



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

Date: 03/11/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 1300, SD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

Purpose of Bill: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households. Requires the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules. Effective 7/1/2050. (SD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of SB1300, SD1, and requests amendments to more effectively achieve its purpose.

The Department has always been an advocate for supporting the well-being of the whole child. Ensuring that students have access to healthy school breakfasts and lunches is critical to their ability to focus in the classroom and achieve academic success. The Department currently provides free and reduced-price meals to qualified students through federal reimbursements and remains committed to expanding meal access for students in need.

While the intent of SB 1300, SD1, is to provide meal subsidies to students from working families struggling with financial constraints, the Department respectfully requests amendments to improve the bill's effectiveness. Specifically, rather than using the asset-limited, income-constrained, employed (ALICE) framework, which relies on cost estimates and self-reported data, the Department requests that eligibility for meal subsidies be determined using a verifiable income threshold. Establishing eligibility at 250% of the federal poverty level will ensure that families experiencing financial hardship, including those classified as ALICE, receive necessary support while maintaining consistency with existing income-based eligibility programs. Additionally, the Department is requesting a tiered implementation to allow for infrastructure and processes to be established to provide the appropriate subsidies to ALICE families.

To align the bill with this approach, the Department requests the following amendments:

1. Extend free meal coverage to students currently qualifying for reduced-price lunch in school year

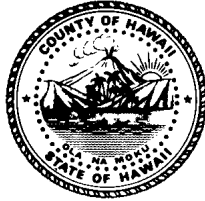
2025-2026 and 2026-2027;

2. Provide free school meals to students whose families earn up to 250% of the federal poverty level beginning in school year 2026-2027; and
3. Revise the appropriation to allocate \$565,000 for students eligible for reduced-price meals in the 2025-2026 school year and the 2026-2027 school year, and \$2.8 million for students whose families earn up to 250% of the federal poverty level in the 2026-2027 school year.

The Department believes these amendments will ensure a more effective and equitable implementation of meal subsidies, providing essential nutrition to students while using a clear and reliable eligibility standard.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration of these amendments.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor



Benson Medina
Director

Dennis Lin
Deputy Director

County of Hawai'i

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

25 Aupuni Street, Room 1301 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4252
(808) 961-8366 • Fax (808) 935-1205
E-mail: chresdev@co.hawaii.hi.us

March 7, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

TUESDAY, March 11, 2025
2:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 309

TESTIMONY ON SB 1300 SD1 Relating to School Meals

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and Members of the Committee,

I am Benson Medina, Director of the Department of Research and Development, County of Hawai'i. One of the agricultural objectives of this department is to "support collaboration, innovation, resource development, and programmatic sustainability throughout the food system to reduce food waste, improve producer viability and resilience, develop workforce development pathways, or increase access to locally produced food among low-income residents."

The County of Hawai'i provides written testimony in **SUPPORT of SB1300 SD1 with amendments**, to appropriate funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families is classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households. Specifically, the County asks that SB1300 SD1 is amended to ensure that all students receive access to free school meals.

The Hawai'i County Council has demonstrated its commitment to this cause by adopting Resolution 42-25, urging the Hawai'i State Legislature to establish a universal free school lunch program for public school students, prioritizing local sourcing and regional procurement. This resolution highlights the pressing need to ensure that all students have access to nutritious meals essential for academic success and personal well-being, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Hawai'i County faces the highest rates of food insecurity in the State, with one in four Hawai'i County households reporting food insecurity in a 2023 study commissioned by Hawai'i Foodbank. The cost of school meals poses a significant barrier to accessing balanced nutrition for many students; two out of three struggling families in Hawai'i are ineligible for free school meals due to strict eligibility thresholds (HIPHI, 2024). Implementing universal free school meals would ensure that all students receive the nourishment they need, regardless of household income, thereby combating hunger and its associated negative impacts on health and well-being.

Additionally, implementing universal free school meals provides an opportunity to support local farmers through Farm-to-School initiatives. Increasing school meal participation enables the

March 7, 2025

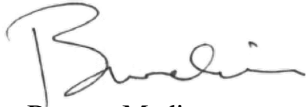
Page 2

HDOE to incorporate fresh, locally grown produce into school meals. Thus, providing students with healthier, more sustainable food options while bolstering Hawai'i's agricultural economy.

Investing in universal free school meals is a cost-effective strategy that addresses food insecurity, enhances academic performance, promotes equity, and supports local agriculture. The County of Hawai'i Department of Research and Development urges you to favorably pass SB1300 SD1 with amendments to ensure that all students in our state have access to the nutritious meals they need to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT of SB1300 SD1 with amendments.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Benson Medina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Benson Medina
Director, Research and Development
County of Hawai'i



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96819
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Osa Tui, Jr.
President

Logan Okita
Vice President

Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Ann Mahi
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: SB 1300, SD1 – Relating to School Meals

Position: Support

Hearing: Tuesday, March 11, 2025, 2:00 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 SB 1300, SD1 which appropriates funds to subsidize meal costs for public school students whose families qualify as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households.

As educators, we witness far too often students who come to school hungry and struggle to focus on their studies, participate fully in class, or reach their full potential. We believe access to nutritious meals is essential for their overall well-being and is critical to academic success and achievement.

The ALICE report released in January 2025 by Aloha United Way highlights the extent of financial hardship faced by many Hawai'i families. While 12% of households in the state are below the poverty line, an additional 29% are ALICE households. These families earn above the federal poverty level but still struggle to afford basic necessities like housing, childcare, food, transportation, and healthcare.

Alarming, 46% of ALICE households experience consistent food insecurity. This means that nearly half of these families are struggling to put food on the table, and their children are likely coming to school hungry.

Expanding the eligibility for school meal subsidies to include ALICE households would be a significant step towards addressing this issue. This would provide much-needed support to families in need and allow students to focus on their education without the added stress of hunger.

By subsidizing meal costs for ALICE households, we can ensure that thousands more children have access to the nutrition they need to thrive in school and in life. We urge the committee to pass SB 1300, SD1 and invest in the future of Hawai'i's children.

Mahalo.

COUNTY COUNCIL

Mel Rapozo, Chair
KipuKai Kualii, Vice Chair
Addison Bulosan
Bernard P. Carvalho, Jr.
Felicia Cowden
Fern Holland
Arryl Kaneshiro



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK

Jade K. Fountain-Tanigawa, County Clerk
Lyndon M. Yoshioka, Deputy County Clerk

Telephone: (808) 241-4188
Facsimile: (808) 241-6349
Email: cokcouncil@kauai.gov

Council Services Division
4396 Rice Street, Suite 209
Lihue, Kauai, Hawaii 96766

March 10, 2025

TESTIMONY OF FERN HOLLAND
COUNCILMEMBER, KAUA'I COUNTY COUNCIL
ON
SB 1300, SD 1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS
House Committee on Education
Tuesday, March 11, 2025
2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309
Via Videoconference

Dear Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT with amendments to amend SB 1300, SD 1, Relating to School Meals. My testimony is submitted in my individual capacity as a member of the Kauai County Council.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the Department of Education budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend SB 1300, SD 1 to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Additionally, please see attached for Kauai County Council's Resolution No. 2025-19, which was unanimously adopted on February 26, 2025, and supports the provision of a universal free school breakfast and lunch program at all public schools.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony in support with amendments SB 1300, SD 1. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Council Services Staff at (808) 241-4188 or via email to cokcouncil@kauai.gov.

Sincerely,

FERN HOLLAND
Councilmember, Kauai County Council

AAO:dmc
Attachment

COUNTY COUNCIL
COUNTY OF KAUAI

Resolution No. 2025-19

**RESOLUTION URGING THE STATE LEGISLATURE TO SUPPORT THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNIVERSAL FREE
SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAM**

WHEREAS, one in ten families in Hawai'i has a child who skips meals due to insufficient food availability; and

WHEREAS, hunger undermines students' ability to focus, engage in the classroom, and reach their full academic potential; and

WHEREAS, food insecure students are at a higher risk of experiencing stress, depression, and chronic diseases throughout their lives; and

WHEREAS, students with insufficient meal account balances are currently denied access to school breakfasts and lunches, exacerbating their hunger and hindering their ability to learn; and

WHEREAS, seventy thousand families in the State of Hawai'i fall into an income gap where their income exceeds the amount necessary to qualify for free school meals, and yet that income is still insufficient to make ends meet at home; and

WHEREAS, studies demonstrate that nutritious school meals can boost test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of learning; and

WHEREAS, offering free, nutritious meals to all students would create a more equitable school environment, remove stigmas associated with free meal programs, and foster the physical and mental health of Hawai'i's children; and

WHEREAS, eight states—California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont—have implemented universal free school meals for public school students; and

WHEREAS, for approximately \$25 million annually—just over 1% of the Department of Education's budget—the State of Hawai'i could implement universal free school meals for public school students statewide; and

WHEREAS, a universal free school breakfast and lunch program would ensure that no student requesting breakfast and/or lunch would be denied; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE COUNTY OF KAUAI, STATE OF HAWAII, that it hereby supports the provision of a universal free school breakfast and lunch program at all public schools.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this Resolution shall be transmitted to Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi, Speaker of the House Nadine K. Nakamura, Representative Daynette "Dee" Morikawa, and Representative Luke A. Evslin.

Introduced by:



FERN HOLLAND

V:\RESOLUTIONS\2024-2026 TERM\Universal Free School Lunch Program CNT_dmc.docx

	Aye	Nay	Excused	Recused
Bulosan	X			
Carbalho	X			
Cowden	X			
Holland	X			
Kaneshiro	X			
Kuali'i	X			
Rapozo	X			
Total	7	0	0	0

Certificate Of Adoption

We hereby certify that Resolution No. 2025-19 was adopted by the Council of the County of Kaua'i, State of Hawai'i, Lihu'e, Kaua'i, Hawai'i, on February 26, 2025.



County Clerk

Dated February 26, 2025



Chairman & Presiding Officer

RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR.
Mayor

JOSIAH K. NISHITA
Managing Director



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
COUNTY OF MAUI
200 SOUTH HIGH STREET
WAILUKU, MAUI, HAWAII 96793
www.mauicounty.gov

LATE

TO: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Committee on Education

FROM: Richard T. Bissen, Jr., Mayor
Rogerene Arce, Director of Agriculture

DATE: March 10, 2025

SUBJECT: **SUPPORT OF SB1300 SD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT** of this important measure. The act appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households. Requires the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules.

