

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

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

Date: 04/10/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Resolution Title: SCR 0134 URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO PROVIDE A DETAILED REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE ON THE TRUE COST OF PRODUCING SCHOOL MEALS TO ENSURE TRANSPARENCY AND AVOID UNNECESSARY PRICE INCREASES.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) is submitting testimony providing comments on SCR 134.

The School Food Services Branch (SFSB) currently has systems in place to identify the costs for preparing both a breakfast and lunch meal that includes the identification of locally sourced food, labor, and additional operational costs. The Department releases both quarterly and annual fiscal reports available to the public. These reports support the rationale for addressing the unnecessary price increases for school meals, with transparency.

In addition, the SFSB reports the number of free, reduced, and paid school meals provided to students for each school year monthly as required for federal reimbursement and annually, utilizing a point of sale counting and claiming system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify with comments on this measure.



HIPHI Board

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HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
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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: April 9, 2025

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

RE: Support for SCR 134, Urging The Department Of Education To Provide A
Detailed Report To The Legislature On The True Cost Of Producing School
Meals To Ensure Transparency And Avoid Unnecessary Price Increases

Hrg: Thursday, April 10, 2025, at 2:00 PM, Conference Room 309

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating, Active Living²
(HEAL) coalition is in **support of SCR 134**, which urges the Department of
Education to provide a report on the cost of producing school meals.

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.

Cost Clarity

State law currently mandates that half of meal production costs be recovered
through meal prices. As production costs rise, so do the prices that students and
families must pay. Accurate and transparent cost assessments are essential to
prevent families from shouldering unnecessary financial burdens.

Risk of Higher Prices for Families in Need

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.

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.



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.

Please take the necessary steps to improve meal cost accounting, ensuring transparency and fairness so that families receive full value for what they pay.

Mahalo,

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

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for SCR134 – Urging the Department of Education to Provide a Detailed Report to the
Legislature on the True Cost of Producing School Meals to Ensure Transparency and Avoid
Unnecessary Price Increases.
House Committee on Education
Thursday, April 10, 2025, at 2:00pm

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **SCR134**, which urges the Department of Education (DOE) to provide a detailed report on the true cost of school meals to ensure clarity and avoid unnecessary price increases.

Confusion surrounding the DOE’s school meal costs has caused a number of concerns in recent years. It has been one of the biggest obstacles to passing universal free school meals legislation, legislation funding farm to school programs, and even past efforts to increase Hawai‘i’s federal reimbursement rates.

Understanding the actual costs associated with producing school meals is essential for the legislature to effectively plan the state’s budget and allocate resources. A detailed report will provide clarity on expenditures, helping legislators and the public to understand the current state of school meal costs before additional funds are requested or programs are proposed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SCR134. We are pleased that the Hawai‘i legislature is paying attention to improving food security.

To: House Committee on Education
Re: **SCR 134 – Urging the Department of Education to provide a detailed report to the Legislature on the true cost of producing school meals to ensure transparency and avoid unnecessary price increases**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
April 10, 2025, 2:00 PM

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 of SCR 134**. This resolution urges the Department of Education to provide a detailed report to the Legislature on the true cost of producing school meals to ensure transparency and avoid unnecessary price increases.

Hawai'i public schools receive federal reimbursements from the USDA when they provide student meals through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Currently, students qualify for free 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.

Unfortunately, many families that have to pay the full price for school meals cannot make ends meet. For example, a family of four that makes \$67,000 per year does not 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 currently need to pay about \$1,300 per year for those meals. In January, the Department of Education proposed nearly doubling the prices charged for school meals, citing high costs of production, but did not provide a cost breakdown.³

Due to advocacy by our Congressional delegation and local anti-hunger groups, two years ago Hawai'i received a 13 percentage point increase in the level of federal reimbursements for school meals.⁴ However, that increase is inadequate, and the USDA is requiring itemized meal cost breakdowns in order to consider further reimbursement increases.⁵

In other words, providing the information requested by this resolution would also move us closer to increasing the amount of federal funds that come into our state to support child nutrition.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please pass this resolution.

