



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
and

House Committee in Education
Friday, February 6, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Nathan Murata, Dean
College of Education

and

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD
Interim Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 1872 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM

Chairs Garrett and Woodson, Vice Chairs Amato and La Chica, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony offering comments on HB 1872 which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program. We respectfully offer the following comments that College of Education believes that such an apprenticeship program provides the necessary financial support for early learning programs service providers in the State.

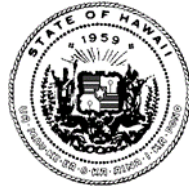
This bill offers a tangible solution to these pressing issues by:

1. **Support and Develop Career Pathways:** The grant program will provide funding to support new early learning apprentices, with financial assistance to cover costs related to earning a credential or degree, on-the-job training while earning a wage, and wage increases when completing RA milestones. This investment will not only enhance the quality of care but also improve recruitment and retention in the early care and education field that has historically faced high turnover due to low wages and limited growth opportunities. By funding apprenticeships, the program will offer a structured pathway for career entry and advancement, that will enhance the recruitment of new individuals into the early learning profession.

2. **Increasing the Supply of Early Learning Slots:** By incentivizing individuals to enter and advance in the field, this program has the potential to add many more slots for infants and toddlers under the age of three. These additional slots will directly benefit families who are on waiting lists or forced to make difficult compromises in their work and other responsibilities.
3. **Strengthening Economic Stability:** For families in Hawai'i who struggle with the high cost of living, access to reliable child care is often the key to maintaining stable employment and achieving economic security. The proposed program will play a critical role in ensuring parents can participate fully in their jobs and careers, knowing their children are in safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate settings.

This legislation aligns with our shared vision of prioritizing early learning as a cornerstone of our state's future. By investing in the apprenticeship grant program, we are not only addressing immediate needs but also laying the groundwork for long-term systemic improvements in early care and education for our young children's success in school and in life.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 4, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
House Committee on Higher Education

The Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
House Committee on Education

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 1872 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.**

Hearing: February 6, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this measure and defers to the University of Hawaii. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace a priority identified in the executive budget.

The purpose of this measure is to establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

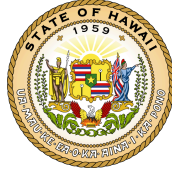
The Department supports efforts to increase the supply of qualified early learning professionals and expand the State's child care capacity, as the early learning field faces growing demand for well-trained professionals and a significant workforce shortage.

Programs across the state are struggling to recruit and retain a qualified, well-compensated workforce, and that instability directly affects children and working families.

Apprenticeships provide accessible training pathways that support the recruitment, retention, and professional development of early learning professionals. By integrating on the job training with formal education and recognized credentials, apprenticeships strengthen workforce quality while reducing barriers to entry into the field.

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

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



ROY M. TAKUMI
CHAIRPERSON

**STATE OF HAWAII
BOARD OF EDUCATION
PAPA HO'ONA'AUAO**
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

House Committee on Education
Friday, February 6, 2026
2:00 p.m.
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 309

Measure: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Purpose of Measure:

Establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

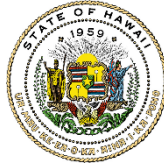
Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee:

The Board of Education (Board) supports House Bill 1872 as a means to recruit and retain the professionals who are paramount to the high-quality learning experiences needed to fulfill the promise of early education.

The ability to expand access to early learning opportunities also relies heavily on efforts to grow and support our early educator workforce.

The Board defers to the University of Hawai'i regarding implementation and funding.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Board.



STATE OF HAWAII

Executive Office on Early Learning

Ke'ena Ho'okele Ho'ona'auao Pae Kamali'i o Hawai'i Moku'āina
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

TO: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
House Committee on Higher Education

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

FROM: Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

SUBJECT: Testimony on H.B. No. 1872 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING
APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

Committee: HED/EDN
Date: Friday, February 6, 2026
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Location: Conference room 309

Executive Office on Early Learning Position: **SUPPORT**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments in support of H.B. No. 1872, and defers to the University of Hawai'i regarding implementation and funding.

This measure aligns with the Early Learning Board's current framework of policy priorities, which are grounded in the Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan. Specifically, the bill advances State Plan Building Block 4: Early Childhood Workforce by expanding opportunities for early learning providers to participate in a state or federally approved Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Program.

Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs) create structured pathways for aspiring early childhood professionals to gain hands-on experience, earn credentials, and advance their careers through apprenticeships that integrate employer-paid classroom learning with on-the-job training and comprehensive wraparound support.

This bill creates a grant program to mitigate financial barriers to participation in state-approved or federally approved ELRAPs for licensed or registered early learning program service providers, with priority given to infant and toddler programs.

EOEL is committed to improving recruitment, retention, and career pathways for our early learning workforce and recognizes that our capacity to expand access to early learning opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki depends on our ability to grow and support our workforce. ELRAPs help build long-term capacity by:

- Addressing shortages through targeted recruitment and retention strategies;
- Offering competitive compensation and benefits that recognize and value educators; and
- Creating clear pathways for professional growth and advancement.

EOEL would be happy to collaborate with the University of Hawai'i to develop the award criteria for this grant program, as directed in this bill.

We appreciate the Legislature's ongoing investment and shared commitment to strengthening Hawai'i's early learning system for our youngest keiki and their 'ohana. Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments in support of this bill.

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA LAWELawe KAIĀULU
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

222 NORTH SCHOOL STREET • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817
PHONE: (808) 768-7762 • FAX: (808) 768-7792 • WEBSITE: honolulu.gov/dcs

RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA



ANTON C. KRUCKY
DIRECTOR
PO'O

AEDWARD LOS BANOS
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
HOPE PO'O

**TESTIMONY OF ANTON C. KRUCKY
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEES ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND EDUCATION
Friday, February 6, 2026, 02:00 PM
Conference RM 309 and Via Videoconference**

TO: Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair, Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee on Higher Education and Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair, and Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee on Education

RE: SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1872

The Department of Community Services (DCS), City and County of Honolulu (City), **supports** House Bill 1872, which would establish an early learning apprenticeship grant program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

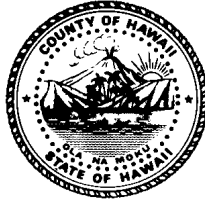
Access to reliable child care is essential for Hawai'i families and the economy, particularly as the high cost of living requires most households to rely on stable workforce participation. Despite this need, our State continues to face a critical shortage of affordable, high-quality child care options. DCS recently conducted a survey of 819 households on O'ahu, and 68% percent reported that they left a job, declined a job opportunity, or reduced their work hours due to a lack of child care. These impacts ripple beyond individual families, contributing to workforce challenges and constraining economic growth across many industries.