We **SUPPORT** this measure for the following reasons:

1. This is a much needed bill that aims to address a systemic issue in a profoundly efficient way, which is why we implore the legislature to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have universal access to free school meals. This would ensure no child goes hungry at school. This is a basic practice of a decent and civilized society, ensuring our keiki are fed.
2. It is incredibly well researched and documented that the cost of living and socioeconomic situation in Hawai'i is incredibly challenging for the vast majority of our community. Vulnerability, poverty, and dispossession within our Hawai'i community are caused by various social determinates of health, the cost of basic needs such as housing, childcare, healthcare, and food, and our governments overall lack of invest in our food and nutrition security.

3. Feeding our keiki is our kuleana. Collectively we have failed them by creating economic barriers to free school meals for all keiki. When are keiki are hungry they can't learn, are more likely to be suspended, and generally exhibit poor behavior.
4. Furthermore, feeding through free school meals for all keiki will generally increase their attendance and improve behavior, academic performance, and overall levels of achievement and higher test scores. We must mālama our keiki.

Mahalo for your consideration.



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for S.B. 1300 – Relating to School Meals
House Committee on Education
Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair LaChica, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 1300, with suggested amendments. This bill would appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Department of Education to cover meal subsidies for students in ALICE households.

School meals are one of the government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children and supporting families. In Hawai'i, three in ten households with children face food insecurity.¹ While some of these children qualify for free meals, any family of four that makes at least \$47,000 does not,² leaving two-thirds of the families over this threshold still struggling to cover their food costs.³ For some Hawai'i children, school meals are the only balanced, nutritious meals they receive in a day.

Research consistently links proper nutrition to better educational and health outcomes and conversely, students who miss meals tend to perform poorly in school.⁴ Meals are more than just nutrition—they are an essential school supply. Ensuring that every student has access to the nutrients necessary for optimal learning is a critical step in helping to close achievement gaps.

While we wholeheartedly support any measure that would expand access to free school meals, this bill could be significantly strengthened to avoid potential pitfalls during implementation and to maximize the benefits to students. **We would like to respectfully suggest that the legislature amend the bill to:**

1. Specify that “meal subsidies” cover the full cost of one breakfast and one lunch per student, per day.
2. Specify that subsidized meals will meet the same nutrition standards as meals provided through the National School Lunch Program.
3. Amend HRS 302A-404 to explicitly restrict schools from denying meals to students when they are unable to pay.
4. Strike out HRS 302A-405, which requires parents to pay at least half the costs of meals.

¹ Hawai'i Foodbank, “The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i,” 2023.

² Hawai'i State Department of Education, “Free and Reduced Price Meals Program,” 2025.

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

³ United for ALICE, “ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship in Hawai'i,” 2024.

⁴ Amy E. Schwartz & Michah W. Rothbart, “Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance,” Maxwell School Center for Policy Research, July 2019.

Finally, we strongly encourage the committee to re-consider limiting this essential benefit only to students classified as ALICE. While we understand the intention of this restriction is to limit the costs of this bill, we are concerned about this provision for the following reasons:

1. **Increased administrative burden on the DOE:** ALICE is a designation that takes into consideration not just household size and income, but also household composition and expenditures. Determining which students qualify using this complex methodology will require a tedious level of information gathering by schools, and may feel invasive for families.
2. **Many children will still be left behind:** Income thresholds are not the only barrier to participation in the free or reduced-price lunch program. Challenges like language barriers, difficulty providing paperwork, and fear of disclosing information result in many children who are eligible simply falling through the cracks. One study found that 34 percent of students who were denied free or reduced price meals were actually eligible to receive them.⁵
3. **Most public school students likely already fall within the ALICE threshold:** Hawai‘i has the highest percentage of students enrolled in private schools of every state in the nation.⁶ While we don’t know exactly how many public school students fall above the ALICE threshold, it is likely a lower percentage than those who attend private schools (which this bill would not cover).

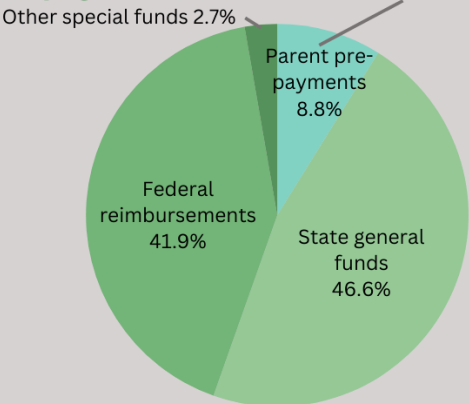
As shown in the attached page, if the price tag for this service is cause for concern, there are other ways the state might consider making up the shortfall that don’t place the burden on public school parents. Across the country, Universal Free School Meal programs have been implemented successfully through the intentional blending of policies and funding mechanisms at the federal, state, and local levels. We are pleased that the Hawai‘i legislature is paying attention to this important issue, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.

⁵ United States Department of Agriculture, Third Access, Participation, Eligibility, and Certification Study, September 2021.

⁶ National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Enrollment data, 2021.

ESTIMATED COSTS

The current proposal would cover the cost of parent pre-payments for school meals - an estimated \$15.3M.



DOE School Food Services Branch Revenues by Funding Source, School Year 2023-24

	Existing Participation Rates	Projected Participation Rates ¹
Breakfast	\$1,384,463.70	\$4,099,767.83
Lunch	\$13,872,568.20	\$22,621,313.73
Breakfast & Lunch	\$15,257,031.90	\$26,721,081.56

1. Assumes a 6.8% increase for lunch and 12.1% increase for breakfast over SY23-24 average daily participation rates.

Note: These cost estimates represent 0.7% to 1.2% of the overall DOE budget.

FUNDING UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS

How Can Hawai'i Fund UFSM?

Closing the capital gains tax loophole could bring in **\$134.8M** in 2025, going up to \$166.9 million by 2030 annually to the state.²

Increasing tax on non-owner occupied home sales over \$4M could bring in **~\$278M** in annual revenue.³

How Have Other States Funded UFSM?

General Funds (Education Fund Appropriation)	CA, ME, MI, MN, NM
Voter-passed tax measure that reduces income tax deductions available to households earning \$300,000 or more	CO
Voter-approved 4% tax on incomes over \$1 million	MA
\$.03 property tax rate increase	VT

2. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 2023 analysis.
3. Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law & Economic Justice, Preserving Hawai'i, How the State Conveyance Tax Can Re-Invest Nonresident Wealth Into Our Island Communities, 2024 analysis.



The Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice advocates for economic justice for and with Hawai'i's people. We envision a Hawai'i that puts its people first—where everyone can meet their basic needs while living happy, healthy and creative lives.



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1300 SD1: RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

TO: House Committee on Education
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai'i
Hearing: Tuesday, 3/11/25 @ 2:00 pm; Videoconference and Room 309

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members, Committee on Education:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i supports SB 1300 SD1, which allocates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students from Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH) is a tax exempt, community-based organization that has been providing social services in Hawai'i for over 77 years. CCH has programs serving elders, veterans, children, families, homeless and immigrants. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy to the most vulnerable of the people in Hawai'i. We serve over 40,000 people each year throughout the state. This bill is one of our economic justice priorities.

Food. A basic human necessity. Keiki need it to grow strong and healthy. Keiki need it to be alert and ready to learn. Keiki are our future, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have access to adequate food while in school.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i is one of the partners with the Aloha United Way in their ALICE Initiative to help these families thrive. Many of these hardworking ALICE families may not qualify for free and reduced-price lunches through the federal reimbursement program. Yet providing access to healthy school meals is critical for their children's nutrition and to remain focused in school. These families often struggle with food insecurity, leaving their children vulnerable.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i strongly supports this bill to provide food security for these keiki. Research has shown that free school meals lead to improved academic performance, higher test scores, and better overall well-being. They also help reduce stress and depression—challenges that many students face today.

Take action now! Supporting this initiative will not only help ALICE families and their children thrive but also build a stronger, healthier future for our community. By ensuring our keiki are well-fed, we invest in their education, their health, and their future success.

We urge your support for this bill.

If you have any questions, please contact our Legislative Liaison, Betty Lou Larson at (808) 527-4813.



CLARENS T. C. CHING CAMPUS • 1822 Ke'eumoku Street, Honolulu, HI 96822
Phone (808) 527-4813 •





Where LGBTQIA+ Rights Meet the Labor Movement
A constituency group of the Hawai'i State AFL-CIO

March 7, 2025

House's Committee on Education
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 2:00 PM

RE: **Strong Support for Senate Bill 1300 SD 1**

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and committee members,

Pride at Work – Hawai'i is an official chapter of [Pride at Work](#) which is a national nonprofit organization that represents LGBTQIA+ union members and their allies. We are an officially recognized constituency group of the AFL-CIO that organizes mutual support between the organized Labor Movement and the LGBTQIA+ Community to further social and economic justice.

Pride at Work - Hawai'i strongly supports **Senate Bill 1300**, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as **Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE)** households. This bill is an essential step toward ensuring that no child in our public schools goes hungry simply because their family's income falls into an underserved gap—earning too much to qualify for free meal programs but still struggling to afford basic needs.

Food insecurity remains a critical issue for working families in Hawai'i, particularly for those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, people of color, and other marginalized groups who disproportionately experience economic hardship. Many ALICE families work multiple jobs, yet their wages do not cover the rising costs of living, leaving children vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. **No child should have to worry about where their next meal will come from while trying to focus on learning.**

By providing meal subsidies to students from ALICE households, SB 1300 directly addresses the gap in existing meal assistance programs. Ensuring that students have access to nutritious meals will:

- Improve their overall **academic performance, concentration, and energy levels** in the classroom.
- Reduce **stigma and social barriers** associated with school meal assistance programs.
- Support working families who contribute to our economy but still face financial hardships.

We also strongly support the requirement that the **Department of Education adopts administrative rules** to implement and oversee this program effectively. Clear guidelines will ensure that the subsidies reach those who need them most while maintaining transparency and efficiency.

As an organization dedicated to economic justice and equity for LGBTQ+ workers and their families, **Pride at Work - Hawai'i urges the committee to pass SB 1300** to help build a more

Pride at Work – Hawai'i's Testimony is Strong Support of Senate Bill 1300

inclusive and supportive educational system where every student has the nourishment they need to thrive.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration. We respectfully ask for your **favorable action** on this important bill.

