on and, ultimately, on our schools and students.

The following are the key factors that contribute to this:

1. Cultural and linguistic differences: Many of us are J-1 teachers coming from different educational backgrounds, with different pedagogical approaches. While we do possess strong English proficiency to qualify for the program, nuances in standardized testing often focused on specific state curriculum frameworks can be hard to navigate in our initial years. Not to mention the added pressures brought on by adjusting to a new culture, a different school system, and often an unfamiliar language environment.
2. Center Everything on Classroom Instructions: As a J-1 teacher, I want to give my very best of my ability, concentrate on instructing and building relationships with students in a personal relationship. Those time consumed in preparing for and administering standardized tests could better be used in focusing on our core duties in planning classroom lessons and helping the students-and even professional development that

benefits our student populations.

3. Recruitment and Retention Issues: This will create a strong deterrent for qualified international teachers to teach in the state of Hawaii. It adds another layer of complexity and cost to an already hard and costly process, thus making it even more difficult for the schools to recruit and retain valuable, experienced, and most importantly, adjusted teachers. This further exasperates the shortages that already exist in the teaching profession and limits the possibilities for our students to learn from diverse perspectives.

4. The Program Alignment: Standardized testing that is focused on specific state curricular standards also does not fit the broader goal of the program, which focuses on cultural exchange and enhanced mutual understanding. By requiring it, an unnecessary barrier is being established that ultimately has a negative effect on the J-1 Visa Program.

5. Five-Year Exemption as a Reasonable Timeframe: A five-year exemption would provide us, J-1 teachers, with sufficient time to get acquainted with the state's curriculum framework, to adjust our teaching methods, and to settle into the school community. We can have our energies concentrated on what is most important - teaching our children.

After this period of time, we would be expected to take the testing like everyone else. This exemption will indeed not affect the educational quality in Hawaii State. We, J-1 visa holders, in this country are thoroughly screened during the visa processing for English competency and qualifications that make us good fits for hiring in different teaching areas. We, J-1 visa holders, are similarly obligated for evaluation through regular activities set by school and district authority for accountability to standards.

Quite frankly, exempting J-1 teachers from state testing for the first five years of service in Hawaii sends a clear message that you value our contributions, are supportive of our professional growth, and believe that we should focus on what is important: educating our students. I urge the committee to view this proposal favorably.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 3:15:39 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Analyn Yonzon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To all the esteemed members of the Committe who are the voice of equality and equity and to whom the Bill HB 439 be heard.

As an advocate of change and strong cultural support. I Analyn B. Yonzon currently assigned as J1 teacher in one of the hard to fill areas of the Leeward district of Hawai'i Department of Education specifically at Waianae Intermediate School profoundly express my plea to all of you esteemed members to pass and support and finalized the bill as affirmative and be favored to us Filipino teachers.

Being part of this cultural program extending my love and passion to teaching to all of these middle schoolers have paved my deep connection and support to the Aloha spirit put into action from the start of my stay up to present.

The complex have had strongly supported us J1 teachers by immersing us into the culture of the community in all forms of programs and exposures from the start and up until now; I am truly welcomed and appreciative of the Ohana spirit from the complex to the admin down to all the staff of WIS is really alive through their efforts and in all so many ways.

As a teacher in the Philippines for more than 2 decades, It has been a challenging endeavour for me to take another stress and focus for the PRAXIS exams which would take a lot of time from me preparing for the quality lesson planning and classroom engagement which for me is the most important thing to which all of my efforts should be directed into. It is my passion and commitment to bring out the best in every student I have been handling; impacting change and empowering them as productive members of the society.

I strongly believe that our experience, educational qualifications and other related trainings we have had manifest how qualified we are and be considered qualified to benefit this HB 439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License.

May this be heard and favored.

All the best,

Mrs. Analyn B. Yonzon (WIS SS G7 teacher)

February 18, 2025

To: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Graciela Esguerra

Position: Science Teacher

Institution: Henry Perrine Baldwin High School

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB439, HD1

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I am writing this testimony in strong support of HB439, HD1. This bill will significantly benefit Hawaii's educators and students.

As a J-1 teacher on Maui, I am committed to fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment. I am passionate about providing a high-quality education for our keiki.

While I hold a Professional Teacher License from the Philippines, I am required to take the Praxis exams for Hawaii licensure. These costly tests are often only offered on Oahu, requiring expensive inter-island travel and leave time, as they are not available on weekends. Aside from that, as an "Emergency Hire" teacher, my salary is lower than fully licensed teachers. I am also responsible for my own housing, which consumes a significant portion of my income.

Hawaii urgently needs qualified teachers, and J-1 teachers are dedicated to serving our students and the community of these beautiful islands. However, we need stability to continue this service.

I urge you to support this bill, HB439, HD1, to ensure Hawaii's students and educators receive the necessary support. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo for all that you do!

Respectfully,

Graciela Esguerra

Science Teacher (Grade 9)

H.P. Baldwin High School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 3:41:58 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rose Churma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The DOE's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success. However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike other state(such as Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina), which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires."

This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the DOE's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities.

For SY 2025-26, the DOE will employ an additional 116 teachers as part of the DOE's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's students.

By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 3:44:38 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
HAZEL T. DAMIAN	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Committee Members,

I wholeheartedly support HB 439, HD1 and urge its amendment to align with SB 819, SD1, concerning education. My strong advocacy lies with the creation of an international visiting teacher license.

Hawaii's J-1 Visa Program has been a beacon of success, bringing 218 exceptionally qualified international educators to 55 schools, filling critical gaps in hard-to-staff areas and special education. These teachers, possessing credentials on par with their U.S. counterparts, make invaluable contributions to our students and communities. The Department's plan to welcome an additional 116 international educators in 2025-2026 demonstrates its commitment to fostering globally competitive and locally grounded students.

Sadly, our current licensing practices create a roadblock to this program's full potential. Unlike states with more efficient systems, Hawaii designates J-1 teachers as "emergency hires," burdening them with expensive and time-consuming exams. This not only steals precious time from classroom instruction but also unfairly denies them the added compensation offered for hard-to-fill roles.

Creating an international teacher license, as envisioned in HB 439, HD1 and reflected in SB 819, SD1, offers a pathway for these dedicated educators to serve for up to five years, ensuring stability in our classrooms and fostering valuable cultural exchange. By removing unnecessary testing hurdles, we can unlock their full potential and cultivate a more diverse teaching force that truly mirrors Hawaii's vibrant global community. I implore you to champion this vital measure.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

As part of the International Teachers here in Hawaii, my compatriots and I wholeheartedly serve our work as teachers to our students knowing that we share not only knowledge but love as second parents to them while they are at school. However, the need to prepare for multiple licensure exams while managing our teaching responsibilities places unnecessary stress on us and takes valuable time away from lesson planning and student engagement. As a teacher of young people with special needs, there are many subjects they must learn, especially the life skills that are important for them so that they can use them in their future life and so that they can have their own lives and abilities that expect nothing else but to be able to stand on their own feet. We teachers, although we teach a different race, our love for our work has not changed and our love for the students we teach is also there. We are also open to learning from our schoolmates as part of the Cultural Exchange Program and we are also ready to help as much as we can and learn the different methods and cultures that exist in the country of Hawaii. In my teaching now although it will take three to five years, I can say that my dedication to teaching will remain there no matter where I go not only the ability to share knowledge but to love my work, students and co-workers. My students today I can see, and I can tell that there is a change in them when it comes to cognitive, sociability, love for others and their readiness to stand on their own feet using their own abilities. I love my job, I love my School, students and coworkers and most of all I love Hawaii so I hope the law about HB439 is pass for our teachers who want to continue our teaching here in Hawaii as far as possible of our ability and we can continue teaching and shaping the students.

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

As a current SPED teacher of Kahului Elementary School, Maui, Hawai'i, I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

I am Rosa Mae Felida Lumbo from the Philippines who had been qualified to be a part of the Teacher Exchange Program of Hawaii.

Generally, I strongly believe that having passed with my fellow foreign teachers, the high qualifications set by the department of Education of Hawaii, we are generally equipped with the skills, competencies and capabilities, acceptable by your international standards. Thus, we are globally competitive.

Personally, with the rich and substantial professional experience that I gained in my country, I would humbly say that I have the attributes of a teacher, specifically a SPED teacher demanded by international standards and guidelines. My exposure as Head of the Values Education Department of one of the biggest public schools in our locality coupled with my degree in the Masteral program major in Special Education together with my more or less 20 years of teaching experience in the graduate, tertiary and secondary levels of our educational system, and as a Guidance counselor, I am optimistic and confident that I have the international qualifications set by the standards of your educational system.

As a teacher for the past six (6) months in Kahului Elementary School, I am handling young learners with Special Educational Needs. With such limited time that I have handled these kind of learners, I know that I have created, to some extent, an impact in the lives of my learners as evidenced by the various comments, remarks of the parents of my learners during IEP meeting sessions. Parents would overwhelmingly and gratefully tell me that their children have tremendously incurred positive changes through my guidance and competence in dealing, training and responding to the needs of their children. One major duty that we do as SPED teachers is to prepare IEP. This is the Individualized Educational Plan/Program (IEP) of a certain learner with special educational needs. It is with humility that I say that the IEP's that I prepare are mostly commended by our school vice principal as "well written" and "well prepared." This is reflected further by the positive results on the behavior of our learners as professed by their parents through their open comments. Furthermore, one of my learner has been even awarded as "EAGLE of the month" in our school for the month of January. "EAGLE of the month" is an award given to our learners who exemplifies the THREE (3) core values of our school which are, ALOHA, KULEANA, and 'IMI NA'AUAO. This positive result, I believe, is made possible by applying the appropriate techniques in dealing with my learners that resulted to a consistent and harmonious relationship that I have established with my special learners. Inspired by these feedbacks, I am further motivated to continue with this endeavor in my professional life, that is to continuously touch lives of other people in my own little way. And this could only be done through a longer working relationship that I will forge with my school. One way therefore to establish such working

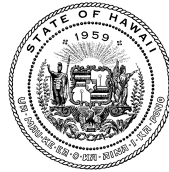
relationship is by allowing us to exercise our profession as SPED teachers without undergoing additional examination administered by your State. Allowing us to continue with our profession without requiring us to undertake an additional examination is a way of nurturing further a strong bond and relationship that we have with our special learners. As special learners, they need, consistency, stability and tranquility in dealing with them. By requiring us to undertake additional examination for us to further qualify to continue as their teachers might distort and stir negatively the already stable orientations we have built with our learners, leading our learners to a more traumatic and adverse behavioral conditions.

Moreover, I believe that such positive results would not also be realized if we are not professionally qualified to handle these kinds of learners in our school.

On the other hand, taking the examination demands additional cost on our part. The examination is expensive, and it is also a fact that we have our respective families that we are supporting back in our home countries. The cost to be incurred, the fees, the transportation going to OAHU and accommodation expenses shall mean a substantial economic burden for us, who have families who are economically depending on us.

With all the foregoing, we beg for your consideration and understanding, we fervently pray that our plight as foreign teachers under this program shall be favorably considered. We vow that we shall continue to render our services with much fervor, and utmost competence and efficiency. May our substantial academic qualifications, robust professional work experience, and positive manifestations of our services as SPED teachers, be sufficient to be considered, for us to be no longer required to hurdle an additional examination. We fervently pray that this bill shall be passed and approved, for us to be able to continuously provide quality and excellent educational service to our learners. The approval of this bill shall be a strong indication of the high standards already set by your State's educational system and a recognition of our substantial qualifications to those high standards.

Again, may we sincerely appeal for your profound consideration and deepest appreciation on this matter.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
Kainalu Elementary School
165 Kaiholu Street
Kailua, Hawaii 96734

February 18, 2025

Chair Matayoshi & Vice-Chair Chun
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

**Subject: Strong Support for HB 439, HD1 & SB819, SD1 - Filipino Caucus; HTSB;
International Teacher License; Criteria; Establishment**

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of the creation of an international visiting teacher license and urge you to amend HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The J-1 Visa Program has proven invaluable for Hawai'i's keiki. These international educators, possessing qualifications equivalent to their U.S.-trained counterparts, currently serve in 55 schools across our state, often in hard-to-staff areas and special education. They bring much-needed expertise and a global perspective to our classrooms, enriching the educational experience for our students. The program has allowed schools from Waimea to Lahaina to Nā'ālehu to access highly qualified teachers who also serve as cultural ambassadors. With plans to employ an additional 116 international educators in the 2025-2026 school year, the program's importance to the Department's Strategic Plan for globally competitive and locally committed students is clear.

However, our current licensing system creates unnecessary hurdles for these educators. Unlike other states with streamlined processes, Hawai'i's "emergency hire" designation for J-1 teachers requires them to take costly and time-consuming additional exams. This not only diverts valuable time from lesson planning, student assessment, and family engagement but also unfairly prevents these teachers from receiving the

additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

At Kainalu Elementary, we've witnessed firsthand the positive impact of the J-1 program. Our Special Education preschool teacher, Raymart Jason Fundal, is a perfect example. He builds deep connections with his students and their families, creating a truly supportive learning environment. Raymart's passion for special education shines through in his creative teaching and unwavering dedication to his students' growth. He is also a tremendous resource for his colleagues, generously sharing his expertise and taking on extra responsibilities to benefit our students and school. [Insert specific example of Raymart's impact. Raymart's willingness to assist other teachers has strengthened our entire special education program, benefiting all of our students.

HB 439, HD1 offers a solution by allowing these qualified international teachers to stay in Hawai'i for up to five years, provided they obtain licensure. This continuity is essential for our students. Crucially, aligning the bill with SB 819, SD1 by eliminating the redundant testing requirements will allow these teachers to focus on what they do best: teaching. By recognizing their existing international credentials, we can fully utilize their skills and experience, enriching our schools with a more diverse and globally representative teaching force.

I urge you to support HB 439, HD1 and amend it to match SB 819, SD1. This is a critical step in ensuring Hawai'i's keiki have access to the best possible education.

Thank you for your consideration.

Me ka ha'aha'a (With Humility),

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Resha Ramolete', with a stylized, cursive script.

Resha Ramolete
Principal
808-305-0300
resha.ramolete@k12.hi.us

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 4:49:08 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Doris Ruiz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, DORIS M. RUIZ and I strongly support of HB439 HD1, which seeks to establish an international visiting teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As an educator, it's not just about teaching facts, but about nurturing the whole child – intellectually, socially, emotionally, and ethically. It is my privilege to be a part of their journey, celebrating their successes and supporting them through challenges. Also, I am consistent in building a harmonious relationship in the school community, collaborating with colleagues, and parents as well to foster a healthy environment for both academic and culture excellence. However, obtaining a teacher state license remains a challenge on my part due to the financial and emotional strains of the numerous Praxis exams. These barrier do not reflect the expertise, years of training, and foreign credentials that international teachers like me have already earned. This bill acknowledges the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience we bring from our home countries and provides a just and reasonable pathway for us towards a meaningful impact in Hawai'i's schools. Hawai'i, like many states, faces an ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved communities. The establishment of an international teacher license would help address this shortage by recognizing the qualifications of dedicated educators who are already contributing to the state's educational landscape.

I humbly urge you to pass HB 439 HD1 to ensure that international teachers can focus on what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students. By passing this bill, Hawai'i will be honoring diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent, ensuring that our children continue to receive the best possible education. Together, we create a brighter future!

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Doris M. Ruiz

Lihikai Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 5:00:26 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherrie Lou Mendoza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to wholeheartedly support House Bill 439, HD1, which proposes the International Visiting Teacher License. As a second-grade teacher at Kahului Elementary School, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges of staffing shortages in our school. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work. Having previously taught in Florida, I have seen the benefits of providing international teachers with the same benefits as certified and tenured teachers. This not only helps to attract and retain top talent but also enriches our schools with diverse perspectives and experiences.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and

experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Sincerely,

Cherrie Lou Mendoza

2nd Grade Teacher

Kahului Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 5:06:00 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Clarissa G. Santiago	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing a testimony to amend and fight for the rights and the chance of just like as which is a Filipino teachers to stay here and teach eventhough we past the praxis exam or not,because we already have also our license in the Philippines,we exert so much effort in order to came here and teach.It took 1 year for the process of application and to be qualified for the position that we have here. I need to wakeup 4am in the morning in order for me to catch the bus going to school and it took 1 hour and 30 minutes including walking.We are dedicated for our work.Thank you for the chance to testify.

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support HB 439, HD1, which proposes creating an international visiting teacher license. I urge you to amend it to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The J-1 Visa Program has proven invaluable, bringing 218 qualified educators to 55 Hawaiian schools. These teachers, comparable in qualifications to their U.S.-trained peers, are essential in addressing staffing shortages, particularly in special education. They provide high-quality instruction and serve as cultural ambassadors for keiki from Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu. Looking ahead, the Department will welcome 116 more international educators in 2025-2026, reinforcing its commitment to developing "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed" students.

However, our current state licensing rules create unnecessary obstacles for these valuable educators. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international teachers, Hawaii classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This requires them to take additional, costly comprehensive examinations (over \$1,000!), diverting crucial time from analyzing student assessments, meeting with families, and planning effective curriculum. Furthermore, they are ineligible for additional compensation offered to other educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same essential work.

HB 439, HD1 offers a solution. By creating an international teacher license *without* these burdensome additional examinations, we can fully leverage the skills and experience of these international educators. This will not only provide continuity of instruction for our keiki, as these teachers can remain for up to five years, but also enrich our schools with a more diverse workforce that reflects Hawaii's global community. The J-1 Visa Program offers exceptional educational and cultural opportunities for our schools. HB 439, HD1 will ensure its continued success and maximize its positive impact on Hawaii's keiki. I urge you to support this important measure.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Mahalo,

Gretchen Cacao

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I am Marcel C. Suniga, a Second Grade Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School. I am submitting this testimony to strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with

families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Marcel C. Suniga
2nd Grade Teacher
Kahakai Elementary School
Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 5:28:14 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bryan Thiel De Leon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB439 HD1 - International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 20, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Bryan Thiel De Leon, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439 HD1, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As an educator with qualifications from the Philippines, I would like to present the following reasons for why J1 teachers from the Philippines should be exempted from taking the Praxis Examination here in Hawaii, and have an international Visiting Teacher License instead:

***Internationally Recognized Credentials - Our teaching credentials from the Philippines are recognized internationally. We have been obtained from accredited institutions, ensuring that we are well-prepared to teach in diverse educational settings. This recognition should suffice as evidence of our qualifications.**

***Comprehensive Training - The teacher education program we've completed in the Philippines provides a rigorous curriculum that covers essential pedagogical skills and content knowledge, closely aligning with the teaching standards established in Hawaii.**

***Significant Teaching Experience - With several years of teaching experience in the Philippine educational system, we have developed effective teaching strategies and classroom management skills that demonstrate our competence and readiness to teach in Hawaii.**

***Alignment with Hawaii Standards - The curriculum and teaching approaches in the Philippines incorporate many of the same principles and practices that are utilized in Hawaii. This alignment indicates that we are already equipped with the necessary skills to succeed as an educator in this state.**

***Advanced Degree Qualifications - We hold the required degree in education, which reflects my commitment to professional growth and a deep understanding of educational**

theories and practices. This level of education should exempt us from additional testing requirements.

***Local Agency Discretion - The discretion of local education agencies to evaluate the qualifications of J1 teachers can play a crucial role in determining the necessity of the Praxis exam. A holistic review of our qualifications should suffice for an exemption.**

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the relevant authorities in Hawaii to consider these reasons granting international teachers (like us) a full teaching license and eliminating unnecessary exams. The said qualifications and experiences reflect our readiness to contribute positively to the educational community in Hawaii.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

**Bryan Thiel De Leon
and Study Skills Teacher
Intermediate School**

**Math
Kalama
Maui, Hawaii**

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 5:28:49 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
RODRIGO DOMINGO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rodrigo Domingo and I submit this testimony in strong support of HB439, HD1, with a recommendation to establish the visiting international teacher license without imposing unnecessary examination requirements.

Hawai‘i’s J-1 Visa Program has been an invaluable asset in addressing the state’s teacher shortage, particularly in hard-to-staff areas and special education. Currently, 218 certified international educators serve in 55 schools statewide, and an additional 116 are expected to join in the 2025-2026 school year. These teachers not only fill critical vacancies but also bring diverse perspectives and cultural enrichment to Hawai‘i’s students, aligning with the Department of Education’s vision of preparing students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, despite their qualifications—holding degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained educators, completing teacher preparation programs, and possessing valid teaching licenses—J-1 teachers in Hawai‘i face unnecessary obstacles. Unlike other states, Hawai‘i classifies these educators as "emergency hires," requiring them to take extensive and costly examinations that other licensed teachers are not subject to. These exams, which can exceed \$1,000, place an undue financial burden on teachers and take away valuable time from instructional planning, student engagement, and collaboration with families. Additionally, J-1 teachers are not eligible for extra compensation for teaching in hard-to-fill positions, despite their vital role in these communities.

HB439, HD1 provides a solution by establishing a renewable visiting international teacher license, ensuring that qualified educators can continue contributing to Hawai‘i’s schools for up to five years. By removing the additional examination requirement, the state can maximize the expertise of international teachers while fostering a more diverse and inclusive educational workforce.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass HB439, HD1 with these revisions to support equity, stability, and excellence in Hawai‘i’s classrooms.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
RODRIGO T. DOMINGO

Science Teacher, Henry Perrine Baldwin High School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 5:52:25 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Liza Resurrecion	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

Hawai‘i’s keiki have greatly benefited from the Department’s J-1 Visa Program. Currently, 218 certified educators, holding qualifications equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers, serve in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. These international educators have embraced the opportunity to provide high-quality education while also serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to employ an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”

However, existing state licensing rules limit the program’s potential. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which offer streamlined or reciprocal licensing for international educators without additional exams, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification mandates a series of comprehensive exams, often costing over \$1,000, which significantly detracts from teachers’ ability to focus on student learning, formative assessments, family engagement, and curriculum planning. Additionally, J-1 teachers are ineligible for the extra compensation granted to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program enhances educational and cultural opportunities across Hawai‘i. HB 439, HD1 ensures that qualified international teachers can remain for up to five years, providing continuity in instruction and enriching students’ learning experiences. By establishing an international teacher license without additional examinations, the state can maximize the expertise of international educators while fostering a diverse workforce that reflects Hawai‘i’s global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 439, HD1.

Mahalo,

Liza Resurrecion

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and committee members,

I strongly support establishing an international visiting teacher license and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1 regarding education.

Hawai'i's keiki have greatly benefited from the Department's J-1 Visa Program. Currently, 218 certified educators with equivalent U.S. degrees teach in 55 Hawai'i schools, primarily in hard-to-staff and special education areas, from Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu. These international educators, employed through the J-1 Visa Program, provide high-quality education and serve as cultural ambassadors. For the 2025-26 school year, the Department will add 116 international educators, in line with its strategic plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, Hawai'i's licensing rules restrict the potential of J-1 visa teachers. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing for international educators, Hawai'i designates J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This requires them to take additional, costly exams (over \$1,000), which reduces their time for essential tasks like analyzing student assessments, meeting with families, and curriculum planning. Additionally, despite performing the same work, J-1 teachers are ineligible for extra compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions.

The J-1 Visa Program offers valuable educational and cultural opportunities. HB 439, HD 1 allows qualified international teachers to stay for up to five years, ensuring instructional continuity and enriching students' learning and cultural experiences. Creating an international teacher license *without* additional exams will allow Hawai'i to fully utilize the skills and experience of these educators and create a more diverse teaching workforce that reflects Hawai'i's global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 439 HD1.