House Bill 1872 offers a meaningful and strategic solution by strengthening the child care workforce—the single greatest barrier to expanding child care capacity. By supporting apprenticeship opportunities, this measure creates an accessible pathway for individuals to enter the profession while equipping them with the training and experience needed to succeed. It also provides, career advancement opportunities for those already in the field and it supports both recruitment and retention, helping to stabilize and grow the industry over the long-term.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support** of this measure.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor

William V. Brilhante, Jr.
Managing Director



Benson Medina
Director

Dennis Lin
Deputy Director

County of Hawai'i

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

25 Aupuni Street, Room 1301 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4252
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February 4, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEES ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND EDUCATION

FRIDAY, February 6, 2026
2:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 309

TESTIMONY ON HB 1872 Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Aloha Chair Garrett, Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Amato, Vice Chair La Chica and Members of the Committees,

I am Benson Medina, Director of the Department of Research and Development, County of Hawai'i. The Department's Early Childhood Resource Program seeks to support the investment into the keiki of our island from birth to 5 years old. We support the expansion of early childhood care, certification of providers through apprenticeship and scholarships.

The County of Hawai'i provides written testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB1872**, to establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State.

For years, child care providers have effectively subsidized the cost of care for families by accepting low wages. During the pandemic, early childhood educators were rightly recognized as essential employees—critical to keeping our economy functioning. While this remains true, their most important role is providing a high-quality environment that supports the healthy development of young children.

We believe the apprenticeship model can be a game-changer for early childhood providers. This approach not only provides apprentices with coursework, but also pairs learning with meaningful, on-the-job experience alongside a mentor. The mentoring team is aware of the specific competencies the apprentice is working to master and intentionally creates opportunities for the apprentice to practice and demonstrate those skills. Because translating theory into practice can be challenging, this model provides critical, structured support that benefits both educators and children.

For the past year and a half, Hawaii County has offered an apprenticeship program using the Keiki O Ka Aina (KOKA) state and federally approved apprenticeship model. Currently, we have seven apprentices working in four community-based preschools. The program is flexible and meets candidates where they are in their educational journey: four apprentices are working toward their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and two are pursuing associate's degrees.

Page 2

I respectfully urge you to pass this bill out of your committee and support its progression through the legislative process. This program not only strengthens and supports our current early childhood workforce in center-based settings, but also helps recruit and attract new, young professionals to the rewarding and essential field of early childhood education.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB1872.**

Respectfully,

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

Benson Medina
Director



TO: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Committee on Higher Education

Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Committee of Education

FROM: Deanna D'Olier, Executive Director
Hawaii Association of Independent Schools

RE: **HB 1872 – Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program –
In Support**

DATE: Friday, February 6, 2026; 2:00 p.m.
Conference room 309 & Videoconference

Aloha Chairs Garrett and Woodson, Vice Chairs Amato and La Chica and Members of the Committees:

On behalf of the Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools (HAIS), I write in strong support of HB 1872, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers participating in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

HAIS supports policies that strengthen Hawai'i's early learning workforce and expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities for families across the state. HB 1872 is responsive to the Legislature's findings that early learning experiences support children's development, help working families sustain employment, and contribute to Hawai'i's broader economic vitality.

HB 1872 recognizes the value of registered apprenticeship programs as a proven workforce pathway while addressing a primary barrier for early learning providers: the high labor costs required to meet compensation standards, which can often disincentivize participation. By establishing a grant program to offset these participation costs, the bill bolsters recruitment, retention, and professional development within the early learning sector.

HAIS specifically appreciates the thoughtful design of this program, which bridges the gap between workforce development and operational feasibility for early learning providers. By tying eligibility to licensed or registered child care providers engaged in approved apprenticeship programs, the bill ensures that grants directly support high-quality workforce pathways.

For early learning programs that are working to recruit and retain qualified staff, apprenticeships can be a powerful “earn-and-learn” pathway, but only if the economics make participation feasible. HB 1872 directly addresses that feasibility gap and helps build a stable, well-prepared early learning workforce for Hawai‘i.

HAIS respectfully urges the Committee to PASS HB 1872.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



Date: February 4, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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

From: Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health, dba AIMH HI
Re: Strong Support of an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

The Association for Infant Mental Health Hawaii (AIMH HI) is a non-profit organization focused on growing a network of professionals and a system of care that supports and nurtures infant and early childhood mental health. AIMH HI works with partners across the complex early childhood system to grow understanding and acceptance of the infant and early childhood mental health field and ensure evidenced-based practices around first relationships become the norm in Hawai'i.

AIMH HI strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program through the University of Hawai'i. AIMH HI acknowledges the challenges that families across the State of Hawai'i face to access affordable, high quality early learning opportunities for their children. AIMH HI has recognized through our work with many partners across the early childhood system that a main contributor to the challenges families face to access early learning opportunities for their children is the limits in recruiting, training, retaining, and supporting early childhood workforce.

We feel strongly that this Bill represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Increasing the accessibility of entry into the early childhood workforce for those who are interested in nurturing the early learning of young children
- Creating clear pathways for early childhood professionals to enter and advance in the field which will help support and maintain professionals' investment in the field and their relationships with the children and families they work with



- Improve retention of early childhood professionals, leading to stronger relationships between professionals and families, which supports the relationships that shape children's mental health
- Growing and supporting the early childhood workforce will have a direct impact on families' ability to access early learning opportunities that support the social-emotional development and mental health of their children

AIMH HI believes that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in Bill 18732 would play a crucial role in supporting the social emotional development of Hawai'i's children. By growing and supporting the early childhood workforce, families and children are supported. For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

Mahalo for your commitment and support to improve the mental health, safety, and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their 'ohana.

Na'u nō me ka ha'aha'a,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Erin Henderson Lacerdo'.

Erin Henderson Lacerdo, LCSW, IECMH-E©

Executive Director, Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i



Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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

From: Commit to Keiki

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Commit to Keiki is a statewide, non-partisan, public-private collaborative to ensure a brighter start for Hawai'i's youngest keiki. Led by a diverse Steering Committee, Commit to Keiki's mission is to increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to early childhood.

Commit to Keiki strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

We recognize that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train, and support a robust early learning workforce.

We feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

Our position is that the proposed Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families and the early learning sector.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

Our Mission

Increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to Hawai'i's youngest keiki and families.



Contact Info

700 Bishop Street, Suite 1701
Honolulu, Hawai'i 93813
info@committokeiki.org
committokeiki.org

Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) is a statewide cross-sector collaborative designed to improve the system of care for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. ECAS partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

ECAS strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

ECAS recognizes that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train, and support a robust early learning workforce.

We feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

ECAS's position is that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families and the early learning sector.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.



STATE OF HAWAII
Early Learning Board
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

February 4, 2026

To: Representative Garrett, Chair
Representative Amato, Vice-chair
House Committee on Higher Education

From: Elaine Yamashita, Chair
Early Learning Board

Re: HB1872 support

Aloha Honorable Chair Garrett, Vice-Chair Amato, and members of the House Higher Education Committee:

The Early Learning Board (ELB) formulates statewide policy relating to early learning, as well as directing the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL).

The Early Learning Board supports HB 1872, which will expand the current early childhood registered apprenticeship program. This directly affects and supports much needed expansion of the early childhood workforce. Recruitment and retention of our important early educators is key to providing high quality care and education for our youngest keiki.

It is a specialized body of knowledge and experience based on child development and effective relationships, and apprenticeships provide both. The bill would also allow community-based providers resources to provide incentives for apprentices to continue and for the program as a whole.

We realize that these are uncertain times and ask that you consider any funding for this program as an important investment in early educators who will have positive impact on keiki and their 'ohana.

Mahalo for your consideration and support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Elaine Yamashita
Early Learning Board Chair
elb@eoel.hawaii.gov



Testimony to the House Committee on Higher Education
Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair

Testimony to the House Committee on Education
Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

Friday, February 6, 2026, at 2:00PM
Conference Room 309 & Videoconference

RE: HB1872 Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Program

Aloha e Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports House Bill 1872 (HB1872), which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

HB1872 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action by addressing a critical workforce bottleneck that affects both families and employers statewide. The Chamber believes that quality early learning is foundational to Hawaii's economy: it enables parents to participate fully in the labor force, reduces turnover among working caregivers, and supports the early development of the future workforce. However, the early learning sector is experiencing significant shortages of qualified professionals, in part due to high labor costs and limited access to structured pathways for recruitment and retention. Investing in early learning workforce capacity through HB 1872 represents an opportunity to realize diversified economic benefit: it expands labor force participation, supports small and mid-sized early learning providers, and prepares a pipeline of skilled workers — all of which enhance Hawaii's economic resilience.

We respectfully ask to pass House Bill 1872. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.



February 5, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT** of **HB1872**, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett and Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chairs
Representative Terez Amato and Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chairs
Members of the House Committees on Higher Education and Education

From: Llasmin Chaîne, LSW, Executive Director, Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women

Re: Testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB1872**, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Hearing: Friday, February 6, 2026, 2:00 p.m
Conference Room 309, State Capitol

Thank you for hearing this important bill. The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women **strongly supports HB1872** and the establishment of an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program as proposed in this measure. **Access to high-quality early learning opportunities is a foundational issue for women and girls, as it directly impacts economic participation, workforce advancement, lifelong health and family well-being.** By supporting early learning service providers through financial assistance and professional development, this bill addresses ongoing needs and persistent barriers faced by women, who make up the majority of the early childhood education workforce and who often shoulder disproportionate caregiving responsibilities.

The proposed grant program aligns with the Commission's commitment to gender equity, economic opportunity, and the advancement of women in the workplace. **Research and best practices indicate that investment in early childhood education not only benefits children and families, but also helps to professionalize and stabilize a workforce that is predominantly female and historically undervalued.** By facilitating access to apprenticeship programs, this measure can help elevate standards, improve compensation, nurture children, and create viable career pathways for women, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Additionally, the requirement for annual reporting to the Legislature promotes transparency and data-driven decision making. This is essential for ensuring that the program effectively addresses workforce shortages, supports equitable access, and advances the status of women and girls across the state. **Ongoing evaluation, monitoring, and reporting, will allow for the identification of gaps and the refinement of strategies to maximize impact.**

The Commission respectfully encourages the Legislature to ensure that the program is inclusive of diverse providers and participants, including those in rural and underserved areas. Thank you for considering this **important step toward strengthening Hawaii's early learning workforce and supporting the economic security of women and families.** I respectfully urge this Committee to **pass HB1872.** Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

LATE

To: House Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Education
Re: **HB 1872 – Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Program**
Hawai'i State Capitol room 309 & Via Videoconference Friday, February 6, 2026,
2:00 PM

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB 1872**. This bill will establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

To ensure families have access to high quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten, we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

This bill would give priority to licensed and/or regulated child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai'i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access quality care from the time children need it most.

In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai'i's children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable child care.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please **SUPPORT HB 1872**.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

LATE

**Testimony in Support of H.B. 1872
Relating to the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program**

To:

Chair Andrew Takuya Garrett and Members, House Committee on Higher Education
Chair Justin H. Woodson and Members, House Committee on Education

From: YMCA of Honolulu

Position: Strong Support

Aloha Chair Garrett, Chair Woodson, and Members of the Committees,

The YMCA of Honolulu strongly supports H.B. 1872, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to support early learning providers participating in state- or federally-approved apprenticeship programs.

The YMCA of Honolulu is one of the largest nonprofit providers of early learning and youth development programs in Hawai'i, serving working families across O'ahu, including infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. Like many early learning providers, we face ongoing challenges recruiting, training, and retaining qualified early learning professionals as workforce shortages and labor costs continue to rise.

H.B. 1872 offers a practical, workforce-centered solution. The YMCA would take advantage of this apprenticeship program to strengthen our early learning workforce, upskill current staff, and create clear career pathways for individuals entering the field. Apprenticeship models that combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction allow providers to maintain high-quality learning environments while building a sustainable pipeline of qualified educators.

The grant funding proposed in this bill would help offset the wage, training, mentorship, and administrative costs associated with participating in apprenticeship programs—costs that often prevent nonprofit providers from participating despite strong interest. We also appreciate the bill's priority for providers serving infants and toddlers, where workforce shortages are most acute and stable, high-quality care is essential.

The YMCA of Honolulu respectfully urges your support of H.B. 1872 as a critical investment in Hawai'i's early learning workforce, keiki, and working families.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Ontai
Interim President & CEO

YMCA OF HONOLULU

1441 Pali Highway, Honolulu HI 96813
P 808 531 YMCA F 808 533 1286 www.ymcahonolulu.org

ARNOLD MARTINES, Chairman, Board of Directors
LISA ONTAI, Interim President & Chief Executive Officer



To: COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair

Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair

Rep. Luke A. Evslin Rep. Ikaika Olds Rep. Jeanne Kapela Rep. Justin H. Woodson

Rep. Darius K. Kila Rep. Christopher L. Muraoka Rep. Trish La Chica Rep. Kanani Souza

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

Rep. Terez Amato Rep. Darius K. Kila Rep. Luke A. Evslin Rep. Ikaika Olds Rep. Andrew Takuya

Garrett Rep. Christopher L. Muraoka Rep. Jeanne Kapela Rep. Kanani Souza

LATE

I am Deborah Bond-Upson, president of Parents for Public Schools of Hawai‘i (PPS-HI). PPS-HI is a statewide nonprofit organization of parents, educators, and community members working together to support enriched, high-quality public education for every child through stronger family–school partnerships and informed engagement in education policy. I am submitting testimony in strong support of HB 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program.