In solidarity,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)

President

[Pride at Work – Hawai'i](#)



HAWAI'I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Phone: (808) 489-9549

Web site: <http://www.hysn.org> E-mail: info@hysn.org

Vonnell Ramos, President
Cyd Hoffeld, Vice President
Sione Ford Naeata, Treasurer
Greg Tjapkes, Secretary

Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

Access to Independence
Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i
Bobby Benson Center
Child and Family Service
Coalition for a Drug-Free Hawai'i
Domestic Violence Action Center
EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.
Friends of the Children's Justice
Center of Maui
Get Ready Hawai'i
Hale Kipa, Inc.
Hale 'Opio Kaua'i, Inc.
Hawai'i Children's Action
Network
Hawai'i Health & Harm
Reduction Center
Hawaii Island Community'
Health Center
Ho'ola Na Pua
Ho'okele Coalition of Kaua'i
Ka Hale Pomaika'i
Kokua Kalihi Valley
Kaua'i Planning and Action
Alliance
Lines for Life Youth Line
Maui Youth and Family Services
Na Pu'uwai Molokai Native
Hawaiian Health Care
Systems
P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.
Parents and Children Together
PHOCUSED
Piha Wellness and Healing
Planned Parenthood of the
Great Northwest, Hawaii
Alaska, Kentucky, Indiana
Residential Youth Services
& Empowerment (RYSE)
Salvation Army Family
Intervention Services
Sex Abuse Treatment Center
Susannah Wesley Community
Center
The Catalyst Group

March 7, 2025

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Education

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1300 SD1 RELATING TO **SCHOOL MEALS**

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports SB 1300 SD1 Relating to School Meals.

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

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

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

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

Providing free school meals to children from ALICE households will ensure that more public school students will have access to healthy food.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director



1050 Bishop St. PMB 235 |

Honolulu, HI 96813

P: 808-533-1292 | e:

info@hawaiiifood.com

Executive Officers

Maile Miyashiro, C&S Wholesale Grocer, *Chair*

Kit Okimoto, Okimoto Corp., *Vice Chair*

Jayson Watts, Mahi Pono, *Secretary/Treasurer*

Lauren Zirbel, HFIA, *Executive Director*

Paul Kosasa, ABC Stores, *Advisor*

Derek Kurisu, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*

Toby Taniguchi, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*

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

Eddie Asato, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*

Gary Okimoto, Safeway, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Education

FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: March 11, 2025

TIME: 2pm

RE: SB1300 SD1 Relating to School Meals

Position: Support

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

HFIA is in support of this measure. As the measure notes for students, access to healthy meals is critical to academic success and achievement. Access to nutritious meals also promotes students' short term and long-term health, improves behavioral outcomes, and improves overall wellbeing.

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

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

We support providing subsidized school meals for students whose families qualify as Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE.) Many families in Hawaii are struggling and food insecurity is at historic levels. For families that are working and can still not consistently provide meals for their keiki this program is vital.

We would also support expanding this program to provide free school meals for all keiki. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



HIPHI Board

May Okihiro, MD, MS

Chair

*John A. Burns School of Medicine,
Department of Pediatrics*

Titiimaea Ta'ase, JD

Secretary

State of Hawai'i, Deputy Public Defender

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Hawai'i Health Partners

Misty Pacheco, DrPH

University of Hawai'i at Hilo

Justin Puckett, CPA, MBA

Humana

Kathleen Roche, MS, RN, CENP

Kaiser Permanente

Dina Shek, JD

Medical-Legal Partnership

For Children in Hawai'i

Garret Sugai

HMSA

JoAnn Tsark, MPH

John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native

Hawaiian Research Office

HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &
Evaluation

Community Health
Worker Initiatives

COVID-19 Response

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: March 10, 2025

To: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Education

Re: Support for SB 1300 SD1, Relating to School Meals

Hrg: Tuesday, March 11, 2025 at 2:00 pm, Room 309

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating, Active Living² (HEAL) Coalition is in **support of SB 1300 SD1, with amendments**, which would subsidize school meals for ALICE students.

Suggested Amendment

Please amend this bill to guarantee that subsidies provide every student with access to free school meals.

Qualification Concern

If free school meals won't be expanded beyond ALICE families, we have concerns that the method to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals is unclear and dependent on administrative rules. Administrative rules can take years to implement and are subject to change with each new administration. A more effective and timely solution is to establish clear qualifications directly within state law.

The State's definition of ALICE families lacks clarity, making it uncertain which families qualify, and for what benefit. A more precise and practical approach would be to use a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) as the standard, as it is already widely utilized in programs like Medicaid, SNAP, and the existing free and reduced-price lunch programs.

The survival budget for an ALICE household is roughly three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. A family of four making below \$107,796 is considered ALICE, while \$107,640 is three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.³

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

² The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.

³ ALICE Report. <https://www.auw.org/auw-alice-report-2024/>



Half of Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.⁴

Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.⁵ By failing to ensure they have access to meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success.

Improved Academic Achievement

Hungry students can't learn. Providing healthy nutrition to our students will ensure they have the resources they need to thrive. Studies have shown that free school meal programs lead to improved student performance.⁶ This program is only estimated to cost around 1-2% of the Department of Education's total budget and provide a 15% increase in test scores, a 15:1 return on investment.⁷

Federal Funding Increases

Eight other states—California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont—have implemented free school meal programs, with data showing increases in their federal reimbursement funding. In California, free and reduced-price lunch enrollment rates have risen alongside the implementation of their program, further maximizing federal support for students.⁸ Hawai'i can follow the lead of these other states by implementing free school meals for all students while also increasing the federal funding we receive to support the program.

Mahalo,

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

Nate Hix

Director of Policy and Advocacy

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

⁵ "Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7282962/>

⁶ "Universal free lunch is linked to better test scores in New York City, new report finds" <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2019/10/15/21121847/universal-free-lunch-is-linked-to-better-test-scores-in-new-york-city-new-report-finds/>

⁷ "Equity on the Menu". Hawai'i Appressed. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601374ae84e51e430a1829d8/t/65f390f60a673a7bf3cfeb89/1710461187562/Equity+on+the+Menu_FINAL.pdf

⁸ "Free or Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data". California Department of Education. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filessp.asp>

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 8:25:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan B Roberts Emery	Green Party of Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson , Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of Committee,

My name is Susan RobertsEmery, I am Co chair of the Green Party of Hawai'i. We are writing in Strong support of SB1300 SD1, with amendments.

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. this is important for children to be able to focus on their daily activities. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please pass SB1300 SD1 with amendments for all children!

Sincerely,

Susan RobertsEmery

Green Party of Hawai'i

Paauilo



SENATE BILL 1300, SD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

MARCH 11, 2025 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support with amendments.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports and suggests amendments for SB 1300, SD1, relating to school meals, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

Hungry children can't learn.

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

Moreover, a 2021 study by the Brookings Institute found that schoolwide free meals improve math performance. This is further bolstered by research conducted by the Food

Research and Action Center, which has noted that **students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and achievement.** Studies have clearly demonstrated the link between school meals and student success, which is especially important as schools and educators continue to strategize how to combat the lingering loss of opportunity to learn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

That said, we urge you to amend this measure to establish free school meals for all public school students in our state. As the National Education Association has stated, through universal free school meals programs, “We can grow generations of healthy eaters and save our country billions.” School meals cost less per student when more students participate in a free meal program. An article in *Nutrients* entitled “Universal Free Meals Associated with Lower Meal Costs While Maintaining Nutritional Quality” found that schools that participated in a universal meal program spent 67 and 58 cents less per lunch and breakfast, respectively, while maintaining the same nutritional quality. **If fully funding free school meals is not affordable at this time, the committee could establish a statutory provision requiring that school meals be made free for all within three years, by the 2028-2029 school year.**

If the committee keeps the appropriation for ALICE families, we urge you to eliminate provisions requiring the DOE to establish administrative rules. Such rules can take over a year, or multiple years, to adopt, by which point the appropriation may have lapsed. **Rather than create administrative rules, the committee should explicitly authorize the DOE in statute to provide free meals to qualifying families.**

In place of the ALICE family designation, we suggest using a specific percentage of the federal poverty limit, such as 300 percent of FPL. While income ranges are considered for identifying ALICE families, they are not the only factor. The ALICE population is deliberately constructed to account for multiple overlapping economic variables that lead to a family being cost-burdened or on the cusp of financial precarity. Using a percentage of the federal poverty limit makes it easier for the DOE to identify families who would qualify for the additional meals coverage, especially since the department will have to design a new process for families to apply for and receive free meals subsidies.

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

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com • 808-679-7454

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 1:12:27 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
laurel brier	Kauai Women's Caucus	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Let's make a Hawaii a state who cares for it children and provides for at least the most basic of needs. Free school meals for all especially financially vulnerable families. Too many of our children are going hungry which impacts ability to learn. And make it a win, win but requiring locally grown produce into those meals. Strong support for SB1300 and amendments to include all as well as locally grown ingredients.



March 10, 2025

Subject: **SB1300**, Relating to School Meals

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and the House Committee on Education,

Hawai'i Food+ Policy strongly **supports SB1300**, which requires the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules to provide a lower rate or free meals to students based on their economic need and appropriate funds to subsidize meal costs for students whose families qualify as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

Access to nutritious meals is fundamental to the health, well-being, and academic success of Hawai'i's keiki. However, the rising cost of living and high rates of food insecurity, particularly among ALICE households, pose significant challenges to ensuring that all students receive the nourishment they need to thrive. According to the Aloha United Way ALICE report (2025), 29% of Hawai'i's households are ALICE, and 46% of these households consistently face food insecurity. For many students from these families, school meals may be their only consistent source of nutrition.

By subsidizing meal costs for ALICE households, SB1300 will not only help alleviate food insecurity but also support students' ability to focus on their academics, extracurricular activities, and long-term goals without the distraction of hunger. This measure ensures that students can reach their full potential regardless of their families' financial constraints.

We urge the committee to **pass SB1300** to support the health, education, and future success of Hawai'i's keiki.

Mahalo,
The Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

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

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



March 6, 2025

Senator Michelle Kidani
214 State Capitol
415 S Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Re: SB 1300 – **Support**

Dear Senator Kidani:

The Church State Council is the oldest public interest advocacy and legal services organization in the Western United States devoted exclusively to issues of liberty of conscience, religious freedom, social justice, and the separation of church and state. We are a Seventh-day Adventist organization serving a five-state western region (Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada & Utah) for the Adventist Church. We are writing this letter in support of SB 1300.