Aloha Mae E. Tamulac

J1 Teacher/ Naalehu ES

My name is Richel Taduran, and I am a 6th Grade Social Studies Teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School in Kauai, Hawaii. Before coming to Hawaii, I dedicated 10 years to teaching English in the Philippines, where I developed strong skills in classroom management, student-centered learning, and cross-cultural education. Now, as a Social Studies teacher, I am passionate about helping students understand history, cultures, and perspectives that shape the world around them.

In my classroom, I strive to create an engaging learning environment where students connect past events to present realities. Using inquiry-based instruction and interactive discussions, I encourage critical thinking and meaningful conversations. I am grateful to be part of a school that values collaboration among students, teachers, administration, and families, fostering a supportive community for learning.

I hold a Professional Teaching License from the Philippines, and my credentials have been evaluated for international teaching. Beyond academics, I am eager to embrace Hawaii's rich cultural diversity, sharing my Filipino heritage while learning from the local traditions and values of the islands. I believe that education is not just about knowledge but also about building connections and understanding between cultures.

Hawaii is currently experiencing a teacher shortage, and HB439 presents a vital opportunity by establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders. This initiative would enable teachers like me to continue making a meaningful impact in schools across the state.

However, to remain in my position, I must pass the Praxis exam—a costly requirement that also demands travel from Kauai to Oahu. Despite these challenges, I am determined to obtain my teaching license and continue serving my students and school community.

I strongly support HB439, as it would not only provide relief for international teachers but also help address the urgent need for educators in Hawaii. Teaching is my passion, and I am committed to growing as an educator and cultural bridge for my students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Richel Taduran
6th Grade Social Studies Teacher
Waimea Canyon Middle School, Kauai, Hawaii

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 6:14:16 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deonel R Advincula	Hawaii DOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license and recommend that **HB 439, HD1** be amended to align with **SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education**.

Hawai‘i’s **J-1 Visa Program** has been a tremendous success, providing high-quality education while fostering cultural exchange. Currently, **218 certified international educators**—with degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained educators—serve in **55 schools across the state**, primarily in hard-to-staff locations and special education. From **Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu**, these dedicated educators have answered the call to provide exceptional instruction while enriching their communities as cultural ambassadors. For the **2025-2026** school year, the Department will welcome **an additional 116 international teachers** as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be *“Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”*

However, **Hawai‘i’s current licensing rules** create unnecessary barriers for J-1 teachers. Unlike states such as **Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina**, which have established **streamlined licensing processes** for international educators, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as **“emergency hires.”** This designation requires them to take a series of costly and time-consuming examinations—exceeding **\$1,000**—despite already being certified educators in their home countries. These additional requirements limit their ability to focus on **student learning, formative assessments, family engagement, and curriculum planning**. Furthermore, **J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation** typically offered for hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same duties as their counterparts.

It is also important to recognize that **J-1 teachers are here for a limited period of time**—typically up to **five years**—before returning to their home countries. By creating an **international visiting teacher license without additional examinations**, the State can **fully utilize the expertise of international educators while maintaining continuity in classrooms**. This would be a **win-win situation** for both J-1 teachers and the **state of Hawai‘i**, ensuring students receive high-quality education while addressing persistent teacher shortages.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on **HB 439, HD1** and urge the Committee to amend it in alignment with **SB 819, SD1**.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Mr. Advincula

J1 Teacher

Testimony in Support of HB 439, HD1

Dear Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Committee Members,

I wholeheartedly endorse the establishment of an international visiting teacher license. I propose that HB 439, HD1 be revised to align with SB 819, SD1 pertaining to education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has proven to be immensely beneficial for the children of Hawai'i. To date, 218 certified educators with degrees comparable to those trained in the U.S. are serving in 55 schools throughout Hawaii, mainly in challenging-to-fill positions and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators participating in the Department's J-1 Visa Program have eagerly stepped forward to deliver exceptional education to the students of Hawai'i while also acting as cultural ambassadors within their communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to hire an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan aimed at fostering students who are "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

Nevertheless, the current licensing regulations in the State impede the full potential of aspiring teachers in the J-1 visa program. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have simplified and reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without requiring extra exams, Hawai'i categorizes J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification obligates prospective participants to undergo a series of additional comprehensive tests that can cost more than \$1,000. The time spent preparing for these exams detracts from their ability to analyze formative assessments, engage with families, and develop curriculum. Furthermore, J-1 teachers do not qualify for extra compensation available to educators in hard-to-fill roles, despite performing equivalent responsibilities.

The J-1 Visa Program offers valuable educational and cultural experiences to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD1 guarantees that qualified international teachers in Hawaii's schools can stay for up to five years, ensuring continuity in instruction and providing high-quality learning and cultural experiences for Hawaii's keiki. By instituting an international teacher license that does not require additional examinations, the State can fully utilize the skills, expertise, and experience of international educators, resulting in a more diversified workforce that reflects Hawai'i's global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony regarding HB 439, HD1.

Respectfully,

Dean Patrick R. Espiritu
Special Education Teacher
Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School

January 31, 2025

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I Arnel Dayame a Math Teacher in Kulanihako'i High School, formally writing a request the recognition of my teaching credentials as a license educator in the Philippines for the purpose of applying for a teaching license within the State of Hawaii.

I am a licensed professional teacher in the Philippines, holding the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Mathematics and Master of Arts in Education major in Mathematics from University of the Visayas, main campus, Colon Street, Cebu City, Philippines and have successfully passed the Philippine Licensure Examination for Teachers(LET). I have been teaching at University of the Visayas, College students for 4 years, specializing in Research and Mathematics and also in Ocana National High School, senior high school level for 3 years specializing research and Mathematics.

Throughout my career, I have demonstrated a commitment to fostering student growth and achieving academic success. I have continually adhered to professional standards, participated in ongoing professional development, and maintained strong connections with students, parents, and colleagues. Furthermore, I have been involved in research presentations and coach for different Math competitions. I have two international Research publications about enhancing students academic performances in Mathematics. I have been also dedicated to creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment that encourage students to embrace diversity and explore global perspectives. I have successfully implemented the Interactive Math Garden: Outdoor Classroom to Enhance Student's Math Academic Performance (IMG:OCTESMAP) project that promote cultural awareness and appreciation among students.

My enthusiastic interest in participating the cross-cultural exchange program as international teacher as an educator is deeply committed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and enriching educational experiences. I am excited about the opportunity to contribute to this esteemed program. Currently I am teaching Algebra 1 and Statistics and Probability in Kulanihako'i High School, 9th, 10th and 11th grade students. I am eager to immerse myself in a new cultural environment. I firmly believe that engaging with diverse community not only enhances my teaching abilities but also broaden my perspective, enriching the learning experiences of both myself and my students. I also proposed the same project in my current school which is the Interactive Math Garden: Outdoor Classroom to Enhance Student's Math Academic Performance (IMG:OCTESMAP) to successfully helps students math academic performance here in Hawaii.

The prospect of collaborating with educators from different cultural backgrounds excites me as it aligns with my belief in the transformative power of cultural exchange in education. I am confident that my experiences, combine with my adaptability and eagerness to learn will enable me to contribute meaningfully to the Hawaii state educational program. I am committed to leveraging this opportunity to not only

enhance my teaching skills but also to foster meaningful connections with students, educators, and the community in Hawaii.

As a Filipino teacher in Hawaii, I believe in the power of community and the importance of giving back. Outside of the classroom, I am honored to volunteer as a Liturgical Master of Ceremony at our local Catholic church. This role allows me to serve the community by assisting in the smooth flow of religious services, fostering a sense of reverence, and helping parishioners connect spiritually.

Through this volunteer work, I've been able to deepen my own faith while also bringing a sense of cultural richness to the church, especially as a Filipino. The values of service, compassion, and community are central to both my heritage and the teaching of the church, guide my approach to teaching and involvement in the community. Being engaged in this way allows me to connect with my students and their families on a deeper level, offering them a space where faith, culture, and education can intersect. It's an experience that has enriched my life and has strengthened the bonds between myself, my students, and the wider Hawaii community.

Being a Filipino teacher in Hawaii has been a deeply rewarding experience, especially because of the strong sense of community here. As an educator, I believe that teaching extends beyond the classroom; it is about making meaningful connections and supporting the diverse cultural fabric that shapes Hawaii.

Ultimately, being a Filipino teacher here in Hawaii has reinforced the idea that education is not just about imparting knowledge; it is about connecting, building relationships, and making a positive impact within the community.

As above mentioned experiences and involvement in the Hawaii Educational System and community, as a dedicated Filipino teacher who has earned my teaching license in the Philippines, I would like to share some of my struggles we face when attempting to gain certification in Hawaii, particularly with the Praxis exam.

While I understand the importance of standardized assessments like the Praxis, many Filipino teachers, including myself, face significant challenges when trying to meet the requirements set by Hawaii. Our professional training, teaching experience, and licensure from the Philippines are not always fully acknowledged, which often places us at a disadvantage compared to other local teachers.

The process of preparing for and taking the Praxis exam can be financially and emotionally burdensome, especially for teachers who have already spent years in the classroom. It is particularly disheartening when our qualifications and experiences, which are recognized in the Philippines, are not immediately accepted in Hawaii, despite the fact that we are trained in the same core principles of effective learning.

I respectfully urge you to consider the possibility of recognizing our Philippines teaching license as equivalent to Hawaii teaching license. Many of us are passionate about continuing our careers in education and contributing to Hawaii's diverse and vibrant community, but we are hindered by these regulatory challenges.

By recognizing the value of our teaching experiences and credentials, we can more effectively serve Hawaii's students and bring unique cultural perspective to the classroom.

Respectfully yours,

Arnel Dayame
Grade 9 Adviser
Math, Teacher
Kulanihako'i High School
Kihie, Maui, Hawaii

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 6:18:14 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
FRITZ MARATA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

Hawai‘i’s J-1 Visa Program has been a tremendous success for our keiki. Currently, 218 certified educators—holding degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers—are serving in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Na‘alehu, these international educators have answered the call to provide high-quality education while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, an additional 116 international educators will join the Department’s Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”

However, the state’s current licensing requirements limit the full potential of international teachers in the J-1 Visa Program. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina—where international educators can obtain streamlined or reciprocal licenses without additional exams—Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification forces them to take a series of costly and time-intensive exams, often exceeding \$1,000. The time spent preparing for these exams takes away from essential responsibilities such as analyzing formative assessments, meeting with families, and planning curriculum. Additionally, J-1 teachers are ineligible for extra compensation provided to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program enriches Hawai‘i’s schools with exceptional educational and cultural opportunities. HB 439, HD1 ensures that qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai‘i’s classrooms for up to five years, offering continuity in instruction and fostering meaningful cultural exchange. By establishing an international teacher license without unnecessary examinations, the state can maximize the expertise of international educators and cultivate a diverse workforce that reflects Hawai‘i’s global community.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439, HD1.

,

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee

I am Ligaya R. de Vera, and I am an Inclusion Teacher of Math, Grade 7 and 8 at Lokelani Intermediate School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 439 which seeks to create an international teacher license for qualified visa holder. My time as a J-1 teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School has been an incredibly rewarding experience. I've been consistently impressed by the dedication of the staff, the resilience of the students, and the supportive atmosphere within the school community. I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this positive learning environment. This exchange has broadened my understanding of education and has allowed me to develop more culturally responsive teaching practices. I have seen how exposure to different cultures and viewpoints can spark curiosity, promote empathy, and prepare students to thrive in an increasingly globalized society.

And from the day 1, I felt welcomed and supported by the faculty and staff, fostering a collaborative environment that encourages growth and innovation.

As an educator, I have dedicated my career to nurturing young minds and ensuring that each of my students receives a high-quality education tailored to their needs. Whether it's helping a student grasp a challenging concept, witnessing their confidence grow as they master a new skill, or simply providing a supportive presence during a difficult day, I strive to make a positive difference in their lives. I've focused on creating a classroom where every student feels safe, respected, and empowered to learn. It's truly inspiring to witness their growth, both academically and personally.

Our training and experience as J-1 teachers have provided us with a solid foundation for this work. We've been equipped with valuable strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom management, and building positive relationships with students. We've learned how to adapt our teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of our learners, recognizing that each student has unique strengths and challenges. This training has been essential in helping us create an inclusive and engaging learning environment for all. Furthermore, the collaborative environment at Lokelani has allowed us to learn from experienced educators and share best practices, further enhancing our skills and knowledge.

Beyond the classroom, I've actively engaged with the school and wider Filipino community. This has included participating in events like cultural festivals, community center events, church gatherings like the Feast of Sto. Niño. I've enjoyed contributing to extracurricular activities, including a J1 teacher cultural dance group and the church choir. These experiences have provided valuable opportunities for cultural exchange, allowing me to share my heritage while immersing myself in the local traditions. I firmly believe that a thriving school community is crucial, and I'm dedicated to contributing to that sense of belonging and support.

In conclusion, my time at Lokelani Intermediate School has been a mutually experience. I'm confident that the work we're doing is making a lasting impact on our students, preparing them for success in high school and beyond. This experience has been invaluable, both professionally and personally, and I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow alongside the students and staff at Lokelani.

My experiences and involvement within the Hawaiian educational system have highlighted the challenges faced by international teachers. As a dedicated teacher licensed in the Philippines, I've witnessed firsthand the struggles in navigating the Praxis examination requirements. While I appreciate the value of standardized assessments like the Praxis, many Filipino teachers, myself included, encounter significant hurdles in meeting these requirements. These challenges create both a financial and emotional burden, adding stress and complexity to the process of obtaining licensure in Hawaii.

I believe that HB439 is a vital step towards strengthening Hawaii's educational system and ensuring that all students have access to high-quality teachers. It will create a more inclusive and diverse teaching workforce, which will ultimately benefit our learners and our communities. I urge you to support HB439 and help bring this important legislation to reality.

Sincerely,

LIGAYA R. DE VERA
Inclusion Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School
Kihei, Hawaii

Aloha,

My name is Ligaya R. de Vera, I am writing in strong support of HB439, which proposes establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders in Hawaii. As a J-1 visiting teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School, I have experienced firsthand the value and contributions that international educators bring to our classrooms and communities.

My time at Lokelani Intermediate School has been incredibly rewarding. I have had the opportunity to share my [mention your area of expertise or cultural background] with my students, enriching their learning experience and exposing them to diverse perspectives. I've also learned so much from my colleagues and the local community about Hawaiian culture and educational practices. This cultural exchange has been invaluable, broadening my understanding of teaching and fostering a deeper appreciation for the diverse backgrounds of our students.

However, the current process for international teachers seeking licensure can be challenging and complex. HB439 offers a crucial solution by creating a clear, accessible, and fair pathway for qualified visa holders to obtain licensure in Hawaii. This will not only benefit international teachers like me, but also, more importantly, it will benefit our students.

By streamlining the licensure process, HB439 will make it easier for Hawaii's schools to attract and retain qualified international teachers. These teachers bring unique skills, experiences, and perspectives that enhance the quality of education for all students. They can fill critical teaching shortages, particularly in specialized subjects or underserved areas. Moreover, they serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting global understanding and preparing our students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

I believe that HB439 is a vital step towards strengthening Hawaii's educational system and ensuring that all students have access to high-quality teachers. It will create a more inclusive and diverse teaching workforce, which will ultimately benefit our learners and our communities. I urge you to support HB439 and help bring this important legislation to fruition.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ligaya R. de Vera
J-1 Visiting Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 6:28:32 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heriel Jhon Sarmiento Bravo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice-Chair and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education. This proposed amendment is a crucial step toward improving the ability of international teachers to fully perform their duties as educators and contribute to the educational landscape in Hawaii.

As an international teacher, I believe that the establishment of this specialized license would help us bridge the gap between international education systems and the needs of students in Hawaii. Many of us bring valuable global perspectives, diverse teaching methodologies, and rich cultural knowledge that can greatly enhance the learning experience for students. However, the current licensure system does not always accommodate the unique qualifications and experiences that international teachers possess, and this sometimes limits our ability to fully engage in the educational process.

The international visiting teacher license would allow a streamlined process for international teachers to obtain the necessary credentials to work in Hawaii. This would not only help attract highly skilled educators from abroad but also support schools in meeting the diverse needs of their students, especially in areas with growing international communities. It would foster greater cultural exchange, bring new teaching strategies, and contribute to a more globally minded curriculum for our students.

Amending HB 439, HD1 to match SB 819, SD1 would ensure that international teachers have the proper recognition and support to thrive in Hawaii's classrooms. This would ultimately benefit our students, schools, and the broader community by ensuring that we are empowered to bring our full range of skills, experiences, and expertise into the classroom.

In conclusion, I urge you to amend HB 439, HD1, to reflect the provisions of SB 819, SD1, as it will significantly enhance the contributions of international teachers to the educational system in Hawaii. By creating a pathway for us to succeed and fully engage with our students, we will be better equipped to make a lasting and positive impact on their learning and development.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Mahalo for your support!

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 6:37:06 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arnie Calamaya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am writing in support of HB439, which seeks to provide fairness and opportunity to us J-1 teachers in Hawai‘i. As a first-year J1 teacher in Hawai‘i, I understand the challenges of navigating a new education system and the uncertainty that comes with it. However, despite these challenges, I am deeply committed to staying and growing as an educator here. I have seen how we J-1 teachers navigate similar transitions, bring invaluable experience, cultural diversity, and global perspectives that enrich the community both inside and outside the schools. One of the greatest challenges for me as a J-1 teacher is the requirement to take the Praxis exam, despite already holding internationally recognized teaching license and undergraduate or graduate degree. Taking this test is an undue burden, as it either requires me to travel from Kauai to Oahu for an in-person exam, an expensive and time-consuming trip for me and those on other islands, or dealing with the difficulties of the online version , which demands a setup with strict technological and environmental conditions. These obstacles for me not only create unnecessary stress but also divert time and energy away from what truly matters--teaching and supporting students.

Lastly, I strongly urge you to support this bill as it allows me and the other J-1 teachers to stay for five years, ensuring continuity for students and helping the community.

Mahalo nui loa!

Arnie Calamaya

Waimea High School

J-1 Teacher

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 6:58:36 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mayvelyn Estacio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Favor of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Mayvelyn R. Estacio

Gen. Education Teacher/Kihei Elementary

February 18, 2025

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I fully endorse the establishment of an international visiting teacher license. I propose that HB 439, HD1 be revised to align with SB 819, SD1, which pertains to education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has proven to be highly effective for the children of Hawai'i. So far, 218 certified educators with degrees equivalent to those trained in the U.S. are currently teaching in 55 schools throughout Hawaii, mainly in challenging-to-staff areas and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators engaged through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have eagerly responded to the need for delivering top-quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural representatives in their communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to hire an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan aimed at preparing students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

Nevertheless, the State's current licensing regulations impede the full potential of aspiring teachers in the J-1 visa program. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have established streamlined or reciprocal licensing procedures for international educators without requiring additional exams, Hawai'i categorizes J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification necessitates that prospective participants undertake a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can cost over \$1,000. The time spent preparing for these exams greatly limits the opportunities for analyzing formative assessments, engaging with families, and planning curriculum. Moreover, J-1 teachers do not qualify for extra compensation provided to educators in positions that are hard to fill, despite performing the same duties.

The J-1 Visa Program offers valuable educational and cultural experiences to schools throughout Hawai'i. HB 439, HD1 guarantees that qualified international teachers in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to five years, ensuring continuity in instruction and providing high-quality learning and cultural experiences for the children of Hawai'i. By establishing an international teacher license that does not require additional examinations, the State can fully utilize the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators, thereby fostering a more diverse workforce that reflects Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the chance to provide testimony on HB 439, HD1.

Mahalo,

Mayvelyn R. Estacio

Gen. Education Teacher-Kihei Elementary

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 6:58:47 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ryan Taea Macadangdang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,**I strongly support establishing an international visiting teacher license and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.**

Hawai‘i’s keiki have greatly benefited from the Department’s J-1 Visa Program. Currently, 218 certified educators—holding degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers—serve in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, these international educators have stepped up to provide top-tier education while enriching their communities as cultural ambassadors. For the 2025-26 school year, the Department plans to employ 116 more international educators as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”

Despite the program’s success, Hawai‘i’s current licensing rules limit its full potential. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which offer streamlined licensing for international educators without extra exams, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as “emergency hires.” This designation forces them to take a series of costly exams—often exceeding \$1,000—which takes time away from lesson planning, working with families, and assessing student progress. Additionally, J-1 teachers are ineligible for extra compensation available to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program enhances education and cultural diversity across Hawai‘i’s schools. HB 439, HD1 would allow qualified international teachers to remain in the state for up to five years, ensuring stability in the classroom and high-quality learning experiences for our keiki. By creating an international teacher license without unnecessary testing, Hawai‘i can fully utilize these educators’ expertise while fostering a workforce that reflects our global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439, HD1.**Respectfully,**

Ryan Tazea Macadangdang

6th Grade Teacher, Lokelani Intermediate School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:01:06 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann Mabel R. Allegado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

Hawai'i's J-1 Visa Program has been a tremendous success for our keiki. Currently, 218 certified educators—holding degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained educators—are teaching in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, these international educators have answered the call to provide high-quality education while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. Looking ahead to the 2025–2026 school year, the Department plans to welcome an additional 116 international teachers as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”

Despite the program's success, existing state licensing rules limit its full potential. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which offer streamlined or reciprocal licensing for international educators without requiring additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation mandates costly comprehensive exams that can exceed \$1,000, diverting valuable time away from formative assessments, family engagement, and curriculum planning. Furthermore, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation despite working in hard-to-fill positions and performing equivalent duties to their peers.

The J-1 Visa Program enriches Hawai'i's schools by providing high-quality educational and cultural experiences. HB 439, HD1 would ensure that qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai'i's classrooms for up to five years, fostering instructional continuity and expanding cultural learning opportunities for our keiki. Establishing an international teacher license without unnecessary testing requirements would allow the state to fully utilize the expertise of international educators while cultivating a diverse workforce reflective of Hawai'i's global community.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 439, HD1.

Respectfully,

Vicdona Reyes
J1 Teacher, Mauka Lani Elementary
92-1300 Panana St., Kapolei HI 96707

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:12:41 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emy Lacson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly endorse and support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. And I suggest that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

February 18, 2025

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Respectfully,



Monica L. Paragas
Science/Computer Science Teacher
Kohala Middle School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:20:43 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aina Mae Ranises	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1- Relating to Education.

Please allow me to introduce first myself. I'm Aina Mae Ranises, a Special Education Teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I've been teaching for 15 years in one of the public schools in the Philippines before I applied as a J1 teacher in Hawaii.

At first I was hesitant for some reasons. First, I need to leave my teaching position in my home country in fact I already had a stable job. Next, I'm very far to my family and living in a foreign land is not easy. Lastly, the expenses that I need to spend just to get through of the program. Honestly, my passion is to teach the children because I want to be an agent of change. I don't want to teach only their minds but I want also to touch their hearts and transform their lives. That's why I decided to push through my application regardless of the hindrances/hesistancies that I'll face in the future.

When I arrived in Maui, I was amazed by the place as well as the environment and I even told myself if given the opportunity, I want to work here a little bit longer. However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential to all of us J1 teachers visa program. Unlike the other states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamline/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams. Hawai'i classifies J1 teachers as "emergency hires" that requires us to take a series of additional comprehensive exams that can exceed \$1000 in costs. Further, we J1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J1 Visa Program provides high quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional exams is one of the keys that we will be able to finish our program successfully.

