



HAWAII
STATE FOUNDATION on
CULTURE and the ARTS

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**Testimony of KAREN EWALD, Executive Director
State Foundation on Culture and the Arts**

**Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
And
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2026 Conference Room 229 at 1:11 PM**

**HOUSE BILL 2437_HD1
RELATING TO
ARTS EDUCATION**

Dear Chair Kim, Chair Lee and members of the Committees,

SFCA **strongly SUPPORTS** H.B. 2437_HD1 which appropriates funds to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts for the Artists in the Schools program.

The Artists in the Schools arts residency grants provide engaging, creative, and fun learning experiences based on the Fine Arts standards for all grade levels, through residencies with qualified, trained teaching artists from the [Artistic Teaching Partners \(ATP\) Roster](#). Many of these teaching artists integrate their art form with other core curriculum areas, such as language arts, math, social studies, and science, meeting both Fine Arts and other core standards. For many students, the Artists in the Schools program is the one main access point to arts education.

There has been an increase in demand for the AITS program, with more applications for residences in public and charter schools throughout the state of Hawaii. Applications have steadily increased in numbers since the pandemic, starting at 97 applications in 2020 to 132 applications in 2025. This serves as a testament to the popularity and positive impact of the program. The appropriation in this measure is appreciated and supported, as the SFCA was unable to fund 25 applications that were approved by the review panel in Fiscal Year 2026.

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



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

Date: 03/25/2026

Time: 01:11 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: WLA/EDU

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB2437, HD1, RELATING TO ARTS EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Appropriates funds to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts for the Artists in the Schools Program. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education supports HB 2437 H.D.1 and defers to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts as to the implementation of the Artists in Schools program.

The Artists in the Schools program, managed by the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, provides supplemental access to high-quality arts education, a foundation of whole-child development that fosters increased student engagement and academic success. By embedding professional teaching artists directly into public school classrooms, students across the state, particularly those in rural and Title I communities, may receive meaningful, standards-based arts experiences. The Department appreciates this long standing partnership with the Artists in the Schools program.

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



Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I write in strong support of HB2437 HD1, which appropriates funds to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts for the Artists in the Schools program. In these challenging times, with families struggling economically, housing costs, and our communities still recovering from climate disasters, investing in arts education is not a luxury. It is **essential** to our children's well-being and our collective healing. It allows our future generation to become outside-the-box problem solvers, critical thinkers, and compassionate citizens. It heals deep trauma and allows the whole brain to fire up and collaborate between the left and the right hemisphere, including the front and back of the brain. Arts and culture in the school system have NEVER been about creating more artists in the world. It has always been the foundation of a balanced society and a thriving economy.

My name is Maki Morinoue, from Hawai'i Island. My parents and the community founded Donkey Mill Arts Center in Holualoa over 30 years ago. They launched the artists-in-schools program 25 years ago and have developed a beautifully thoughtful, culturally grounded approach to arts in education. My son was lucky to have experienced this program, and the children excel in so many other areas of education because they can better express themselves and have the confidence to do so. Arts and culture teach us to listen, to observe, and to be mindful. The process teaches us to feel within when something is completed. These are important life skills. I am a huge supporter of artists in schools, as data shows that the value of the arts and culture has been studied for decades and is appreciated and valued by people around the world. Hawai'i and the Continental US must reflect on the state of humanity and invest in our collective future to solve problems and invent new concepts. It begins with our children through arts & culture education.

Art heals. When our keiki experience trauma, whether from economic hardship, lack of food, displacement, or the devastating wildfires and floods that have torn through our communities, creative expression gives them a voice for feelings too big for words. Professional artists in classrooms create safe spaces where children can process grief, build resilience, and remember joy. This is not supplemental education—this is survival education for the whole child.

Culture teaches us how to look after each other, our land, and ourselves. Through Hawaiiana, our children learn the stories of place and the responsibility of stewardship. Through traditional crafts, they understand the patience and care our kupuna brought to everything they created. Through music and chant, they connect to genealogies that root them in something larger than themselves. These are not abstract lessons—they are practical teachings about mālama 'āina, about community care, about knowing who you are and where you come from. In a world that



often tries to erase Hawaiian identity and values, arts education is cultural preservation in action.