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

¹ <https://hawaiipublicschools.org/school-services/school-food-services/free-and-reduced-priced-meals-program/>

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

³ https://boe.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-01-16_FIC_fees.pdf

⁴ <https://hiappleseed.org/press-releases/usda-increase-hawaii-school-meal-reimbursement-rates-after-40-years>

⁵ https://assets.nationbuilder.com/goodbeginnings/pages/2185/attachments/original/1661908583/Feed_Our_Keiki_Print_Final.pdf



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 Education

April 10, 2025, at 2:00PM

RE: SUPPORT for SCR134, URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO PROVIDE A DETAILED REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE ON THE TRUE COST OF PRODUCING SCHOOL MEALS TO ENSURE TRANSPARENCY AND AVOID UNNECESSARY PRICE INCREASES.

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 strong support for **SCR134**.

This bill would urge the Department of Education (DOE) to provide a detailed report on the true cost of school meals to ensure clarity and avoid unnecessary price increases.

One of the biggest obstacles in various efforts to strengthen Hawai'i's school meal programs has been the confusion around the DOE's meal costs. This resolution is a formal request that the DOE provide a full, transparent reporting of their food service costs, so that the legislature can make informed decisions about the budget.

Mahalo for your leadership and for your consideration of SCR134.

SCR-134

Submitted on: 4/8/2025 3:26:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 4/10/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Diana Silva-Feliciano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It has been a long time since I was in school, but things are a lot different from then. However, the problem of hunger was far less than it is now. The cost of food and items is much higher, but I believe the costs can be reduced by producing in bulk or using other preservation methods like freezing (if sanitary and allowed). We should focus on the children, as they are the ones who take over when the responsible parties are gone. We need to let children be children. Children should have recess, climbing trees, favorite subjects, science projects, homework on their minds, NOT violence, homelessness, and especially, hunger on their minds. I am in support for every student to receive a free meal, and in support of providing a detailed report of how much it truly costs to make a school meal. Some spend more money on coffee and that is just optional; School meals are **ESSENTIAL**. Meals are school supplies!

Thank you.

LATE

SCR-134

Submitted on: 4/9/2025 11:37:59 PM

Testimony for EDN on 4/10/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gavin Borja	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Gavin Borja

Regarding the Department of Education

04/09/25

Aloha Senate and Council members, I am Gavin Borja, a student of Hawaii Pacific University. I am testifying on the true cost of producing school meals to ensure transparency and unnecessary price increases. This will help provide families with reassurance as well as affordable meals for children all across Hawaii.

I've chosen to testify on behalf of this bill because of my current job working at Nu'uuanu Elementary School, primarily running their before-school program. With the program already requiring parents to pay and sign their kids up, the last thing they need is to worry about their kids' breakfast becoming more expensive or worse, their kids going hungry. I've seen kids get excited and run to get breakfast; some bring in breakfast from home, or worse, some don't eat at all. From my personal experience as well, during elementary school, I was one of the kids who would rely on free/reduced meals at school because of the situation my family was in financially. I was a Chamorro kid who had just moved to Ohio and wanted to make sure I could fit in anyway I could. So the new experience of having readily available food at school got me excited to see what would be on the menu every day. It put a smile on my face, kept me from going hungry, and provided a sense of excitement every day. Although they weren't the best meals I could've gotten, it was better that I had a meal on my plate rather than nothing at all. This took a lot of pressure off my parents when they were concerned about whether or not I would be eating at school.

I wanted to share this experience because just like me, hundreds of kids feel the same way about school breakfast/lunch and look forward to it. Parents shouldn't have to worry so much about their kids going hungry at school. For kids out there who were like me, their worries should be focused on what choices of meals they get to choose from. It's a rewarding feeling knowing that you're efforts to care for one another go a long way. Having affordable meals allows for a lot of flexibility for parents who need it, and it prevents kids from being malnourished as well.

I know providing cheap meals isn't always the easiest thing to produce, especially on a larger scale for schools that have an abundance of children enrolled there. One thing you can do is to incorporate local produce into the meals so it provides more nutritious, fresh, and ready meals to students all over the state. It also stimulates the local economy, placing the money back into the community's hands to the people who need it the most. Having farm-to-table meals also decreases the amount of pollution it takes to ship in products from other countries/states to create meals for students. This helps not only the local economy and community, but also the environment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony councilmembers. I hope my experiences helped to paint a picture as to the importance of having inexpensive meals available. I hope that my potential solution as well sparks something that can create a more sustainable system to ensure that meal prices don't need to be raised. Your time and consideration on this matter is greatly appreciated.