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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 SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: SB 1300 – Relating to School Meals

Position: Support

Hearing: Friday, January 31, 2025, 3:00 pm, Room 229

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

Dear Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and members of the committees,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) **supports** SB 1300, 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 and invest in the future of Hawai'i's children.

Mahalo.



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

January 28, 2025

To: Senator Michelle Kidani, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Education

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1300 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports SB 1300 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



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info@hawaiiifood.com

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Gary Okimoto, Safeway, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Education
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: January 31, 2025

TIME: 3pm

RE: SB1300 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.

To: Senate Committee on Education
Re: **SB 1300 – Relating to School Meals**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
January 31, 2024, 3:00 PM

Dear Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of SB 1300**. 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 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 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>



SENATE BILL 1300, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

JANUARY 31, 2025 · EDU HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** SB 1300, relating to school meals, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families is 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



January 31, 2025

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

Aloha Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and members of the committee,

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for SB 1300, 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.

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. 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



Maui Food Bank
Nourishing Lives. Feeding Futures

January 30, 2025

RE: Support for SB 1300, Relating to School Meals

Aloha Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Maui Food Bank, I express our strong support for SB 1300 Relating to School Meals which appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families is classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

For 30 years, Maui Food Bank has provided daily and emergency assistance to those facing food insecurity in Maui County. Maui Food Bank distributes food to families and individuals on Maui, Molokai and Lanai through direct service programs and through our network of 170 agency partners. Last year, we served an average of over 700,000 people each month, distributing a total of 8.7 million pounds of nutritious food, including 2.3 million pounds of fresh produce.

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 SB 1300 to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony,

Lisa H. Paulson
CEO, Maui Food Bank

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 6:55:23 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and Committee Members,

The Green Party of Hawai'i is in Strong Support of SB1300, we believe that the Alice families need the security of free meals for all students. We all know the term "hangry" it is a combo of Angry and Hungry. A student that is hungry cannot focus on their studies and will become a problem for the teacher and the other students. Please subsidize the school meal for all the students, and vote Yes on SB1300.

Mahalo nui,

Green Party of Hawai'i

Susan RobertsEmery

Co Chair GPH

Paauilo

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 9:50:53 AM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Leake	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

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 11:21:13 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Kidani and members of the EDU committee,

I'm writing in strong support of SB1300 as the economic data are clear from numerous studies that the short- and long-term benefits of providing meals to students who cannot afford them far outweigh the costs of the meals. Furthermore, this bill provides an incentive for parents or caregivers to work, which helps our community. Last, I see such a program as pono and reflecting the sense of aloha to which we should strive. Please pass this bill out of your committee.

Mahalo,

Paul Bernstein

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 9:53:11 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support SB1300 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.

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 7:19:26 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Shizuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am testifying in support of this bill.

The cost of living in Hawaii, along with stagnant wages, and extremely high cost of homes are all reasons many of our middle-class families are struggling to make ends meet. For many of these struggling families, it isn't always guaranteed that there will be food available for them to eat at home. We need to be helping those who are struggling to provide food for their families, and this bill does just that.

While this bill could be better by providing free meals for all students, it is still a step in the right direction. There are some challenges that remain in-terms of the paperwork that ALICE families need to provide, and the embarrassment of discounted meals for the students, but it is still better than not providing any sort of subsidies. Hopefully in the future, we can make it a level-playing field for all by providing free school meals for all.

Mahalo for your consideration.

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 5:53:54 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I appreciate that HB1300 will provide free lunches to some students. It does not go far enough, though. Please amend this bill to ensure that all students receive access to free school meals.

Food insecurity is a problem for 1 in 3 families in Hawai'i. Families in need can be 300% below the Federal Poverty Level. The current 185% requirement, means many families are not able to get help.

Providing meals to all children will make sure every student has the opportunity to thrive at school. Those who are hungry perform poorly on tests and are at higher risk for stress, depression and chronic disease.

Thank you

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 2:09:13 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in full support of **SB1300 to appropriate funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset-limited, income-constrained, employed (ALICE) households.** ALICE families fall into the gap between being ineligible for assistance and yet are unable to make ends meet. Securing meal subsidies would tremendously benefit ALICE families, providing the help they need to ensure at least their keiki have food while at school.

However, ALL students have the right to eat nutritious meals while at school. So, 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.**

I appreciate your consideration of **SB1300**, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset-limited, income-constrained asset-limited, income-constrained, employed (ALICE) households. Thank you!



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
Senate Committee on Education
Friday, January 31, 2024, at 3:00PM

Dear Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, 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).

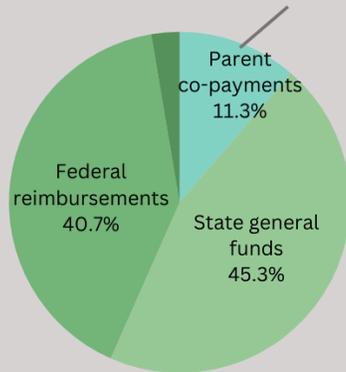
As shown in the attached page, if the price tag for this service is cause for concern, there are other ways the state might consider making up the shortfall that don’t place the burden on public school parents. Across the country, Universal Free School Meal programs have been implemented successfully 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	\$4,390,294.20
Lunch	\$13,872,568.20	\$21,695,778.29
Breakfast & Lunch	\$15,257,031.90	\$26,086,072.49

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.

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 12:30:50 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Franny Kinslow Brewer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Feed kids. That's an easy one to support. Just do it!

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 12:43:41 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, 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.

Free school meal programs are more effective when they are free for ALL. 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.