Research consistently shows that students engaged in quality arts programs demonstrate higher academic achievement across all subjects. They develop critical thinking skills, creative problem-solving abilities, and collaborative capacities that employers desperately seek. But beyond workforce preparation, arts education creates engaged citizens who can imagine different futures and have the creative confidence to build them. In Hawai'i, where we face existential challenges from climate change to affordable housing to cultural erasure, we need our young people to be imaginative, bold, and rooted in values that transcend profit margins.

The Artists in the Schools program brings professional practicing artists directly into classrooms across our public and public charter school systems, particularly reaching students in underserved communities who might never otherwise encounter working artists or experience hands-on creative instruction. These are not art teachers reading from textbooks—these are master practitioners sharing living traditions and contemporary innovations, showing our keiki that artistic careers are possible, that Hawaiian culture is vibrant and evolving, that their creativity matters.

This program also strengthens our local creative economy by providing sustainable income for Hawai'i's artists, many of whom struggle to make ends meet despite being cultural treasures. When we invest in Artists in the Schools, we invest in the people who make Hawai'i special—the musicians, dancers, visual artists, storytellers, and cultural practitioners whose work draws visitors from around the world and reminds us all why we fight so hard to protect these islands.

Right now, tourists come to Hawai'i seeking the culture, artistry, and aloha that define us. But if we do not invest in passing these traditions and creative practices to the next generation, what will be left to share? Shopping centers that could be anywhere? ***Our cultural identity, the very thing that makes Hawai'i irreplaceable, depends on our willingness to fund its transmission to our children.***

I understand budget constraints are real. But I also know that the cost of not investing in our children's creative and cultural development is far higher. Students without arts education are more likely to disengage from school, more vulnerable to mental health challenges, less connected to their cultural identity, and less equipped to navigate an uncertain future. In the long run, prevention through education costs far less than intervention after a crisis.

The effective date of July 1, 3000, appears to be a placeholder, and I urge you to correct this to July 1, 2026, so this critical funding can reach classrooms immediately. Our keiki cannot wait 974 years; they need these resources now.



I respectfully urge you to pass HB2437 HD1 and fully fund the Artists in the Schools program. Invest in the healing, cultural grounding, and creative development that our children deserve. Invest in the artists who keep our culture alive. Invest in the identity that makes Hawai'i more than just a dot in the Pacific—invest in what makes us who we are.

Know Hawaiians
Know Hawai'i
No Hawaiians
No Hawai'i
~ *Brandy-Alia Serikaku*

Mahalo nui loa for your consideration and your service to our keiki and our future.
Maki Morinoue
HULI PAC, Hawai'i Island

TO: SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair, and
Members of the Committee

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS
The Honorable Chris Lee, Chair
The Honorable Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair, and
Members of the Committee

FROM: Elise Inouye, Director of Policy & Public Affairs

RE: Testimony in Support for HB 2437 HD 1, Relating to Arts Education

DATE: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 at 1:11 pm

LOCATION: Conference Room 229

The Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) **supports HB 2437 HD 1**, relating to arts education. This bill would appropriate funding to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA) for the Artists in the Schools (AITS) program. For over 18 years, HCF has partnered with the SFCA by awarding funding to increase access to arts education at public and charter schools through the AITS program.

AITS brings dance, drama/theatre, literary arts, mime, music, puppetry, and visual arts to classrooms across the state, increasing access to arts education. However, the demand for the AITS program from public and charter schools is greater than the current available funds. The funding from this bill is essential to increase the reach of this program across the state, especially for Title I schools and schools in rural communities.

HCF believes that when opportunities to practice and participate in arts and culture are inclusive and accessible to everyone, from keiki to kūpuna, we will have a healthier community in Hawai'i. That is why we are committed to increasing access to arts and culture as a priority area within HCF's CHANGE Framework.