HB 1872 establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program, administered by the University of Hawai‘i, to provide financial support for early learning apprentices and the programs that host them. The Legislature’s findings recognize what parents already know: high-quality early learning experiences in a child’s earliest years improve long-term outcomes, including school readiness, graduation rates, and economic stability for families and communities. This bill is an important step toward building a sustainable pipeline of well-prepared early childhood educators for our public schools and community-based early learning settings.

Parents across Hawai‘i see the consequences of an underpaid and understaffed early childhood workforce: long waitlists, program closures, limited hours, and educators leaving the field because they cannot afford to stay. These disruptions affect children’s development and families’ ability to work, and they ultimately impact our public K–12 system when children arrive at kindergarten with vastly different levels of readiness. Apprenticeship models—such as the existing early childhood apprenticeship partnerships with Honolulu Community College and community-based organizations—have already demonstrated that combining on-the-job learning, mentoring, and credit-bearing coursework can develop skilled educators, reduce turnover, and support a diverse, local workforce.

By providing grants for apprenticeships, HB 1872 lowers financial barriers for current and prospective early childhood educators, many of whom are parents themselves and from communities that are underrepresented in higher education. The program will help align workforce development with community needs, using culturally responsive, place-based approaches that reflect Hawai‘i’s languages, cultures, and values. For PPS-HI, this is central to educational equity: when we invest in the adults who care for and teach our keiki from birth through the early grades, we strengthen the foundation for success throughout the P–20 public education system.

HB 1872 also complements other statewide efforts to expand access to early learning and pre-K, including public preschool classrooms and pre-K-only charter schools that partner closely with families. Without a strong, stable workforce, these investments cannot deliver on their promise to families or to our public schools. An apprenticeship grant program is a practical, evidence-informed strategy to grow and retain that workforce over time, in every community across our islands.

On behalf of Parents for Public Schools of Hawai‘i and the families we represent, I respectfully urge you to pass HB 1872. Our keiki, our working families, and our public schools all depend on a well-supported early childhood workforce, and this bill is a significant step toward that goal.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



LATE

Testimony to the House Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Education
Friday, February 6, 2026, at 2:00PM
Conference Room 309 & Videoconference

RE: HB 1872 Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Aloha Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committees,

I am writing in support of HB 1872, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program through the University of Hawai'i to support early learning providers participating in approved apprenticeship programs.

At Family Promise of Hawai'i, a nonprofit that serves children and families facing homelessness, we see every day that access to child care is a significant barrier to families attaining stable housing. Most of the families we serve are working families, and without child care, they can't secure jobs that will allow them to afford housing. Research also demonstrates that high-quality early childhood education is especially beneficial for children experiencing adversity, leading to better educational and health outcomes.

HB 1872 makes a targeted investment in Hawai'i's workforce infrastructure by strengthening the early learning pipeline where shortages are most acute. As a member of the Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i's Economic Action Policy Committee, I also know that this measure directly supports Hawai'i's employers by addressing one of the most persistent barriers to employee participation and retention: access to reliable child care. When child care is unavailable or unstable, businesses across healthcare, tourism, construction, defense, and other sectors face higher absenteeism, reduced productivity, and increased turnover, undermining competitiveness and growth.

By offsetting wage and training costs that limit provider participation in apprenticeship programs, HB 1872 helps stabilize and expand the early learning workforce and increase licensed child care capacity. This approach strengthens the labor supply by enabling more working parents, particularly women, to remain in or re-enter the workforce, while creating a pipeline of locally trained professionals more likely to stay in Hawai'i.

A stable child care system functions as essential economic infrastructure for Hawai'i's business community. HB 1872 reduces workforce disruption, supports long-term talent development, and contributes to a more resilient and productive economy. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ryan Catalani".

Ryan Catalani
Executive Director

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 2:53:17 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Blazak	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee,

As a constituent of House District 2, I support this measure.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 3:35:06 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support HB1872.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 3:43:23 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
cheryl burghardt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee members

I am in support of HB 1872 which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai‘i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

As a long time early childhood educator in Hawaii, I understand the importance and benefits to our community of an apprenticeship program and especially for the keiki.

Requiring an annual report to the Legislature is a positive path to accountability and appropriating funds provides the needed support to apply and partake in the programs.

I support HB 1872.

Cheryl Burghardt

Nuuanu Oahu

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 6:03:32 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Silvia Sharrar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.
Silvia Sharrar

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 6:05:42 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sophie Wright	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Sophie Wright

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 6:43:56 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natalie Portugal	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo,

Natalie Portugal

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 6:55:22 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley de Coligny	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Ashley de Coligny

Kaneohe, HI

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 7:14:34 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslie Keating	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this grant for the training of early childhood educators.

To: Hawaii State House Committee On Higher Education

Hearing Date/Time: Friday February 6, 2026, 2:00pm

Place: Hawaii State Capitol, CR 309 & Videoconference

Re: Judith Ann Armstrong supports the HB1872 Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Dear Chair Rep. Andrew Takuya, Vice Chair Rep Terez Amato and members of the Committee on Higher Education

I, Judith Ann Armstrong, support HB1872 which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

This program will:

- Help pay for training and education to become or stay an early childhood teacher
 - Create career pathways so teachers can grow and stay in the field
 - Help programs hire and keep more qualified teachers
 - Increase the number of childcare and preschool spots for local families
 - Improve quality of early learning for keiki
 - Strengthen the local workforce

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith Ann Armstrong

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 7:50:39 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laurie Tochiki	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I SUPPORT HB1872 because I care about the wellbeing of children and families. I am a member of the Hawaii Children's Action Network. Quality early childhood educators can have a lifetime positive impact. Teachers provide the skill, knowledge and expertise to make this difference and should earn a living wage.

