



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

Date: 02/11/2025

Time: 02:01 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0683 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

Purpose of Bill: Establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinators positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the State.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of HB 683, which seeks to establish four (4) additional full-time permanent student transportation coordinator positions.

Currently, eight (8) district transportation officers manage and coordinate services across Hawaii's diverse districts—Kauai, West Hawaii, East Hawaii, Maui, Central Oahu, Leeward Oahu, Windward Oahu, and Honolulu. These officers are tasked with ensuring safe, efficient transportation, particularly with the rising number of curb-to-curb requests.

Adding four (4) positions will provide essential support for larger districts, like Maui and East Hawaii, and alleviate the pressure on current staff. This expansion will help manage growing demands, particularly for federal and state-mandated transportation, ensuring students with Individualized Education Plans receive timely services.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for this measure.



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96819
Tel: (808) 833-2711 • Fax: (808) 839-7106 • Web: www.hsta.org

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TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: HB 683 – Relating to Student Transportation

Position: Support

Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 2:01 pm, Room 309

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

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

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) supports HB 683 which addresses the urgent need to strengthen Hawai'i's student transportation system. HB 683 proposes establishing student transportation coordinator positions for each county to improve oversight and efficiency in providing these essential services.

These coordinators would play a vital role in addressing the chronic bus driver shortages and service disruptions that have plagued our schools in recent years. By improving coordination and communication among schools, transportation providers, and families, we can ensure that all students have reliable access to education.

Mahalo.



HOUSE BILL 683, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

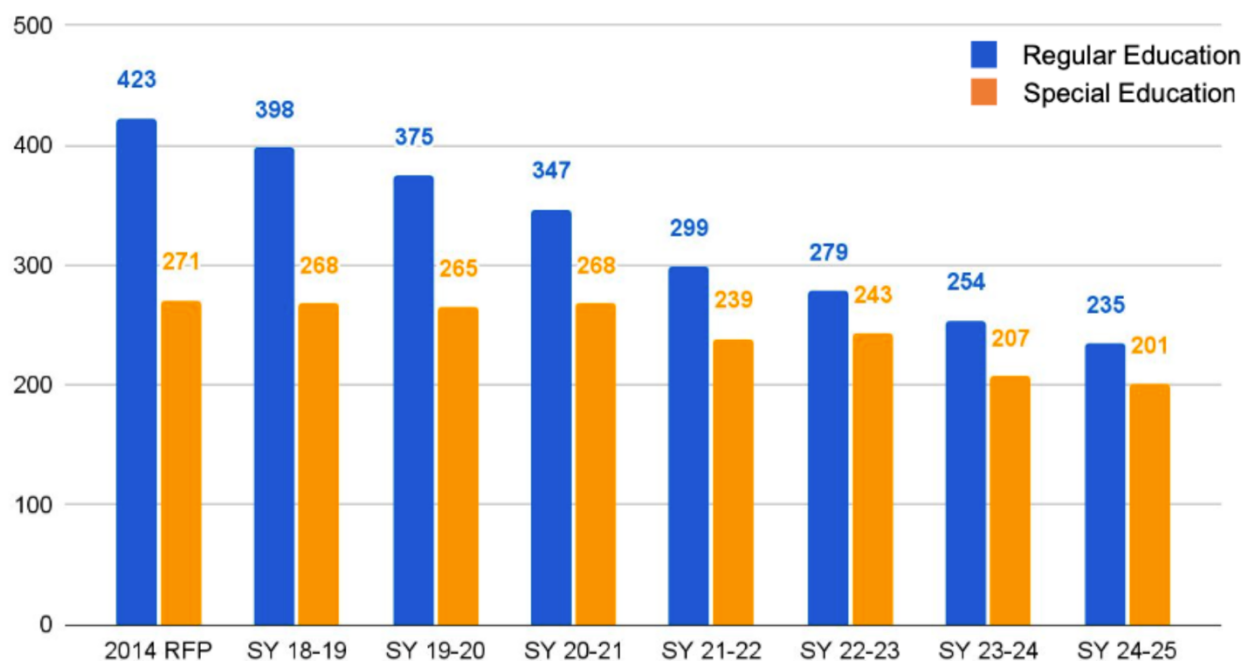
FEBRUARY 11, 2025 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports HB 683, relating to student transportation, which establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinators positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the State.