Supporting the arts and culture community contributes significantly to the well-being of Hawai'i's residents, including keiki. One of the teaching artists for the AITS program shared that through the AITS residencies, "students not only developed visual art skills, but also

deepened their sense of identity, connection to place, and belonging within their community.” **We respectfully urge the legislature to advance HB 2437 HD 1** to continue to affirm the importance of arts and culture in Hawai‘i.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 10:02:29 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ellen Crocker, Teaching Artist	Testifying for Hawaii Arts Alliance	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I am Ellen Crocker, a Teaching Artist of Hawai'i for 40 years. I am writing to ask you to support this bill with more funding so more Artists can continue to go into our schools. Art is important for our students, it provides opportunities for them imagine, think through an idea, make a plan and carry out the plan, thus being successful! This is very important for our children to do, it teaches them to think. Our education has changed so much over 40 years, our schools are lacking in creativity. I have watched it disappear over the years. It is a main reason for me remaining a Teaching Artist. I work at teaching students to think! We need thinkers, people who look into the future with a plan they have thought of. Please fund the Hawai'i Arts Alliance Teaching Artist Program with more funding.

Sincerely, Ellen Crocker

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 10:32:54 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angel Prince	Testifying for Prince Dance Company	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of this important bill. As a member of ARTS FIRST Partners, Prince Dance Company strongly supports HB 2437.

We see firsthand the transformative power of arts education. Through our work in schools, we witness how the arts increase student engagement, build confidence, and deepen learning. Programs like Artists-in-the-Schools—and the broader arts education ecosystem—equip students with essential skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration.

Currently, Prince Dance Company brings dance education to seven schools on Hawai‘i Island—schools that would otherwise have little to no access to the arts. Our goal is to expand to 15 schools within the next two years, but we cannot do this vital work without sustained state support. Continued investment in programs like AITS ensures that more students across Hawai‘i can access meaningful, enriching learning experiences.

HB 2437 is an investment in our students and in the future of our communities. It helps ensure that thousands of young people can engage with a universal language—the arts—that fosters connection, expression, and possibility.

The arts are not a luxury; they are essential. They are a lifeline and a pathway to the kind of world we all want to build.

We respectfully urge you to support HB 2437 and champion the development of the whole child.

March 23, 2026



Testimony in Support of HB2437 HD1
Relating to Arts Education

Aloha,

On behalf of the Donkey Mill Art Center, a nonprofit arts education center located in Hōlualoa on Hawai'i Island, I respectfully submit this testimony **in support of HB2437 HD1**.

Our organization was founded on the belief that arts education is essential to whole-child development. For more than 23 years, we have provided arts education programs within local elementary schools through the AITS program because **arts education is education**.

We have a long-standing partnership with Hōlualoa Elementary (HES), a nearby Title I school, where we serve more than 200 keiki each year through the Artist-in-the-Schools (AITS) program. While AITS funding supports one semester, we prioritize additional funding to ensure students at HES receive arts integration year-round. Through additional grants and partnerships, we also bring arts education into third grade classrooms at Kealakehe Elementary School, serving more than 240 students annually.

The impact is tangible. As one third-grade teacher from Hōlualoa Elementary shared, "I'm motivated by the fact that I see how it helps the students grow. Some are not as successful as readers or in math, but when they can build confidence in art, it supports growth in other areas as well."

Programs like AITS are not supplemental. They are transformative, building confidence, creativity, and strengthening academic growth across disciplines.

Sustained funding for this program is essential. It ensures continuity for students and teachers and affirms that arts integration is not an extracurricular add-on, but a core component of a well-rounded education. The students we serve and the educators we partner with consistently demonstrate how critical this work is for academic success, engagement, confidence, and overall well-being.

Demand for youth arts education across West Hawai'i and throughout the state continues to grow, yet current funding levels fall short of meeting that need. Without increased and reliable support, students will continue to miss out on these opportunities. **We respectfully urge your support of HB2437 HD1, while fully funding or increasing the budget of the SFCA's Artist-in-the-Schools program so we can continue to serve the students who need it most.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashley Raymond".