Mahalo

Laurie Tochiki

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:00:43 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are the ever evolving foundation that lays as a critical component to early childhood development, vital to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs WILL aid in the growth and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Brian Hall

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:01:03 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ka'ale'a Kyrstin Hanawahine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I am in strong support of HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.*Ka'ale'a Hanawahine*

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:08:57 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elzadia Kaina	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:54:09 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Hagan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Erin Hagan

Waialua

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:55:20 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.
Noelle Lindenmann, Kailua-Kona

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 10:34:49 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aisley Dela Rosa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Aisley Dela Rosa

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 11:23:43 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chloe Pua'ena Vierra-Villanueva	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood education professionals are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Investing in educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities throughout Hawai'i.

This bill will also support child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T). Families face great challenges in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai'i. Supporting I/T child care providers and programs sustainably will help families access quality care from the time young children and families need it most. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

C. Pua'ena Vierra-Villanueva

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:22:52 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
J. Kehau Lucas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I **strongly support HB1872** because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai‘i’s families, workforce, and overall economic stability. Hawai‘i currently faces a **critical shortage of qualified early childhood educators**, which directly undermines families’ ability to access reliable, high-quality child care and impacts parents’ capacity to fully participate in the workforce.

Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven strategy to recruit, retain, and advance early childhood professionals by providing *earn-while-you-learn pathways* that combine paid on-the-job training with structured academic coursework. These programs help educators gain nationally recognized credentials and degrees while remaining employed and gaining practical experience.

For example, Hawai‘i’s first Early Childhood Education Registered Apprenticeship Program—launched through a partnership between Honolulu Community College and Keiki O Ka ‘Āina—allows apprentices to earn wage increases as they complete milestones such as a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and an associate’s degree. This model incorporates mentoring, wrap-around supports, and academic credit for on-the-job learning, providing a *sustainable career pathway* and strengthening retention.

Across the nation, similar apprenticeship programs have shown **encouraging results in workforce stability and quality**. Case studies from other states demonstrate that:

- Registered apprenticeship programs help retain educators long-term, with many apprentices remaining with their employers and advancing into leadership roles.
- The combination of wage increases and structured training supports recruitment into a field that historically struggles with low compensation and high turnover.

Research on apprenticeship models also shows that structured, competency-based on-the-job learning helps apprentices deepen their understanding of child development and improve instruction quality, which benefits children’s learning outcomes.

Investing in apprenticeship programs aligns with Hawai‘i’s broader workforce development goals and makes quality early care **more accessible for families statewide**—helping parents

remain in the workforce, reducing turnover in early learning programs, and ensuring that keiki receive the developmentally appropriate care and education they deserve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:22:54 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alfred Castle	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill as it will improve the quality of beginning teachers and assistants. Moreover, it will address the enormous shortage of preschool teachers and assist them to get "hands-on" experience while gaining valuable experience in child development and child interaction. Some states known for strong early education programs also have similar workforce development programs. Working with the UH College of Education, it is likely that foundation funds can bolster the state program.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:25:50 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joell Edwards	Wainiha Country Market	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members,

My name is Joell Edwards, a small business owner and resident of Wainiha on Kaua‘i. I strongly support HB1872.

Kaua‘i is a child care desert. Families across our island struggle with the high cost and limited availability of child care due to a severe shortage of early childhood educators. As a small business, we recently lost a valued employee—a mother of three—not because of job performance, but because child care was unaffordable and unavailable. This is a reality many employers and families are facing.

Early childhood educators are essential to Hawai‘i’s families and economy. HB1872’s investment in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen this workforce, creating pathways for local residents and allowing more families to access quality child care.

Supporting early childhood educators supports our keiki, working families, and communities statewide. I respectfully urge your support of HB1872.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:34:00 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair

Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Friday, February 6, 2026 at 2 pm

Via videoconference

Conference Room 309

State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1872 - RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

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

My name is Christine Andrews and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I write to you today in **strong support of HB 1872**, relating to an early learning apprenticeship grant program. HB 1872 establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

HB 1872 would:

- Help pay for training and education to become or stay an early childhood teacher
- Create career pathways so teachers can grow and stay in the field
- Helps programs hire and keep more qualified teachers
- Increase the number of child care and preschool spots for local families
- Improve quality of early learning for keiki
- Strengthen the local workforce

Based on the foregoing benefits of HB 1872, I request that you vote in support of HB 1872.

Mahalo for all you do in support of Hawai'i students and families,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.

Wailuku, Maui

Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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



From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers (KOKA) is a statewide Native Hawaiian non-profit organization whose mission is to educate children, strengthen families, perpetuate culture, and enrich communities. In support of increasing the capacity and quality of the early childhood education workforce, KOKA has developed the only Department of Labor approved **Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program** in partnership with Honolulu Community College.

KOKA strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

KOKA recognizes that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train, and support a properly and specially trained early learning workforce.

We feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

KOKA's position is that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families when looking for preschool or infant-toddler child care, as well as, impacting the early learning workforce, and the economic stability for all here in the state of Hawai'i.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 12:29:41 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
christopher castillo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Chairs and Members of the Committees,

My name is Christopher Castillo, and I am currently a public preschool teacher working within the Department of Education and the Executive Office of Early Learning (EOEL). I am writing to express my **strong support for HB1872**.

While I am encouraged by the State and the teachers' union's commitment to expanding early learning through the rapid creation of new classrooms, we are facing a critical reality on the ground: **we simply do not have the qualified workforce to meet this demand**. From my perspective in the classroom, I see the following challenges every day:

- **The Staffing Gap:** Many of our current "lead" roles are filled by long-term substitutes or dedicated individuals who are still in the process of obtaining their early learning licenses.
- **Sustainability:** We cannot continue to scale a system without a stable foundation of qualified professionals. Creating physical classroom spaces is only half the battle; ensuring they are staffed by licensed experts is essential for the "Ready Keiki" initiative to succeed.
- **Empowering Educational Assistants (EAs):** This bill provides a vital pathway for our EAs. These individuals are already in our classrooms and possess the heart for this work, but they need the formal support and structured pathways this legislation encourages to transition into fully licensed roles.

We cannot continue to build programs that we do not have the qualified personnel to sustain. To provide the high-quality education our keiki deserve, we must prioritize the professional pipeline as much as the infrastructure.

I urge you to pass **HB1872** to ensure that Hawaii's expansion of early childhood education is both successful and sustainable.

Mahalo for your time and for your commitment to our youngest learners.

Sincerely,

Christopher Castillo

Date: February 4, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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

From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program



Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers (KOKA) is a statewide Native Hawaiian non-profit organization whose mission is to educate children, strengthen families, perpetuate culture, and enrich communities. In support of increasing the capacity and quality of the early childhood education workforce, KOKA has developed the only Department of Labor approved **Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program** in partnership with Honolulu Community College.

KOKA strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

KOKA recognizes that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train, and support a properly and specially trained early learning workforce.

We feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

KOKA's position is that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families when looking for preschool or infant-toddler child care, as well as, impacting the early learning workforce, and the economic stability for all here in the state of Hawai'i.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

Mahalo Nui,

Momi Akana, CEO

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 3:01:38 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Valley B. Varma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice Chair Terez Amato, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and committee members,

I am testifying in strong support of HB 1872 which would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai‘i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).

To ensure families have access to high quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten, we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The early learning apprenticeship grant program would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

This bill would give priority to licensed and/or registered child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai‘i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access quality care from the time babies need it most.

In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai‘i’s children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay

in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable child care.

Having been working with children and ohana for nearly 30 years this issue is dear to my heart. Early childhood professionals deserve so much more than what is currently average.

Now that I work to prepare new teachers and caregivers for a career in early childhood education I want to ensure that they continue to receive the support they deserve for ongoing professional growth.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo,

Valley Varma

Early Childhood Professional and ECE Instructor HCC

Elaine Yamashita
105 Kamehameiki Rd.
Kula, HI 96790-8451
808-281-1216
elainey208@gmail.com

Feb. 4, 2026

To: Representative Garrett, Chair
Representative Amato, Vice-chair
House Committee on Higher Education

From: Elaine Yamashita

Re: HB1872

Aloha Honorable Chair Garrett, Vice-Chair Amato, and members of the House Higher Education Committee:

While I serve as chair of the Early Learning Board, this is my personal testimony. I've been an advocate for early childhood care and education since the 1980s. I am professor emerita of University of Hawai'i Maui College, where I was the program coordinator for Early Childhood Education from 2000-2019.

I support HB1872, which would expand the current early childhood apprenticeship program. This is a way to grow our important early childhood care and education workforce in a way that supports the specialized knowledge and relationship building that effective early educators utilize to optimize children's growth and development.

Equitable compensation to retain early educators is crucial, and apprenticeships support this.

Mahalo for your consideration and support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Elaine Yamashita
elainey208@gmail.com

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 3:08:40 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Toni Fujimoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice Chair Terez Amato, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and committee members,

I am testifying in support of HB 1872 which would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai'i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).

I am testifying in support of HB 1872, which would encourage early learning employers in Hawai'i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).

To ensure families have access to high-quality early childhood care and education, we must support and fairly compensate the early care and education workforce. ELRAPs are a proven way to recruit and retain early educators by combining paid, on-the-job learning with pathways to higher education and professional advancement. These programs strengthen the workforce while improving the quality of early learning programs statewide.

However, many early learning providers cannot afford to participate in ELRAPs because they are unable to pay apprentices higher wages or maintain fair wage levels for existing staff. The proposed apprenticeship grant program would help remove this barrier by providing funding to support wages for apprentices and existing staff, allowing providers to meet required wage standards.

This bill appropriately prioritizes licensed and registered child care providers serving infants and toddlers, where the need for affordable, high-quality care is greatest. Supporting infant and toddler programs helps families access care during the most critical early years.

In short, this bill would expand access to ELRAPs, strengthen Hawai'i's early childhood workforce, support families, and help working parents remain in the workforce.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB 1872.

Toni Fujimoto

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 5:25:45 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Ball	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this legislation.

David Ball

Waiālae-Kahala

February 4, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
and members of the House Committee on Higher Education

Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
and members of the House Committee on Education

Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Measure H.B. No.1872 – Relating to the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of H. B. No. 1872.

Aloha,

My name is Dr. Terry Lock. I am the Director of the Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Excellence and Equity (ECE³) Project at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa College of Education. Since 2022, the ECE³ Project has been gathering, reviewing and disseminating research on apprenticeship programs in the early learning industry.

Families across our state are struggling to find affordable, high-quality early learning programs that support their young children's development while families maintain their own economic stability. At the same time, there is a desperate need to support the recruitment, retention, and stabilization of our specially trained early learning workforce.

HB 1872 offers a tangible solution to these pressing issues by establishing an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State who participate in state- or federally-approved early learning registered apprenticeship programs or ELRAPs.

1. **Creating Career Pathways for Early Learning Apprentices:** Growing studies show that state- or federally-approved early learning registered apprenticeship programs or ELRAPs are associated with increases in employment, skills, and earnings for apprentices and with greater retention and recruitment of skilled staff for employers and the broader economy. The grant program will provide funding to support new early learning apprentices, with financial assistance to cover costs related to earning a credential or degree, on-the-job training while earning a wage, and wage increases when completing ELRAP milestones.

2. **Increasing the Supply of Early Learning Slots:** By incentivizing individuals to enter and advance in the field, this program has the potential to increase slots for infants and toddlers, and increase slots for three- and four-year-olds, in early learning program services providers, who are Department of Human Services (DHS) licensed group child centers/ homes and registered family child care homes. The additional slots will directly benefit families with young children, who are on child care center/homes' waiting lists or forced to make difficult compromises in their work and other responsibilities.
3. **Support Early Learning Program Services Providers and the Early Learning Industry:** The grant program will not only help early learning program service providers recruit new early learning apprentices, but also retain existing early learning professionals by addressing their low wages with wage supplements. This investment will support the early learning industry.
4. **Strengthening Economic Stability:** For families in Hawai'i who struggle with the high cost of living, access to reliable child care is often the key to maintaining stable employment and achieving economic security. The proposed grant program will play a critical role in ensuring parents can participate fully in their jobs and careers, knowing their children are in safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate settings.

For example, in the summer of 2023, Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers' (KOKA) gained approval as our state's first ELRAP. Recently, I spoke to one of KOKA's apprentices, who is employed at KOKA's Ka Pua Preschool, located in Mā'ili, 'Oahu. This apprentice, a mother of four children, shared, "To be in a job, while going to school, has made a huge difference. This apprenticeship program fits the type of learner that I am. I love that I get to apply what I learn from my mentor and my college instructors, while interacting with preschool children." She also credits her "very encouraging" early childhood education instructors at Honolulu Community College (HonCC). At the end of this Spring 2026 semester, she will complete her second milestone, a certificate of achievement in early childhood education from HonCC.

HB1872 will help to grow our ECE workforce and aligns with the shared vision of prioritizing early learning as a cornerstone of our state's future. By investing in this early learning apprenticeship grant program, we are not only addressing immediate workforce development needs but are also laying the groundwork for long-term systemic improvements in early learning for our young children's success in school and in life.

Mahalo for your support of H. B. No.1872.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:36:18 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Ho	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members!