The Church State Council supports legislation that helps to bring about equality and freedom. All Americans are entitled to the fundamental rights of conscience, religious freedom and the pursuit of happiness.

Food plays a vital role in preparing children and students to learn and make sure they are healthy enough to attend school. Nutrition impacts brain development, memory and cognitive function, energy, attention and focus, which are all critical to the ability to absorb and retain information.

This bill presents an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our vulnerable citizens and address a societal issue with appropriate legislation.

Thank you for your important work in authoring SB 1300.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephen Allred
Director of Government Relations

W W W . C H U R C H S T A T E . O R G

2686 TOWNSGATE ROAD | WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA 91361
(805) 413-7396 | (916) 446-2552 | FAX: (805) 778-8843

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 10:36:22 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sylvia Dolena	Pele Lani Farm LLC, Kulia I Ka nu'u Outreach Services	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support Free Meals for ALICE children. They cannot learn anything on an empty stomach. Extend free meals for students determined “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed,” by the DOE.

Mahalo,

Sylvia Dolena

Pele Lani Farm LLC, Kulia I Ka nu'u Outreach Services



**Parents And
Children Together**
BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS
THAT MATTER MOST

ParentsAndChildrenTogether.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1300 SD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

TO: Chair Woodson, Vice-Chair La Chica, & Members,
House Committee on Education

FROM: Ryan Kusumoto, President & CEO

DATE: March 11, 2025 at 2:00 PM

Parents and Children Together (PACT) supports SB 1300 SD1 Relating to School Meals, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households. PACT supports this measure as a means of getting closer towards providing Universal free meals to all public school students. Universal free meals would not only improve nutrition, academic performance and reduce food insecurity for students whose families are facing economic strain or hardship but also create a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Founded in 1968, PACT is a statewide community-based organization providing a wide array of innovative and educational social services to families in need. Assisting more than 15,000 people across the state annually, we help identify, address, and successfully resolve challenges through our 20 programs. Among our services are early education programs, domestic violence prevention and intervention programs, child abuse prevention and intervention programs, childhood sexual abuse supportive group services, child and adolescent behavioral health programs, sex trafficking intervention, poverty prevention and community building programs.

Through our programs, we are seeing the rise in food insecurity that our local families face. Even working families who have not previously needed help with food have started to request and accept it. We saw this increase start during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and increase through the rise of inflation and the 2023 Maui wildfire crisis. In response, we have increased direct food and financial assistance to program participants in the Kalihi and Maui communities. Additionally, we support survivors of domestic violence through the financial impact of keeping their families safe, which often includes leaving their abusive financial provider partner. Many of the survivors we serve struggle through houselessness and loss of income. Increased access to food assistance such as school meals would help these families achieve and/or maintain basic stability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact me at (808) 847-3285 or rkusumoto@pacthawaii.org if you have any questions.



March 11, 2025

Subject: Hawai'i Foodbank in Support of SB 1300, SD1 Relating to School Meals

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for SB 1300, SD1 Relating to School Meals. This bill appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households and requires the Department to adopt administrative rules.

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

The recent 2024 ALICE in Hawai'i report, released by Aloha United Way, underscores the broader economic challenges fueling food insecurity. Forty percent (40%) of Hawai'i's families are at the ALICE threshold or below. These households live paycheck to paycheck, and nearly half of those below the ALICE threshold face food insecurity.

As the state's largest hunger-relief organization, Hawai'i Foodbank has been committed to ensuring no one in Hawai'i goes hungry since 1983. We work with over 225 agency partners on O'ahu and Kaua'i to distribute food, and programs like Food 4 Keiki and 'Ohana Produce Plus provide nutritious meals to children and families.

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

With aloha,

Amy Miller
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank



PROJECT VISION

**House Committee on Education
Chair Woodson and Vice-Chair La Chica**

SB1300 SD1: RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice-Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee,

Project Vision Hawai'i is submitting testimony in strong support and with amendments for SB1300 SD1. Free meals for all keiki has been a long standing debate in Hawai'i. In Hawai'i, about 48% of families live in financially vulnerable positions, with only $\frac{2}{3}$ of those families qualifying for free and reduced lunch. This barrier prevents students from receiving the proper meals they may need to not only gain proper nutrients, but to be fed for the school day ahead of them.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

By giving students and families the chance to not have to worry about paying for school meals, a huge financial burden will be lifted from their shoulders. Currently, school lunches for high schools cost \$2.75, requiring families to spend nearly \$500 solely on lunches alone, with an expected rise to \$5 in the coming year. Through our work serving various Title I communities in Hawai'i, it is one of our priorities that the stress of paying for school lunches doesn't become a burden as it already has in the community. Taking away this financial stress will give families the leeway and capacity to focus on other important and prioritized needs which is why we strongly urge you to pass SB1300 SD1 with amendments.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



HAWAII HEALTH &
HARM REDUCTION CENTER

677 Ala Moana Blvd, Ste 226
Honolulu, HI 96813

(808) 521-2437
www.hhhrc.org

*"Reducing harm,
promoting health,
creating wellness, and
fighting stigma
in Hawai'i and
the Pacific."*

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1300 SD1

TO: Chair Justin H Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, & Members of the House Committee on Education

FROM: Heather Lusk, Executive Director

DATE: March 11, 2025 (2:00 PM)

Aloha,

Hawai'i Health & Harm Reduction Center (HHHRC) supports with amendments SB 1300 SD1, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

For many families, the cost of school meals is a barrier to accessing a balanced diet for their children. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals.

Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security for students who may otherwise not eat at all. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. Schools that provide free meals experience significant academic increases, as access to basic nutrition has empowered their students to focus better on learning.

For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. **Please amend** this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



2025 Network Members

Aloha Harvest
Aloha United Way
Chef Hui
City and County of Honolulu
County of Hawai'i
Hawai'i Alliance for
Progressive Action (HAPA)
Hawai'i Appleseed
Hawai'i Children's Action
Network
Hawai'i Dept. of Agriculture
Hawai'i Dept. of Health
Hawai'i Food Bank
Hawai'i Food Bank - Kaua'i
Branch
Hawai'i Good Food Alliance
Hawai'i Public Health Institute
Kōkua Kalihi Valley
Lanakila Pacific
Mālama Kaua'i
Maui Department of
Agriculture
Maui Food Bank
Parents and Children Together
Supersistence
The Food Basket
The Pantry, by Feeding Hawai'i
Together
Wai'anae Coast
Comprehensive Health Center

hawaiihungeraction.org

House Committee on Education

March 11, 2025, at 2:00pm

RE: Support for SB 1300, Relating to Education

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

The Hawai'i Hunger Action Network, a coalition of more than twenty local organizations with the mission to advocate for food security for Hawai'i households, would like to express support for SB1300 which would appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Department of Education to cover meal subsidies for students in ALICE households. We enthusiastically support any measure that would expand access to free school meals, and we are hopeful that this is seen as an incremental step toward the ultimate goal of providing free meals to all students.

For many keiki, school meals are the most nutritious meals they receive all day. Hawai'i households who struggle to afford the rising cost of living often still earn too much to qualify for free meals. Offering up to two free meals a day would eliminate the stigma associated with unpaid meal balances, ensuring that every student has access to healthy food, regardless of their family's financial situation.

Additionally, UFSM has proven to improve academic performance in other states by ensuring children receive proper nutrition necessary for healthy development and learning.¹

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of this important legislation because keiki cannot learn when they are hungry.

With aloha,
Hawai'i Hunger Action Network membership

¹ Amy E. Schwartz & Michah W. Rothbart, "Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance," Maxwell School Center for Policy Research, July 2019.

https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/working-papers/wp-203-let-them-eat-lunch.pdf?sfvrsn=efae783d_8



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Fawn Helekahi-Burns
Hāna, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakalā, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahālāwai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Kilia Avelino-Purdy
Moloka'i

Negus Manna
Lāna'i

India Clark
North Shore, O'ahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, O'ahu

Ted Radovich
Waimānalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kaua'i

Aloha Chair La Chica, Vice Chair Woodson, and Members of the House Education Committee,

The Hawai'i Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFU supports SB1300.**

SB1300 embodies a significant commitment toward ensuring that every student in Hawaii has access to nutritious school meals, recognizing the unique challenges faced by families identified under the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) classification. By allocating funds to subsidize meals for students from these households, the bill acknowledges the financial barriers that can impede a child's ability to thrive academically. However, identifying and classifying ALICE families presents several logistical challenges that need consideration. Determining eligibility based on annual household income, household size, and the age distribution of household members requires precise data collection and regular updates to maintain accuracy over time. This task could be burdensome and complex for both the families providing this information and the Department of Education managing it.

Given these complexities, **a universal free meal program may offer a simpler, more equitable solution**. Such an approach would eliminate the arduous process of verifying ALICE status, sidestepping potential errors or omissions that could leave vulnerable children without support. By providing universally free school meals, we can ensure that all students benefit from proper nutrition, which directly supports their education and well-being. A universal program would also reduce administrative burdens on the Department of Education, allowing resources to focus directly on enhancing meal quality and accessibility rather than on complex eligibility verification processes. By addressing the nutritional needs of all students comprehensively, we can foster a more inclusive and nurturing educational environment statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



March 10, 2025

O'ahu Youth Action Board

Est. 2017

Co-Chair

Efren Berrones

Co-Chair

Jean Grey

Vice Chair

Kahekili "Kai" Alip

Treasurer

Dawson Pahia-Kuloloia

Social Coordinator

Laleiyana "Lala" Caton

Communications Coordinator

Kyle-Ann Bobo

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB 1300 with Amendments Relating to School Meals

TO: House Education Committee

FROM: Efren Berrones- Co-Chair of O'ahu Youth Action Board,
Partners In Care (PIC)

Hearing: Tuesday, March 11, 2025 2:00 PM

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the House Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 1300, with amendments to provide free school meals for all keiki.

My name is Efren Berrones, and I serve as the Co-Chair of the O'ahu Youth Action Board (OYAB). OYAB is a designated board composed of youth with lived experience of homelessness on O'ahu, advocating for policy changes that directly impact houseless young people. We firmly believe that any decisions affecting us must include our voices, perspectives, and lived experiences.