Ashley Raymond
Executive Director
Donkey Mill Art Center, Holualoa, HI

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 11:52:21 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin O'Hara	Testifying for Honolulu Theatre for Youth	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a teaching artist working with students in Hawai'i schools, I strongly support HB 2437. Through the Artists-in-the-Schools (AITS) program, I have seen firsthand how arts education transforms learning by increasing student engagement, building confidence, and strengthening critical thinking and collaboration skills.

In my work with elementary students, I have witnessed students who are typically hesitant to participate become active, expressive learners through drama and creative exploration. Arts integration provides students with meaningful opportunities to connect academic content to their own experiences, making learning more relevant and impactful.

These experiences are not optional and they are essential to supporting the whole child. Learning with professional teaching artists allows students to develop communication skills, collaborative skills, cultural awareness, and creative problem-solving abilities that extend far beyond the classroom. This program hones life skills that are required of a citizen - clarity of communication, empathy in the workplace, active listening and collaboration, creative and quick problem solving and a commitment to a larger goal.

Increased funding for AITS will ensure that students across Hawai'i, regardless of background or location, have equitable access to high-quality arts education. I urge you to support HB 2437 and continue investing in programs that empower our students to succeed both in school and in life.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 7:02:03 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anna Scott	Testifying for Honolulu Theatre for the Youth	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Senator Keohokalole,

As a member of the Board of Trustees for Honolulu Theatre for Youth (HTY), I am writing to respectfully urge your support for a suite of bills currently before the legislature that will ensure every child in Hawai‘i, regardless of their zip code, has access to the transformative power of the arts.

For seven decades, HTY has seen firsthand how professional theatre and arts integration unlock a child's potential. To sustain and expand this work, we ask that you lend your support for the following measures:

- HB 2437 (Artists in the Schools): Provides essential funding for the SFCA Artists in the Schools program, the primary vehicle for bringing professional artists into classrooms.
- HB 2436 (Arts Integration Coordinators): Establishes dedicated specialist positions within the DOE to ensure arts integration is a core part of the public school experience.
- HB 2117 (Mapping Arts Data): Creates a task force to map arts education statewide, ensuring we identify and fill "arts deserts" so that rural and neighbor island keiki are not left behind.
- HB 2605 (Specialized & Therapeutic Arts): Supports coordination for neurodiverse and underserved populations, ensuring theatre and art are accessible to all students.
- HB 1815 (Performing Arts Grant Standards): Ensures clear standards and transparency for the SFCA Performing Arts Grants Program, stabilizing the local arts ecosystem.

This work is especially meaningful to me on a personal level. In my previous role at the Bishop Museum, I had the honor of working closely with cultural educators who were deeply committed to preserving and sharing Hawai‘i’s stories and traditions. It has been incredibly special to now see some of those same individuals continuing that work through performance as part of HTY’s acting company. That full-circle connection has reinforced for me how vital the arts are, not only for education, but for cultural continuity, identity, and community. These are not just programs, they are pathways for our keiki to see themselves, their heritage, and their voices reflected and valued.

The arts are an essential part of what makes Hawai‘i unique, serving as the heartbeat of our culture and the foundation of our vibrant community. They are not a "frill" or an elective, they are a fundamental tool for developing better, more active citizens. Through theater and arts

education, our keiki learn empathy, critical thinking, and collaboration, skills necessary to participate fully in our democracy and lead our islands into the future.

By supporting these bills, you are investing in a more engaged and creative citizenry for generations to come.

Mahalo for your leadership and for your continued commitment to the future of Hawai'i's children.