School bus service is essential for getting students to and from school, particularly for students who lack other transportation options or face hardship in obtaining school transportation services due to economic difficulty. Yet, chronic bus driver shortages have led to the cancellation or consolidation of many school bus routes, especially in West O'ahu and in rural and remote areas of the neighbor islands, reducing transportation options for local families.

Over the last ten years, the number of bus drivers serving DOE students has fallen from 423 serving general education students and 271 drivers serving special education students in 2014 to just 235 drivers serving general education students and 201 serving special education students for the 2024-2025 school year.



This decline has led to dramatic service disruptions, the most recent of which occurred in August of last year when department officials unexpectedly announced that they were temporarily suspending 108 bus routes serving middle and high school students in central O’ahu and students of nearly all grade levels on the southern and eastern portions of Hawai’i Island.

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

A lack of adequate school bus transportation service exacerbates chronic absenteeism. Rates of chronic absenteeism are highest in rural, remote, and socioeconomically disadvantaged school communities. In the 2022-2023 school year, 30 percent of Hawai’i students were chronically absent from school, meaning they missed fifteen or more days of class. That was a significant jump from two years before, when only 18 percent of students were counted as

chronically absent, and far exceeds the national average of only 10 percent. Numerous studies show that chronic absenteeism hampers student achievement and lowers graduation rates.

Governor Josh Green announced an emergency proclamation related to the school bus shortage on August 17, 2023, which allows the department of transportation to grant exemptions for the use of vehicles other than school buses to transport students and allows commercial driver's license holders with a "P" endorsement for driving passenger vehicles to operate student transportation vehicles. The order allows for alternative vehicles—such as vans and minibuses—to transport students in impacted communities.

The emergency proclamation also allows for the temporary use of tour buses to transport regular education students, a solution that has enabled school bus contractor Ground Transport Inc. to subcontract with such providers as Polynesian Adventure Tours for student transportation. Furthermore, the proclamation provides critical flexibility with procurement rules, allowing the department to contract directly with additional providers, like Roberts Hawai'i, to supply buses and drivers in shortage areas throughout the islands.

More needs to be done, however, to sustain critical bus service programs for Hawai'i's public school students and their 'ohana.

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com



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

To: House Committee on Education
Re: HB 683 Relating to student transportation

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 309 and via videoconference
February 11, 2025 2:01PM

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

On behalf of HCANSpeaks!, I am writing in support of HB 683, relating to student transportation. This bill establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinators positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the State.

By creating these student transportation coordinator roles, the bill aims to enhance the efficiency and reliability of student transportation services across the state, which is urgently needed. This initiative is crucial for ensuring that students have safe and timely access to get to school, thereby promoting better attendance and academic performance. Moreover, dedicated coordinators can address transportation challenges promptly, which relieves problems experienced by not only students but also their caregivers and parents, as well as school staff. Investing in these positions demonstrates a commitment to the well-being and success of Hawai'i's students.

Reliable student transportation is essential to ensuring that all children have consistent and equitable access to education. Without safe and efficient transportation, many students—especially those in rural or underserved areas—face significant barriers to attendance, which directly impacts their academic success and well-being. Investing in strong transportation systems supports not only student learning but also family stability and community engagement.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 683.

Sincerely,
Noreen Kohl, Ph.D.
Policy Researcher and Advocate



Email: communications@ulupono.com

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Tuesday, February 11, 2025 — 2:01 p.m.

Ulupono Initiative supports HB 683, Relating to the Student Transportation

Dear Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mariah Yoshizu, and I am the Government Affairs Associate at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy, clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

Ulupono supports of HB 683, which establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinator positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the state.