For many low-income and houseless students in Hawai'i, school meals are the only reliable source of nutrition they receive each day. No child should have to struggle through the school day hungry, yet food insecurity remains a major barrier to learning and academic success. While SB 1300 takes steps toward addressing this issue, we strongly urge the Committee to amend the bill to ensure that free meals are available to all students, regardless of income.

Providing universal free meals would eliminate the stigma associated with receiving free or reduced-price lunch. Right now, many students from low-income families feel embarrassed or singled out when accessing school meals, leading some to skip meals altogether rather than be labeled as "poor." By offering free meals to all students, we can create a more equitable and inclusive school environment where no child feels ashamed for needing a basic necessity.

Universal free school meals would also ease the financial burden on struggling families, ensuring that every student—regardless of background—has the nutrition needed to focus, learn, and thrive. Hawai'i has an opportunity to set a standard for supporting its keiki by guaranteeing that no child is left behind when it comes to access to food.

We urge the Committee to amend SB 1300 to provide free school meals for all students and ensure that every child in Hawai'i has the nourishment they need to succeed.

With Aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Efren Berrones". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Efren Berrones

Co-Chair, O'ahu Youth Action Board

efrenb@partnersincareoahu.org



ALOHA CARE

LATE

To: The Honorable Justin H. Woodson, Chair
The Honorable Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
House Committee on Education

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

Hearing: Tuesday, March 11, 2025, 2:00 p.m., Conference Room 309

RE: **SB1300 SD1 Relating to School Meals**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support with comments on SB1300 SD1**. This measure appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households; and requires the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules.

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

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

AlohaCare supports the intent of this measure, but as a member of the Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, we are aligned with HEAL's request for an amendment to provide free school meals for all students. Under this measure, many students may be denied meals due to inability to pay and their household's income being even slightly over the income requirements. Providing breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of household income, ensures they have a consistent source

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

² <https://hawaiifoodbank.org/keiki/>



of nutritious food and can focus on learning, while also removing stigma for students accessing free or reduced meals.

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

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support with comments** on **SB1300 SD1**.

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: **SB 1300 SD1 – Relating to School Meals**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
March 11, 2025, 2:00 PM

LATE

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT with suggested amendments to SB 1300 SD1**. This bill appropriates funds to the Department of Education (DOE) for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

Hawai'i public schools provide students with access to meals through the federal National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Currently, students qualify for free school meals if their families earn up to 130% of the federal poverty level and for reduced-price meals if their income is between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level.

Many families that have to pay for school meals can't make ends meet. For example, a family of four that makes \$67,000 per year doesn't qualify for free or reduced-price meals,¹ while the ALICE household survival budget to afford the "bare-minimum costs of basic necessities" for that same family is nearly \$108,000.² If that family has two students eating breakfast and lunch at school, they must pay about \$1,300 per year for those meals.

In order to receive federal subsidies for the meals they serve, the DOE is required to determine if students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. **With this bill, the DOE would need to conduct additional income determinations on top of those that they are already doing and add a fourth eligibility tier for school meals, which would add significant administrative burdens and costs to the program. In addition, the DOE would be dependent on Aloha United Way determining ALICE thresholds every year, as ALICE is not an official annual statistic, as the federal poverty level is.**

It would be more efficient to simply provide free meals for all students, and the case for universal free school meals is strong.³ Schools benefit from reduced administrative burdens because they no longer need to collect meal payments. Students see better academic performance and nutrition. Currently 94 DOE schools are already providing universal free meals, and it would make sense to build from there.⁴

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please consider our suggestion and pass this bill.

Thank you,
Nicole Woo, Director of Research and Economic Policy

¹

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

² <https://www.auw.org/about/alice-initiative/alice-reports/>

³ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20220504.114330/>

⁴ <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/CEP.aspx>



LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus Commission

Advocating for the Hawai'i LGBTQIA+ Community



Mailing Address: LGBTQ+ Commission, c/o The Department of Human Services,
P.O. Box 339, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96809-0339

Email: hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com
Web: <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/lgbtq-commission/>

March 10, 2025

House's Committee on Education
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

LATE

Hearing: Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 2:00 PM

RE: Strong Support for Senate Bill 1300 SD 1

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and committee members,

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 816, SD 1 on behalf of the Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus. (LGBTQ+) Commission, which was established by the 2022 Hawai'i State Legislature with the following purpose:

"...to improve the State's interface with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus community; identify the short- and long-range needs of its members; and ensure that there is an effective means of researching, planning, and advocating for the equity of this population in all aspects of state government."

The Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission strongly supports Senate Bill 1300, which seeks to appropriate funds to the Department of Education to provide meal subsidies for students from families classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households. We commend the Legislature's efforts to ensure that all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, have reliable access to nutritious meals, which are fundamental to their well-being and academic success.

While SB 1300 is critical for supporting students from ALICE households, we urge the Legislature to recognize that access to school meals is also a matter of equity and safety for LGBTQIA+ youth. Many LGBTQIA+ students experience food insecurity not necessarily due to household income but because they come from hostile home environments where they may be neglected, denied resources, or subjected to rejection and discrimination. These students often rely on school meals as a primary or consistent source of nutrition, and ensuring broad access to meal subsidies would help protect their well-being.

National and local research consistently shows that LGBTQIA+ youth are disproportionately affected by family rejection, homelessness, and mental health

Proudly established pursuant to Hawai'i Revised Statutes Chapter 369, as enacted through Act 41, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022

HI State LGBTQ+ Commission Testimony in Strong Support of SB 1300 SD 1

challenges. In Hawai'i, a significant percentage of LGBTQIA+ youth report experiencing family conflict and housing instability. For those living in unsupportive homes, school meals may be their only guaranteed access to daily nutrition. Thus, limiting eligibility solely to ALICE households may unintentionally exclude vulnerable LGBTQIA+ students who do not meet the financial criteria but nonetheless experience food insecurity due to family rejection or neglect.

By expanding access to meal subsidies, SB 1300 takes a meaningful step toward ensuring that all students—especially those from marginalized communities—can focus on learning without the distraction of hunger. The Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission urges the Legislature to pass this measure and consider additional safeguards to ensure that LGBTQIA+ students in unsafe or unsupportive homes can access these essential meals.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,

Kathleen O'Dell, Ph.D. (she/her)

Chair

[Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission](#)

LATE



House Committee on Education

Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA) Supports: SB1300 SD1 w/ amendments

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 at: 2:01 p.m. Conference Room 309

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and Members of the Committee,

HAPA supports SB1300 SD1 which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students. Extending these benefits to all students will lessen the burden on DOE administration and ensure that children will not be left behind. It is likely that most students already fall within the ALICE threshold.

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

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

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

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

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



programs, and also removes a huge burden from parents who will no longer have to worry about making sure their children are able to eat while at school.

Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support SB 1300 SD1 with amendments to include all students to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Frederick', is written over a light gray horizontal line.

Anne Frederick
Executive Director

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/7/2025 4:57:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB1300. Any action to reduce costs for student meals is needed. Students perform better when they are not hungry. Please pass this bill. In the future, we need to continue to work for free meals for all students.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/7/2025 6:43:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Support with amendments. While this bill currently provides funding to make school meals free for students whose families are asset limited, I am requesting amendments to the proposal to make school meals free for all students across our state. Thank you.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/7/2025 8:28:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kat Saneewong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 1300 SD1

March 7, 2025

Hawai‘i State Legislature

To Committee Members,

Aloha, my name is Kat Saneewong, and I am writing in strong support of SB 1300 SD1, which would provide free school lunches to all students in Hawai‘i. I have seen firsthand how important school meals are for children and families, and how access to food can impact a child’s ability to learn, focus, and thrive.

For many keiki, a school lunch isn’t just a convenience—it’s a necessity. It may be the only guaranteed meal they receive that day. I have spoken with parents who stretch their budgets to ensure their children have food, sometimes at the expense of other necessities. I have worked with students who struggle to concentrate in class simply because they are hungry. Hunger isn’t just a physical issue—it directly affects a child’s confidence, academic performance, and overall well-being.

Hawai‘i has one of the highest costs of living in the country, and many families face tough financial choices every day. No child should have to worry about whether they can afford to eat at school, and no parent should have to stress over lunch money when they are already doing everything they can to provide for their family.

Providing free school lunches for all students is not just the right thing to do—it's a smart investment in our children and our future. When kids have access to nutritious meals, they perform better in school, have fewer behavioral issues, and are more likely to succeed in the long run. Removing the financial barrier to school meals also eliminates the stigma some children face when receiving free or reduced-price lunch.

I urge you to pass SB 1300 SD1 and help make sure that every keiki in Hawai'i has the food they need to learn, grow, and thrive. No child should go hungry at school—ever. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kat Saneewong

(808)459-1808

Kat@hawaiiigoodfoodalliance.org

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/7/2025 9:02:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noel Shaw	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I'm writing in support of SB1300, but requesting amendments to increase the scope and secure free school meals for all keiki. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Additionally, with constant changes and fluctuations to the incomes of families and the realities of job cuts happening- people are going in and out of the ALICE range. The administrative burden tracking this would have on both the DOE and on parents to report would be massive.

Please pass this bills with amendments and fund free school meals for all keiki in Hawai'i.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/7/2025 11:15:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa Galloway	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support [SB 1300 SD1](#)

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 5:26:32 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia Blair	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support free school lunches for children.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 7:54:18 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenni Guillen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Dr. Jenni Guillen, and I am writing in strong support of SB1300, but would like to see this bill expanded to ensure that all children in Hawai‘i receive school meals, regardless of income.

Hawai‘i families are facing an unprecedented financial strain. While the median household income in our state is \$97,360 ([Statista, 2024](#)), the cost of living index—which includes essential expenses like food, housing, transportation, and healthcare—is a staggering \$179,000 per year ([World Population Review, 2024](#)). This stark discrepancy means that many families who do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals are still struggling to put food on the table.

For households with school-aged children, fixed costs such as housing, gas, and medical expenses leave little room for flexibility. Often, food is the expense that gets adjusted when budgets are tight. No child in Hawai‘i should have to worry about where their next meal is coming from while trying to focus on learning.

Providing universal free school meals is not just about nutrition—it’s about equity, academic success, and the well-being of our keiki. Research consistently shows that students who have access to nutritious meals perform better academically, have improved concentration, and experience better overall health. By ensuring every child is fed, regardless of their family's income, we are investing in a stronger, healthier, and more resilient future for Hawai‘i.