I urge you to vote in favor of HB 1872. As a former Headstart Teacher, foster care social worker, and a grandmother of eight, I can unequivocally attest to the need for strong supports for every family in Hawai'i to be able to provide quality early childhood for their children.

This early exposure to play; stimulating learning materials; and activities that develop large and small motor skills will provide the cornerstone for the continued healthy development of each youngster. Such early development will eventually result in youths and young adults who are interested, aware, and potential contributing members of our society.

To this end, I urge you to provide funding for training in career pathways for adults who have natural potential, but lack the financial resources necessary to pursue work as Early Childhood Educators.

Mahalo nui,

Cheryl O. Ho, Nu'uauu

I

To: Chair Andrew Takuya Garret, Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice-Chair Terez Amato, Vice-Chair Trish La Chica, and Members of the Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Education

From: Brenda Watanabe

Date: February 5, 2026

Subject: TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB 1872, Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Grant Program

Aloha Chairs, Vice-Chairs, and members of the committees,

My name is Brenda Watanabe and I am parent, grandparent and early childhood educator deeply committed to the future of our Keiki. I am writing to voice my strong support for **HB 1872**.

We often talk about how important the first five years of a child's life are, yet the people we entrust with those years are often among the lowest-paid workers in our state. Currently, the median wage for early childhood staff in Hawai'i is a staggering \$13–\$17 per hour. We cannot expect to build a quality education system on the backs of a workforce that can barely afford to live here.

Why the Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Program is a solution for Hawai'i needs:

- **A Promising Start:** The 2023 partnership between Honolulu CC and Keiki O Ka 'Āina (KOKA) provides starting wages of **\$17–\$19 per hour**. This isn't just a "pay raise"; it's a path to dignity.
- **Growing from Within:** Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs) allow our community-based programs to grow their own talent. By using an "earn while you learn" model, staff can stay employed while earning their CDA or Associate degree.
- **Lifting Everyone Up:** This bill doesn't just help the new apprentices. It provides grants so employers can raise the wages of *existing* staff too. It supports the current workforce and honors the knowledge and experience of our dedicated early childhood educators.

The ripple effect on our families: When early learning programs can't find staff, they close their doors or hike tuition. This forces parents to make the impossible choice between their careers and their children's care. By stabilizing the workforce through this bill, we are keeping tuition affordable and keeping Hawai'i's parents in the workforce.

This bill is a win for the teachers who deserve a living wage, a win for the businesses that need reliable employees, and most importantly, a win for the children who deserve well-prepared, well-qualified and well-respected educators.

I respectfully urge you to pass **HB 1872** to ensure Hawai'i's early learning programs can thrive. Mahalo for your time and for your commitment to our community.

Sincerely,



Brenda Watanabe

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 7:35:50 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Traci Garma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Traci M. Garma

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 7:37:12 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin ODonnell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

TO: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
House Committee on Higher Education

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

FROM: Robert G. Peters, EdD
Past Chair, Early Learning Board

SUBJECT: HB No. 1872 – Relating to An Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

DATE: Friday, February 6, 2026

TIME: 2:00 pm

PLACE: Via Videoconference
Conference Room 309

POSITION: Support

Aloha Chairs and Members of the Higher Education and Education Committees:

My name is Robert G. Peters, Past Chair of the Early Learning Board (ELB) and retired Head of Hanahau`oli School.

Mahalo for the opportunity to supply testimony in support of HB No. 1872, which is designed to incentivize early learning providers to participate in apprenticeship programs (Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs, or ERLAPS). It seeks to help address critical recruitment and retention challenges in the early learning field and target one of the most critical needs for Infant & Toddler workforce development.

Recent efforts in Hawaii and nationally support the effectiveness of ERLAP programs, offering higher compensation, on-the-job training and improved quality experiences for children and families. The results also indicate this is an effective strategy to both attract and retain qualified staff. This bill would help to address the barrier that many current providers encounter who wish to participate but are unable to afford to pay higher wages required by apprenticeships while guaranteeing wage parity for current staff members.

Ultimately, the primary beneficiaries of the provisions of HB No. 1872 will be Hawai`i's keiki and their families, particularly those seeking infant and toddler settings for their very young children. Apprenticeship programs of this type will help to support affordable child care services while also assisting providers in keeping their programs open and available. The additional training and education directly in the early care setting will also equip staff to deliver quality services for enrolled children.

And not to be overlooked is that such apprenticeship programs, by expanding and enhancing staff growth and development for infants and toddlers, can contribute to general workforce employment needs by offering affordable child care. In a state like ours, with such a low unemployment rate, the need for workers is pronounced.

I respectfully ask your support for HB No. 1872 in support of the bill's proposed early learning apprenticeship grant program in recognition of the critical role early childhood care and education play in a sustainable future for the state of Hawai'i.

Mahalo,
Robert G. Peters, EdD
Past Chair, ELB

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 10:47:43 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sonya Zabala	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers (KOKA) is a statewide Native Hawaiian non-profit organization

whose mission is to educate children, strengthen families, perpetuate culture, and enrich communities. In support

of increasing the capacity and quality of the early childhood education workforce, KOKA has developed the only

Department of Labor approved Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program in partnership with

Honolulu Community College.

KOKA strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant

Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

KOKA recognizes that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality

early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better

recruit, train, and support a properly and specially trained early learning workforce.

We feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to

the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career

- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within

the field

- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals

- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and

advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

KOKA's position is that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a

critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families when looking for

preschool or infant toddler child care, as well as, impacting the early learning workforce, and the economic stability for all here in the

state of Hawai'i.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872

Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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



From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers (KOKA) is a statewide Native Hawaiian non-profit organization whose mission is to educate children, strengthen families, perpetuate culture, and enrich communities. In support of increasing the capacity and quality of the early childhood education workforce, KOKA has developed the only Department of Labor approved **Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program** in partnership with Honolulu Community College.

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For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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



From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

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To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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



From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
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From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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



From: Shani Simeona: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers-Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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

From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program



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Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
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From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program



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KOKA's position is that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families when looking for preschool or infant-toddler child care, as well as, impacting the early learning workforce, and the economic stability for all here in the state of Hawai'i.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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



From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 11:20:38 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raya Peralejo-Esteban Tan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice Chair Terez Amato, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and committee members,

I am testifying in support of HB 1872, which would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai‘i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).

To ensure families have access to high-quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten, we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work toward earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.