Lastly, I'm knocking your heart to please hear our side because we are not chosen on the spot. We did a lot of processes just to get through this program. All we are asking is to give us a

chance to stay until 5 years and 5 years is enough for me before I'll go back to my home country and I'm very proud to myself that I'm one of those who were given the opportunity to teach here and I'm able to finish the program successfully with my American dream unforgettable experienced. Thank you and more power.

Mahalo,

Aina Mae Ranises

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:22:48 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zenaida P. Guillermo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I support the intent of HB439, HD1, but recommend the following revisions to HB439, HD1 to ensure that a visiting international teacher license is created without burdensome examinations that other licensed teachers are not required to take:

Establish a visiting international teacher license to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries." The international teacher license shall provide teachers hired by the department or public charter schools the ability to teach all subjects and grade levels that the teacher is qualified to teach; provided that:

(A) International [educators] teachers hired by the department or public charter schools as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following:

- (i) A valid and current J-1 visa;
 - (ii) The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;
 - (iii) Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;
 - (iv) A valid teaching license in the teacher's home country; and
 - (v) Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting; and
- (B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license is conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawai'i, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international educators, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Respectfully yours,

Zenaida P. Guillermo

Special Education Inclusion Teacher

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:22:41 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Orville Mantua	Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

My name is Orville Mantua who heartily and earnestly the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I strongly support and recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The J-1 Visa Program administered by the Department has proven to be highly effective for the children of Hawai'i. Currently, 218 certified educators, holding degrees equivalent to those of U.S.-trained professionals, are employed in 55 schools throughout the state, primarily in challenging staffing areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, these international educators, recruited through the Department's J-1 Visa Program, have eagerly embraced their roles, delivering exceptional education to Hawai'i's students while also acting as cultural ambassadors within their communities. In the upcoming academic year 2025-2026, the Department plans to hire an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan aimed at equipping students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

The current licensing regulations in the State present obstacles that limit the full potential of prospective teachers participating in the J-1 visa program. In contrast to states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have established streamlined or reciprocal licensing procedures for international educators without necessitating further examinations, Hawai'i categorizes J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification mandates that prospective participants undergo a series of additional comprehensive examinations, which can incur costs exceeding \$1,000. The preparation for these assessments significantly diminishes the time available for analyzing formative assessments, engaging with families, and developing curriculum. Moreover, J-1 teachers are not eligible for the additional compensation provided to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing equivalent duties.

The J-1 Visa Program offers exceptional educational and cultural experiences to educational institutions throughout Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 guarantees that eligible international teachers employed in Hawai'i's schools may extend their stay for a maximum of five years, thereby ensuring consistent instruction and enriching learning and cultural experiences for the children of Hawai'i. By establishing an international teacher license that does not require further examinations, the State can effectively utilize the expertise, knowledge, and experience of

international educators, fostering a more diverse workforce that reflects Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Testimony in Support of HB439, HD1

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lynette Fernandez, and I am a first-grade J1 teacher at Naalehu Elementary School in Naalehu, Hawai'i (Big Island). I am submitting this testimony in strong support of the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

As an educator, my career has been centered around shaping young minds and ensuring my students receive a high-quality education. Since becoming part of the Naalehu Elementary School community, I have been dedicated to providing meaningful instruction, fostering a positive school environment, and supporting the academic and personal development of my students.

Despite my extensive experience and dedication, obtaining a full license in Hawai'i has been a significant challenge due to the financial and logistical barriers posed by the Praxis exams. These exams are not only costly, but they are also difficult to access across the islands, often requiring travel to O'ahu, which adds even more financial strain. In addition, while we are able to take exams online, it is still challenging for people like me to take tests by simply looking at a screen. I prefer the experience of a traditional paper exam. These obstacles fail to recognize the years of training, expertise, and foreign credentials that international teachers like myself already bring. HB439 acknowledges our qualifications and provides a fair, accessible path to licensure.

In addition to that, I want to express also my concern about the current situation regarding the relocation and salary packages for J1 teachers. As per the HTSB, we are required to take and pass the Praxis exam before we can receive the full amount of our relocation and salary benefits. Unfortunately, this had led to a delay in receiving exact compensation we were promised, which has created some financial strain for us as we navigate the process. It is important that this issue is addressed so that all teachers, including J1s, receive the full support they need without unnecessary delays or barriers.

Hawai'i is currently facing a teacher shortage, particularly in rural and under served areas. By creating an international teacher license, this bill will help address the shortage by recognizing the qualifications of talented, committed educators who are already contributing to the state's educational system. Passing this bill would demonstrate Hawai'i's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and the recognition of international talent, ensuring our students continue to receive a quality education.

I strongly encourage you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, equitable, and reasonable pathway to licensure.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lynette Fernandez
First Grade Teacher
Naalehu Elementary School

Big Island, Hawai'i

A Testimony in Supporting of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Aloha!

My name is Janica Mary C. Pogoy, a professional teacher from the Philippines who has almost a decade of experience, currently teaching at Solomon Elementary School. I am writing this testimony to support HB 439 for teachers that recognize the contributions of educators across the world.

Stepping off the plane in Hawaii, I was captivated by the breathtaking view of the mountains, cool weather, very kind people and that validated my goals as an adventurous teacher. I came here with the dual purpose of teaching and sharing my culture, an opportunity that is important to me, particularly because it allowed me to work with elementary students, my area of expertise.

From the first day of school, I feel welcomed by a warm and supportive community. The faculty's collaborative spirit is evident in terms of helping the structure in the classroom, how to make a sub plan, their willingness to share resources, and fostering a truly enriching and positive working environment.

Transitioning into this new environment, I prioritized getting to know my students, recognizing their diverse cultural backgrounds. I focus on fostering independence, kindness, and responsibility in my students. I consistently strive to give my best in the classroom. My prior experience teaching preschoolers, middle schoolers, high school students, and even college students have prepared me to effectively address the diverse needs of my current students, particularly given their varied cultural background.

While I possess extensive teaching experience and a master's degree earned prior to my arrival, the licensing process in Hawaii has presented a significant challenge. This examination is a barrier, financially and mentally, to us teachers. As I am here on a J1 exchange visa under the emergency hire category, which entails average compensation and additional requirements. I believe that we can do more, share knowledge and expertise in the teaching field.

I respectfully request that the committee consider the impact of these factors on educators in similar circumstances. We sincerely hope the committee will consider our testimony.

Sincerely,

Janica Mary C. Pogoy

Kindergarten, Solomon Elementary School

Aloha Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Arien A. Potenciano, a teacher from Philippines and currently teaching at Wailuku Elementary School as a 3rd Grader teacher. I am here today to testify in strong support of policies that recognize our invaluable contributions as a J-1 teacher and allows us to continue serving our keiki and our community. I have had the privilege to be a part of the teaching workforce here in Hawaii Public Schools contributing to a vibrant, diverse, and dynamic learning environment here in Hawaii. The opportunity to work with students and local teachers from different backgrounds and share my own international perspective has not only shaped my teaching approach but has allowed me to have a positive and lasting impact on my students, the school community, and the overall campus climate.

One of the most significant benefits of being a J-1 teacher is the chance to stay in Hawaii for up to five years. This stability has allowed me to build meaningful connections with my students and immerse myself in the community. I have had the chance to watch my students grow over the years, both academically and personally, which has been deeply rewarding. The longer I am here, the more I can contribute to a positive, inclusive atmosphere, helping students feel supported and empowered to reach their fullest potential.

The program also ensures that I receive equal pay for the work I do. As a licensed educator, I am aiming to be eligible for pay differentials, which fairly compensates me for the experience and qualifications I bring to the table. This recognition of my professional background, regardless of where I was trained, fosters a sense of respect and mutual appreciation within the school community. It also helps me feel valued as a key member of the team, contributing to a collaborative, positive working environment.

Additionally, the recognition of my internationally earned credentials has been incredibly important. I hold a teaching degree and certification from my home country, and the fact that these qualifications are acknowledged as being on par with those of U.S.-trained educators is deeply affirming. It not only validates the hard work I've put into my career but also demonstrates the school's commitment to valuing diverse educational backgrounds and experiences. This recognition enhances my ability to contribute meaningfully to the educational experience, knowing that my skills and expertise are both appreciated and respected. It would be a great help if the state would be in favor of HB 439 to better continue our ultimate goal as a teacher.

One of the most impactful aspects of the program is the exemption from the costly and burdensome Praxis exams. Having already earned a degree and teaching credentials internationally, I don't have to navigate the expensive and time-consuming process of taking exams that would have little bearing on my actual ability to teach. This has allowed me to focus on what truly matters—supporting my students and engaging in the community. Without the added stress of extra testing, I can dedicate my energy to creating engaging lessons, building strong relationships with my students, and contributing to the school's growth.

Overall, the J-1 teacher program has allowed me to be fully present in my role as an educator. It has given me the opportunity to focus on what I do best: teaching and supporting the students and the community around me. The ability to stay for multiple years, receive fair compensation, and be acknowledged for my international credentials has allowed me to become a deeply involved and committed member of this school. I am grateful for the chance to work in a place that not only values my contributions but also creates an environment where both students and teachers thrive.

This version focuses on your personal experiences and the positive impact you've made as a teacher, while highlighting the benefits of the program. Let me know if you'd like to make any changes or additions!

Arien A. Potenciano
3rd Grader Teacher
Wailuku Elementary School

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Ruel M. Cabasa, and I strongly support HB 439, creating an International Visiting Teacher License. As a teacher licensed in the Philippines, I'm dedicated to serving Hawaii's students, but the current Praxis testing requirements create unnecessary obstacles. While I understand the need to demonstrate competency, these tests place a significant burden on international teachers. For example, each Praxis exam costs approximately \$150, and I need to take three exams amounting to \$450. This financial strain, coupled with the significant time commitment required for test preparation – often 10-15 hours a week – directly takes away from the time I can spend developing engaging lessons and providing individualized support for my students. Just last week, I had to postpone working with a struggling student because I needed to study for an upcoming exam. This is the kind of impact these requirements have. In addition it diverts valuable time and energy away from lesson planning, student engagement, and professional development. I spend countless hours studying for these exams, time that could be better spent collaborating with colleagues, creating innovative learning experiences, and addressing the individual needs of my students.

Our limited visas, typically three to five years, add further pressure. Extending our stay is often contingent on obtaining licensure, compounding the stress. I love Hawaii, its people, and my school community. I want to focus on what I do best: teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students. I urge you to vote in favor of HB 439, allowing us to prioritize our students, not excessive testing.

I am committed to providing the best possible education for my students here in Hawaii, a place I have come to love. Passing HB 439 will allow international teachers like myself to focus on our passion: teaching. I respectfully urge you to support this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ruel M. Cabasa

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:42:37 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sannylee Ermac	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sannylee Ermac, an English Language Arts teacher at Maui Waena Intermediate School. My educational mission is to guide and inspire students toward a high-quality education. For more than a decade in education, I've focused on building a strong school community, and supporting student growth...and that's what I'm doing in my present school. However, despite my experience and license from the Philippines, I still need to take and pass the Praxis exams which adds to my financial burden and preparation stress.

Hence, I am writing to express my strong support for the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. I recommend that HB439, HD1 be amended to match SB819, SD1 - Relating to Education. This legislation is a vital step toward addressing the ongoing teacher shortage and enriching the educational experiences of students across the state. It also acknowledges the extensive training and qualifications international teachers possess, offering a fair pathway to continue our positive impact on Hawai'i schools.

I urge your support for HB439 HD1, extending our visas for five years to promote stability for our students and enable us to become fully integrated members of our schools and communities, guaranteeing equal pay and benefits to ensure we can adequately support our families, and providing international teachers with full teaching licensure to remove additional testing requirements. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Sannylee Ermac

Aloha! My name is NORMAN RUELO MARQUEZ, I am a highly motivated with a strong background in teaching science and other related fields and integrating research into my teaching. I finished my master's degree major in science teaching. Furthermore, I've been in the teaching profession for almost 14 years and this experience allowed me to develop strong skills in communication, teamwork, and problem solving made me passionate and enthusiastic. I am submitting this testimony and strongly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

Hawaii Department of Education J-1 Visa Program has been a tremendous success for our keiki. Currently, 218 certified educators—holding degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers—are serving in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators have answered the call to provide high-quality instruction while enriching their communities as cultural ambassadors. In the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to expand the program by hiring an additional 116 international educators, further advancing its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.

Despite its success, the program is hindered by the State's current licensing requirements, which create unnecessary barriers for prospective J-1 visa teachers. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which offer streamlined or reciprocal licensing processes without additional exams, Hawaii classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires them to take costly and time-intensive examinations often exceeding \$1,000 before we can teach. The time spent preparing for these exams detracts from critical instructional responsibilities, such as analyzing student assessments, meeting with families, and planning lessons. Additionally, me myself as J-1 teacher ineligible for the extra compensation provided to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program plays a vital role in providing high-quality educational and cultural opportunities across Hawaii. HB 439, HD1 ensures that qualified international educators can remain in Hawaii's schools for up to five years, fostering instructional continuity and enriching students' learning experiences. By creating an international teacher license without redundant examinations, the State can fully leverage the expertise of international educators while fostering a more diverse workforce that reflects Hawaii's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 439, HD1.

Sincerely,

Norman R. Marquez
Physics Teacher
Kaua'i High School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:45:43 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andemar Jamon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

Hawai‘i’s J-1 Visa Program has been an outstanding success for our keiki. Currently, 218 certified educators—holding degrees equivalent to those of U.S.-trained teachers—serve in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Na‘alehu, international educators in the J-1 Visa Program have stepped up to deliver high-quality education while serving as cultural ambassadors within their communities. Looking ahead to the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to employ an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”

However, existing state licensing requirements limit the full potential of these prospective J-1 educators. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina—which offer streamlined or reciprocal licensing without requiring additional exams—Hawai‘i designates J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification mandates a series of comprehensive exams that can cost over \$1,000, significantly reducing the time teachers can dedicate to formative assessments, family engagement, and curriculum planning. Additionally, J-1 teachers are not eligible for the extra compensation provided to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program enriches Hawai‘i’s schools by offering high-quality education and cultural exchange. HB 439, HD1 ensures that qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai‘i’s classrooms for up to five years, fostering instructional continuity and expanding learning opportunities for our keiki. Establishing an international teacher license—without unnecessary examinations—will allow the state to fully utilize the expertise of international educators while enhancing workforce diversity to better reflect Hawai‘i’s global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 439, HD1.

Mahalo and God bless!

February 18, 2025

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF AMENDING HB 439 HD1 TO ALIGN WITH
SB 819 SD1**

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of amending HB 439 HD1 to align with SB 819 SD1 in order to establish an international Visiting Teacher License. This amendment is crucial in addressing the ongoing teacher shortage while enriching our education system with diverse global perspectives.

Hawai'i's schools continue to face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified educators. By creating an international Visiting Teacher License, we open doors to experienced educators from around the world who can bring unique insights, cultural diversity, and specialized skills to our classrooms. SB 819 SD1 provides a well-structured framework to ensure that international teachers meet appropriate licensure standards while easing the pathway for them to contribute meaningfully to our education system. Aligning HB 439 HD1 with this framework would enhance recruitment efforts and provide much-needed support for our students and schools.

Hawai'i's schools continue to face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified educators. By creating an international Visiting Teacher License, we open doors to experienced educators from around the world who can bring unique insights, cultural diversity, and specialized skills to our classrooms. SB 819 SD1 provides a well-structured framework to ensure that international teachers meet appropriate licensure standards while easing the pathway for them to contribute meaningfully to our education system. Aligning HB 439 HD1 with this framework would enhance recruitment efforts and provide much-needed support for our students and schools.

I respectfully urge you to amend HB 439 HD1 to match the provisions of SB 819 SD1 and help ensure that Hawai'i can attract and retain high-quality international educators. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Shirley A. Samonte
P.O. Box 631089
Lanai City, Hawaii. 96763
Phone: (808) 5548-6186
Email: shirley.a.samonte@gmail.com

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Mahalo,
Mark Anthony Domingo

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 7:58:01 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Freddie Abulencia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Freddie Abulencia, and this is my second year participating in a cultural exchange program as an international teacher. One of my goals is to promote cross-cultural collaboration with my colleagues and equip students with global perspectives. As a J1 teacher, I strongly support the HB 439, HD1 that recognizes our years of experience and teaching certification from our home country without requiring additional and costly tests, allowing us to focus on our role in the international visiting teacher program. This will help us to complete our 5-year program, maximizing our contributions as international educators. This bill ensures excellent classroom stability and continuity, benefiting learners through more profound cultural exchange and enhanced global awareness. I appreciate your support.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 8:01:01 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angelie Mae Galario	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for HB439, which aims to create an international teaching license for certain visa holders and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to match SB 819, SD1.

The development of this license is crucial for acknowledging the significant contributions of international educators, who offer diverse perspectives and experiences to our educational institutions.

The current licensing system creates major obstacles for these qualified teachers, often forcing them to take long and expensive exams. Making this process simpler would help skilled teachers share their knowledge and improve learning for our students without taking additional examinations. By establishing this international teaching license, we can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment that reflects our global community. I encourage the committee to support this initiative so our schools can benefit from the rich backgrounds and skills that international teachers provide.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee, my name is Zhylaine Dacoron, and I am writing to express that I firmly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. To advance this initiative, I propose amending HB 439, HD1 to align with the provisions outlined in SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. I am a dedicated educator here in Hawai'i, and I firmly believe that this bill will not only honor the exceptional experience and qualifications that teachers like me bring to our schools, but also allow us to continue making a meaningful impact on our students.

I have had the privilege of teaching in Hawai'i for 6 months now, and during this time, I've worked hard to create an inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning environment for my students. I'm proud to have contributed to their growth and success, whether it's through personalized instruction, fostering a love of learning, or helping them develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. My background and diverse experience as a teacher—honed in my home country, where I earned my teaching license and underwent rigorous training—have equipped me to offer unique perspectives and methods in the classroom.

However, as a foreign-trained educator, I've faced significant challenges when it comes to obtaining a teaching license in Hawai'i. While my qualifications have been evaluated and recognized, the process of taking and passing the required exams is expensive and logistically difficult. In some cases, scheduling the exams locally on Maui can be difficult. I have often found myself running out of available exam dates here, which means I need to travel to Oahu in order to take exams that are not available locally. This will result in additional financial burdens and time away from my students, which is particularly challenging for teachers who are committed to being present for their students' learning. This often means I must wait for an open exam slot on Maui before I can proceed with the testing. These barriers create unnecessary hardships for teachers like me, who are committed to making a difference here in Hawai'i but are limited by the current system.

This bill will alleviate these challenges by providing a clear and accessible path for international teachers to earn a license that reflects their expertise and qualifications. Having a specific international teacher license will streamline the process for teachers who have already demonstrated their abilities abroad and make it easier for us to continue contributing to the Hawai'i educational system. The ability to teach without unnecessary barriers would allow us to focus on what truly matters—our students' success.

I truly believe that the diverse backgrounds and experiences of international educators add significant value to our classrooms, and this bill recognizes that value. By establishing criteria for an international teacher license, we can ensure that more highly qualified educators have the opportunity to share their knowledge, enhance the learning experience, and contribute to the future success of our students and communities.

Thank you for considering this important bill. I hope that you will support it so that teachers like me can continue making a positive and lasting impact here in Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui loa,
Zhylaine Dacoron
6th grade ELA/ Social Studies/ Reading Workshop Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School
zhylainecdacoron@gmail.com/ 8083853349

Testimony in Support of HB 439, HD1, with Amendments to Align with SB 819, SD1

Aloha, I'm Melvin Dumelod, and I am an international educator currently teaching in Kauai Hawai'i through the Department's J-1 Visa Program. As a dedicated teacher committed to providing high-quality education to Hawai'i's keiki, I strongly support HB 439, HD1 and urge its amendment to align with SB 819, SD1.

Every day, my fellow international educators and I work tirelessly to inspire, support, and uplift our students, often in hard-to-staff schools where the need for passionate and qualified teachers is greatest. However, despite our dedication and qualifications—equivalent to those of U.S.-trained educators—we face unnecessary barriers due to the State's existing licensing requirements. These obstacles not only hinder our ability to focus on student success but also create inequities in compensation and recognition for the work we do.

Hawai'i has taken an important step in embracing international educators as part of its vision to cultivate globally competitive and locally committed students. Now, by establishing an international visiting teacher license without unnecessary testing requirements, the State can further strengthen its commitment to equity, diversity, and excellence in education.

I respectfully ask for your support in ensuring that highly qualified international teachers can continue serving Hawai'i's students effectively, without undue financial and bureaucratic burdens.

Thus, I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license and urge the Committee to amend HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1. This amendment would strengthen Hawai'i's ability to attract and retain highly qualified international educators, ensuring our keiki receive the best possible education.

The Hawai'i State Department of Education's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success. To date, 218 certified educators—holding degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers—are working in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff locations and special education programs. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā'ālehu, these dedicated professionals have answered the call to provide high-quality instruction while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to welcome an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

Despite this success, the State's current licensing rules hinder the full potential of the J-1 Visa Program. Unlike Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have implemented streamlined or reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation imposes an undue burden on these highly qualified educators, requiring them to take a series of expensive, comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. The

time and resources spent preparing for these exams detract from their ability to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and develop curriculum—all critical components of effective teaching. Additionally, J-1 teachers are ineligible for the additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides immense benefits to Hawai'i's students, offering high-quality education and cultural enrichment. HB 439, HD1 ensures that qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai'i's classrooms for up to five years, providing stability and continuity of instruction. By creating an international teacher license without additional testing barriers, the State can fully utilize the expertise, skills, and global perspectives of these educators while promoting a more diverse and representative workforce.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support the amendment of HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1, thereby removing unnecessary barriers for international educators and strengthening Hawai'i's education system. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this critical measure.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 8:19:11 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raymart Jayson M. Fundal	Special Education Teacher (J1 Program)	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony Regarding J-1 Visa Extension Exception for Teaching License in Hawai'i

My name is Raymart Jayson M. Fundal, and I am a Special Education Teacher currently in Hawai'i on a J-1 visa. I am writing to express my sincere desire to extend my J-1 visa and to respectfully request an exception regarding the teaching license requirement for this extension.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Hawai'i and have developed a deep love for the islands and the community. This experience has been invaluable, both personally and professionally. I am passionate about making a positive impact on the lives of children with special needs, and I believe I have made significant contributions to the students I serve here in Hawai'i. I am eager to continue this important work.

My primary motivation for extending my J-1 visa is twofold. First and foremost, I am committed to supporting my family back in the Philippines. The opportunity to work in Hawai'i allows me to provide much-needed financial assistance to them. Secondly, I am deeply invested in building a legacy of positive change in the lives of the children I teach here in Hawai'i. I have formed strong bonds with my students and their families, and I am dedicated to continuing to provide them with the high-quality special education they deserve. Extending my visa would allow me to continue nurturing these relationships and further develop my skills as an educator within this unique and diverse environment.

I understand the requirements for extending a J-1 visa, including the teaching license requirement. I am respectfully requesting an exception to this requirement in my specific case. I know what's needed to stay, the teaching license, the rules. But I'm asking, pleading, for a chance, a break. The license...it's just out of reach right now. Too much, too many IEP meetings, too much on my plate at school. I'm drowning, and this deadline is another weight pulling me under.

I am confident that my skills and experience as a Special Education teacher, coupled with my dedication to my students, make me a valuable asset to the Hawaiian educational system. I am a responsible and committed individual, and I am confident that I will continue to uphold the highest professional standards.

Thank you for considering my request. I am hopeful that I will be granted the opportunity to continue my work here in Hawai‘i and contribute to the well-being of its children.