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Advisory Committee's January 2025 Annual Report¹ outlines several critical findings regarding school transportation and safe routes to school in Hawai'i. National research shows that SRTS programs can significantly increase walking and biking to school, with participation rising 18-37 percent, while simultaneously reducing pedestrian injuries in school zones by 44-75 percent. The need for these programs is widespread, as approximately 77 percent of Hawai'i residents live within one mile of a school. Furthermore, a preliminary analysis has already identified more than \$800 million in SRTS infrastructure needs across the state. One of the key recommendations of this report is to "invest in a strong network of SRTS staff ..." to address these issues and develop these types of programs, of which student transportation coordinators can be an integral part.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Mariah Yoshizu
Government Affairs Associate

¹ <https://hidot.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/HWY-S-25-2.45019-DOT-Report-for-Act-244-SLH-2023-Safe-Routes-to-School.pdf>



Testimony of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

Committee on Education

Date & Time February 11, 2025, at 2:01pm

Location VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Conference Room 309

State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

Measure HB683

Measure Title: Relating to Student Transportation

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

The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OahuMPO) **supports Measure HB683**, which establishes and appropriates funds for student transportation coordinators positions within the Department of Education to strengthen student transportation services across the State.

Supporting this legislation will empower students to become more independently mobile by ensuring transportation coordinators consider the unique needs of all students. Hawaii's school transportation system must go beyond traditional busing to include safe, multimodal options that allow students to walk, bike, or take transit with confidence.

Dedicated coordinators can work with families, schools, and communities to develop transportation plans that support students with disabilities, those in rural areas, and those without access to traditional school buses. By integrating bike buses, walking school buses, and transit education, these positions will help students build lifelong mobility skills while reducing school-related traffic congestion.

Coordinators will also ensure that transportation policies align with equity, climate, and safety goals, creating a system that works for all students. Investing in these roles will foster student independence, improve access to education, and build a more sustainable future.

HB683 aligns with the Vision and Goals of the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), by promoting an equitable and resilient transportation system.

The OahuMPO is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on the island of Oahu responsible for carrying out a multimodal transportation planning

process, including the development of a long-range (25-year horizon) metropolitan transportation plan, referred to as the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), which encourages and promotes a safe, efficient, and resilient transportation system that serves the mobility needs of all people and freight (including walkways, bicycles, and transit), fosters economic growth and development, while minimizing fuel consumption and air pollution ([23 CFR 450.300](#)).

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

HB-683

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 8:21:35 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anika Agerlie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an elementary public school teacher in Hawai'i, I have seen firsthand the difficulties students face in getting to school. In SY23-24, one of our school bus routes was cancelled at least once a week, often with little notice. The families we serve had to adjust their schedules frequently to accommodate the cancelled transportation, or in some cases, keep their children home due to lack of transportation. I am in full support of establishing four positions within the HDOE to coordinate student transportation at the county level. This is an important step in creating an education system that is accessible to all and works for our students and their families.

HB-683

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 7:33:54 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Kākou,

My name is Jess Sobocinski and I currently teach first grade at a public elementary school in the South Kona district of Hawai‘i Island. I am writing in support of HB683 and want to emphasize the need for FREE, reliable, and safe transportation for our public school students. This need is particularly pertinent for rural communities like mine where parents and caregivers have to travel an hour or more to work in Kona or Hilo, and are unable to transport their children to and from school given their work schedules. There have been multiple times this current school year when the cancellation of bus services have resulted in student absences (or tardies) in my class. This is especially frustrating to me because this is a service that families pay for! Schools and families are doing everything they can to ensure that their students receive a high-quality education, yet this lack of an essential service is hindering our ability to do so. This is also a safety concern as it can leave children at home without adult supervision while parents have to either arrange childcare or leave work (which impacts their employment/pay). Having limited access to transportation services for our students also impedes our ability to facilitate community-based educational experiences like field trips! Our current bus contractor (we only have one) charges mileage from their baseyard to the school location, which provides a significant financial barrier to our rural schools, making field trips cost prohibitive. Additionally, the shortage of drivers create a limited timeframe for these types of activities. While it would require a large amount of funding, my dream is that the state eventually deprivatizes school transportation services so that HIDOE is able to provide transportation services in-house for our over 160,000 students. Our students and families deserve better!

Mahalo for your time and work on this issue.

~Jess