I was a preschool teacher for three years, and though I loved my job, I often struggled to make ends meet. I had to take on multiple jobs to supplement my income and earn a livable wage; oftentimes, the toll of working numerous jobs left me exhausted and unable to provide the quality care my kids deserved. At the time, I was living under my parents’ roof, and so I did not have to pay for rent. But if I had to account for housing expenses, there would have been no possibility for me to fulfill my vocation as an early childhood educator. An early learning apprenticeship program would have been perfect for me—allowing me to earn higher wages while gaining valuable education credits and on-the-job learning without needing to leave the classroom.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

Furthermore, this bill would give priority to licensed and/or registered child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early

learning services in Hawai‘i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access quality care from the time babies need it most. Additionally, many community-based programs are at risk of shutting down due to a lack of public investment, causing critical staff shortages. This has huge consequences for families seeking I/T care since the majority of programs that serve I/T are in the community-based sector. Since this bill would support community-based programs’ participation in ELRAPs, it has the potential to strengthen our mixed delivery system and maintain or create more I/T slots.

Innovative recruitment and retention strategies such as apprenticeship programs are especially important because early learning programs depend on staff to maintain their operations. If more and more early childhood education professionals leave the field because of low wages, we will have no one to care for our keiki, and early learning programs may be forced to shut down. This will have devastating outcomes for children, who deserve safe, stable, and nurturing environments, particularly in the formative years of their lives.

In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai‘i’s children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable child care.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo,
Raya Tan

Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
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From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers- Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program

Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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KOKA strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

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HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 11:51:04 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ty Tamagawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai‘i.

I recognize that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train, and support a properly and specially trained early learning workforce.

I feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

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HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 12:12:51 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

1872 HB RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

1872 HB RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 12:16:39 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beth Anderson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. I think this may be one of the most important bills before the legislature this year and I hope it moves through and passes. Supporting early childhood education and families are essential, positive investments toward the future of our state , our youngest citizens, as well as our economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Beth Anderson

Testimony of
Joy Barua

Before:

The House Committee on Higher Education
The Honorable Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
The Honorable Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair

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

Friday, February 6, 2026
2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309 & Via Videoconference

RE: HB1872 Relating to Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Aloha e Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Joy Barua, and I am writing in **SUPPORT of House Bill 1872 (HB1872)**, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program through the University of Hawaii to support early learning providers participating in approved apprenticeship programs.

A stable childcare system functions as essential economic infrastructure for Hawaii's business community. HB1872 will help reduce workforce disruption, support long-term talent development, and contribute to a more resilient and productive economy.

HB1872 proposes a targeted investment in Hawaii's workforce infrastructure by strengthening the early learning pipeline where shortages are most acute. By addressing one of the most persistent barriers to employee participation and retention, access to reliable childcare, this measure directly supports Hawaii's employers. When childcare is unavailable or unstable, employers across healthcare, tourism, construction, defense, and other sectors face higher absenteeism and increased turnover leading to adverse economic impact.

By offsetting wage and training costs that limit provider participation in apprenticeship programs, HB1872 aims to address and expand the early learning workforce and increase licensed childcare capacity. This approach strengthens workforce development via job-creation and expansion opportunities by enabling more working parents, particularly women, to remain in or re-enter the workforce, while creating a pipeline of locally trained professionals more likely to stay in Hawaii.

For these reasons, I respectfully request your support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,



Joy Barua
(808) 295-0190

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 1:58:32 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maka Gibson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai‘i’s families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality childcare. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

As a parent of a child who is in a quality childcare setting, I’ve seen firsthand just how special, unique, and gifted early childhood educators are. My daughter’s teachers are so kind, patient, and understand, and they deserve to be compensated.

I previously worked in Oregon and partnered with Oregon State University to administer their early childhood grant program that had similar goals, and over the course of several years, we started see more preschool teachers who looked demographically like the students they were serving. We were also able to support their education and career pathways, thereby increasing the workforce itself, and the system as a whole.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Maka Gibson

Kāne‘ohe, HI

LATE

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 2:22:54 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anamalia Su'esu'e	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators (ECE) are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. As a mother of three children, ECEs are so important in our lives and our family has been so grateful to have had such great preschool teachers over the years. We need to continue supporting our ECEs and future ECEs in Hawaii. My youngest child will soon be preschool age and I hope that she and other keiki continue to have great experiences in preschool with awesome ECEs that help prepare them for elementary and lifelong learning.

Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Anamalia

LATE

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 2:56:02 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnetta Jordan-Piper	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Garrett and Woodson, Vice Chairs Amato and La Chica, and Members of the Committees,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 1872, which proposes the establishment of an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program administered by the University of Hawai‘i. I submit this testimony in my individual capacity as a longtime early childhood educator and advocate who has worked directly with children, families, and early learning professionals in Hawai‘i.

Across our state, families continue to face significant challenges accessing affordable, high-quality early learning programs. At the same time, early learning providers struggle to recruit and retain qualified educators due to low wages, limited career advancement opportunities, and the high cost of education and training. These challenges are deeply interconnected and require workforce-centered solutions.

From my own experience working in early learning settings and supporting early childhood educators, I have seen talented, committed individuals leave the field—not due to lack of passion or skill, but because there were no viable pathways to earn while learning or to advance without taking on unsustainable financial burden. Many educators enter the field through informal or entry-level roles and have the capacity to grow, yet lack access to structured, paid training models that would allow them to remain in the workforce while building credentials. This instability affects not only educators, but also children and families who rely on consistent, high-quality care.

House Bill 1872 offers a thoughtful and practical response by creating structured, paid apprenticeship pathways into the early learning profession. Apprenticeships provide an accessible entry point for individuals who may otherwise be unable to pursue postsecondary education due to financial or personal barriers. By combining paid, on-the-job training with formal education, this model supports workforce development while allowing individuals to earn income and gain experience simultaneously.

As someone who has worked within Hawai‘i’s early childhood system, I have seen firsthand how the lack of sustainable workforce pathways impacts program quality, staff stability, and ultimately children’s outcomes. An apprenticeship model recognizes early learning as a skilled profession and values the time, mentorship, and preparation required to support young children effectively.

Importantly, expanding the early learning workforce through apprenticeships also supports families statewide by increasing the availability of early learning slots.

When programs are adequately staffed with trained professionals, children benefit from continuity of care, educators experience greater job satisfaction, and families gain reliable access to services that support employment and economic stability.

I believe House Bill 1872 represents a meaningful investment in Hawai‘i’s future. Strengthening the early learning workforce strengthens families, communities, and the broader economy. I respectfully urge you to support this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your continued commitment to Hawai‘i’s keiki and families.

Respectfully submitted,

Johnnetta Jordan-Piper
O‘ahu, Hawai‘i

HB-1872

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 5:37:14 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:00:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ANDREW ISODA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

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Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Andrew Isoda
Lahaina, Mau'i



LATE

Date: February 6, 2026

To: Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
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