Sincerely,

**Raymart Jayson M. Fundal
Special Education Teacher
Kainalu Elementary School
+ (01) 808-286-8642**

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Roxanne M. Tano, and I am a Science teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School. I am writing to express my strong support for the creation of an international visiting teacher license and recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been incredibly successful for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with degrees equivalent to those of U.S.-trained teachers are working in 55 schools across the state, mainly in hard-to-staff locations and special education. International educators in the J-1 Visa Program, from Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, have responded enthusiastically to the need for top-quality education in Hawai'i's schools while also serving as cultural ambassadors in our communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the current licensing rules in Hawai'i are hindering the full potential of prospective J-1 teachers. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have streamlined or reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without requiring additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation forces them to take a series of comprehensive exams, often costing over \$1,000, before they can be fully licensed. The time and effort spent preparing for these exams reduces the time available for vital tasks such as analyzing assessments, meeting with families, and planning curricula. Additionally, J-1 teachers are not eligible for extra compensation given to educators in hard-to-fill positions, even though they perform the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides invaluable educational and cultural experiences for schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD1 would ensure that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can stay for up to five years, bringing consistency to instruction and continuing to offer high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional exam requirements, Hawai'i would be able to fully utilize the talents, expertise, and experience of international educators, fostering a more diverse workforce that reflects the global community we serve.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony on HB 439, HD1, and thank you for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,
Roxanne M. Tano
Science Teacher, Waimea Canyon Middle School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 8:31:18 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Joy Selda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello,

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. I strongly believe that J1 Teachers possesses the necessary skills, knowledge and character to excel as a licensed teacher. Their teaching practices are informed by deep understanding of pedagogy, and have shown remarkable ability to adapt the diverse needs of their students.

In addition, their experience and educational achievement are remarkable.

Respectfully,

MARY JOY SELDA

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Pepito S. Ferrer, and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, a bill that would establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This legislation is vital for educators like me, who have already earned our teaching credentials in our home countries yet face additional barriers—such as the Praxis exams—that hinder our ability to continue serving students in the Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE).

As an international teacher from the Philippines, I bring with me years of experience, expertise, and a deep passion for educating students. I am fully committed to providing high-quality education, enriching students' perspectives through a global lens, and contributing positively to my school community. However, balancing my teaching responsibilities while also preparing for multiple standardized tests creates unnecessary stress and diverts my time and energy away from where it is needed most—my students.

While I understand the importance of assessing subject knowledge and teaching competency, the current system does not fully acknowledge the qualifications and professional experience that international teachers bring. HB 439 is crucial because it addresses several challenges we face, including the Unnecessary Testing Requirements, Visa Limitations and Job Stability, and Recognition of Global Teaching Credentials.

International teachers play a critical role in Hawai'i's education system. Our presence benefits students, schools, and the broader community in several ways like Bringing Cultural Diversity to the Classroom, Addressing Teacher Shortages, and Strengthening School Communities.

By passing HB 439, the Hawai'i State Legislature has the opportunity to support qualified international teachers, improve teacher retention, create a fair and equitable system and ensure all students receive quality education by keeping experienced teachers in the classroom.

I love Hawai'i—its people, its culture, and the school community that has embraced me with open arms. My goal is to continue inspiring and guiding students without the added stress of unnecessary testing requirements. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, ensuring that international teachers like myself can continue doing what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawai'i's students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Sincerely,
Pepito S. Ferrer**

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 8:34:02 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maria Joy Menesses	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am Maria Joy Menesses, a 5th-grade teacher at Princess Nahienaena Elementary School and an international visiting teacher from the Philippines. I am writing to advocate for the recognition of our Philippine teaching licenses and credentials as equivalent qualifications for licensure in Hawai‘i, eliminating the need for us to take the Praxis exam.

Filipino teachers who come to Hawai‘i have already met rigorous standards for teaching in our home country. We hold professional teaching licenses from the Philippine Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), which requires us to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET)—a comprehensive test that assesses subject mastery, pedagogy, and educational competence. This examination ensures that we are fully prepared and qualified to teach.

Requiring internationally licensed teachers to take the Praxis exam creates unnecessary redundancy and financial burdens. Many of us arrive in Hawai‘i already possessing years of teaching experience, strong pedagogical skills, and a deep commitment to education. The additional requirement of Praxis does not necessarily reflect our ability to teach effectively in a real classroom setting, as our professional credentials and teaching experience already demonstrate our qualifications.

Furthermore, waiving the Praxis requirement for Filipino teachers would help address Hawai‘i’s ongoing teacher shortage by streamlining the process for experienced international educators to contribute to the local education system without unnecessary delays. By recognizing our existing credentials, the state can ensure that schools have access to well-qualified, passionate educators who are ready to serve students immediately.

I respectfully urge the committee to consider policies that acknowledge the qualifications of internationally licensed teachers, particularly those from the Philippines, and allow us to obtain Hawai‘i teaching licenses without requiring Praxis exams. This policy change would benefit not only international teachers but also Hawai‘i’s schools and students by ensuring a steady and qualified workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to improving education in Hawai‘i and would be happy to provide further information if needed.

Mahalo,

Maria Joy Menesses

5th Grade Teacher

Princess Nahienaena Elementary School

My name is Rosalie L. Ohayas, and I teach at Wahiawa Middle School. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be part of Hawaii's educational system, which has allowed me to grow professionally and expand my knowledge as an educator. I fully support HB439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher program.

Taking a licensure exam in the state is a valuable step in our professional development. However, I would like to know if teaching licenses from the Philippines, along with our master's and doctoral degrees, could be considered in the certification process.

Additionally, many teachers live far from Honolulu, where the nearest testing center is located, making travel for the exam challenging. The cost of each test is \$90, and as the primary provider for my family, the total expense of \$450 is a significant financial burden.

Given these challenges, it would be incredibly beneficial if reciprocity could be considered to support educators like myself. Mahalo and God bless.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 8:39:34 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
CHRISTOPHER M KANYI	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Christopher Kanyi**Before the House Committee on Education****Regarding House Bill 439, House Draft 1 (HB 439, HD1)****Date:** 2/18/2025

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Christopher Kanyi, and I am a special education teacher at Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School. I submit this testimony in strong support of the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I respectfully recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to conform to the language of Senate Bill 819, Senate Draft 1 (SB 819, SD1), relating to education.

The Department of Education's J-1 Visa Program has demonstrably benefited the keiki of Hawai'i. Currently, 218 certified educators, possessing degrees equivalent to those held by U.S.-trained educators, are employed in 55 schools throughout the state, primarily serving in hard-to-staff locations and special education classrooms. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators participating in the Department's J-1 Visa Program have diligently provided high-quality instruction to Hawai'i's students while simultaneously acting as cultural ambassadors within their respective communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to employ an additional 116 international educators, consistent with its Strategic Plan objective to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, existing state licensing regulations impede the full potential of prospective J-1 visa program teachers. Unlike other states, such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have implemented streamlined or reciprocal licensing procedures for international educators that do not require additional examinations, Hawai'i designates J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification mandates that prospective participants complete a series of comprehensive examinations, the cost of which can exceed \$1,000. The time dedicated to preparing for these examinations significantly diminishes the time available for crucial professional responsibilities, including analyzing formative assessments, conducting family meetings, and engaging in

curriculum planning. Furthermore, J-1 teachers are currently ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing equivalent duties.

The J-1 Visa Program provides valuable educational and cultural enrichment opportunities to schools across Hawai‘i. HB 439, HD1 will ensure that qualified international teachers working in Hawai‘i’s schools can remain for up to five years, thereby providing instructional continuity and enhanced learning and cultural experiences for Hawai‘i’s keiki. By establishing an international teacher license that does not require additional examinations, the State can fully utilize the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and cultivate a more diverse educator workforce reflective of Hawai‘i’s global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding HB 439 HD1.

I am Dyan Y. Ferrer of Solomon Elementary School and I am deeply grateful to Hawaii for allowing me to be part of its educational system. Teaching in Hawaii has provided me with numerous opportunities to grow and expand my expertise as an educator. I strongly support HB439 the creation of an International Visiting Teacher. Taking a licensure examination in the state would be a valuable step in our professional development as teachers. However, I would like to inquire whether our teaching licenses from the Philippines, along with our master's and doctoral degrees, could be considered in the certification process. Additionally, many teachers reside far from Honolulu, with the nearest testing center located in the city, making it challenging to travel for the examination. Furthermore, the cost of each test is \$90, and as the primary provider for my family, the total expense of \$450 is a significant financial burden. Given these circumstances, it would be highly beneficial if reciprocity could be considered to support educators like myself. Mahalo and God bless!

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 8:56:12 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Joy Fernandez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for HB439 HD1, which seeks to establish an Internantional Visiting Teacher License in Hawai‘i.

As an 8th-grade special education teacher at Kalama Intermediate School and a holder of a professional teaching license from the Philippines, I strongly advocate for the recognition of international teaching credentials, allowing us to obtain a Hawai‘i teaching license without the need to take additional exams.

Granting international teachers the ability to serve the Department of Education for up to five years would be mutually beneficial. Having fully adapted to the norms and school culture, I am committed to continuing my service. In turn, the department would benefit from retaining experienced educators without the additional costs and efforts required to recruit and train new teachers.

The current requirement to pass the Praxis test—covering at least five and up to eight different categories—is both time-consuming and financially burdensome. Additionally, international teachers are initially granted only a three-year stay, with the possibility of an extension to five years contingent upon passing Praxis. This limitation makes it difficult for dedicated educators to continue serving Hawai‘i’s students without undue hardship.

If passed, HB439 HD1 would grant international teachers a full teaching license by recognizing the rigorous licensure process we have already completed in our home countries, which aligns with the Praxis assessment standards. Furthermore, it would allow us to stay for the full five years, providing greater stability for our students and enabling us to make a lasting impact in Hawai‘i’s schools.

I urge you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Joy M. Fernandez

8th-Grade SPED Teacher
Kalama Intermediate School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 9:06:28 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jamiefel Pungtilan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I'm Jamiefel P. Pungtilan, a Math teacher at James Campbell High School. I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

As a teacher handling Grade 9 Inclusion class, I'm deeply committed to the success of my students, especially those with diverse learning needs. As an educator committed to providing quality instruction to my students, particularly those in the inclusion program, I recognize the significant impact this bill could have on addressing the teacher shortages in the schools in Hawaii. One of the most important aspects of this bill is the acknowledgment of the equivalent education that international teachers possess, which meets the standards required in the United States. Many qualified international educators hold degrees and credentials that are fully comparable to those required here. However, despite this equivalent qualification, we international teachers often face numerous financial and logistical barriers.

Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. The current requirement for passing the Praxis exams places a significant burden on us, not only financially but also in terms of the extra time and preparation it demands instead of focusing on the preparation for our lessons. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

By establishing the International Visiting Teacher License, this can remove many of the barriers that we international educators face. This will not only help address teacher shortages but also expose students to diverse teaching methods and global perspectives, which are vital in today's interconnected world. The value international teachers can bring to our classrooms is immense, and by supporting this bill, we are ensuring that students will have access to high-quality, culturally rich educational experiences.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 9:16:18 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ELVIN BEJERANO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439, HD1 & SB 819, SD1 – International Visiting Teacher License**Hearing Date:** February 20, 2025**Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,**

I strongly support the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License and urge that HB 439, HD1 be amended to align with SB 819, SD1. This legislation is essential in recognizing and supporting the international educators who help address Hawai‘i’s critical teacher shortage.

The Hawai‘i Department of Education’s J-1 Visa Program has tremendously succeeded. Currently, 218 certified educators—holding degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers—serve in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff locations and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā‘ālehu, international teachers have provided high-quality education while enriching their school communities as cultural ambassadors. Next school year (2025-2026), another 116 international educators will join Hawai‘i’s public schools as part of the Department’s commitment to preparing students to be “*Globally Competitive and Locally Committed*.”

However, the state’s current licensing policies create unnecessary barriers for J-1 visa teachers. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which provide streamlined or reciprocal licensing processes, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as “emergency hires.” This designation forces us to take multiple costly exams—often exceeding \$1,000—despite our years of teaching experience and internationally recognized credentials. Preparing for these exams takes time away from what matters most: analyzing student progress, meeting with families, and designing engaging lessons. Additionally, J-1 teachers are ineligible for salary differentials offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work as our licensed colleagues.

My wife, Arlene M. Bejerano, and I are both J-1 teachers at Kihei Elementary School. I have dedicated over 25 years to education and hold a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Management, a Master’s in Elementary Education, and 42 doctoral units in Educational Administration and Supervision. I also hold valid out-of-state teaching licenses from Nevada and New Mexico. Yet, despite my extensive qualifications, I cannot obtain a full Hawai‘i teaching

license without additional costly exams. This places a significant financial strain on our family. Even with both of us working full-time, the high cost of living in Hawai'i makes it difficult to support our two children who are here with us.

Passing HB 439, HD1, and SB 819, SD1 would grant international teachers a full teaching license without redundant and costly exams, ensuring that we are treated fairly and compensated appropriately for our work. It would also provide much-needed financial stability for our families and allow us to continue focusing on what truly matters—the education and well-being of our students. Moreover, by extending the license term to five years, this legislation would provide continuity in the classroom, benefiting both teachers and students.

Hawai'i's students deserve experienced, dedicated educators who are here to stay. International teachers are already in place, working tirelessly to support them. We are committed to the success of Hawai'i's keiki, but we need fair policies that recognize our contributions and allow us to continue our work without unnecessary obstacles. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, HD1, and SB 819, SD1.

Mahalo for your time and support.

Dr. Elvin Valero Bejerano

4th Grade Teacher, Kihei Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 9:22:56 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abegail P Abarquez	J1 Teacher	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my support for HB439, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. My name is Abegail Abarquez, and I am a Special Education teacher at Naalehu Elementary. With over 14 years of experience—three years in 6th grade and ten years in special education—I am dedicated to providing quality education to my students here in Hawaii.

While I fully appreciate the importance of demonstrating subject knowledge, the additional requirements, such as multiple licensure exams, create unnecessary stress and detract from my ability to engage with my students. The limited duration of our visas, often contingent upon obtaining licensure, adds further pressure. The high costs of the Praxis exams, combined with our time constraints, make it challenging to focus on what truly matters—our students.

The implementation of the International Visiting Teacher License through HB439 would allow educators like me to continue contributing to Hawaii's educational landscape without the burden of excessive testing. I genuinely love Hawaii, its culture, and the welcoming school community. My goal is to inspire and support students without unnecessary barriers.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB439, enabling international teachers to dedicate themselves fully to teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

February 18, 2025

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. A bill that recognizes and values the experience and qualifications of teachers like myself, who have earned their credentials internationally and have demonstrated commitment to student success here in Hawaii.

As an educator, I foster academic excellence, support student growth, and create a nurturing environment in my school. Every day, I witness the positive impact I have on my students, helping them reach their full potential and guiding them toward a bright future. My background and training have equipped me with the tools necessary to inspire young minds, implement effective teaching strategies, and contribute meaningfully to my school community.

However, despite my experience and credentials, the current licensure requirements present significant barriers that make it difficult for qualified teachers like myself to continue serving Hawaii's students. The Praxis exams, while intended to standardize teacher qualifications, is costly. The high fees associated with these tests create financial strain. This burden is challenging for teachers like me.

This bill is a step in the right direction. By honoring the exceptional experience and qualifications that educators have demonstrated through foreign-evaluated transcripts and international licensure, this bill acknowledges the rigorous training and dedication we bring to our classrooms. Recognizing these qualifications would not only ease the licensure process for experienced educators but also help alleviate Hawaii's ongoing teacher shortage by retaining skilled professionals who are already making a difference in our schools.

Passing this bill would demonstrate the state's commitment to valuing and supporting its educators while ensuring that students continue to benefit from highly qualified teachers. I urge you to support this bill and remove unnecessary barriers that prevent dedicated teachers from fully contributing to Hawaii's education system.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Sincerely,



Cecelia B. Medina

(808) 830 – 9055

Staff (Gen. Education Teacher)

Wailuku Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 9:38:15 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 9:42:35 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LORALIE N BAGASBAS	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend amending HB439, HD1 to align with SB819, SD1, which better supports this initiative.

Hawai‘i’s Department of Education’s J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success, bringing 218 certified international educators—whose qualifications match those of U.S.-trained teachers—to 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā‘ālehu, these educators not only provide high-quality instruction but also serve as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to welcome an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”

However, existing state licensing rules limit the program’s full potential. Unlike states such as Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international educators, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as “emergency hires.” This designation imposes unnecessary examination requirements, costing over \$1,000 and taking valuable time away from instruction, student engagement, and curriculum planning. Additionally, J-1 teachers are ineligible for the additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program enriches Hawai‘i’s schools with diverse perspectives and high-quality instruction. HB439, HD1 ensures continuity by allowing qualified international teachers to remain in Hawai‘i classrooms for up to five years. By establishing an international teacher license without additional examinations, the state can maximize the contributions of international educators while fostering a workforce that reflects Hawai‘i’s global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB439, HD1.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Loralie Bagasbas

2nd Grade Teacher, Kahului Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 9:44:32 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arlene Macotocruz Bejerano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439, HD1 & SB 819, SD1 – International Visiting Teacher License**Hearing Date:** February 20, 2025

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License and to respectfully urge that HB 439, HD1 be amended to align with SB 819, SD1. This legislation is crucial in recognizing and supporting international educators who help address Hawai‘i’s critical teacher shortage.

The Hawai‘i Department of Education’s J-1 Visa Program has proven to be a tremendous success. Currently, 218 certified educators—holding degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers—serve in 55 schools statewide, primarily in hard-to-staff locations and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā‘ālehu, international teachers have stepped up to provide high-quality education while enriching their school communities as cultural ambassadors. In the upcoming 2025–2026 school year, an additional 116 international educators will join Hawai‘i’s public schools, supporting the Department’s mission to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the state’s current licensing policies impose unnecessary barriers on J-1 visa teachers. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which provide streamlined or reciprocal licensing processes, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as “emergency hires.” This designation requires us to complete multiple costly exams—often exceeding \$1,000—despite our extensive teaching experience and internationally recognized credentials. Preparing for these exams takes valuable time away from analyzing student progress, meeting with families, and designing engaging lessons. Additionally, J-1 teachers are ineligible for salary differentials offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work as licensed colleagues.

My husband, Elvin V. Bejerano, and I are both J-1 teachers at Kihei Elementary School. I have dedicated over 22 years to education, earned a Master’s degree in Elementary Education, and

completed the academic requirements for a doctorate in Educational Administration and Supervision. Yet, despite my extensive qualifications, I am unable to obtain a full Hawai'i teaching license without additional costly exams. This places a significant financial strain on our family. Even with both of us working full-time, the high cost of living in Hawai'i makes it challenging to support our two children, who are here with us.

Passing HB 439, HD1 and SB 819, SD1 would grant international teachers a full teaching license without redundant and costly exams, ensuring that we are treated fairly and compensated appropriately for our work. It would also provide much-needed financial stability for our families and allow us to continue focusing on what truly matters—the education and well-being of our students. Moreover, by extending the license term to five years, this legislation would provide continuity in the classroom, benefiting both teachers and students.

Hawai'i's students deserve experienced, dedicated educators who are here to stay. International teachers are already in place, working tirelessly to support them. We are committed to the success of Hawai'i's keiki, but we need fair policies that recognize our contributions and allow us to continue our work without unnecessary obstacles.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, HD1 and SB 819, SD1.

Mahalo for your time and support.

Arlene M. Bejerano

3rd Grade Teacher, Kihei Elementary School

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the intent of HB439, HD1, as it seeks to establish a visiting international teacher license to enhance cultural and educational exchange between our state and other countries. I truly believe this initiative will provide valuable opportunities for both students and teachers, enriching our classrooms with diverse perspectives and experiences.

At the same time, I would like to offer a few thoughtful recommendations to ensure that the process for obtaining this license remains accessible and fair for all international teachers. I believe these revisions will help create a program that truly supports the goals of educational exchange, without placing unnecessary burdens on qualified teachers. Specifically, I would recommend the following revisions:

- The visiting international teacher license should allow teachers hired by the Department of Education or public charter schools to teach all subjects and grade levels for which they are qualified, ensuring that they can contribute to a wide range of educational needs in our schools.
- For issuance of the license, I believe the criteria should include:
 - A valid and current J-1 visa;
 - The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;
 - Completion of an equivalent teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;
 - A valid teaching license from the teacher's home country;
 - Verification of at least three years of teaching experience in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting.
- Additionally, I recommend that renewal of the license be based on maintaining a valid J-1 visa and continued participation in a designated exchange visitor program with the United States Department of State.

These revisions will help ensure that the visiting international teacher license serves its intended purpose of promoting educational exchange, while also respecting the expertise and experience of the teachers involved. I truly appreciate your time and attention to this matter, and I'm hopeful that with these adjustments, we can create a program that benefits both our students and the international educators who are eager to share their knowledge.

Mahalo for your consideration, and I look forward to continued discussion on this important issue. - **M.B. Alvarez (Baldwin High School)**

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 10:15:40 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Franchette Alodia Ferrer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I am writing this testimony in support of the J-1 Visa Program in Hawaii and to share my experience regarding its impact. The program has provided invaluable opportunities for cultural exchange, professional growth, and personal development for participants from around the world. Beyond professional development, the J-1 Visa Program fosters a deeper understanding of American culture and values while promoting global collaboration. Living and working in Hawaii provided a unique environment where I experienced both professional challenges and personal growth, contributing positively to my future career.

However, the current licensing regulations in Hawaii create significant obstacles for J-1 visa teachers like me, limiting their potential compared to other states, which have more streamlined and reciprocal processes for international educators. In Hawaii, J-1 teachers are classified as "emergency hires," which means they must complete additional, costly exams—sometimes over \$1,000. This requirement reduces the time available for important tasks like assessing student progress, meeting with families, and planning lessons. Additionally, J-1 teachers do not receive extra compensation for working in hard-to-fill positions, despite doing the same work as other educators.

By creating an international teacher license without the need for extra exams, the state can fully tap into the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators, creating a more diverse teaching workforce that mirrors Hawai‘i’s global community.

I urge you to support and pass HB 439 for the betterment of our state and its people. Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 10:33:24 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April D. Asuncion	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I support the intent of HB439, HD1, but recommend the following revisions to HB439, HD1 to ensure that a visiting international teacher license is created without burdensome examinations that other licensed teachers are not required to take:

(7) Establish a visiting international teacher license, and the requirements necessary to obtain the visiting international teacher license, to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries." The international teacher license shall provide teachers hired by the department or public charter schools the ability to teach all subjects and grade levels that the teacher is qualified to teach; provided that:

(A) International [educators] teachers hired by the department or public charter schools as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following:

(i) A valid and current J-1 visa;

(ii) The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;

(iii) Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;

(iv) A valid teaching license in the teacher's home country; and

(v) Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting; and

(B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license is conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international educators, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 10:50:08 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JEFFREY C. DEL ROSARIO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Officers and Members of the Committee:

I, Jeffrey C. Del Rosario, Inclusion Teacher (SPED) of August Ahrens Elementary School, firmly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license. Also, I suggest amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1-Relating to Education.

Embracing each student's individuality has always been important to me as a special education teacher. In Hawaii for over 6 months now, however, I have been learning how important diversity in culture is to forming my teaching style. The rich blend of different cultures influences has given me a new insight into how different cultures affect teaching and learning methods. And the Cultural Exchange Program for Teachers has made me more passionate about engaging learners especially the ones with special needs, school administrators, colleagues, parents and stakeholders.

The Cultural Exchange Program for Teachers has strengthened my conviction in the value of cultural competence in education while also improving my teaching methods. Learning from an environment that values diversity and interacting with educators who share my enthusiasm for helping all learners gave me a newfound sense of purpose and a wider range of resources to help my learners.