Sincerely,
Anna Scott
Board of Trustees
Honolulu Theatre for Youth

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 4:47:45 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kirsten Erickson	Testifying for Honolulu Theatre for Youth	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a Teaching Artist across the state, I strongly support HB 2437. Through the Artists-in-the-Schools program, I have seen firsthand how arts education increases student engagement, builds confidence, and supports critical thinking and collaboration. I have had students who felt so connected, seen and valued in my class that they cried on my last day. One teacher said “(Kirsten) Provided students with a safe and accepting space to express their vocal and physical responses to situations.” - 3rd grade teacher. These students were able to express themselves through drama. They not only learn academic skills but also Social Emotional Learning Skills in AITS. They learn empathy and kindness, something we all need more of in the world! These residencies help students grow as a performer, artist, collaborator and a learner. Our students benefit deeply from learning with professional artists, and these experiences are essential, not optional, to their growth and success. Increased funding for AITS ensures that students across Hawai‘i have access to these meaningful learning opportunities. Funding AITS funds the next generation of problem solvers, of collaborators, of confident curious creative keiki. It is necessary for our keiki and our students to know that they can create and they can create well.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 11:25:20 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kari Park Toyama	Testifying for WAIHEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Legislators,

Please support HB2437 and fund the Artists In the School Program.

I am a teacher at Waihe'e Elementary School, and we are working with a teaching artist to create a residency for the 2026-2027 school year. Approving this funding will help this happen.

A residency centered on 'āina-based art is vital for Waihe'e Elementary because it bridges the gap between academic standards and our students' lived experiences. By bringing in an artist who is passionate about the unique environment and history of Waihe'e, we provide our students with a mirror to see the value of their own backyard as a source of knowledge, inspiration, and identity.

For our students, many of whom have deep roots in this community, art becomes a tool to explore their relationship with the land. An artist who focuses on 'āina-based themes encourages students to observe the world with the eyes of both a scientist and a creator. Whether it is studying the patterns of our native flora or the stories of our local waters and communities, this residency fosters a sense of stewardship (kuleana) that is essential for the future of our island.

Art is often the "hook" that engages learners who may struggle with traditional lecture-based formats. By integrating local environmental themes; as teachers, we make learning tangible. Students aren't just drawing; they are documenting their environment, telling stories of their community, and expressing their unique voices. This builds immense self-esteem and a sense of belonging within the school culture.

As a teacher from Waihe'e school, this residency will help us move toward a more integrated curriculum. It provides our teachers with fresh perspectives on how to weave culture and environment into daily lessons. Having a professional artist on campus signals to our families and community that we value HĀ (Breath of Life) and are committed to nurturing the "whole child" through authentic, place-based education.

Mahalo!



**Hawai'i Alliance
for Arts
Education
dba Hawai'i Arts
Alliance**

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**TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB2437 (HD1)
Relating to Arts Education | Artists-in-the-Schools**

Aloha Chairs, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committees,

The Hawai'i Arts Alliance strongly supports HB2437 (HD1), which provides critical funding for the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts' Artists-in-the-Schools (AITS) program.

This bill recognizes what we consistently witness across Hawai'i: when professional teaching artists are embedded in classrooms, learning becomes more engaging, more relevant, and more human. The Legislature itself affirms that arts education strengthens student engagement, academic success, and whole-child development while building essential skills like creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking .

Recent AITS residencies across our public schools demonstrate the depth of this impact:

At Hale'iwa Elementary, students explored math concepts like symmetry and geometry through movement and visual art—transforming abstract ideas into embodied understanding. Students proudly described their work: “Mine is symmetrical because both sides match exactly,” while another shared, “I made mine asymmetrical so it looks funny and surprising.” These moments reflect more than engagement—they show students making meaning, taking ownership, and finding joy in learning.

At Maunawili Elementary, students connected to culture, language, and place through rhythm and drumming. They spoke about learning Japanese words, creating rhythms from their own names, and understanding the stories behind songs and public artworks on their campus. One teaching artist shared a powerful moment: a student who typically struggled to participate was able to fully engage, follow along, and experience success—demonstrating how arts learning can unlock participation for students who may not thrive in traditional settings.

Across both schools, teachers reported increased student engagement, stronger connections between academic subjects, and new strategies for integrating creativity into their classrooms. These residencies are not “extras”—they are essential pathways for reaching diverse learners and making education meaningful.

