



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

Date: 02/12/2025

Time: 10:01 AM

Location: CR 211 & Videoconference

Committee: Senate Ways and Means

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 SB 1300, SD 1.

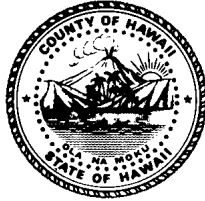
The Department has always been an advocate for supporting the well-being of the whole child. Part of that commitment means ensuring that students have access to healthy school breakfasts and lunches that allow them to then be focused in school and in class. The Department further supports access to meals by utilizing reimbursements from the federal government to provide free and reduced price lunches to qualified students.

The recent ALICE study put out by Aloha United Way paints a stark picture of additional hardships that many of our working families are facing. While these families may not qualify for free and reduced price lunches, they are still struggling day to day to make ends meet. To that end, the Department is supportive of covering the costs of all families who are considered ALICE households.

The Department appreciates the appropriation provided in this measure and would ask \$11.7m be appropriated to cover the cost of providing free meals for all ALICE households which would include those families that are currently paying a reduced meal rate.

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

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor



Benson Medina
Director

Dennis Lin
Deputy Director

County of Hawai'i

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

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February 10, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

WEDNESDAY, February 12, 2025
10:01 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 211

TESTIMONY ON SB 1300 SD1 Relating to School Meals

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki 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

February 10, 2025

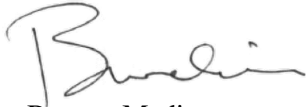
Page 2

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 black ink, appearing to read "Benson Medina", with a stylized, flowing script.

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

**OFFICE OF ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION
KE KE'ENA HO'OMOHALA WAIWAI
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

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LATE

RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA



AMY ASSELBAYE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PO'O HO'OKO

GAVIN THORNTON
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
HOPE PO'O

February 11, 2025

STATE OF HAWAII
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

**TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL NO. 1300
RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS**

BY
AMY ASSELBAYE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

The City and County of Honolulu's Office of Economic Revitalization (OER) supports SB 1300, Relating to School Meals, which appropriates funds to subsidize meal costs for public school students whose families qualify as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households.

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 toward 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.

OER is also working to create opportunities for ALICE households on O'ahu through programs that (1) enhance digital literacy, online access, and computer hardware in homes, (2) provide training in diverse economic sectors for shock-proof jobs, (3) create an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem where it's easy to start and grow a business, and (4) enhance the connection to local arts, culture, and commerce in our communities.

OER's Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Program mission shares the goals of SB 1300 to create more opportunities to reduce financial barriers for more food-secure families on O'ahu. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 1300.



SENATE BILL 1300, SD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

FEBRUARY 12, 2025 · WAM HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **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.

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 either amend this measure or pass a related proposal 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.

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



LATE

HIPHI Board

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Kaiser Permanente

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

Garret Sugai
HMSA

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

HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &
Evaluation

Community Health
Worker Initiatives

COVID-19 Response

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: February 11, 2025

To: Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

Hrg: Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 10:01 am, Room 211

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.

One in three families in Hawai'i face food insecurity, leaving many students to go hungry throughout the school day. One in ten keiki in Hawai'i skip meals due to food insecurity. Hawai'i can ensure all students are able to eat by providing free school meals for all students.

Suggested Amendment

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

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.³

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

¹ 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 "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census.

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



Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ Hawai'i can follow the lead of these other states by implementing free school meals for all students while also increasing the federal funding we receive to support the program.

Thank you for considering increasing access to school meals for our keiki. Please support SB 1300 SD1, and amend it to include free school meals for all students.

Mahalo,

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

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

⁴"Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers.

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

⁵ "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/>

⁶ "Equity on the Menu". Hawai'i Applesed.

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

⁷"Free or Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data". California Department of Education.

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



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

February 10, 2025

Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 10:01 AM

RE: **SUPPORT the Intent for Senate Bill 1300 SD 1**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Moriwaki and fellow 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 SD 1, 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. This measure is critical to ensuring that students from working-class families receive the nutrition they need to succeed in school and beyond.

Hawai'i's high cost of living places an immense burden on ALICE households—families who earn above the federal poverty level but still struggle to meet basic needs, including housing, healthcare, and food. These families often fall through the cracks of government assistance programs, leaving their children vulnerable to food insecurity. By funding meal subsidies, SB 1300 directly addresses this gap and ensures that no child goes hungry simply because their family earns slightly too much to qualify for existing free meal programs.