Thankfully, August Ahrens Elementary School in Waipahu has been providing me trainings and first-hand experience to better comprehend Inclusive Education, an integral part of the SPED Curriculum. It has been my joy, inspiration and motivation to nurture my learners with disabilities with so much love, care, willingness, and enthusiasm. I want to create an atmosphere where each student here in Hawaii, feels seen, heard, and appreciated for who they are—regardless of their difficulties or skills—is what I believe real inclusion is all about.

Thus, it is my fervent prayer that the wellbeing of the learners here in Hawaii most especially the SPED learners must be a priority. Therefore, I strongly support whatever initiative or move to strengthen this program.

Laslty, I urge everyone of us to work hand in hand for our learners, the hope of the present and next generations to come.

Mahalo in advance!

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 10:51:40 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cristel Key Gapas	Hawaii State Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Cristel Key Gapas, a J-1 teacher from the Philippines and currently a Preschool Special Education Teacher at Alvah Scott Elementary School in the Hawaii State Department of Education. As a J-1 visa holder, I am writing in strong support of HB 439, HD1.

My experience as a J-1 teacher in Hawaii has been incredibly enriching and has provided me with the opportunity to make a meaningful, lasting impact on the school, students, and community. By working collaboratively with my colleagues, building positive relationships with students, and becoming involved in the community, I've been able to contribute to a better learning environment.

HB 439, HD1 will allow qualified J-1 teachers like myself to remain in Hawaii for up to five more years with an international teacher license. This will provide our students with consistent instruction and support their academic success.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass this bill so that Hawaii's students can continue to benefit from the service of international teachers without unnecessary obstacles.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 10:54:08 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jocelle Ale	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Jocelle Cina Ale, and I am writing to strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

I am currently a Math and Math Work Shop Teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School in Maui District through the J1 Visa Program. I hold a Bachelor of Secondary Education and also Master's Degree in Teaching Mathematics in the Philippines and I have 11 years of teaching experience in Philippines and this year in Mau, Hawai'i USA . During this time, I have had the privilege of working in diverse educational systems and have developed a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and educational exchange.

As J1 educator - an international teacher, I am dedicated to offering the highest quality education to my students. I have devoted my career to shape their minds and ensuring they receive an exceptional learning experience. As a middle school Math and Math Workshop teacher, preparing five lessons a day with differentiated instruction was exhausting, but it never discouraged me. My passion for providing the best education for my students kept me going. I strongly believe that education should be inclusive, engaging, and adaptable to the needs of each student, and I consistently strive to create a learning environment that reflects these values.

Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom I offer a free tutorial in Math to some of my students after school to further practice their learning in Math. I actively engage in the school community, working together with colleagues, parents, and stakeholders to cultivate a culture of excellence.

My role as an international teacher through J1 – Visa Program has allowed me to broaden my professional knowledge and teaching skills. However, balancing my teaching duties and preparing for the PRAXIS exams creates unnecessary stress and takes precious time away from lesson planning and engaging with my students. I believe that our qualifications, experience and dedication should be acknowledged without the need for multiple standardized tests, which place both financial and emotional strain on teachers, especially those who manage five or more subjects in a day. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. The impact of my work goes beyond academics; I instill values, build self- confidence, and prepare my students for lifelong success.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Sincerely,

Jocelle Cina Ale

J1 Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School

Maui District

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 11:32:34 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Benny S. Gavino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

I, Benny Gavino, one of the hundred J1 teachers here in Hawai‘i share our expertise to continuously uplift and reach the standard of education to globally competitive. Our Ele Ele School is filling with Filipino J1 teachers just to give highest quality of education for the students here in Hawai‘i same with other 54 schools from Waimea to Lahaina. It is very welcoming to our part to teach while I'm sharing our culture exchange and make every learning of the students with diversified and yet meaningful to the students. From this, the department will employ 116 experienced teachers tha will have a great impact to the education of the students for the school year 2025-2026.

However, existing law of the state hinders the J1 Program not to uplift the situation of the J1 Teachers unlike in Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Ang the Hawai‘i J1s were classified as Emergency hired that requires to pass the exam that cost about \$ 1000 that supposedly use for our family and for living support of the J1 in a regular basis.

The HB 439, HD 1 helps that qualified international teachers working in Hawai‘i’s schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai‘i’s keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can help not only teachers but also students of Hawai‘i to cater their needs when it comes to globally competitiveness and diverse learning which in the long run could help not only the next generation but also the state to be best place for learning and best teachers as well.

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school years 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Mahalo!

Sincerely,
Mr. Emelito A. Ortillo

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lara Escoto, and I am a J-1 teacher at Kahakai Elementary. I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license and recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

During my time at Kahakai Elementary, I have witnessed firsthand the impact that dedicated teachers can have on students and the school community. The collaboration and support from fellow educators continue to foster a positive, inclusive environment where students and staff thrive. One of the greatest benefits of the J-1 program is the ability to stay in Hawaii for up to five years with licensure, allowing us to build lasting relationships with students and families.

However, the process of obtaining a full teaching license can be a major obstacle, particularly for teachers like myself with internationally recognized credentials. While I am proud of my qualifications, the requirement to pass multiple Praxis exams is burdensome. The time spent preparing for and taking these exams takes away from my ability to focus on lesson planning and connecting with my students. The effort and energy I invest in test preparation could be better spent on enhancing classroom instruction.

Additionally, equal pay for equal work is critical. Teachers with international experience should be eligible for the same compensations as those in hard-to-fill positions. Streamlining the licensure process and recognizing internationally accredited credentials would allow teachers like me to contribute more effectively to our schools and communities.

Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, Hawaii classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires," requiring additional exams that can cost over \$1,000. These exams take time away from essential tasks like curriculum planning and engaging with families, and J-1 teachers are ineligible for compensation offered to other educators.

The J-1 Visa Program provides valuable cultural and educational opportunities for Hawaii's schools. By creating an international teacher license, the State can better support qualified teachers and ensure continuity of instruction, enriching students' learning experiences.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 12:04:36 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ANNALIZA PIGAO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

My name is Annaliza Pigao and I am a Science teacher at Aliamanu Middle School. I am writing in strong support of HB439, a bill that would create an international visiting teacher license in Hawai'i. I have witnessed firsthand the incredibly positive impact that international teachers, particularly those on J-1 visas, have had on our students, our school community, and our campus climate.

Our school has benefited greatly from the presence of a J-1 teacher. I brought a wealth of diverse experiences, perspectives, and teaching methodologies that enrich the learning environment for all students. As an international teacher, I don't just teach; I also inspire, broaden horizons, and create a more globally aware and accepting school culture.

Currently, the short-term nature of the J-1 visa program creates instability for our schools and our students. HB439 addresses this critical issue by allowing these highly valued educators to remain in Hawai'i for up to five years if we obtain the international visiting teacher license. This extended stay will provide much-needed continuity for our students, allowing them to build strong, lasting relationships with their teachers. It will also allow our schools to invest in teachers like us, knowing that our expertise and dedication will benefit our community for a longer period.

The provisions within HB439 are essential for ensuring fairness and respect for educators. Equal pay for equal work is a fundamental principle, and I applaud the bill's commitment to this. Granting access to differentials for licensed teachers further acknowledges the value and qualification we bring. Recognizing our internationally recognized credentials as equivalent to "highly qualified" status would be a great help. We have already demonstrated our expertise and experience in our home countries, and we should not impose unnecessary burdens, such as expensive and time-consuming Praxis exams, when we already hold international licenses and degrees.

By streamlining the licensing process and removing unnecessary obstacles, HB439 allows us, as international teachers, to focus on what truly matters: supporting our students, enriching our schools, and contributing to our community. It allows us to do what we are best qualified to do and what we came here to do.

I urge the committee to support HB439. It is a win-win for our students, our schools, and our community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 4:01:41 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shanika Mae Isagan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

My name is Shanika Mae Isagan, a 6th grade teacher at Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School. I wholeheartedly support HB 439, which proposes an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is incredibly important to me, and to teachers like me who have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines. We came to Hawaii with a deep passion for education and a desire to share our knowledge and experience with your children. We've poured our hearts into our training and dedicated ourselves to the profession, yet we face significant hurdles, like the Praxis exams, to continue serving students in the Hawaii Department of Education. It feels like an unnecessary obstacle placed in our path when all we want is to nurture and inspire the young minds in our classrooms.

As international teachers, we are deeply committed to providing the best possible education for our students here in Hawaii. We see their potential and are driven to help them succeed. However, the reality of balancing our teaching responsibilities with the intense pressure of preparing for multiple licensure exams is incredibly challenging. It pulls us away from what we love most – lesson planning, engaging with our students, and creating a positive and supportive learning environment. While I understand the need to demonstrate subject knowledge, I truly believe that our existing qualifications, experience, and the dedication we demonstrate in our classrooms every day should be recognized. Requiring us to take numerous standardized tests adds a financial and emotional strain that ultimately takes away from our students.

The limited duration of our visas, ranging from three to five years, adds another layer of uncertainty and anxiety. It's difficult to fully invest in our students and our communities when we're constantly worried about the future. I've also heard that extending our stay to the full five years is contingent upon obtaining licensure, which only compounds the pressure we face. The high cost of the Praxis exams, combined with the limited time we have, makes it incredibly difficult to focus entirely on what truly matters: our students. We are here to share our love of learning and contribute to the vibrant educational landscape of Hawaii, but these bureaucratic hurdles make our mission so much harder.

I urge you to consider the impact of HB 439 on dedicated teachers like myself. We are not just numbers or statistics; we are individuals with a genuine passion for teaching and a deep desire to make a difference in the lives of Hawaii's children. Passing this bill would not only streamline the licensing process but also show international teachers that their skills and experience are valued and respected. It would allow us to focus on what we do best: inspiring the next generation.

I fell in love with Hawaii the moment I set foot on this beautiful island. I adore the school where I currently teach; it feels like home. I've never felt like I don't belong because the aloha spirit, the 'ohana, is so strong here. Every single day, I wake up before sunrise with one goal in mind: to help my students become the best versions of themselves. That's what drives me, what inspires me, and what makes me excited to face each new day.

My heart is here, with my students, in this community. I wish to continue inspiring and supporting them, nurturing their dreams, and helping them reach their full potential. However, the burden of excessive testing requirements threatens to pull me away from that core mission. It takes time, energy, and focus away from what truly matters: my students.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I respectfully recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. This bill is not just about paperwork and procedures; it's about allowing dedicated teachers like myself to focus on what we do best: teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students. It's about ensuring that the children of Hawaii have access to passionate and qualified educators who are fully present and engaged in their learning. Please, let us focus on our students, on building relationships, and on fostering a love of learning. We need your support to make this happen.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 5:11:29 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Neil Christian T. Corales	Hawaii State Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 5:56:23 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Princes Joy Calingangan	Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

I am Princes Joy V. Calingangan, a Special Education Teacher at August Ahrens Elementary School. I strongly support HB439, which would establish an international visiting teacher license for Filipino teachers. This legislation is crucial in addressing the critical teacher shortage, particularly in special education, and offers mutual benefits for both Filipino teachers and American students.

Teaching in Waipahu, with its strong Filipino community, has been a truly heartwarming experience. The predominantly Filipino student population has created a sense of belonging, making it feel like a home away from home, especially for special education teachers like myself. We've been deeply touched by the appreciation from parents, who often commend our patience and dedication to their children with disabilities. The strong rapport we've built with families here is incredibly rewarding and reinforces the positive impact we're able to make.

This positive experience underscores the eagerness of many qualified Filipino teachers, like myself, to contribute to addressing the critical teacher shortage and ensuring all students have access to a quality education. The establishment of the proposed international visiting teacher license, as outlined in HB439, would streamline the process for us to share our expertise and fill these vital roles.

My time teaching in the US has been invaluable, providing me with the opportunity to immerse myself in a different educational system, explore diverse teaching methodologies, and adapt to new classroom environments. This professional growth has significantly enhanced my skills and broadened my teaching repertoire, ultimately benefiting my students.

In turn, Filipino teachers bring unique skills, knowledge, and perspectives to American classrooms. We offer specialized expertise in various subjects and teaching approaches, enriching the learning experience for all students. Moreover, we foster cross-cultural understanding by sharing our cultural heritage and perspectives, promoting global citizenship and broadening students' worldviews. The interaction between Filipino teachers and American students creates a rich learning environment that benefits everyone involved. HB439 would facilitate this vital exchange and ensure a more equitable and enriching educational experience for all students.

Princes Joy V. Calingangan

SPED-FSC Teacher

August Ahrens Elementary School

Waipahu, Hawaii

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 6:25:14 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annie Baltazar	DOE - Lanai High and Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Annie Baltazar, I am a J! teacher in Lanai High and Elementary School. I am writing to express my strong support for the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and to recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1.

It is my second year now teaching in LHES. I have witnessed firsthand the impact that dedicated teachers can have on students and the community. The J-1 Teacher Exchange Program has been instrumental in addressing teacher shortages across the United States, including here in Hawai'i. By bringing qualified international educators into our classrooms, we not only fill critical teaching positions but also enrich our students' learning experiences with diverse cultural perspectives. We serve as cultural ambassadors, fostering cross-cultural understanding and preparing our students to thrive in a global society. Our presence encourages the exchange of innovative teaching methodologies and ideas, benefiting both students and faculty.

Currently, Hawai'i requires us J-1 visa teachers to pass the Praxis exams in basic skills, pedagogy, and content knowledge to obtain licensure. While these exams are designed to ensure teaching competency, they present significant challenges for international educators. The financial burden of these exams can exceed \$1,000, a substantial expense for many. Additionally, the time and effort required to prepare for these exams detract from our primary responsibilities, such as lesson planning, student engagement, and community involvement. This process can be particularly daunting for those who have already demonstrated their qualifications and teaching proficiency in their home countries.

International educators participating in the J-1 program like me are required to have academic credentials evaluated by recognized agencies to ensure we meet U.S. educational standards. We also provide valid copies of our current teaching licenses from our home countries. These steps confirm that we possess the necessary qualifications and experience to teach effectively. However, despite these verifications, the additional requirement of passing the Praxis exams in Hawai'i creates an unnecessary barrier, potentially discouraging highly qualified teachers from contributing to our education system.

By amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1, Hawai'i can establish an international visiting teacher license that acknowledges the existing qualifications of J-1 educators. This change would not only alleviate undue burdens on these teachers but also enhance our ability to attract and retain diverse, talented educators who enrich our students' learning experiences.

Mahalo for considering my testimony on this important matter.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 6:57:37 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shayne Greenland	Ilima Intermediate School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, HD1, and respectfully recommend amending it to align with SB 819, SD1. This measure is critical in establishing an international visiting teacher license, which will help address our ongoing teacher shortage while enriching the educational experiences of Hawai‘i’s students.

The Hawai‘i Department of Education’s J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success, bringing 218 certified international educators holding equivalent degrees to U.S.-trained teachers to 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff locations and special education. These dedicated professionals have embraced the call to provide high-quality education while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. In the 2025-2026 school year, an additional 116 international educators will join the program as part of the Department’s Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, current state licensing regulations limit the full potential of J-1 visa teachers. Unlike other states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have reciprocal licensing processes without additional exams, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires them to take costly and time-consuming examinations, sometimes exceeding \$1,000. Preparing for these exams detracts from their ability to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Furthermore, J-1 teachers are ineligible for the additional compensation available to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing equal work.

At Ilima Intermediate School, where I serve a diverse student population, J-1 teachers have had a profoundly positive impact on students, our school community, and the overall campus climate. They bring invaluable global perspectives, cultural diversity, and international best practices that enrich classroom learning and foster cross-cultural understanding. Their presence enhances not only academic outcomes but also the social-emotional growth of our students by exposing them to diverse viewpoints and experiences.

HB 439, HD1 ensures that qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai‘i for up to five years, providing continuity in instruction and enriching the learning experience for our keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the state can fully

leverage the skills, knowledge, and expertise of these educators while promoting a more diverse and representative workforce.

I urge you to support the passage of this measure. Recognizing and valuing the contributions of J-1 teachers is not only fair but essential to strengthening education in Hawai'i. Thank you for your time, attention, and continued commitment to improving our schools.

Mahalo.

Shayne Greenland - Principal

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:00:36 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jan Mariae Margaret Labadan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 HD1

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jan Mariae Margaret M. Labadan, and I am a J-1 teacher in Hawaii. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439 HD1, a bill that will significantly benefit Hawaii's students and schools by addressing the challenges faced by J-1 teachers.

As a J-1 teacher, I have witnessed the great contributions my colleagues make to our educational system. We bring various outlooks, improving classrooms with global experiences and promoting cross-cultural understanding. We introduce creative teaching methodologies, ignite a passion for learning in students, and provide critical support to those with diverse learning needs. My fellow J-1 teachers serve as mentors, actively participate in extracurricular activities, and become deeply integrated members of our school 'ohana. Outside of the classroom, we expand horizons and reinforce community ties by sharing our cultures through storytelling, activities, and culinary adventures. We act as role models by exhibiting fortitude, flexibility, and a strong dedication to education. Nonetheless, there are a number of difficulties with the existing J-1 visa regime. We are unable to properly invest in our students and the communities we serve because of the ongoing uncertainty caused by the temporary nature of our permits. Our mid-year departures produce disruptions that have a detrimental effect on student learning and deprive schools of committed, experienced teachers. We are also unable to adequately support our schools' long-term objectives and strategic plans because of this volatility. HB 439 provides an important remedy. It would give teachers and schools much-needed stability if J-1 teachers were allowed to stay in Hawaii for five years after receiving their license. Fundamental justice and a fair assessment of our abilities and knowledge require equal compensation for equal labor, which includes differentials for certified teachers. It shows respect for our professional status and expedites the licensing procedure when we acknowledge our globally recognized credentials as proof of our qualifications and waive the expensive and time-consuming Praxis exams when we already hold international degrees and licenses. Enacting HB 439 is an investment in the future of Hawaii's educational system, not just a way to help J-1 teachers. It guarantees that we can keep improving our students' lives and adding to Hawaii's dynamic educational environment. This law enables us to concentrate on the things that really count: fostering student development, fortifying our school communities, and creating a welcoming and stimulating learning environment for everyone. With all due respect, I implore the legislature to back HB 439 and give Hawaii's keiki's future top priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:20:17 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JEOHANA PEARL JAMON	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Committees,

I wholeheartedly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license. I suggest amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1 - Realting to Education.

For Hawaii's keiki, the Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a huge success. Currently, 218 certified educators with degrees comparable to those of US-trained educators teach 55 schools throughout Hawaii, mostly in special education and hard-to-staff areas. International educators working via the Department's J-1 Visa program have eagerly embraced the opportunity to serve as cultural ambassadors in their communities and offer Hawaii students the best education possible. As part of its Strategic Plan to develop students to be globally competitive and Locally Committed", the Department will hire additional international educators for the school year 25-26.

However, prospective instructors' full potential for the J-1 Visa program is hampered by the State's current licensing regulations. In contrast to other states such as Nevada, California, and Texas, which have reciprocal and simplified licensing procedures for foreign instructors that do not require extra tests, Hawaii considers J-1 teachers "emergency hires". To receive this distinction, potential participants must pass a battery of extra, in-depth tests, which can cost more than \$1000. Exam preparation drastically cuts down on the amount of time needed for curriculum planning, family meetings, and formative assessment analysis. Additionally, even though J-1 instructors put in the same amount of labor, they are not entitled to the extra pay given to teachers in positions that are difficult to fill.

By creating an international license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawaii's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Sincerely,

Jeohana Jamon, J-1 Teacher

Kihei Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:26:36 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ma Arriesa B Tejano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of establishing an international visiting teacher license. I recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1, which addresses education-related matters.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has proven highly beneficial to Hawaii's students. Currently, 218 qualified educators, holding degrees comparable to U.S. standards, are employed across 55 schools, primarily in areas facing staffing challenges and in special education. These international educators, from communities like Waimea to Naalehu, have enthusiastically contributed to high-quality education while enriching their communities as cultural ambassadors. For the 2025-2026 school year, an additional 116 international educators will be employed as part of the Department's plan to foster students who are both "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, current state licensing regulations restrict the J-1 visa program's potential. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have simplified licensing for international educators, Hawaii categorizes J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation necessitates additional, costly examinations (potentially over \$1,000). Preparing for these exams detracts from essential tasks like analyzing student progress, communicating with families, and curriculum planning. Moreover, J-1 teachers are excluded from extra compensation offered for difficult-to-staff positions despite their equivalent contributions.

The J-1 Visa Program enhances educational and cultural opportunities in Hawaii's schools. HB 439, HD 1 is designed to enable qualified international teachers to stay for up to five years, ensuring consistent instruction and enriching learning experiences for students. Establishing an international teacher license without additional examinations will fully utilize the expertise of international educators and diversify the teaching workforce, reflecting Hawaii's global character.

Thank you for the chance to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:27:40 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Norven Perez Badillo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Norven P. Badillo, a STEM teacher at Kahakai Elementary School, and I am honored to be part of this vibrant educational community here in Hawaii. As a new J1 teacher in the United States, particularly in Hawaii, the experience has been nothing short of a transformative journey. Coming from the Philippines, I've faced various challenges as I adapt to the differences in lifestyle, teaching methodologies, and cultural norms. These changes, while daunting at times, have provided me with invaluable opportunities for growth both as an educator and as an individual. The adjustment to the American education system, the diverse learning styles of my students, and the dynamics of working with new colleagues have required patience, resilience, and an open heart. However, one of the most rewarding aspects of this experience has been the chance to contribute my passion for teaching and learning to a new community. The Filipino teachers here, including myself, bring with us not only a wealth of knowledge but also an intrinsic love for teaching and nurturing young minds. This passion, combined with our unique perspectives and experiences, allows us to build meaningful connections with our students and their families, making the journey of teaching in this new environment much more fulfilling. As a STEM teacher at Kahakai Elementary, I am dedicated to bringing innovative and cutting-edge knowledge to our students. In particular, I focus on coding and programming, subjects that are increasingly relevant in today's technology-driven world. By equipping our students with the foundational skills of coding, I aim to empower them with the critical thinking and problem-solving abilities that are essential for success in the 21st century. Seeing the excitement and curiosity in their eyes as they begin to grasp the concepts of coding has been one of the highlights of my teaching career. One of the most significant milestones I've had so far was hosting our STEM Night, an event that I can proudly say was a huge success for our school community. This event wasn't just a celebration of STEM learning, but also an opportunity for our students' families to engage in the learning process alongside their children. It was heartwarming to see families come together to explore the fascinating world of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and to witness the bond that formed between the students, their families, and the school. The enthusiasm and participation of everyone involved demonstrated the power of collaboration and community, reinforcing the idea that learning doesn't stop at the classroom door. It continues in the home, in the community, and throughout life. Overall, while the transition to a new country and a new teaching environment presented its challenges, I firmly believe that the work we do as educators—especially as STEM teachers—is making a significant impact. We are not just teaching our students about coding or problem-solving, but also helping them build the confidence and curiosity they need to succeed in the future. The journey may have its hurdles, but the rewards are incredibly fulfilling, and I am

grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the growth and development of the next generation of learners here in Hawaii.

Testimony of Support

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice- Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

As a J1 teacher, I strongly support the proposed amendment to HB439, HD1, aligning it with SB819, SD1, to create an International Visiting Teacher License. This initiative will allow us Philippine educators to bring diverse perspectives, teaching methods, and cultural experiences into the U.S. classrooms, enhancing students' global competencies and preparing them for the interconnected world. It will also help address critical teacher shortages in subjects like STEM, special education, and languages, ensuring students receive high-quality instruction. The license will align international educators with rigorous standards, ensuring effective teaching while promoting global collaboration and professional growth. This amendment is essential for diversifying Hawaii's teaching workforce, improving educational outcomes, and positioning the state as a leader in educational innovation. I urge the committee to support this amendment for the benefit of our students and future generations.