Honolulu, 96813



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
S.B. NO. 1300, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

BEFORE THE:
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Friday, January 31, 2025 **TIME:** 3:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 229

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi or Randall M. Wat, Deputy Attorneys General

Chair Kidani and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

This bill seeks to appropriate funds to the Department of Education (DOE) for meal subsidies for students from families classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

Section 2 of this bill on page 2, line 15, to page 3, line 2, does appropriate \$10,000,000 to be expended by the DOE for the purposes outlined in the stated purpose of this bill. However, the bill does not provide the DOE with the authority to implement the act, such as by the statutory establishment of a subsidy program with stated standards provided by law and with specified mechanisms for ALICE households to apply for and obtain the subsidy.

We recommend that the Legislature expressly establish by statute a program for providing meal subsidies to students from ALICE households with adequate standards provided by law as required by section 4 of article VII of the State Constitution and with authority for DOE to adopt any necessary administrative rules to administer this program. An example of such an approach, while not directly a subsidy program, is the the career development success program established by Act 143, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022, which is codified as section 302A-453, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS).

Alternatively, we recommend that the Legislature amend the bill to state that the DOE shall adopt rules or modify existing rules to provide the meal subsidy to ALICE households. The DOE has the authority to provide lower rates or free meals based on economic need under section 302A-405(a), HRS, which states that the DOE “**by rule** shall provide a lower rate or free meals to children based on their economic need.” (Emphasis added). Accordingly, sections 8-37-4 and -5 of the Hawaii Administrative Rules outline the eligibility criteria and application process for free or reduced-price meals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this bill.



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

Date: 01/31/2025

Time: 03:00 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: Senate Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 1300 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

Purpose of Bill: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families is classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 1300.

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 but would ask that it be raised to \$11.7m which we feel would be the true 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.

SB1300 - Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families is classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households.

I am writing to express my support for SB1300, which aims to appropriate funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students from families classified as asset-limited, income-constrained, employed (ALICE) households. This is a critical step towards addressing the alarming issue of food insecurity impacting our children and communities.

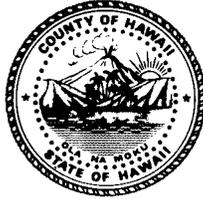
In the third grade, I had a humbling experience when I was denied my school lunch due to an insufficient balance in my account, something I was completely unaware of at the time. Instead of enjoying a warm meal like my classmates, I was taken to a small room in the principal's office, where I sat alone eating crackers and milk. The isolation felt crushing, and I remember the embarrassment washing over me. It felt as though I was being punished for not having enough money. That moment has stayed with me, and I can't bear the thought of other children experiencing the same thing.

I urge lawmakers to **amend this bill** to ensure that **all students, regardless of their family's income level, receive access to free school meals**. This is not just a matter of nutrition; it's about equity and opportunity for our children. Together, we can create a healthier, more supportive environment where every student has the resources they need to thrive.

Thank you for considering the importance of this vital legislation.

Respectfully,
Leigh Ann Lopez

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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January 30, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

FRIDAY, January 31, 2025
3:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 229

TESTIMONY ON SB 1300
Relating to School Meals

Aloha Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim 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 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 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

January 30, 2025

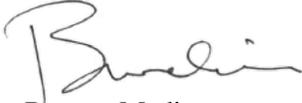
Page 2

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 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 with amendments.**

Sincerely,

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

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

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 2:22:53 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth A. Ho'oipo Pa Nakea	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB1300 WITH AMENDMENTS

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

Hunger knows no income bracket. A hungry child is a hungry child.

SB1300 is a step forward, but we must go further. We must feed all students, not just some. No keiki should sit in class with an empty stomach while food is within reach. No family should have to prove their struggle before their child is nourished.

Queen Lili'uokalani reminded us: "You may put out the fire, but the embers will remain." If we help only ALICE families, we leave too many embers burning.

Dr. King told us: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." To feed some and not others is an injustice.

Food is not a privilege—it is a right. Education and nutrition go hand in hand. Let us choose compassion over restriction, fairness over limitation, and Aloha over convenience.

Please amend SB1300 so that all students, regardless of status, receive free school meals. Let Hawai'i lead with Aloha.

Mahalo for your time and commitment to our keiki.

Elizabeth Pa Nakea,

Castle High School Teacher, Kaneohe, HI 96744

panakealaw@me.com

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



MAKALAPUA ALENCASTRE, ED. D.
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1100, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

LATE

FOR: SB 1300 Relating to School Meals
DATE: January 31, 2025
TIME: 3:00 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Education
ROOM: Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim , and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in **SUPPORT of SB 1300 with AMENDMENTS** which appropriate funds to the Department of Education to subsidize meal costs for students whose families qualify as ALICE households.

The Commission would appreciate the inclusion of public charter schools in this measure as charter school students and families eligible for the benefits provided by this measure would also be positively impacted.

The Commission is available to work with this committee, the DOE, and our public charter schools in gathering the data and information that move this legislation forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

LATE

SB-1300

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 5:01:50 PM

Testimony for EDU on 1/31/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony in Support of Universal Free School Meals

Aloha Honorary Chair, Vice Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for universal free school meals for all students. Access to nutritious meals is essential for children's health, well-being, and academic success. Yet, many families who struggle to afford basic living expenses do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals due to outdated income thresholds. No child should have to face hunger simply because their family falls just above an arbitrary cutoff.

Studies have shown that universal free school meal programs improve attendance, concentration, and academic performance, leading to better outcomes for students and schools alike. Additionally, removing the stigma associated with meal programs ensures that every child can eat with dignity, without fear of judgment.

By implementing universal free school meals, we are making an investment in the future of our children, promoting equity, and ensuring that no student has to worry about where their next meal will come from while trying to learn. I urge you to support this initiative and make free, healthy school meals accessible to all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kealoha Madriaga