I urge you to pass SB1300 to make school meals accessible to all children, ensuring that no student goes hungry simply because their family falls between the gaps of financial eligibility.

Mahalo nui for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Guillen

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 12:34:33 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shay Chan Hodges	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 1:04:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
B.A. McClintock	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 1:42:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Greg Crawford	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 1:46:01 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 2:09:48 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annalise Brolaski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 2:10:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anthony Makana Paris	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB1300 SD1 - Relating to School Meals

Aloha members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing in support of SB1300 SD1, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households. I strongly believe that this bill will make a positive difference in the lives of countless children and families across Hawai‘i, including my own personal story.

Growing up, my family faced significant financial struggles, and there were times when we were not able to put enough food on the table. Free school meals were often the only time in a day when I knew I would have something to eat. The meal I received at school was not just nourishment for my body—it was sometimes the only opportunity I had to feel full and focused enough to learn. These meals gave me the strength to stay in school, to stay focused on my studies, and to dream of a better future, despite the difficult circumstances at home.

For many children across Hawai‘i, school meals are an essential part of their day. In fact, research has shown that one of the most powerful tools the government has to deliver good nutrition to children is through school meal programs. Unfortunately, Hawai‘i faces an alarming food insecurity crisis, with three in ten households with children experiencing food insecurity. While some of these families qualify for free meals, any family of four making more than \$47,000 does not, leaving many struggling families with limited access to nutritious meals.

According to research, proper nutrition is closely linked to better educational and health outcomes. Children who are not adequately nourished tend to perform poorly in school, which can affect their long-term success. Meals are more than just food—they are essential school supplies that help ensure that every student has the energy and focus needed to succeed. It is critical that we do everything we can to make sure that every child has access to the nutrients necessary for optimal learning.

I support this bill because it directly addresses the needs of ALICE households, who are too often overlooked when it comes to accessing free school meals. Ensuring that these families can receive meal subsidies would help alleviate some of the financial strain they face and give their children the chance to thrive both in the classroom and beyond.

Please support SB1300 SD1. Every child deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed, and a critical part of that is ensuring they have access to healthy, nutritious meals. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Me ke aloha,

Anthony Makana Parisk

Kapolei, O'ahu

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 2:32:04 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chris Speere	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SB1300 is a necessary step in ensuring fresh, wholesome, and nutritious foods are included in local childrens diets in a safe, consistent and supportive manner. Our children are our most valuable resourse and regardless of cost we must take a stand to have this option available for every student who chooses to or has no other option for lunch.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 3:18:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cynthia M Archibald	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a Nutritionist, I have extensively researched and written on the topic of childhood diet/nutrition, and specifically the correlation with cognitive function. The evidence shows that regular access to healthy and nutrient dense food improves children's' cognitive performance. Making these meals free for every student eases a significant financial and psychological burden on the families, improving the quality of life for the students' and creating a more conducive better learning environment. This bill supports the overall goals/purpose of our public education system and is an investment in Hawaii's future. I strongly support the bill

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 3:18:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victoria Hill	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB1300. Children should not be worried about being hungry while at school, and it is our job to take care of our community by providing free meals for all Hawaii students.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 3:34:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robert H. Pahia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We all have a civic duty to ensure that all students have access to at least one healthy, nutritious meal.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 3:28:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

My name is Darian, and I am a resident of Kāneʻohe. I am submitting testimony in support of SB1300 **with** amendments because while this bill takes a step in the right direction by expanding access to free and reduced-price school meals, it does not go far enough. All children in Hawai'i should receive free breakfast and lunch at school, regardless of household income.

The cost of living in Hawai'i is among the highest in the nation, and many working families who do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals are still struggling to make ends meet. Just because a families income appears sufficient on paper does not mean they can easily afford school meals. Every child deserves access to nutritious food at school, no exceptions.

A universal free meal program would:

- Eliminate stigma for students who qualify for free or reduced meals.
- Reduce administrative burdens on schools by removing the need to process applications and verify income.
- Ensure no child goes hungry simply because their family earns slightly above the qualifying threshold.

I urge lawmakers to amend SB1300 to work toward universal free school meals for all students in Hawai'i. Investing in our keiki's nutrition is an investment in their education, health, and future success. No child should have to worry about where their next meal is coming from while trying to learn.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 3:47:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha,

I support SB 1300 SD1.

Mahalo nui.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 4:20:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janis Turner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass SB1300.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 4:33:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joell Edwards	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodsen, Vice Chair LaChica and the committee on education~

I am here today to voice my strong support for SB1300 which supports our ever growing ALICE families here in Hawaii. But I also urge you to amend this bill so that all students have access to free school meals. As you are aware so many of our working families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses.

As the former food access coordinator on Kauai, I witnessed the impact of the income guidelines on families who live in school zones where free and reduced lunch ratios were higher and these keiki were left out of the school food distribution. We worked diligently to make certain they could get the resources, but we should not have had to battle the way we did.

I live in a rural community here on Kauai and the school bus stop is right in front of my small market and I watch these kids start their day grabbing a musubi and then get off the bus starving and often wonder if they arent able to afford the school lunch provided.

As you know, students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

Mahalo for your time today and all your hard work this session.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 4:41:53 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Theresa M Thompson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB1300 Which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households. Requires the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules.

Mahalo,

Theresa Thompson

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 4:59:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannon Rudolph	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT

Date: March 8, 2025

To: The Honorable Justin H. Woodson, Chair
The Honorable Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Education

Re: **Support for SB1300 SD1 with amendment**, Relating to School Meals

Hrg: Tuesday March 11, 2025 at 2:00 pm via Videoconference Conference Room 309

Aloha House Committee on Education,

As a parent, community member and healthcare professional I am writing in **strong support of SB1300 SD1**, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households; and, requires the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules.

Many of Hawai'i's struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses in our state.

Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues.

Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state. For 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need, along with the learning and health benefits of hunger-free school days.

I **strongly support SB1300 SD1**, respectfully ask you to amend and pass it out of committee.

Many thanks for your consideration,

Forrest Batz, PharmD
Keaau, HI

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 5:55:37 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emelia Briscoe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 7:14:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tiare Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

****Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1300****

Aloha e nā Luna o ka Senate,

I am Tiare Smith, a Native Hawaiian resident of Kahalu‘u, O‘ahu, where I have lived for 45 years, steeped in the rhythms of this ‘āina and the struggles of its people. It is with a profound sense of kuleana and aloha that I submit this testimony in resolute support of Senate Bill 1300, an Act Relating to School Meals. This legislation confronts an insidious crisis—food insecurity among our keiki—by extending meal subsidies to students from asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households, a measure that promises to nourish both body and mind while uplifting Hawaii’s working families.

The legislature’s findings, bolstered by the Aloha United Way’s January 2025 ALICE report, paint a stark picture: while twelve percent of Hawaii’s households languish below the poverty line, an additional twenty-nine percent—our ALICE families—teeter on the edge of economic precarity, unable to meet the bare-minimum costs of living despite employment. For forty-six percent of these households, food insecurity is a persistent specter, a reality that has precipitously eroded the wellbeing of our communities. In Kahalu‘u, I have witnessed families stretch meager resources to the breaking point, their keiki too often reliant on school meals as their sole consistent source of sustenance. SB 1300 acknowledges this plight with intellectual clarity, targeting these households for support and recognizing that access to nutritious meals is not a luxury but a cornerstone of human dignity and academic success.

The bill’s mandate is elegantly precise: it directs the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules providing lower-rate or free meals based on economic need, with appropriations to subsidize costs for ALICE students. This is a pragmatic intervention, one that eschews blanket universalism for a targeted approach that amplifies impact where it is most needed. For our keiki, the benefits are manifold—adequate nutrition fuels physical development, sharpens mental acuity, and frees them to pursue academic excellence and extracurricular passions unhindered by hunger. To deny them this is to disenfranchise an entire generation, a prospect antithetical to the values of aloha and mālama that define us as a people.

As a Native Hawaiian, I see SB 1300 as more than policy—it is an act of restoration. Our traditions teach us to care for one another, to ensure no child goes without. Yet, the rising cost of living and inflation have strained this covenant, leaving working families like those in Kahalu‘u

to bear burdens no single household should endure alone. By investing in meal subsidies for fiscal years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027, this bill redistributes that burden to the state, affirming our collective responsibility. It is a step toward equity, ensuring that economic hardship does not dictate a child's potential.

I urge the Senate to pass SB 1300 with urgency, appropriating the funds necessary to bring its vision to fruition. The keiki of ALICE households are not statistics—they are our future, deserving of nourishment and opportunity. To delay is to perpetuate a cycle of want; to act is to forge a Hawaii where every child thrives, their dreams unencumbered by empty stomachs. Let us honor our legacy by securing their tomorrow.

Me ka 'oia'i'o a me ke aloha,

Tiare Smith

Kahalu'u, O'ahu

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 8:52:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brian Heithaus	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 7:21:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann Dorsey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I urge you to amend SB1300 so it will guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school. It is important to provide free school meals to those who are in need because hungry students are at higher risk for stress, depression and chronic disease.. Unfortunately, as the bill is currently written, not all children who need a free meal will be able to have one. Many families in need don't qualify for the current free and reduced lunch program. Families are only eligible with incomes below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, but 300% or more is needed to make ends meet. Studies have shown access to free school meals increases students' test scores. Please help ensure all children can do well in school.

Thank you

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 9:41:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mele McPherson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

So many children like myself had/have parents who are at work and aren't there to make yummy healthy breakfasts or snacks after school or even dinner! Some parents like mine made/make just enough over the limit to have qualified for us to be able to receive these options. It didn't leave us any less hungry or forced to resort to super unhealthy options. Please approve this bill. Children don't have a choice or a say as to what situations they're born into. As a tax payer, THESE are the things I WANT my hard earned dollars going towards. I am 50 years old, I don't even have kids myself, but I WAS that kid. I support this effort whole heartedly, I sincerely ask you to as well.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 10:34:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sven Sorge	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Thank you very much for your help!

With kind regards!

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 4:55:59 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kimberly D. Lepold	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

According to the Aloha United Way ALICE Report 2025, 29% of Hawai'i's households are ALICE, & 46% of these households consistently face food insecurity.

for many students from ALICE families, school meals may be their only consistent source of nutrition.