HB2437 (HD1) is an opportunity to stabilize and expand this proven program so that more students—regardless of geography or circumstance—can benefit from the presence of professional artists in their learning environments.

Artists in our schools do more than teach art. They cultivate confidence, curiosity, cultural connection, and a sense of belonging. They help students see themselves as creators, collaborators, and contributors to their communities.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support of HB2437 (HD1).

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Gaye Humphrey
Executive Director
Hawai'i Arts Alliance

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 12:25:36 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ed Noh	Testifying for Honolulu Theater for Youth (HTY)	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Kim, Chair Lee, and Members of the Committees:

As a Board Trustee of the Honolulu Theater for Youth (HTY) and lifelong educator, I **STRONGLY SUPPORT** HB 2437, HD1. Through the Artists-in-the-Schools (AITS) program, I have seen firsthand how arts education increases student engagement, builds confidence, and supports critical thinking and collaboration.

All keiki benefit when taught by professional artists, and these experiences are essential—not optional—to their growth and success. Increased funding for AITS ensures that students across Hawai‘i have access to these meaningful learning opportunities.

Mahalo,

Ed H. Noh, Ed.D.

HTY Board Trustee

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 9:13:04 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

I am writing in **strong support of HB2437**, which appropriates funds to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts for the Artists in the Schools Program. As a political cartoonist whose work has appeared in *Civil Beat* and elsewhere, I have seen firsthand how art shapes not only culture but democracy itself. This program is a vital investment in both.

Art is essential to an open and democratic society. My own work as a cartoonist depends on the ability to question power, to provoke thought, and to hold the powerful accountable through image and idea. That capacity does not emerge from nowhere. It is cultivated—through exposure, through practice, through mentors who show young people that their voice and their vision matter. The Artists in the Schools Program plants those seeds.

For decades, this program has brought working artists into classrooms across Hawai‘i. It has introduced students to hula, chant, woodcarving, painting, theater, and storytelling—not as abstract concepts, but as living practices passed down by practitioners. It has shown young people that art is not a luxury or an extracurricular afterthought, but a fundamental way of understanding ourselves and our place in the world.

Art also teaches the skills democracy requires. To make art is to observe closely, to think critically, to persist through failure, and to communicate clearly. These are the same skills required of an engaged citizen. When we fund arts education, we are not just funding creativity; we are funding the next generation of people who will show up, speak out, and hold their leaders accountable.

HB2437 is a modest investment with outsized returns. It supports working artists, enriches our schools, and ensures that every child in Hawai‘i has the opportunity to discover the power of their own creative voice.

I urge you to pass this bill. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/21/2026 4:06:29 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

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

Comments:

I strongly support HB2347 because as an artist I know how art programs in schools are essential to increasing creativity, independent thinking, introspection and expression, emotional release and satisfaction, increased observation and analysis of the world, and expansion of academic freedom of thought, as well as imaginary thinking and expression.

The arts increase achievement scores and broaden horizons, satisfaction and skills for students whether it is in the area of performing in an orchestra or band, a choral group, or participating in dance arts, visual arts, performing arts, or fine arts like painting and drawing, or ceramics and glass making. The arts are such a vital, important aspect of education that is often overlooked and underfunded.

Please pass this important bill in order to fund arts in the schools.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/21/2026 12:09:48 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Oppose w/COMMENT PROGRAM SHOULD BE FREE TO PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS.

IRAN WAR IS COSTING TAXPAYERS 1BILLION \$ A DAY.

2437 HB RELATING TO ARTS EDUCATION.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 8:41:29 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christine Cook	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha

I am Mauiola Cook and have loved being a Teaching Artist here in Hawai'i for the last 40 years. It is an extraordinarily rewarding career.

I find myself now working with teachers who I had the pleasure of teaching when they were students in elementary school. They have the fondest memories of enjoying creative dance when they were children and are thrilled that their students get to have the same experience.

I also teach other subjects in schools that students enjoy and benefit from. But, across the board, when the children know it is time for a creative dance class they burst into cheers. If they haven't had creative dance in a while they ask me longingly when they will get to have another class.