Research consistently shows that proper nutrition is essential for academic success, cognitive development, and overall well-being. Students who have access to nutritious meals perform better in school, have higher attendance rates, and experience fewer disciplinary issues. Furthermore, ensuring that every student has adequate access to meals fosters a more equitable and inclusive learning environment where no child is stigmatized for their economic status.

As an organization dedicated to advocating for the rights and well-being of LGBTQIA+ workers and their families, Pride at Work - Hawai'i understands the unique struggles faced by marginalized communities, many of whom are disproportionately affected by financial insecurity. Supporting ALICE households aligns with our commitment to social and economic justice, ensuring that all working families—regardless of background—have the resources they need to thrive.

SB 1300 is a crucial investment in Hawai'i's keiki and the future of our state. We urge the committee to pass this bill and help create a more equitable, supportive environment for all students.

In solidarity,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)
President
[Pride at Work – Hawai'i](#)

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 10:55:48 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/12/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ted Bohlen	Testifying for Climate Protectors Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Climate Protectors Hawaii **SUPPORTS** this bill!



Testimony of the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for S.B. 1300 – Relating to School Meals
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at 10:01AM

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 1300, with suggested amendments and comments provided. 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).

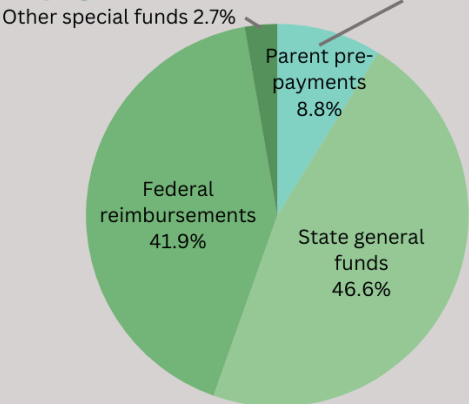
As shown in the attached page, if the price tag for this service is cause for concern, there are other ways the state might consider making up the shortfall that don’t place the burden on public school parents. Across the country, Universal Free School Meal programs have been implemented successfully 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.



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Eddie Asato, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*

Gary Okimoto, Safeway, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

LATE

DATE: February 12, 2025

TIME: 10:01am

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.



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Tel: (808) 833-2711 • Fax: (808) 839-7106 • Web: www.hsta.org

Osa Tui, Jr.
President

Logan Okita
Vice President

Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Ann Mahi
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Item: SB 1300, SD1 – Relating to School Meals

Position: Support

Hearing: Wednesday, February 12, 2025, 10:01 am, Room 211

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

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, 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.

Alarmingly, 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.



LATE

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

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

February 12, 2025, at 10:01am

RE: Support for SB 1300, Relating to Education

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, 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

February 11, 2025

To: Chair Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Donna Mercado Kim, and the Senate Committee on Education,

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

Aloha,

Hawai'i Food+ Policy strongly **supports SB1300**, which requires the Department of Education (DOE) 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 academic careers, 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.

To: Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Re: **SB 1300 SD1 – Relating to School Meals**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
February 12, 2024, 10:01 AM

LATE

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, 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 lunch in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) if their families earn up to 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and for reduced-price lunch if their income is between 130% and 185% of the FPL.

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 lunch,¹ while the ALICE household survival budget to be able to afford the "bare-minimum costs of basic necessities" for that same family 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 school meals, 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 eligibility determinations on top of those that they are already doing, which would add significant administrative burdens and costs to the school meals program.**

It would be more efficient and cost-effective for DOE to simply provide free school meals to all students, rather than creating a burdensome third tier of income eligibility for subsidies. 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>

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 10:00:33 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/12/2025 10:01:00 AM

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

Comments:

The crisis that our country is in feeding our most vulnerable groups are the children and the elderly. This bill would feed our children and make it possible for them to consintate on learning not worrying if they would be able to eat. You can't learn when your stomach is growling.

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:53:52 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/12/2025 10:01:00 AM

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

Comments:

I strongly support SB1300.

Mike Golojuch, Sr

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 10:58:44 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/12/2025 10:01:00 AM

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 you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals**.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LATE

SB-1300-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 12:24:53 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/12/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ellen Awai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I stand in support of SB1300 SD1. Many Hawaii families are struggling just to survive in their homelands! Any relief to even those above the poverty level who has to decide between buying food, pay for gas, car insurance and registration, or seeking emergency health care for themselves, we should not have to go without some basics in life. Mahalo for providing all alternative options!