Mahalo,

Maylen M. Patanao
Special Ed. Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:33:24 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
KAREN FAYE SOBERANO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

MY TESTIMONY

I am Karen Faye Soberano, a SPED Teacher at Solomon Elementary. I've been teaching in Solomon for two years now. For the two years of experience teaching here in Hawaii- I might say this is a testimony of loving the Island, loving the culture, loving the keiki of Hawaii and loving teaching as my profession. That DOE is my ohana- my home away from home.

Education in Hawaii reflects the state's unique cultural, historical, and geographic context. The state's diverse population, the central role of Native Hawaiian culture, and the challenges posed by its island geography make Hawaii's educational system distinctive. This is why my interest in teaching here in Hawaii becomes deeper.

As a teacher, I've seen firsthand how diversity in teaching staff can bring unique perspectives and innovations to the classroom. However, we face significant barriers when it comes to hiring highly qualified teachers, as current licensing requirements are often restrictive or difficult to navigate. The Praxis exam can be a real challenge for me, especially when I am balancing everything else on my plate. It can feel overwhelming because it's not just about knowing the material, but also about how you can best demonstrate your understanding under pressure and the cost of the Praxis exam adds to the stress. The fees for the test, plus the cost of study materials or prep courses, can really add up, especially if I need to retake sections. It's one of those extra barriers that doesn't always feel fair, especially for me who is already managing a lot of responsibilities.

An international teacher license would help alleviate teacher shortages by attracting qualified educators from other countries, ensuring that every student has access to high-quality education, no matter where their teacher is from. It would also help our students develop global awareness and adaptability in an increasingly interconnected world.

For teachers like myself who have gained qualifications abroad, navigating complex and often costly certification processes can be an overwhelming and time-consuming experience. An international license would streamline this process, allowing skilled teachers to enter the workforce sooner, providing more opportunities for professional growth and financial stability.

The J-1 program allows teachers from other countries to come to the U.S. for a period of time to share their knowledge, skills, and cultural perspectives with American students, while also

getting the chance to experience life and work in the U.S. It's a fantastic way to foster global understanding and diversity in schools. We- the J1 teachers hired because of our eligibility. We have the qualifications since we are also licensed teachers in the Philippines. We have passed the Licensure examinations which are composed of General Pedagogy, Subject-specific knowledge, Reading and writing and Professional ethics. Which I believe have the same content with the Praxis. We were hired by a certain agency that links to the DOE here in Hawaii and paid an amount for the processing and everything that needed to be paid just to come here including plane tickets, housing, and some of our prime commodities when we arrived here. We have decided to apply and get qualified not to be forced to apply and pay the amount needed. The loan we owe just to come here is our discretion if we do like to grab it and use it. That loan helps us a lot to suffice the needed amount just to come here.

In conclusion, I fully support this bill because I believe it will create a more inclusive, dynamic, and effective education system for our students. By recognizing the qualifications of international teachers and offering them a streamlined path to licensure, we will not only support educators but also empower the next generation of learners to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. In this way, we the J1 teachers could really do our job to be an advocate of cultural exchange and to help our learners to broaden their worldviews.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:34:33 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lyn Nicole Chua	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I urge you to amend HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1, which relates to education.

As a J-1 visa teacher working in Hawai'i, I've seen firsthand the incredible impact that the J-1 Visa Program has on the students . This program has brought educators with qualifications equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers, education and experience-wise.

The J-1 Visa Program offers invaluable educational and cultural opportunities to schools throughout Hawai'i. By creating an international teacher license, us qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai'i's schools for up to 5 years. This ensures consistent, high-quality learning, as well as cultural opportunities for Hawai'i' schools.

However, the current licensing rules in Hawai'i present significant obstacles for prospective teachers in the J-1 visa program. Unlike other states with streamlined processes, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires". This forces us to take additional comprehensive exams that can cost over \$1,000. The time spent preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time available to analyze student progress, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Furthermore, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

Creating an international teacher license without these additional examinations would allow the state to fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators. It would also create a more diverse workforce that truly reflects Hawai'i's global community.

Thank you for considering my perspective. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. All the best!

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:37:48 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eloisa Micah Guabes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Matayoshi and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Eloisa Micah Guabes**, and I am an English Language Arts teacher at **Waimea Canyon Middle School** on Kauaʻi. I am submitting this testimony in **strong support** of HB439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As an educator, I have dedicated my career to shaping young minds and ensuring that my students receive high-quality education. Since joining **Waimea Canyon Middle School**, I have worked tirelessly to provide engaging and effective instruction, contribute to the school community, and support my students in their academic and personal growth. My training and experience as a licensed teacher from the Philippines have allowed me to bring valuable skills, diverse perspectives, and innovative teaching strategies that benefit both my students and my colleagues.

However, obtaining full licensure in Hawaiʻi presents significant challenges for international teachers like myself. The **Praxis exams**, required for licensure, are not only **expensive** but also **not readily available** across the islands. In many cases, I would have to **travel to Oʻahu**, adding financial and logistical burdens that make the process even more difficult. These barriers do not reflect the expertise, years of training, and foreign credentials that international teachers already possess. This bill **acknowledges the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience** that we bring from our home countries and provides a fair and reasonable pathway for us to continue making a meaningful impact in Hawaiʻi's schools.

Hawaiʻi, like many states, faces an ongoing **teacher shortage**, particularly in rural and underserved communities. The establishment of an international teacher license would **help address this shortage by recognizing the qualifications of dedicated, highly skilled educators** who are already contributing to the state's education system. By passing this bill, Hawaiʻi will be honoring **diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent**, ensuring that our keiki continue to receive the best possible education.

I urge you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Eloisa Micah Guabes

English Language Arts Teacher

Waimea Canyon Middle School, Kauaʻi

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:38:26 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alvin Montecalto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Esteemed Committee Members:

I wholeheartedly support the establishment of an international educator licensing framework and that HB 439, HD1 be revised to align with SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. The success of the Department's J-1 Visa Program has been remarkable for the students of Hawai'i. To date, 218 certified international educators, holding degrees equivalent to their U.S. counterparts, are making invaluable contributions in 55 schools throughout the state, especially in areas that struggle to attract qualified teachers and in the realm of special education. These international educators have eagerly stepped in to provide exceptional educational experiences while enriching their communities with cultural insights.

The current licensing framework imposes significant challenges on teachers from the J-1 Visa Program, limiting their full potential. In contrast to states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have adopted streamlined and reciprocal licensing procedures for international teachers without requiring extra examinations, Hawai'i categorizes J-1 educators as "emergency hires." This designation forces these educators into a cumbersome process of taking several costly and extensive exams, sometimes totaling over \$1,000. The preparation for these examinations detracts precious time from their ability to engage in formative assessments, collaborate with families, and design effective curricula. Furthermore, J-1 educators are deprived of the additional compensation often afforded to teachers in high-need positions, despite fulfilling similar responsibilities. The J-1 Visa Program plays a crucial role in delivering high-quality education and cultural experiences to schools across Hawai'i. By supporting HB 439, HD1, we can ensure that qualified international teachers are afforded the chance to remain for up to five years, thereby enhancing consistency in instruction and fostering valuable educational and cultural experiences for Hawai'i's students. Creating an international teacher license devoid of supplementary examinations would empower the State to fully harness the talents, expertise, and diverse perspectives of international educators, reflecting the rich tapestry of Hawai'i's global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony regarding HB 439 HD1.

Alvin L. Montecalto

CKMS - Middle School Math Teacher

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:40:26 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jerome Menesses	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Everyone!

I am Jerome Menesses, and I am a middle school Science Teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB439 HD1.

Both my wife, Maria Joy Menesses and I are J-1 teachers here in Hawai'i, bringing years of teaching experience and a passion for education. We both hold professional teaching licenses from the Philippines, and I also have out-of-state licenses from New Zealand. I applied for reciprocity in Hawai'i, hoping my credentials would be fully recognized, but I was only granted a reduction in the number of PRAXIS exams required. Despite having proven my qualifications, I still cannot obtain a full Hawai'i teaching license without taking more exams. I know that this is part of HTSB rules to hire globally competitive teachers but I also heard that some of the out of state license are just being converted to Hawai'i Teaching License and not taking PRAXIS Exams. I feel being discriminated by this rules.

This has placed a heavy financial burden on our family. Even though we both work as full-time teachers, the high cost of living in Hawai'i makes it difficult to make ends meet. As emergency hire teachers, we earn less than fully licensed teachers, and with housing costs taking up a large portion of our income, supporting our family in the Philippines has been an ongoing challenge.

Hawai'i is in desperate need of qualified teachers, and international teachers are already here, working hard every day to meet this need. We are dedicated and committed to the success of Hawai'i's students, but we need stability to continue making a difference in the classroom.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB439 HD1, so international teachers can continue to serve Hawai'i's students without unnecessary barriers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jerome Menesses

Middle School Science Teacher

Lahaina Intermediate School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:42:32 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Ann Ureta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Warm Greetings Chair Matayoshi and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to advocate for the creation of an international visiting teacher license, and I recommend aligning HB 439, HD1 with SB 819, SD1, which focuses on education.

The J-1 Visa Program is invaluable, enriching schools across Hawai'i with diverse educational and cultural perspectives. By establishing an international teacher license, qualified international teachers like myself will have the opportunity to contribute to Hawai'i's schools for up to 5 years. This commitment ensures not only consistent, high-quality instruction but also enriches the learning experience with diverse cultural insights for Hawai'i's students and schools.

However, the existing licensing framework in Hawai'i places undue burdens on prospective J-1 visa teachers. Unlike other states that have simplified their licensing for international educators. This classification requires us to undergo additional, comprehensive exams and preparations. The time I spend preparing for these exams directly detracts from the time I could be using to assess my students' needs, connect with their families, and develop engaging lesson plans and participate in any cultural activities in the community. Moreover, despite carrying the same workload and responsibilities, J-1 teachers are not eligible for the full compensation and limited stay of 3 years in spite of the schools and school principals expressing their support and being vocal about loving the performance and contributions of the j-1 teachers in every school.

By creating an international teacher license without mandating these extra examinations, the state would be empowering us to fully utilize our unique skills, knowledge, and experiences to the benefit of Hawai'i's students. It would also foster a more diverse educational environment that truly reflects Hawai'i's global community.

I sincerely appreciate your time and consideration of my perspective.

Many Mahalo!

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:44:35 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Spencer Margaret	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J1 visa program has been a success for Hawai'i's keiki. Currently, there are 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawai'i, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. This program has significantly contributed to the success of Hawaii's schools by sharing diverse cultural insights, and expanding students' global awareness. It also enhances the quality of education especially promoting cross-cultural understanding.

As a J-1 visa holder and 8th grade inclusion teacher in Hawaii, I have seen the positive impact that educators like myself can have on students, particularly in a state as diverse and unique as ours. The opportunity to teach here has not only allowed me to share my knowledge and passion for teaching children with special needs, but also to learn from my students and the rich cultural environment that Hawaii offers. For my students, the experience of learning from someone with a different background helps them to grow in ways that go beyond academics — it encourages curiosity, open-mindedness, and a deeper appreciation for the world around them.

TESTIMONY

Dear Members of the Legislature,

My name is Mark Vincent Espiritu, and I am a J-1 teacher at Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School, where I teach 8th grade English Language Arts and Social Studies Inclusion Class. Kalama Intermediate is home to over 800 students, serving grades 6 through 8, with students coming from diverse communities spanning Huelo to Kipahulu. I am honored to be part of this vibrant learning environment, where I contribute to student success while engaging in meaningful professional growth.

The J-1 visa program has provided me with the opportunity to bring my expertise, cultural perspective, and passion for education to Hawaii's public schools. My foreign-evaluated transcripts and licensure from the Philippines reflect my years of training and experience—qualifications that align with global teaching standards. However, despite these credentials, Hawaii's current licensing structure presents challenges for J-1 educators. The additional testing requirements, which can cost over \$1,000, create unnecessary financial and logistical barriers. This process detracts from the time and focus that should be dedicated to analyzing formative assessments, collaborating with families, and planning effective instruction.

Despite these challenges, my experience at Kalama Intermediate has been deeply fulfilling, thanks to the unwavering support of the department head, administrators, teachers, and the school-wide community. From the moment I joined the faculty, I was welcomed with open arms and provided with the necessary guidance to transition smoothly into my role. The mentorship and collaboration I have received have allowed me to not only contribute to student learning but also grow professionally.

Furthermore, my presence in the classroom has had a profound impact on students, particularly those of Filipino heritage. Representation in education matters—when students see teachers who share their background, they gain confidence, motivation, and a stronger sense of belonging. Beyond academic benefits, diverse educator representation fosters cultural appreciation, empathy, and global-mindedness among all students. By establishing a provisional licensing pathway for visiting international teachers, Hawaii can fully recognize and leverage the talents of educators who are already making significant contributions to student learning. Streamlining this process will ensure equity in hiring and compensation, attract more highly qualified teachers to serve in hard-to-fill positions, and reinforce Hawaii's commitment to a globally competitive and locally committed education system. I wholeheartedly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Vincent Espiritu
J-1 Inclusion Teacher, 8th Grade ELA & Social Studies

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:49:34 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Dingus	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am an 8th grade teacher on Kauai. I have worked with several of the J1 teachers for the past few years. They have helped the community here at CKMS. They have all been professional and caring for the students and other school staff. Without them, the school would have been short by another half dozen teachers. Staffing is an issue at schools. This group helps solve that. I believe they should be able to stay for longer than originally thought.

Mahalo

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:49:52 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aisa Mingaracal	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and members of the committee,

I support the intent of HB439, HD1, and offer the following revisions to strengthen it and ensure a smooth licensing process for visiting international teachers:

(7) Establish a visiting international teacher license, outlining its requirements, to promote cultural and educational exchange between Hawai‘i and other nations. This license will allow teachers hired by the department or public charter schools to teach in their qualified subject areas and grade levels, provided that:

(A) International teachers participating in a designated U.S. Department of State J-1 visa exchange program will receive a renewable visiting international teacher license upon demonstrating:

(i) A valid, current J-1 visa; (ii) A degree equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree or higher; (iii) Completion of a teacher preparation program equivalent to U.S. standards, including documentation of basic skills and subject matter knowledge deemed equivalent by the Department; (iv) A valid teaching license from their home country; and (v) Three years of experience teaching in a pre-K through grade 12 public or private school setting.

(B) License renewal requires a valid, current J-1 visa and continued participation in a designated U.S. Department of State exchange program.

The Department’s J-1 Visa Program has proven invaluable for Hawai‘i’s keiki. Currently, 218 certified international educators, holding qualifications equivalent to their U.S. counterparts, teach in 55 Hawai‘i schools, often in hard-to-staff and special education positions. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā‘ālehu, these educators provide high-quality instruction while serving as cultural ambassadors. The Department plans to hire an additional 116 international educators for the 2025-26 school year, supporting its strategic goal of preparing students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”

However, Hawai‘i’s current licensing system hinders the program. Unlike states such as Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which have streamlined processes, Hawai‘i designates J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This requires them to take additional, costly examinations (over \$1,000), which detracts from valuable time that could be spent on lesson planning, student assessment,

and family engagement. Furthermore, despite performing equivalent work, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered for hard-to-fill positions. These proposed revisions do not lower standards; international teachers will still be required to hold a valid teaching license in their home country, possess a U.S.-equivalent bachelor's degree, and have completed an equivalent teacher preparation program.

By allowing qualified international teachers to remain for up to five years, HB 439, HD1 promotes continuity and enriches learning experiences for Hawai'i's students. Establishing an international teacher license *without* unnecessary examinations will allow the state to fully benefit from these educators' skills and experience, creating a more diverse and globally representative teaching workforce. This streamlined approach will free up teachers' time to focus on what matters most: our keiki.

Thank you for considering my testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Sincerely,

Aisa Mingaracal

ELA Teacher

Baldwin High School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:53:02 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Jane Empalmado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly advocate for the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. The Department's J-1 Visa Program has proven highly successful for Hawai'i's students. So far, 218 certified educators with degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers are employed in 55 schools across Hawai'i, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators participating in the J-1 Visa Program have answered the call to deliver high-quality education while also serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities.

For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department will hire an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed." However, the State's current licensing rules limit the full potential of J-1 Visa teachers. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which offer streamlined or reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without requiring additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This status requires them to take a series of costly exams—often totaling over \$1,000—that significantly cut into the time available for analyzing formative assessments, meeting with families, and planning curriculum.

Additionally, J-1 teachers do not qualify for extra compensation provided to educators in hard-to-fill positions, even though they perform the same duties. The J-1 Visa Program offers valuable educational and cultural opportunities to schools throughout Hawai'i. HB 439, HD1 would allow qualified international teachers to stay in Hawai'i schools for up to five years, providing continuous instruction and enriching educational and cultural experiences for students. By introducing an international teacher license without additional exams, the State could fully utilize the expertise and experience of international educators, fostering a more diverse workforce that reflects Hawai'i's global community. This bill mandates the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to create an international teacher license for specific visa holders, outlining the necessary requirements for obtaining the license. It also requires the Board to submit a report to the Legislature.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 439, HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:54:27 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Federlie Abejero	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Federlie Sabado-Abejero and I am a SPED/English and World History Inclusion teacher in Kaua'i High School. I am currently handling the Grade 10 class. I am writing in strong support of HB 439 HD1, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License in Hawai'i. This bill is important for teachers like me, who have already earned our teaching license in the Philippines, but experience additional challenges, such as the Praxis tests, in order to keep on serving students in Hawai'i.

As an educator with 21 years of teaching experience, I have shown dedication in ensuring the holistic development of my students. Since joining Kaua'i High School in September 2025, I have worked tirelessly to give effective instruction and engaging activities, support my students in their learning and personal growth, and contribute to the success of the school community.

However, despite my full experience and commitment, obtaining full licensure in Hawai'i remains a big challenge due to the financial and logistical constraints of the Praxis tests. These tests are expensive and it adds to our struggles as teachers.

Hawai'i is my dream place to teach and now that I am finally here, I can truly say that it is my second home because it is so similar to the Philippines. I love its people, its culture, and the school and the Filipino-American community welcomed me with open arms. My goal is to continue what I love most, to teach and inspire students. I respectfully urge all of you to pass HB 439 HD1 to make sure that international teachers can continue enhancing and shaping the young minds of Hawai'i.

Thank you for your time and we are looking forward to a positive response from you.

Respectfully,

Federlie Sabado-Abejero

SPED-English and World History Inclusion Teacher

Kaua'i High School

Lihue, Hawai'i

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 7:54:12 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grezylen O. Lalusin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License and recommend that HB439 be amended to align with SB819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

Hawai‘i’s J-1 Visa Program has been instrumental in addressing teacher shortages while enriching students’ learning experiences through cultural exchange. As an international educator, I am honored to be part of this initiative, bringing diverse teaching strategies and global perspectives to my students. However, the State’s current licensing requirements impose unnecessary burdens on international teachers, limiting the full potential of this valuable program.

Currently, international educators are classified as “emergency hires,” requiring them to take extensive and costly examinations—often exceeding \$1,000. These additional requirements not only create financial strain but also reduce the time we can dedicate to lesson planning, student assessments, and family engagement. Furthermore, despite teaching in hard-to-staff areas, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation provided to educators in these positions.

Other states have implemented streamlined or reciprocal licensing processes for international teachers without imposing additional testing requirements. By creating an International Visiting Teacher License, Hawai‘i can adopt a similar approach, ensuring that highly qualified educators can focus on delivering high-quality instruction without unnecessary licensing barriers.

HB439 ensures that international teachers can remain in Hawai‘i’s classrooms for up to five years, providing consistency for students and schools. By recognizing the expertise and dedication of international educators, this bill supports a diverse, globally connected workforce that reflects Hawai‘i’s multicultural identity.

I respectfully urge the committee to support HB439 and remove barriers that hinder the success of international teachers. Passing this bill will allow us to continue our mission of educating and inspiring Hawai‘i’s students.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Testimony in Support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. My name is Chabilita Meneses and I am writing to express my strong support, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. As a Social Studies teacher who has earned my teaching certification in the Philippines, I have encountered several barriers to continuing my work in the Hawaii Department of Education, particularly with the requirement to pass the Praxis exams.

While I am fully committed to delivering high-quality education to my students, balancing my teaching responsibilities with the pressure of preparing for multiple licensure exams has proven to be stressful and time-consuming. The time and effort spent preparing for these exams detracts from the time I could be using to engage with my students and plan meaningful lessons. While I understand the need to demonstrate subject mastery, I believe that the experience, skills, and dedication that international teachers bring to the classroom should be recognized without the added burden of additional standardized tests.

Furthermore, the temporary nature of our work visas, typically lasting between three to five years, adds an element of uncertainty. I have learned that extending my stay beyond three years is dependent on obtaining licensure, which creates additional stress, especially considering the financial burden of the Praxis exams.

I have developed a deep appreciation for Hawaii's people, culture, and the school community that has so warmly welcomed me. I am passionate about continuing to inspire and support students, and I believe that HB 439 will help reduce the unnecessary challenges that international teachers face, allowing us to focus on what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and contributing to the growth of Hawaii's students.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Chabilita Meneses

8th Grade Social Studies Teacher
Lahaina Intermediate School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:09:43 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
NICOLAS JR CRISPO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support for the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

It's a great opportunity to be part of The Department's J-1 Visa Program that has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's learners. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's learners while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

On the other hand, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires" that requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Moreover, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an

international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai‘i’s global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:13:02 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

February 19, 2025

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sarah Kern and I am a resident of Līhu‘e, Kaua‘i and an instructional coach at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School (CKMS). I am testifying in support of HB439 to recognize the teaching experiences and qualifications of international teachers who are helping to educate our keiki. CKMS currently has eight teachers who are on a J-1 visa. These teachers make up more than 10% of our faculty and are crucial members of our school’s community. They are team players who are incredibly dedicated to their teaching and can often build relationships with our Filipino students in ways that other teachers cannot.

As a coach, I am often asked to support teachers as they pursue a teaching license in Hawai‘i, and have been shocked to learn that our J-1 visa teachers are having to jump through multiple hoops and take extra Praxis exams in order to earn a Hawai‘i teaching license when they are already licensed to teach in the Philippines. These teachers are already facing challenges upon arriving in Hawai‘i, including finding housing, adapting to a new society and culture, and navigating the ins and outs of teaching at a new school within the Hawai‘i DOE which is a challenge in and of itself. One of our J-1 visa teachers has decades of experience in education and was even a principal in the Philippines. Shouldn’t his credentials be recognized here as well? Instead of forcing these teachers to study and pay for multiple Praxis exams, jumping through extra hoops while helping us fill our vacant positions, let’s support them and allow them to focus on what they came here to do – help to educate our keiki.

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

Mahalo nui loa,

Sarah Kern

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:24:11 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
APPLE JANE DONADILLO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

"Good afternoon Members of the Committee, my name is Apple Jane Donadillo, and I'm a Computer Science teacher at Nanakuli High and Intermediate School. I'm a J-1 teacher, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my experiences and speak in support of the proposed measures regarding J-1 teachers in Hawaii.