SB1300 will not only help alleviate food insecurity but also support students' ability to focus on their academic careers, extracurricular activities, and long term goals without the distraction of hunger.

DO THE RIGHT THING!!!

Please & Mahalo

Sincerely, Kimberly Lepold

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 5:07:50 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tamara Luthy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 8:35:36 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michele Nihipali	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Mahalo for your consideration,

Michele Nihipali

54-074 A Kam Hwy.

Hauula, HI 96717

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 9:14:26 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I personally know so many hardworking families that struggle to put food on the table on Kaua'i. One week of being sick, or God forbid, layoffs, and their kids will be hungry.

The future of our community is reliant on a strong infrastructure to give our kids the tools they need to strive and do better. School meals is one of those tools and structures.

I'm asking you in behalf of our future and our beautiful kids, please provide free school lunches. Without exception, if a child is hungry, we must feed them.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 9:20:04 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Krista Vessell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in SUPPORT of this bill WITH REQUEST TO UPDATE to include FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL STUDENTS. Why should parents be forced to pay costs of food for their children from a PUBLIC institution that is funded BY ALL OF US, THE TAXPAYERS? Bus fare, school supplies, field trips, FOOD?! Stop putting additional costs on parents in order to cover for decreased STATE funding for our PUBLIC SERVICES. Allocate MORE FUNDS DIRECTLY for our KEIKI.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 9:49:33 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Stayton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Thanks for your consideration,

Susan, Lawai, Kauai

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 10:16:00 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rosemary Bearden	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Position: Support with amendments.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals, but with amendments this bill could ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 10:32:52 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jodi Robinson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals is a worthwhile investment in the DOE system. I support this bill, and encourage an amendment to make school meals free for all students. Let's support our keiki by making sure they are fed at school and help them receive the quality education they deserve. Mahalo.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 10:45:42 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Please ammend this bill to provide universal meals to all students. Thank you.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 11:12:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Acasio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please SUPPORT this bill. With the unacceptable percentage of food insecure families and current trend in federal budget cuts to support services, Hawaii keiki need this more than ever before. As a former teacher I can attest to the many students whose only opportunity to eat is at shcool.

I ask that the measure be amended to include ALL students, not just asset limited families. Students need to me fed in order to learn and grow.

Mahalo for your service,

Laura Acasio, Hilo

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 11:13:41 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Greetings Committee Chair and Committee Members,

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Mahalo,
Marcia Kemble
Makiki

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 11:27:34 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melissa Barker	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Members,

I am writing to respectfully ask that you support SB1300 SD1 which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Melissa Barker

Kapaa, HI

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 12:22:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kevin Faccenda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 1:07:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marc-Anthony Gamboa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 1:29:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
robin knox	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

29% of Hawaii's families are ALICE. 41% of these families worry about housing insecurity.46% worry about food security. Lets make sure the keiki of these economically stressed families get fed at school withoutstraining family finances

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 2:21:11 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jotis Russell-Christian	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 2:55:01 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Suzanne Fields	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Your SUPPORT is NEEDED!

For many families, the cost of school meals is a barrier to accessing a balanced diet for their children. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals.

Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Schools that provide free meals experience significant academic increases, as access to basic nutrition has empowers their students to better focus on learning.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Fields

Haiku, Maui

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 3:16:11 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
TERI SAVAIINAEA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I strongly support SB1300 SD1 to appropriate funds for school meals for our keiki.

Kind regards,

Teri Kia Savaiinaea

District 45, Wai‘anae resident

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 4:17:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mavis Oliveira-Medeiros	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

I have seen a cafeteria for a school I worked at, refuse lunch to kids who couldn't afford it, or didn't remember their code for free lunch. Sadly those are often the children who need it the most.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Mahalo nui,

Mavis Oliveira-Medeiros

(808)866-7409

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 8:06:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noreen Dougherty	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill. All students should be offered free lunches. I always thought that every child should be treated equally and none shamed. Now it is much more important because the cost of food has skyrocketed and parents are too stressed out because the cost of everything is overwhelming, This can assure that each student gets a balanced meal and feeding our children is top priority., I ask you to please support SB1300 SD1 Mahalo.

Noreen Dougherty

Kapaa, Hawaii

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 8:24:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB1300 SD1: Relating to School Meals

My name is Janae and I am a graduate student pursuing my Master's degree in Social Work at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The views I am expressing in this testimony are my own and don't necessarily reflect the school. I am testifying in support of SB1300 SD1.

Meals are more than just nutrition—they are an essential school supply. Ensuring that every student has access to the nutrients necessary for optimal learning is a critical step in helping to close achievement gaps. For some children within Hawai'i, school meals are the only balanced, nutritious meal they receive in a day. Moreover, no child would experience the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.

I respectfully write in support of SB1300 SD1 and urge you to consider amending this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school means, ensuring no child goes hungry at school. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 9:43:42 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

I am in strong support for this bill.

- No Child Should Go Hungry – 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.
- No child would have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.
- Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.
- Increased Academic Performance – When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes.
- Improved Health Outcomes – Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 4:16:32 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malia Delacruz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a public school teacher in Hawaii's Department of Education. Firsthand, I see the effects of school lunch on the learning outcomes of our students. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 6:55:17 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katie Folio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this bill with ammendments making school lunch free for all students. This will ensure every student recieves the nourishment they need at school.

Mahalo,

Katie Folio

Kula, HI

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 7:04:01 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patti Hatzistavrakis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Education Committee,

I am expressing my support for **SB1300**, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

While this is a great start to ensuring our keiki are well fed, we can do more.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB1300. I appreciate your consideration of this important bill and the amendment suggested.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 7:11:39 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joella Speelman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 7:48:55 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noelle Lindenmann	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Mahalo,
Noelle Lindenmann, Kailua-Kona

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 8:57:53 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha, I believe that all children have the right for free meals while attending school everyday as part of their nourishment and education. This is a vital part of raising and caring for our children. Please pass the bill to ensure our children are being fed.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 9:01:41 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support SB1300 SD1 **but with a proposed amendment.** This measure would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families is classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households. However, many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, leading to child hunger, food insecurity, negative health outcomes, not to mention impacting their ability to learn.

The DOE should implement free school meals for **all**. Nutritious school meals support education by providing food to ensure that children are not distracted by hunger during class. **No child should go hungry.** Every student should be provided access to cost-free nutritional meals. Universal school meals can improve this access.

I urge the Committee to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals. The legislature always makes sure to put funds towards what it values. Let's make clear that we value all our keiki.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 9:23:09 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann V Saffery	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha All,

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Mahalo,

Ann V Saffery

Honolulu, HI

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 9:30:08 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jordan Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Mahalo for supporting this important bill.

Sincerely,

Jordan

Honolulu 96813

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 9:39:27 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristin Clark	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support (with amendments) of SB1300 SD1. I'm requesting the amendments to ensure ALL students have access to school meals FOR FREE. As you are aware, not meeting requirements for free/reduced lunch does not mean you're above the struggle. For the years my children attended DOE schools, there were a few times we qualified for free/reduced lunch. An income increase took us out of range of free/reduced lunch and we STRUGGLED. Although my kids are graduated, I am painfully aware of the economic struggles of friends, co-workers and neighbors. Feeding children should be a no-brainer. Assisting your constituents to help their hard-earned dollars go further should be a no-brainer. Please do the right thing by our children and our families.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 10:11:55 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson and Vice Chair La Chica,

My name is Will Caron and I am a resident of Kahalu‘u on O‘ahu's windward side, where I was born and raised.

I am writing to you to urge you to turn SB1300 into a true Universal Free School Meals bill.

Currently, this bill would only extend free school meals to ALICE families. While it is true that keiki from ALICE families are the ones most likely to be slipping through the cracks when it comes to our state's current free school meal policy, determining which keiki are from ALICE families will be a significantly difficult task for the DOE to accomplish. ALICE designation comes from a wide range of factors that make the formula for designation much more complicated than an arbitrary income cut-off level, as is the case with the federal poverty designation.

The amount of time, energy and resources required for the DOE to sort through every student not already receiving free meals to determine which come from ALICE families would be far better spent on expanding the program to make it universal so that all keiki get free meals.

Across the board, means testing in policy is a bad idea. It wastes resources on a harmful thought framework that seeks to determine who is "worthy" of assistance, and by extension who is worthy of living a secure and happy life. The truth is that all keiki—all people—are worthy of living a life free from poverty, food insecurity and the poor health outcomes that come from those circumstances. The poor health outcomes end up costing us all far more money in the long run.

A far better policy framework is one that embraces the truth that all keiki are worthy of receiving the nutrition they need to grow and thrive. Making the program universal means we know from the get-go that all our keiki are getting a solid foundation for their growth into future leaders of Hawai‘i. It precludes the DOE from wasting time, energy and resources on sorting through which keiki are "worthy."

A universal program also eliminates any chance of lingering stigma among our keiki over which of their peers are getting free meals and which are fortunate enough to not need them. Stigma over socioeconomic status is a big distraction from learning and can lead to harmful bullying.

At a cost of just roughly 1 percent of the DOE's current operating budget, we can most certainly afford to ensure that the next generation here in Hawai'i is equipped with the nutrition it needs to succeed. Research shows that a universal free school meals program has the potential to improve learning outcomes by as much as six additional weeks of schooling.

Universal free school meals are an investment in our collective future. It will matter greatly to all of us whether our keiki are able to succeed, whether we realize it now or not. I urge you to amend SB1300 to apply it to all keiki regardless of socioeconomic status. This is the year we must make it happen.

Mahalo for your leadership and commitment to our shared vision of a thriving, food-secure Hawai'i. I am deeply grateful for your consideration of this important legislation.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 10:36:46 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Diliaur Tellei	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson and Vice Chair La Chica,

While the reasoning behind this bill is sound, I think it could go further to destigmatize and make free school meals more accessible if they were opened to all children, not just those who fall into the ALICE household category. Universal access to this program would keep kids from falling through the cracks whether those be bullying for accessing this program, or an inability to complete the paperwork required due to an unstable home life, language or social barriers, or other reasons. Therefore I'm requesting that you consider amending this bill to expand the free school meal program to all schoolchildren.

Mahalo,
Diliaur Tellei (resident and voter in Makiki)

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 10:39:23 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Regina Gregory	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

support

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 10:44:38 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
emily gambino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Suggested Amendment:

While providing access to free school meals for ALICE families is important we suggest that the bill be amended to provide free school meals for all students.