Coming to Hawaii to teach has been an incredible experience. I'm passionate about sharing my expertise with the students at Nanakuli High and Intermediate School and learning from the rich culture and traditions of this beautiful island. I've been so warmly welcomed by the community, my colleagues, and my students. I've seen firsthand the positive impact I can have on my students' lives, both inside and outside the classroom. For example," I've been able to share my knowledge and expertise as a teacher" , "I've been able to help students who were struggling with the lesson by using Project Inquiry Approach. Seeing their confidence grow has been incredibly rewarding."I'm also learning so much from my fellow teachers and contributing to a collaborative and supportive school environment. I enjoy NIT MEETING AND PD: "sharing my own cultural traditions with the students" or "collaborating with other teachers on new curriculum development".

The opportunity to stay in Hawaii for five years if licensed would be invaluable. The current two-year limit makes it difficult to fully integrate into the community and build lasting relationships with students and colleagues. Knowing I could stay longer would allow me to invest even more deeply in the school and the community, and provide greater stability for my students. Continuity is so important for their learning and well-being.

It's also essential that J-1 teachers receive equal pay for equal work, including access to the same differentials as other licensed teachers. We bring valuable skills and experience to the classroom, and we should be compensated fairly for our contributions. My international credentials represent years of study and dedication to my profession. It would be a great relief to have these credentials fully recognized and to not have to face the added burden of the Praxis exams when I already hold international licenses and degrees. This would allow me to focus on what truly matters: my students.

By supporting these measures, you're not only supporting J-1 teachers like myself, but you're also investing in the future of Hawaii's keiki. We are dedicated educators who are passionate about making a difference. Thank you for your time and consideration."

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:25:27 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chopper Cubacub Jr	Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of the International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii

I am a J-1 teacher from the Philippines currently teaching at Lahaina Intermediate School for two years. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. As a licensed teacher in the Philippines, I have dedicated myself to providing quality education to my students in Hawaii. However, the current licensure process presents significant financial challenges, as the required exams are costly.

The International Visiting Teacher License would be a great opportunity for educators like me, allowing us to continue contributing to Hawaii's schools for up to five years. This license would help address teacher shortages while recognizing the qualifications and experience of international teachers. By implementing this program, Hawaii can retain skilled educators who are already integrated into the community and committed to student success.

Beyond the classroom, my role extends to supporting students and the community, especially in the aftermath of the devastating wildfire in Lahaina in August 2023. Teaching here has allowed me to provide stability, encouragement, and a sense of normalcy for students who have faced immense challenges. By continuing to serve in Hawaii, I can further support these students' recovery, both academically and emotionally.

I strongly support the establishment of this license, as it would ease financial burdens, promote educational continuity, and allow dedicated educators like me to continue making a positive impact on Hawaii's students and communities.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:30:19 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amira Rae R. Bonifacio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Amira Rae R. Bonifacio, and I am a special education teacher at Princess Nahienaena Elementary School in Lahaina, Maui. I am writing to express my strong support for HB439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders through the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board.

As an educator, I provide individualized instruction to students with learning challenges, equipping them with the skills they need to succeed in reading, writing, and mathematics. My professional training and teaching experience in the Philippines have prepared me to meet diverse student needs, and I am honored to bring my expertise to Hawai‘i’s classrooms. Filipino teachers are highly skilled, dedicated, and well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to the state’s education system.

Beyond my role in the classroom, teaching in Hawai‘i enables me to support my family in the Philippines, reinforcing the broader impact of this opportunity. However, the current licensure process presents significant financial and logistical challenges. The required exams are costly and, in many cases, only available on Oahu, requiring inter-island travel that further increases expenses. These barriers make it difficult for qualified international teachers to obtain the necessary credentials to continue serving Hawai‘i’s students.

Passing SB819 would provide a more equitable and accessible pathway for dedicated international educators. I am especially committed to continuing my service to the students of Lahaina, many of whom have faced immense hardship following the devastating August 2023 wildfire. These children need stability, guidance, and compassionate educators who are committed to their growth and recovery.

I respectfully urge you to support HB439 to ensure that passionate and qualified international teachers can continue making a lasting difference in the lives of Hawai‘i’s keiki. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

Amira Rae R. Bonifacio

Special Education Teacher

Princess Nahienaena Elementary School, Lahaina, Maui

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:33:43 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dame Justine Tunac	Lanai High and Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am writing in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders through the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board. As a J-1 teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School, I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact that international educators bring to Hawai‘i’s diverse classrooms. This bill recognizes the essential role that international teachers play in bridging cultural gaps, enhancing global perspectives, and addressing the ongoing teacher shortage in our schools. By streamlining the licensing process, HB439 will enable more qualified educators to contribute meaningfully to the academic success of Hawai‘i’s students.

The establishment of an international teacher license is a crucial step toward recognizing the expertise and experience that J-1 and other visa-holding educators bring to the table. Many international teachers undergo rigorous training and possess valuable teaching experience in their home countries. However, the current certification process can be lengthy and complex, creating unnecessary barriers for skilled educators who are eager to serve Hawai‘i’s students. By implementing clear and accessible requirements, HB439 will ensure that international teachers can transition more smoothly into the local education system, ultimately benefiting both educators and students alike.

Additionally, this bill supports the state's commitment to cultural diversity and global education. Hawai‘i is a unique melting pot of cultures, and its students deserve access to a curriculum enriched by diverse perspectives. International teachers provide students with invaluable insights into different cultures, languages, and worldviews, fostering a more inclusive and globally aware generation. By formally recognizing and supporting international teachers through licensure, Hawai‘i is taking a progressive step toward creating a truly multicultural educational environment.

Moreover, the teacher shortage in Hawai‘i remains a pressing issue, particularly in rural and remote areas such as Lanai. International teachers have been instrumental in filling these gaps and ensuring that students receive quality education despite staffing shortages. HB439 will provide a sustainable solution by allowing qualified educators to continue teaching in the state without unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles. By streamlining the licensure process, the bill will encourage more international teachers to choose Hawai‘i as their teaching destination, ultimately strengthening the state’s educational workforce.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly support HB439 as it will facilitate the integration of international teachers into Hawai'i's education system, enhance cultural diversity in classrooms, and address the ongoing teacher shortage. Recognizing and supporting international educators through a dedicated licensing process will not only benefit teachers but also provide students with a richer, more well-rounded education. I urge the committee to pass this bill and help create a more inclusive and effective educational system for Hawai'i's future generations.

Dame Justine Tunac - Middle School -ELA Teacher

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 8:36:34 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erick Medrano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1. Hawai‘i’s J-1 Visa Program has successfully addressed teacher shortages by employing 218 certified international educators in hard-to-staff areas and special education. Research shows that teacher diversity improves student outcomes, particularly for underserved populations, and enhances cultural exchange within schools (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015). However, current licensing policies classify J-1 teachers as “emergency hires,” requiring exams that cost over \$1,000 and detract from essential responsibilities like curriculum planning and family engagement. These educators are also ineligible for additional compensation, further discouraging participation despite their critical contributions.

By streamlining licensing and eliminating unnecessary barriers, HB 439, HD1 would maximize the program’s impact, enabling international educators to remain for up to five years. This approach aligns Hawai‘i with other states that have adopted reciprocal licensing practices and strengthens the Department’s Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.” Research underscores the importance of continuity and diversity in improving educational equity and outcomes, making this legislation a vital step toward addressing workforce challenges and enhancing learning opportunities for Hawai‘i’s keiki (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.**Erick Medrano, J1 Teacher****References:**

Egalite, A. J., Kisida, B., & Winters, M. A. (2015). Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement. Economics of Education Review, 45, 44-52.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2019). Understanding teacher shortages. Learning Policy Institute.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:06:35 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laryson F Bagumbay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Kumu Laryson Bagumbay

Kealekehe Intermediate School

Kailua Kona

Testimony in Support of HB439

Hearing Date: February 20, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Good day, members of the committee. My name is John Paulo Rivera, and I'm a high school teacher at H.P. Baldwin High School on Maui.

I respectfully offer testimony in strong support of efforts to enhance the international visiting teacher program, and I believe aligning HB 439, HD1 with the provisions of SB 819, SD1 would be a significant step forward.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of international teachers here in Hawaii. I'm here to respectfully advocate for an exemption from the state's standardized testing requirements, specifically the Praxis exam, for J-1 visa teachers who are committed to serving Hawaii Department of Education students for five consecutive years. We recognize the importance of ensuring qualified educators, and I want to emphasize that prior to coming to the U.S., we have all earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines. Our academic credentials, including our Transcripts of Records, have also undergone thorough evaluation to confirm their equivalency and ensure we meet the standards for teaching in the United States.

The state of Hawaii has been incredibly welcoming to J-1 teachers, and we deeply appreciate the opportunity to contribute to its educational system. We are fortunate to share our diverse cultural perspectives with students, which we hope enriches their understanding of the world. We also understand the importance of filling critical teaching needs, particularly in areas like STEM, foreign languages, and special education, and are grateful to play a role in addressing these shortages. As educators, we are dedicated to investing our time and energy in supporting our students and their growth.

While we deeply value the opportunity to teach in Hawaii and contribute to its educational system, we respectfully suggest that the current requirement for J-1 teachers to undergo state standardized testing within our initial years of service presents some significant challenges, which we believe ultimately impact our schools and students. We understand the importance of ensuring teacher competency, and we are absolutely committed to meeting all necessary requirements. In fact, even during a proposed exemption period, we are dedicated to demonstrating our qualifications and commitment to professional growth in every single year through other means, such as classroom observations, professional development activities, and ongoing evaluations.

I believe that establishing an international teacher license, without the need for additional examinations, would allow us to more fully utilize the skills and experience these educators bring. By creating a more streamlined pathway, we can ensure continuity of instruction for our keiki and further diversify our educational workforce, better reflecting Hawai'i's diverse and global community.

In fact, granting J-1 teachers an exemption from state standardized testing for the first five years would send a powerful message. It would demonstrate that you value our contributions to Hawaii's schools, support our ongoing professional development, and recognize the importance of allowing us to focus on our primary mission: educating our students. We believe this focused approach during our initial years will ultimately benefit the students of Hawaii. We respectfully urge the committee to give this proposal your favorable consideration.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts and thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:24:50 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dioscoro Visto Narciso	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Dioscoro Visto Narciso, and I am a high school teacher at King Kekaulike High School on Maui. I am also a J-1 teacher from the Philippines, and I stand here today with a heart full of aloha and strong support for HB 439, HD1, and its alignment with SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been an absolute blessing for Hawai'i's keiki, and I've witnessed its positive impact firsthand. It's truly inspiring to see how 218 dedicated educators, possessing qualifications equivalent to their U.S.-trained counterparts, are serving in 55 schools across our islands, many in those hard-to-staff locations and in special education. These teachers, myself included, are not just instructors; we are cultural ambassadors, sharing our own rich heritages while dedicating ourselves to providing the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students, from Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu. Knowing that the Department plans to bring an additional 116 international educators in the 25-26 school year as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed" fills me with hope for the future.

However, I've also seen firsthand how Hawai'i's current licensing rules create unnecessary hurdles for prospective J-1 teachers. Unlike other states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have embraced streamlined licensing processes for international educators, Hawai'i's classification of J-1 teachers as "emergency hires" presents significant challenges. The required additional comprehensive examinations, costing over \$1,000, place a heavy financial burden on these educators. More importantly, the time spent preparing for these exams takes away precious time that could be dedicated to analyzing student assessments, connecting with families, and crafting engaging curriculum. Furthermore, the ineligibility of J-1 teachers for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same essential work, feels like a disservice.

The J-1 Visa Program is a vital source of high-quality education and cultural enrichment for our schools. HB 439, HD 1 is crucial as it ensures that qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai'i for up to five years, providing stability and continuity for our keiki. By establishing an international teacher license *without* these additional examinations, Hawai'i can truly unlock the full potential of these educators, creating a more diverse and globally representative teaching

force that reflects the beautiful tapestry of our island communities. This will not only benefit our students but also enrich the educational landscape of Hawai'i.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I wholeheartedly support HB 439, HD1 and urge its swift passage. Mahalo nui loa.

February 19, 2025

House of Representatives--Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Bertania Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Honorable Representative Scot Z. Matayoshi, Chair
Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce
Rep. Cory Chun, Vice Chair & Members

Dear Chair, Matayoshi and Members,
RE: HB439 HD1

Aloha! My name is Randall Francisco. I am writing in strong support of this legislation which recognizes J-1 educators who have the qualifications and experiences in this pathway towards an international teacher license. On Kauai, during the past three years, 30+ J-1 teachers have demonstrated that indeed they do make a difference in the education of our youth from Pre-K -12. I have had the opportunity to get to know many of these Philippine trained teachers especially, at the middle and high schools. They not only have the experience, knowledge and high degree of professionalism, they are also very dedicated to their craft of educating our future members, professionals and contributors of our island and statewide communities.

What strikes me most is not only their commitment but their extra efforts to insure students' success such as helping students after school, devoting extra time in their classrooms or at home to continue to focus on their students' success. They also serve as the bill states to be excellent role models and, especially, understand Filipino students who are able to culturally AND educationally, connect.

The criteria to provide the pathway towards an international license like its contemporaries in the states of Alaska, Nevada and North Carolina will also help to incentivize more foreign trained teachers to strongly consider Hawaii as a place where they can successfully continue their profession and contribute to the communities that they live and work. What everyone collectively in Hawaii is doing is to educate and empower the next generation of Hawaii's youths. In one of the previous hearings, I realized that Hawaii is not only competing with other states and countries but, also, itself. We must continue to strive to create an environment that for J-1 teachers is an attractive, supportive community, especially, on the islands of Kauai, Hawaii, Maui, Molokai and Lanai which are rural communities have even greater challenges of recruiting and retaining teachers due to not only the even higher cost of living, even great shortage of housing and less options but, also not providing easily accessible services that are available in larger metropolitan locales.

Mahalo for your consideration and for the opportunity to provide testimony. Aloha and Selamat Po.
Randall Francisco
Former President/CEO, Kauai Chamber of Commerce, Former President, Kauai Filipino Chamber of Commerce and Former Vice President, Filipino Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii
Former Dean, University of Hawaii Community College System

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:59:15 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JERIC SABADO GALDICAN	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

As a J-1 visiting international teacher currently teaching in Hawaii, I strongly support the intent of HB439, HD1, and recommend the following revisions to ensure the creation of a visiting international teacher license without burdensome examinations that other licensed teachers are not required to take:

(7) Establish a visiting international teacher license, and the requirements necessary to obtain the visiting international teacher license, to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries. The international teacher license shall provide teachers hired by the department or public charter schools the ability to teach all subjects and grade levels that the teacher is qualified to teach; provided that:

(A) International teachers hired by the department or public charter schools as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following: (i) A valid and current J-1 visa; (ii) The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher; (iii) Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge; (iv) A valid teaching license in the teacher's home country; and (v) Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting; and

(B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license is conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State.

I've witnessed firsthand the positive impact of the Department's J-1 Visa Program on Hawaii's keiki. Like many of my fellow international educators, I was drawn to Hawaii by the opportunity to share my expertise and contribute to the education of its students. We bring diverse perspectives and a passion for teaching, enriching the learning environment for children across the islands, particularly in hard-to-staff areas and special education.

However, the current licensing rules create unnecessary obstacles. Unlike other states that have streamlined the process, Hawaii's classification of J-1 teachers as "emergency hires" forces us to take additional, costly examinations. These exams place a significant financial burden on us and,

more importantly, divert valuable time and energy away from what truly matters: preparing engaging lessons, collaborating with colleagues, and connecting with students and their families. The time spent studying for these exams takes away from the time we could be using to analyze student assessments, meet with families, and develop enriching curriculum. Furthermore, the "emergency hire" designation unfairly prevents us from accessing additional compensation offered to other educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same essential work.

HB 439, HD 1 offers a crucial solution. By creating a dedicated international teacher license without these unnecessary examinations, Hawaii can fully benefit from the skills and experience of international educators. This will not only provide continuity for students but also foster a more diverse and globally representative teaching workforce, reflecting the rich cultural tapestry of Hawaii. It will allow teachers like myself to focus on what we do best: teaching and inspiring the next generation.

I urge the committee to support HB 439, HD1 and make these important revisions. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 10:06:28 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lanz Arana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lanz Araña, and I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

As a dedicated educator from the Philippines, I have already earned my teaching license and devoted my career to shaping young minds. However, the additional barriers imposed by standardized tests like the Praxis create unnecessary challenges that hinder my ability to fully focus on what truly matters—my students. Teaching is not just a profession for me; it is a calling. Since arriving in Hawaii, I have poured my heart into ensuring my students receive quality education, cultural enrichment, and unwavering support. Yet, balancing my responsibilities in the classroom while preparing for multiple licensure exams is an overwhelming burden—one that diverts my time and energy away from lesson planning, student engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. While I recognize the need for teacher accountability, I firmly believe that my qualifications, experience, and dedication should speak for themselves. The Praxis exams, aside from being financially and emotionally taxing, do not necessarily measure the passion, adaptability, and commitment that international teachers bring into Hawaii's schools. Additionally, the constraints of our three- to five-year visas make the process even more daunting, as our ability to continue teaching here is often tied to passing these tests within a limited timeframe. Hawaii has become my second home. I have come to love its people, culture, and the vibrant school community that has welcomed me with open arms. My greatest hope is to continue making a difference in the lives of my students without being held back by excessive testing requirements. By passing HB 439, HD1, you would not only be supporting teachers like me but also ensuring that Hawaii's students benefit from passionate, experienced educators who can dedicate themselves fully to their success. I respectfully urge you to consider the profound impact of this bill and to support international teachers who are deeply invested in the future of Hawaii's education system. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Testimony for HB 439

My name is Rowena Aldana, and I am a J-1 teacher currently teaching 9th Grade Science at Henry Perrine Baldwin High School in Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii. I am honored to share my perspective as an international educator directly benefiting from the provisions that HB 439 seeks to enhance.

As a J-1 teacher, I have the privilege of bringing diverse cultural perspectives into the classroom, enriching the educational experiences of my students while also fostering global awareness and cross-cultural understanding. This program not only allows me to share my knowledge and heritage but also to learn from my students and colleagues, creating a dynamic, inclusive learning environment.

HB439 is critical because it supports the professional growth and well-being of J-1 teachers like myself. Specifically, this bill addresses the process for obtaining an international teacher license in Hawaii, which is essential for ensuring that qualified educators from around the world can continue to teach and contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's classrooms. By streamlining licensing procedures, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and enhancing access to resources, HB 439 will make it more feasible for passionate, qualified educators to thrive both professionally and personally.

Moreover, this bill recognizes the value of cultural exchange as a cornerstone of educational excellence. In an increasingly interconnected world, exposing students to diverse perspectives prepares them to be thoughtful, informed global citizens. The presence of international teachers helps bridge cultural gaps and promotes mutual respect and understanding among students from different backgrounds.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to support HB439. This legislation will not only benefit J-1 teachers by facilitating the international teacher licensing process but also enrich the educational experiences of countless students across Hawaii.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

ROWENA ALDANA

J-1 Teacher

H.P.BALDWIN HIGH SCHOOL

February 19, 2025

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 10:20:02 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennelyn Soriano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Representative,

I am writing to express my strong support for the bill to establish a visiting international teacher license, currently under consideration in the House of Representatives. As an advocate for educational diversity and global learning, I believe this bill is an important step toward enriching the American education system and fostering a more inclusive, well-rounded learning environment for students.

The inclusion of international teachers brings a wealth of knowledge, unique perspectives, and global experiences that can significantly benefit both students and the broader educational community. By establishing a clear and effective pathway for international educators to work in the United States, we can help create an environment that not only prepares students for local success but also equips them with the global awareness and cross-cultural understanding essential for success in today's interconnected world.

Moreover, the bill promotes the exchange of ideas between educators from diverse cultural backgrounds, enhancing teaching methods, and enriching classroom discussions. International teachers bring valuable expertise in various subject areas, especially in global studies, foreign languages, and international relations. This bill would make it easier for these talented individuals to contribute to our education system, thereby enhancing the academic experience for students nationwide.

I urge you to consider the long-term benefits of this bill in creating a more diverse, global, and inclusive educational system. By supporting the establishment of a visiting international teacher license, we are investing in the future of education, helping to prepare students for a globalized workforce, and ensuring the exchange of knowledge and expertise between educators worldwide.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. I hope you will support the bill and take action to make this vision a reality.

Sincerely,
Jennelyn Soriano,

J1 teacher

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 10:20:26 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherie Mae Pablo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been very successful for Hawai'i's students. Currently, 218 certified international educators work in 55 schools across the state, particularly in hard-to-staff areas and special education. These teachers bring quality education and act as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, 116 more international educators will join the program.

However, the current licensing rules make it harder for these teachers to reach their full potential. Unlike other states, Hawai'i requires J-1 teachers to take expensive exams, which can cost over \$1,000. This reduces their time for teaching and planning, and they are not eligible for extra compensation despite doing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program offers great educational and cultural benefits to Hawai'i's schools. HB 439, HD1 would help international teachers stay in Hawai'i for up to 5 years, providing better continuity and learning opportunities. Creating an international teacher license without additional exams would allow the state to fully utilize the skills of these educators and create a more diverse workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439, HD1.

Cherie Pablo

Dear Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Esteemed Committee Members,

I fully support the creation of an international educator licensing framework and recommend that HB 439, HD1 be revised to align with SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been highly successful, with 218 certified international educators contributing to 55 schools across Hawai'i. These educators, who hold degrees equivalent to U.S. counterparts, are especially valuable in high-need areas such as special education and rural schools, enriching communities with cultural insights.

However, the current licensing system creates unnecessary obstacles for J-1 educators. Unlike other states, such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, Hawai'i classifies J-1 educators as "emergency hires," requiring them to take multiple costly exams—often totaling over \$1,000. This process takes time away from their core responsibilities, such as curriculum development and family collaboration, and they are also excluded from additional compensation typically offered to teachers in high-need positions.

Supporting HB 439, HD1 will allow qualified international educators to stay for up to five years, ensuring consistency in instruction and enhancing the educational experience for Hawai'i's students. Streamlining the licensing process to eliminate unnecessary exams will help the state better utilize the skills and diverse perspectives of these educators.

Thank you for considering my testimony regarding HB 439, HD1.

Sincerely,
Rizza Verina
J1 Teacher
Chieffess Kamakahahelei Middle School

Testimony in Support of HB 439

My name is Marlene Leary, and I serve as the principal at Kaua'i High School. I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

In our school, we have faced significant challenges in filling critical teaching positions specifically in mathematics and the sciences with highly qualified teachers. This year, we had the privilege of welcoming five new teachers from the Philippines, and our experience with them has been overwhelmingly positive. These educators come with graduate-level expertise in their subject areas and possess exceptional teaching skills. Moreover, they have demonstrated a genuine willingness to embrace Hawai'i culture and engage fully with our school's initiatives and community.

The State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I urge the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board and our legislators to support HB 439 HD1. It is a necessary and forward-thinking step that will help us attract and retain exceptional educators, ultimately benefiting our students, our schools, and our entire community.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marlene Leary
Principal, Kaua'i High School

marlene.leary@k12.hi.us

(808) 977-9710

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 10:31:12 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marlyn Sotto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

I am Marlyn Sotto, a J1 visa holder and Secondary School Teacher here in Hawaii, and I want to express my strong support for creating an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has proven to be highly effective for the children of Hawai'i. To date, 218 certified educators, holding degrees equivalent to those of US-trained teachers, are employed in 55 schools throughout the state, primarily in challenging-to-staff areas and special education. Across the state, international educators participating in the Department's J-1 Visa Program responded to the need for high-quality education for Hawai'i students while also serving as cultural ambassadors to the communities.