Please support SB1300 SD1 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Mahalo,

Emily Gambino

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 11:19:42 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paul Bernstein	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson and Members of the EDN Committee:

I'm writing in **support** of SB1300 because of the need to strengthen for Hawai'i's communities. We need to take steps to break the cycle of poverty. As I'm sure you folks know, education is one of the keys to doing this. But for students to learn, they need attend class free of hunger. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. Therefore, in the interest of helping our disadvantaged keiki and the health of our state, I urge you to pass this bill out of your committee with an **amendment** that guarantees all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Mahalo,

Paul Bernstein

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 11:24:37 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha, I strongly support the basis of SB1300 SD1, but wIould like it to be amended to include enough funding to supply FREE meals to all ALICE students.

One reason why I feel this way is that I believe meals should be free regardless for our keiki, simply because we never know when the financial circumstances of a child's family changes, such as illness or domestic violence and trauma such as this is not the best time to put a children through analysis by public services to determine if they are worthy of free meals or not.

But I do understand that due to the financial constraints the state is facing, that free meals are only being considered at all for ALICE recipients. Using the same logic as before, I also would rather all ALICE applicants receive free meals. It is simpler, and children would not have to go through ongoing analyses based on income fluctuations. Mahalo.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 11:51:10 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristen Young	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

I believe that well nourished keiki grow up to become the contributing community members that we need. As a taxpayer, feeding children is exactly what I want my money to go toward.

I support this bill and urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that ALL students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Kristen Young
Honolulu, HI 96813

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 11:57:43 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kekoa Kealoha	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kakou,

I am writing in strong support of this bill. Ultimately, I believe in free school lunches for ALL students because almost everyone I know is one paycheck away from losing everything. While this bill will not extend this to all students, this bill will increase the threshold for ALICE families who need assistance. ALICE households often face decisions that no one should have to face in a learning environment: gas/transportation vs food, clothes vs school supplies, phone plan vs internet bill. Children should never bear the burden of poverty because they are not able to overcome it on their own. Food is the most basic of human needs, and it is essential to proper learning, socialization, growth and development. Only the state is positioned to tackle this burden at schools, so it is essential that the state government pass this bill with urgency. With the rising cost of goods and economic destabilization that the Trump administration is causing, we must position our schools to provide this service for children who need it.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Mahalo piha,

Kekoaopololu Kealoha

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 12:50:21 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Henry Poorman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Representative Woodson, Justin H., Chair

Representative La Chica, Trish, Vice Chair

Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Abigail Poorman

Subject: Support of SB1300 SD1, Relating to School Meals

Hello! My name is Abigail Poorman and I am a student at Kalaheo High School. I strongly support SB1300 SD1 and would like to ask you to vote yes on this bill. People in need are not invisible and need our help.

The ALICE program is a step in the right direction, but sometimes a step is not enough, we need a jump. For students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, their parents meet a money income of around 22,503-70,785 annually. But what about the students who make just above that? It is very important for children to eat lunch because eating food gives you the energy to do stuff, helps you grow the way you should, and can even keep you from getting sick, and taking these away from people can make them severely unhealthy. Many families struggle just above the federal poverty line, making it difficult for them to afford essential things like healthy and nutritious food. By providing financial assistance to the ALICE program, we can help bridge the gap for these families, allowing them to access healthy meals for their children. When children receive the support that they need, they are less likely to experience the effects of food insecurity, such as chronic illness and developmental delays. This investment not only benefits the individual children but also

contributes to a healthier future workforce. By ensuring that all children have the opportunity to thrive, we promote social stability and equality for all.

If SB1300 SD1 is passed, I believe that this will better children's growth and even there school experiences. For many children school lunch is their only source of food and broadening the gap will benefit the starving families in need here in Hawai'i.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 1:13:16 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dana Fulton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Schools meals are the only meals some students get and can rely on every day. In this dark world of our federal tax dollars going to nonsense, please use our tax dollars to feed kids here in the state.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 1:20:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lana Bilbo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school meals are an essential service. Kids should not be punished or have food withheld because their families cannot afford meals.

Free school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

LATE

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 2:38:04 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacob Hitchcock	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

All students should be able to eat lunch, regardless of their income status. This bill should guarantee all students in the Hawaiian education system the right to eat, regardless of economic status, and should address the systemic issues that result in people being below the ALICE or poverty threshold.

It's like putting a bandaid on an open wound. It's helpful, but a bandaid won't keep a knife from cutting.

LATE

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 4:37:03 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christine L. Andrews, J.D.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Although it is rarely included on the standard school supply list, school meals are one of a child's most important school supplies.

Universal free school meal (UFSM) programs offer up to two free, nutritious meals (i.e. breakfast, lunch, or both) to all students in a qualifying school, regardless of their ability to pay. These programs are designed to improve access to and increase participation in federal school meal programs—especially for students from households with lower incomes.

UFSM programs are a proven strategy to address Hawai'i's rising rates of childhood food insecurity and help working families overcome long standing, systemic economic, administrative, language, and social barriers to accessing school meals.

The Case for Universal Free School Meals

1. Eliminate social stigma

Hawai'i still allows schools to deny meals to students who have a negative meal balance, making students not only hungry, but also ashamed. UFSM creates a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

2. Improve academic performance

Studies of UFSM in other states have shown [large test score improvements and improved academic performance](#).

3. Promote equity & justice

UFSM supports ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households in Hawai'i struggling to stretch their budgets. It makes sure that every child has access to nutritious meals regardless of ability to pay

4. Improve nutrition & reduce food insecurity

For many students, school breakfast and lunch are the only full, balanced meals they receive a day. UFSM is a proven strategy to improve nutrition and food insecurity.

5. Support locally grown food

UFSM supports Farm-to-School initiatives and local farmers by incorporating fresh, locally grown produce into school meals. This provides students with healthier, more sustainable food options.

6. Strict eligibility thresholds

[2 out of 3](#) struggling Hawai'i households still have to pay for school meals.

7. Missed school meal applications

[34% of students nationally](#) who were denied free or reduced-price meals were actually eligible to receive them.

8. Effects on teachers

The impact of hungry students is not limited to children and parents. Schools are bearing the financial impact as well. In fact, many teachers have reported using money from their own paychecks to keep a supply of snacks on hand for when students come to school hungry.

Estimated Costs

With projected participation rates, UFSM would cost ~\$26 million, which is only 1.2% of Hawai'i DOE's annual budget.

LATE

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 8:45:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Blaine De Ramos	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose SB1300. I would like to see an amendment to include free lunch to all students.

SB 1300 Relating to School Meals

Submitted by: Joyce M. Martin

March 11, 2025

LATE

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Joyce Martin, and I am writing in **strong support of SB1300 SD1**, which aims to provide free or reduced-cost meals to students based on economic need—particularly those in ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households.

As many stakeholders and members of the community have shared in previous hearings, access to nutritious meals is essential for student well-being and academic performance. From my own experience, I grew up in an ALICE household, and food insecurity was a constant challenge during my childhood.

There were times in primary school when I felt ashamed because I could not afford to purchase a school meal, and my working parents often lacked the time or resources to prepare nutritious meals for me. It wasn't until the state I previously resided in implemented a free school meals program that things began to change. From that point on, my academic performance improved significantly throughout secondary school.

I respectfully ask the committee to support this bill so that all students in Hawaii can experience food security. No child should be deprived of a meal while trying to meet academic expectations.

SB1300 SD1 is a practical and compassionate response to the realities faced by working families across our state. Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Mahalo,

Joyce M. Martin

Honolulu Resident

joezmartin@gmail.com

LATE

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 7:38:37 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chloe Franklin	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Subject: In favor with reservations of SB1300, relating to ALICE households

Good morning, my name is Chloe Franklin at Kalaheo High. I'm delivering this testimony in relation to SB1300. I believe that the ALICE meal subsidy plan should be made into a law due its ability to protect Hawaii's underprivileged youth and I implore you to vote in favor of the bill as a result.

SB1300 ensures that more students in Hawaii will be able to access school meals, which is critical to their overall well-being and success. By expanding the eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, this bill removes barriers to accessing nutritious food, which is vital for all students.

In our communities, many families struggle to make ends meet, especially in a state where the cost of living is high. This bill will provide much-needed relief for low- and middle-class families who may be facing financial hardships, enabling their children to receive the nutritious meals they need without worrying about the financial burden of school lunches.

Proper nutrition plays a direct role in a student's ability to perform academically. The glucose derived from well-balanced meals provides the brain with the energy it needs to focus, learn, and engage in classroom activities. By ensuring all students have access to nutritious food, SB1300 directly supports their cognitive function, leading to improved academic outcomes.

According to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), meals provided at school are not only essential for students' physical health but also for their educational success. Studies have shown that students who receive regular, nutritious meals are better equipped

to engage in learning, are less likely to miss school, and demonstrate improved concentration and behavior. By supporting SB1300, we are prioritizing the health and success of our students.

Finally, by increasing the number of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals, we help sustain and strengthen our school lunch programs. The increase in participation directly supports the funding and resources necessary to provide these essential meals. It ensures that our schools can continue to offer nutritious, balanced meals, which in turn enhances the learning environment for all students.

In conclusion, SB1300 is a step in the right direction for supporting our students, especially those from low and middle-class families. It is an investment in the academic success, health, and well-being of the next generation. I urge you to pass this bill and ensure that all of our students have the opportunity to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

LATE

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 7:51:29 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Reinalyn M. Terrado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair LaChica, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit **testimony in support of SB1300, with suggested amendments** to re-consider expanding the scope of the program to ALL HI DOE students instead of limiting eligibility to students classified as ALICE only for the following reasons:

1. Determining which students qualify as ALICE will require a tedious level of information gathering by schools; thus, increased administrative burden on the DOE. The process may feel invasive for families, as well.
2. Challenges like language barriers, difficulty providing paperwork, and fear of disclosing information are some of the barriers to participation ALICE designation does not and cannot address, which FREE school meals for ALL can.
3. Most public school students likely already fall within the ALICE threshold. While we don't know exactly how many public school students fall above the ALICE threshold, it is likely a lower percentage than those who attend private schools, which SB1300 would not cover (Hawai'i has the highest percentage of students enrolled in private schools of every state in the nation).

Thank you for your consideration of SB1300 and the suggested amendment in scope.