However, the current licensing regulations in the State pose obstacles to the full utilization of teachers under the J-1 visa program. Hawai'i categorizes J-1 teachers as "emergency hires" which necessitates the participants to undertake a series of extensive examinations. These examinations I believe have the same standards as the Licensure Examination for Teachers which Filipino teachers have successfully passed and obtained licenses with.

Hence, I support the establishment of an international teacher license that does not require additional examinations, instead, the State can fully capitalize on the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to give my testimony.

Mahalo!

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 10:47:39 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marie Jane B. Agcaoili	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

Hawai‘i’s Department of Education’s J-1 Visa Program has been an invaluable asset to our keiki, bringing highly qualified educators with credentials equivalent to those of U.S.-trained teachers into our classrooms. Currently, 218 certified international educators serve in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff locations and special education settings. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā‘ālehu, these educators have not only provided high-quality instruction but have also enriched their school communities as cultural ambassadors. Looking ahead to the 2025–2026 school year, the Department plans to welcome an additional 116 international teachers, furthering its Strategic Plan goal of preparing students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

Despite the program’s success, the State’s current licensing requirements limit its full potential. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which offer streamlined or reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional testing requirements, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation mandates that prospective participants complete multiple comprehensive examinations, often costing over \$1,000. The time and financial burden of these assessments detract from critical responsibilities such as analyzing formative assessments, engaging with families, and planning effective instruction. Additionally, J-1 teachers are not eligible for the financial incentives provided to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite fulfilling the same instructional responsibilities.

The J-1 Visa Program has demonstrated its ability to bring high-quality educators into Hawai‘i’s classrooms while fostering cultural exchange. HB 439, HD1 would ensure that qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai‘i for up to five years, supporting instructional continuity and enriching student learning experiences. Establishing an international teacher license without additional examination requirements would enable the state to fully utilize the expertise and diverse perspectives of these educators while creating a more inclusive and representative workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439, HD1.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
LIHIKAI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
335 S. Papa Ave.
Kahului, HI 96732

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to support the creation of an international visiting teacher license and recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S. trained educators work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide Hawai'i students with the highest quality education while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional, comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage international educators' skills, knowledge, and experience and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara Oura Tavares".

Barbara Oura Tavares, Principal

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 10:51:50 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ROSELYN B. DELA CRUZ	DOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of the creation of an international visiting teacher license and respectfully recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

The Department of Education's J-1 Visa Program has been an undeniable success for Hawai'i's keiki. Since its inception, the program has brought 218 certified educators—each holding equivalent degrees to U.S.-trained teachers—to 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education settings. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, these international educators have answered the call to deliver high-quality education while enriching their communities as cultural ambassadors. Their presence not only fills critical vacancies but also enhances the cultural diversity and global perspectives available to Hawai'i's students.

The Department's commitment to fostering a globally competitive and locally committed student body is reflected in its Strategic Plan. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department will welcome an additional 116 international educators, further advancing this mission. However, despite the program's success, current state licensing rules present significant barriers that hinder the full potential of the J-1 Visa Program.

Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina—which have adopted streamlined and reciprocal licensing processes for international educators—Hawai'i categorizes J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification imposes burdensome requirements, including a series of additional comprehensive examinations that often cost more than \$1,000. Beyond the financial burden, preparing for these exams consumes valuable time that could otherwise be spent analyzing student assessments, meeting with families, and planning effective instruction. These barriers not only deter prospective international educators but also place unnecessary strain on those already working tirelessly to serve Hawai'i's students.

Additionally, J-1 teachers are excluded from receiving the supplemental compensation available to educators in hard-to-fill positions—despite performing the same critical work. This inequity undermines efforts to recruit and retain qualified teachers in the areas where they are needed most. By addressing these systemic barriers, Hawai'i can better support the educators who are already making a profound impact in our schools.

HB 439, HD1 represents a vital step toward removing these obstacles. By establishing an international teacher license without requiring additional examinations, the State can attract and retain high-quality international educators, promote instructional continuity, and enrich the cultural learning environment for Hawai'i's keiki. This legislation would also align Hawai'i's policies with best practices from other states, ensuring a fairer and more efficient process for licensing international teachers.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to support and amend HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1. Doing so will empower international educators to continue providing exceptional educational experiences while fostering a diverse and globally informed student body. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this critical matter.

Mahalo nui loa,
Roselyn B. Dela Cruz
Lanai High and Elementary School- 4th Grade

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 10:58:46 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
OSCAR GATCHALIAN	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawai'i, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality

learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Oscar Gatchalian

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

My name is Reynosa Madlangbayan, and I am a Special Education Teacher with 13 years of experience in the field of special education. I am writing in strong support of HB 439, HD1 be amend to match SB819, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher. My experience has provided me with comprehensive understanding of the needs of students with diverse learning challenges.

I firmly believe that an International Visiting Teacher License would allow our students to learn firsthand from educators with diverse cultural backgrounds and teaching experiences. This exposure is invaluable in preparing students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. It foster cultural understanding, empathy and appreciation for different perspectives, enriching the learning environment of the students. Also, addressing critical teacher shortages, like many other states facing on going teacher shortages particularly in Special Education. I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

By supporting this, offers a potential solution by providing a streamlined pathway for qualified international teachers to contribute our expertise to our school. We would help fill critical vacancies and ensure that all students have access to high-quality institution. Thus, International teacher like me will bring them a wealth of knowledge and innovative teaching methodologies from our home countries. This exchange of best practices can benefit our existing teaching force, leading to improved instructional strategies and better outcomes for students. It allows us to learn from different educational systems and adopt successful approaches. This can also attract talented teachers from around the world, further enhancing the quality of our educational system and boosting our state's reputation.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

I urge the committee to favorably consider HB 439 in support with SB819. This legislation represents a significant investment in the future of our students and our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Reynosa Madlangbayan
Special Education Teacher
Lihikai Elementary School

Aloha!

May I take this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to the Chair of the Board, esteemed members of the committee and/or legislatures for giving us the opportunity to provide testimonies in support of HB 439.

My name is Florante D. Romero a J1-Teacher at Mauka Lani Elementary School, Kapolei. I am submitting this testimony in support to the said Bill. This testimony emphasizes the importance of supporting international teachers, not just for our own benefit, but for the overall improvement of the educational system in the State particularly in Hawaii.

It cannot be denied that we, the J1 teachers, sacrificed our teaching positions in the Philippines to provide enough needs for our own families and of course our 'will' to serve as an international teacher. Of course, as an international teacher, I don't just serve as a teacher but to be an exemplary in all aspects. Being committed to provide the best education possible for our students in my/our utmost priority. However, many of us faces significant barriers such as taking the Praxis tests to continue serving the students. This is so because taking the said test requires time, effort and money especially in the application process. I would say that our qualifications should be recognized without undergoing state's standardized tests, and financial constraints.

May I humbly request the Chair, members of the committee, legislatures and other significant individuals to support this Bill to provide international teachers with a clear and fair path to licensure. With this, it will also create a more inclusive, diverse and effective educational system for all. This bill is not just an investment in international teachers for today's generation but in the future of education itself. Consequently, this Bill is an essential step toward strengthening the quality of education that may benefit the students because international teachers bring unique perspectives, skills, and expertise that enrich the learning environment in the State as a whole.

Thank you for your time and effort in this endeavor.

Mahalo!

Much Aloha,

Florante D. Romero
Elementary Teacher
Mauka Lani Elementary
Kapolei, HI

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 12:08:08 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ivy Macawili	Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

Hawai‘i’s Department of Education (DOE) J-1 Visa Program has been a tremendous success for our keiki. To date, 218 certified international educators—holding equivalent degrees to U.S.-trained teachers—serve in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā‘ālehu, these educators have answered the call to provide high-quality instruction while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. In the 2025-2026 school year, the DOE will welcome an additional 116 international teachers as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”

However, existing state licensing rules create unnecessary barriers for prospective J-1 teachers. Unlike Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina—where international educators can obtain licenses without additional exams—Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires them to take costly, time-consuming exams that can exceed \$1,000. Preparing for these assessments detracts from their ability to analyze student progress, meet with families, and plan instruction. Additionally, J-1 teachers remain ineligible for compensation incentives available to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program enriches Hawai‘i’s education system by bringing high-quality instruction and cultural diversity to our schools. HB 439, HD1 ensures that qualified international teachers can remain in Hawai‘i classrooms for up to five years, fostering continuity in instruction and cultural exchange. By establishing an international teacher license without additional examinations, the state can better utilize the skills and expertise of these educators while promoting a workforce reflective of Hawai‘i’s global community.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 12:09:36 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glorie Ann Cabaluna	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Glorie, and I have been a teacher for seven years. Teaching is not just a profession to me it is a mission and a vocation. Educating children is like building a home; if we are not there to effectively guide and impart knowledge, the foundation of their learning may weaken.

Since arriving in Hawai‘i, I have experienced an incredible sense of fulfillment in my work. The rich culture, the close-knit school community, and the opportunity to positively impact my students’ lives have reinforced my dedication to this profession. However, as a foreign teacher, I have also faced significant challenges. Despite being fully licensed in my home country and holding advanced degrees, I am classified only as an emergency hire in Hawai‘i. This classification limits my professional standing, affects my access to fair compensation, and places unnecessary obstacles in my path challenges that my colleagues in states like Virginia, Florida, and Texas do not have to endure.

I have no intention of comparing, but I cannot ignore that my fellow foreign teachers in these states are granted full licensure based on their qualifications, allowing them to work with confidence and stability. Some of them have even encouraged me to apply in their states, knowing the benefits they receive. However, my heart belongs to Hawai‘i. I chose to be here because I believe in serving this community, supporting my students, and making a lasting impact in their lives.

The current system does not recognize the extensive qualifications, credentials, and years of experience that international teachers bring. Additionally, the requirement to pass costly and burdensome Praxis exams—despite already being licensed educators—only adds to the hardship. These barriers do not determine our capability or effectiveness in the classroom. Rather, they discourage passionate and highly skilled teachers from continuing their work in Hawai‘i at a time when the state is facing an ongoing teacher shortage.

HB439 provides a necessary and fair solution. By establishing an international teacher license, this bill ensures that experienced educators can continue to serve Hawai‘i’s students, contribute meaningfully to our school communities, and focus on what truly matters—supporting and inspiring the next generation. More importantly, it allows us to stay for the full five years of our visa term, providing stability for both teachers and students.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB439 so that international teachers can continue serving Hawai‘i’s students without unnecessary barriers.

Mahalo for your time and support.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 12:13:12 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Geralyn E. Nabaysa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for **HB 439, HD1** and to recommend necessary revisions that will ensure the establishment of a **visiting international teacher license** without imposing additional examinations that are not required for other licensed teachers.

As a **J-1 teacher currently serving in Hawai‘i**, I have experienced firsthand both the opportunities and challenges that come with being part of the **Department of Education’s J-1 Visa Program**. This program has allowed me to share my expertise and culture with my students while learning about Hawai‘i’s rich history and values. **Teaching here is more than just a job—it is a calling that allows me to contribute meaningfully to my students’ education and to the larger community.**

However, one of the greatest challenges I have faced, along with many of my fellow J-1 teachers, is the **unnecessary and burdensome licensing requirements** that significantly hinder our ability to focus on what truly matters—**our students**. Unlike states such as **Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina**, which provide **streamlined pathways for international educators**, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as **"emergency hires."** This designation requires us to take additional **costly and time-consuming examinations**, often exceeding **\$1,000**. The time spent preparing for these tests could be better used **analyzing student progress, developing engaging lessons, and connecting with families**.

Additionally, despite teaching in **hard-to-staff areas and special education classrooms**, J-1 teachers are **excluded from additional compensation** that other educators in similar positions receive. This creates **an inequitable system** that undervalues the contributions of international teachers, even though we meet the same rigorous qualifications and expectations.

Currently, **218 certified international educators** are teaching in **55 schools across Hawai‘i**, and next year, **116 more will join** as part of the Department’s **Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “Globally Competitive and Locally Committed.”** Our presence in Hawai‘i’s classrooms has provided students with **high-quality instruction and diverse cultural perspectives** that prepare them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. However, if licensing policies remain as they are, **many talented and dedicated educators may be discouraged from continuing to serve in Hawai‘i’s schools.**

HB 439, HD1 ensures that international teachers can **remain for up to five years, providing stability and continuity for students**. More importantly, by removing the requirement for additional examinations, this bill will allow the State to **fully utilize the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators**, making the teaching workforce more **diverse, inclusive, and representative of Hawai‘i’s global community**.

I urge you to support **HB 439, HD1** to create a fair and welcoming system for international teachers who are committed to the success of Hawai‘i’s keiki.

Mahalo nui loa,

Geralyn E Nabaysa

J-1 Teacher, Kalama Intermediate School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 12:20:17 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hazel Jordan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I am Hazel Jordan and I am originally from the Philippines, where I was a licensed and experienced special education teacher. I am currently teaching at Honouliuli Middle School, where I am helping to address the teacher shortage in the United States. My background and experience in the Philippines have equipped me with a strong foundation in effective teaching practices, which I have successfully implemented in my current role. As a resource and inclusion special education teacher, I am dedicated to positively impacting the lives of students with special needs.

I fully support the objectives of HB439, HD1; however, I would like to suggest the following revisions to ensure that the visiting international teacher license is established without imposing examination requirements that are not applicable to other licensed teachers.

- 1. Participation in an approved exchange program sanctioned by the U.S. Department of State, accompanied by a valid J-1 visa.**
- 2. Possession of a degree deemed equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree or higher.**
- 3. Completion of a teacher preparation program recognized as meeting U.S. standards, demonstrating requisite skills and knowledge.**
- 4. Holding a valid teaching license issued by their home country.**
- 5. A minimum of three years of teaching experience in either a public or private school environment, encompassing pre-kindergarten through grade twelve.**

I believe that teachers on J1 visa, bring many benefits to the Hawaii Department of Education (DOE). As one of the international teachers, we add cultural diversity to classrooms, helping students gain a broader view of the world and encouraging understanding between different cultures. Teachers often share new and creative teaching methods, which can make learning more engaging and give students different viewpoints on what they study. J-1 teachers have special skills in areas where there aren't enough local teachers, ensuring that students have access to qualified instructors. International teachers also act as role models, showing students the importance of cultural exchange and being a part of a global community. Outside the classroom, I am instrumental in enriching the local community by sharing my cultures and experiences, which promotes awareness and understanding among everyone. Additionally, this program offers local teachers the chance

to grow professionally by working with international colleagues and learning from their varied experiences.

Thank you for granting me the opportunity to present my perspectives regarding HB 439, HD1.

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 12:35:40 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

My name is Grace Marie Hatton, and I am a licensed professional teacher from the Philippines with firsthand experience in the field of education. I was a teacher in the Philippines for 8 years, graduated with a Bachelor of Elementary Education Major in Special Education and also with a Master's degree in Special Education. Currently, I am a kindergarten fully self-contained Special Education Teacher at Kahului Elementary School, Maui, Hawai'i. I am here today to express my strong support for the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education. This initiative is vital not only for addressing the global teacher shortage but also for empowering educators like myself to contribute meaningfully to diverse classrooms while navigating fewer barriers.

As a Filipino educator, I understand the passion and dedication that teachers from around the world bring to their profession. J-1 teachers, in particular, come to the United States with a mission to share our expertise, promote cultural diversity, and support student learning. Through the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, we international teachers serve as ambassadors of knowledge, enriching classrooms with their unique perspectives on education and life.

This program is a two-way street: while us J-1 teachers contribute to addressing teacher shortages in critical subject areas, we also bring global awareness to U.S. students, preparing them to thrive in an interconnected world. However, our ability to serve effectively is often hindered by licensing challenges.

As an educator, I am aware of the complexities associated with obtaining state-specific teaching licenses. For J-1 teachers, these challenges are amplified as we navigate unfamiliar systems and requirements while trying to adjust to a new country. These barriers often result in delays, frustration, and even lost opportunities for international educators who

are already highly qualified in their home countries. Without a streamlined international license, a lot of us are struggling to fulfill our roles effectively, which not only impacts our careers but also deprives schools and students of valuable contributions. The current process discourages many skilled educators from pursuing opportunities abroad, perpetuating the teacher shortage in the U.S.

As a professional teacher from the Philippines, I know the value of being able to share my expertise beyond my home country. The cultural exchange between educators and students is a powerful tool for building bridges between nations. However, this exchange can only thrive if teachers are given the tools and support they need to succeed. An international teaching license would honor the qualifications and dedication of J-1 teachers while ensuring that they remain focused on their mission: educating and inspiring students.

In closing, I urge you to pass this important bill HB439 to grant J-1 teachers an international teaching license. This measure will not only address pressing teacher shortages but also foster global collaboration and innovation in education. Let us break down the barriers that prevent skilled educators from making a difference in the lives of students worldwide.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions or share further insights.

GRACE MARIE HATTON

808-500-4394

Kahului Elementary School

449 Kaao Circle, Maui, Hawai'i 96732

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 1:01:40 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
MARIA CHRISTINE	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license and recommend that **HB 439, HD1** be amended to align with **SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education**.

The Department's **J-1 Visa Program** has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, **218 certified educators**, with qualifications equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers, serve in **55 schools across Hawai'i**, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Na'alehu, international educators have answered the call to provide **high-quality education** while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For the **2025–2026 school year**, the Department plans to employ **an additional 116 international educators** as part of its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be **"Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."**

However, **the State's existing licensing rules create barriers** that limit the full potential of the J-1 Visa Program. Unlike states such as **Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina**, which offer **streamlined or reciprocal licensing** for international educators without requiring additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as **"emergency hires."** This designation imposes costly and time-consuming testing requirements, with exams exceeding **\$1,000 in fees**. Preparing for these exams **reduces valuable time** that teachers could otherwise spend analyzing student progress, meeting with families, and planning curriculum. Additionally, J-1 teachers are **ineligible for extra compensation** provided to educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same work.

The J-1 Visa Program **enhances educational and cultural opportunities** for schools across Hawai'i. **HB 439, HD1** would allow **qualified international teachers to remain in Hawai'i's schools for up to five years**, ensuring **instructional continuity** and enriching the learning experience for Hawai'i's keiki. By **creating an international teacher license without additional exams**, the State can fully leverage the **skills, knowledge, and experience** of international educators while building a more **diverse workforce** that reflects Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of **HB 439, HD1**.

Mahalo,

Maria Christine L. Espina

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 1:16:46 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vince Patrick Pastor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of the creation of an international visiting teacher license and respectfully recommend that **HB 439, HD1** be amended to align with **SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education**.

Hawai‘i’s **J-1 Visa Program** has been a tremendous success for our keiki. Currently, 218 certified international educators—with qualifications equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers—serve in 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff locations and special education programs. From **Waimea** to **Lahaina** to **Na‘alehu**, these educators not only provide high-quality instruction but also act as cultural ambassadors within their communities. Looking ahead to the **2025-2026** school year, the Department plans to welcome an additional 116 international educators, advancing its Strategic Plan to prepare students to be “*Globally Competitive and Locally Committed*.”

However, Hawai‘i’s current licensing rules limit the full potential of the J-1 Visa Program. Unlike states such as **Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina**, which offer streamlined or reciprocal licensing for international educators without extra examinations, Hawai‘i classifies J-1 teachers as “*emergency hires*.” This designation requires them to complete a series of costly exams—often exceeding **\$1,000**—while also making them ineligible for additional compensation offered to teachers in hard-to-fill positions. The time and resources spent preparing for these exams detract from essential tasks like analyzing student assessments, engaging with families, and planning curriculum.

HB 439, HD1 would allow qualified international teachers to remain in Hawai‘i’s schools for up to **five years**, promoting instructional continuity and enriching cultural exchange. By establishing an international teacher license that eliminates unnecessary exams, Hawai‘i can better utilize the expertise of global educators while fostering a more diverse and representative workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill.

Vince Pastor
J1 Teacher

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Manuel Jayjay D. Asuncion III, and I am a J-1 teacher at Wailuku Elementary School. I strongly support HB 439, HD1 and respectfully recommend aligning it with SB 819, SD1 – Relating to Education.

As an international educator, I am deeply committed to providing high-quality education to Hawai'i's keiki. The Department's J-1 Visa Program has given me the opportunity to bring my expertise to the classroom while also sharing my culture, enriching the learning experience for students. However, the current licensing process limits the full potential of J-1 teachers.

Unlike other states that recognize international teaching credentials without additional testing, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires," requiring us to take costly and time-consuming exams. These requirements not only place financial burdens on international educators but also take valuable time away from lesson planning, student engagement, and professional development. Additionally, J-1 teachers are not eligible for extra compensation despite teaching in hard-to-fill positions.

By establishing an international visiting teacher license without additional exams, HB 439, HD1 would allow J-1 teachers to focus on what truly matters—providing the best education for Hawai'i's students. This bill would also help retain highly qualified international educators, ensuring continuity in instruction and fostering global perspectives in the classroom.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and urge your support for HB 439, HD1.

Mahalo,

MANUEL JAYJAY D. ASUNCION III
Teacher, Wailuku Elementary School

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 1:26:16 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JOMAR MAESTRE MENDEZABAL	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee:

I am Jomar Mendezabal, a J1 teacher, and work at Kalama Intermediate School. I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

HB-350-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 1:46:13 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/19/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Helen Cox	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support HB350. Heat pumps are a cost-effective and efficient renewable energy source. They should be part of the state's portfolio to reach our energy goals. Mahalo!

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 2:04:35 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lorraine Rose Berdin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lorraine Berdin, I am a J1 Teacher. I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

Teaching in Hawai‘i is a valuable opportunity that enhances our experience and skills. The J-1 Visa Program not only supports teachers but also helps alleviate the state’s teacher shortage, particularly in hard-to-staff areas, by providing high-quality education. As certified educators with degrees equivalent to U.S.-trained teachers, we contribute to Hawai‘i’s education system while offering cultural exchange, benefiting both teachers and students.

Despite this, the existing state licensing regulations prevent us teachers participating in the J-1 visa program from reaching our full potential. Unlike other states which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international teachers without additional exams, Hawai‘i classifies us J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This category requires prospective participants to take a series of comprehensive exams that can cost a significant amount, which adds to the challenges of managing the high cost of living in Hawai‘i. The time and energy spent preparing for these exams could otherwise be better used to analyze formative assessments and design lesson plans. Furthermore, J-1 teachers do not qualify for the additional compensation given to teachers in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same responsibilities.

Hawai‘i is beautiful, and I love its culture and the community where I teach. That is why I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, HD 1. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, we can improve our work and focus more on what we do best—teaching.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Lorraine Rose Berdin
Algebra I Teacher
James Campbell High School

LATE

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 4:13:29 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Milagros Cadang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I'm Milagros R. Cadang, a participant in the J-1 Exchange Program in the USA. Currently, I'm teaching at Kalakaua Middle School. If you were to ask me if I'm okay, I would say I'm perfectly fine and enjoying the program. I'm eager to share this wonderful experience with others back home in the Philippines. However, with only a short time allotted for this program, we need to maximize our efforts to learn as much as possible. Requiring us to take the Hawai'i teacher licensure exam adds an extra layer of difficulty. We must prepare for and pass five different subjects, incurring additional expenses. Failing to obtain this license promptly may lead to our current school not rehiring us for the next school year, forcing us to find new positions. What's more, this license won't be valid in our home country. If only J-1 teachers like myself could be exempt from taking the exam, we could devote that time to preparing lessons, attending cultural programs, seminars, and training.

I sincerely hope this bill passes. It would be a huge help for us.

LATE

HB-439-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 7:38:29 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melinda Luz Bolo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. I respectfully recommend that HB 439 HD1 be amended to match SB 819 SD1 – Relating to Education.

Sincerely,

Melinda Bolo of Lanai City, HI