Of course they cheer for recess as well. But the fun they enjoy in creative dance class is very different from the fun and freedom of recess. In creative dance they are carefully guided to deepen their ability to think creatively and to understand how to use their bodies to express themselves. The look in their faces when they connect with creativity, and the physical expression of it, is priceless. And, well documented by those of us privileged to have these profound teaching/learning experiences.

I am so grateful to all the legislators and representatives who have seen the value of arts education and voted to support it.

I hope you all will vote for HB 2437 and allow me and my fellow Teaching Artists across the archipelago to continue to do the vital work we love, enhancing the education of our youth.

Na'u me ka ha'aha'a

Mauli Ola Cook

Aka Christine Cook

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 9:49:14 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julie Matheis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Funding arts education is vital for all Hawai'i residents, in ways that many people do not recognize. The arts develop critical thinking skills, which are necessary for not only designing everything around us, but also for navigating life. Perpetuating traditional crafts should not be optional. We need to help keiki find ways to create sustainable solutions that work here and abroad. The artists that develop curriculum and educate children throughout the state with this funding understand how arts integration truly creates a deeper level of learning and connection for students engaged in various art forms. When students learn through the arts, neurological connections are made in a variety of ways that allow students to recall and internalize subject matter, which leads to an ability to cross reference knowledge and allow for deeper understanding and a personal connection unlike the disconnected method of lecturing. The therapeutic qualities of art practices are also proven and essential in today's world. We need this funding to develop and inspire the next generation more now than ever. Consider a world without the arts, without crafts & designers. No music, no movies, no Super Bowl performance, no architecture, no artifacts, no products for daily life, no car, no web design, etc, etc, no creative eye anywhere. Please recognize that arts are essential & the creativity around us is what makes all individuals thrive, regardless of whether they are creating or experiencing the arts.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 12:31:57 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

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

Comments:

As an administrator supporting the Artists-in-the-Schools program on Hawai‘i Island, I strongly support HB 2437. Through this program, I have seen firsthand how arts education increases student engagement, builds confidence, and supports critical thinking and collaboration. Our students benefit deeply from learning with professional artists, and these experiences are essential—not optional—to their growth and success. Increased funding for AITS ensures that students across Hawai‘i have access to these meaningful and transformative learning opportunities.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 12:40:36 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karen Kiefer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I am writing to encourage support for this funding of arts education in Hawaii. There is nothing more important as the arts are the heart of each students learning experience in that it is about processing content and expressing it, an attribute of true understanding. Without the arts, students are left without a voice. Without a voice, we do not have self actualized citizens, fundamental to the vibrancy and success of a community. I have been teaching art in Hawaii for 40 years. I have witnessed its powerful impact on the lives of people and I wish this positive experience for everyone of our keiki.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 3:42:16 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

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

Comments:

I was a teaching artist with Artists in the Schools for many years. I saw first hand how students of all backgrounds benefitted from the program. In visual arts and science integrated lessons, which I mostly taught, student learned about science through creating murals or art books about science. Students actively learned science, critical thinking skill and creativity.

On top of that, they enjoyed the experience. The teachers benefitted also through professional development that we provided. It's a win-win situation. Please support our keiki!

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 6:46:36 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniel A. Kelin, II	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 2437 – Relating to the Arts in the Schools Program

TO: Chair of the Senate Committee on Education / Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Aloha Chairs and Committee Members, my name is Daniel A. Kelin, II. I am the Director of Drama Education at the Honolulu Theatre for Youth (HTY), an original member of Hawai'i's Arts First Partners (a cooperative of arts organizations across the state) and Past President of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. As a multi-year **Fulbright Fellow**, I have had the privilege of teaching arts-integrated approaches to classroom teachers and teaching artists in five countries. While my work is global, my commitment is local; I have spent over 35 years in Hawai'i's classrooms witnessing the transformative power of the AITS program. I am writing today to express my strongest support for HB 2437.

HTY is the largest provider of school-based drama programs in the islands and the only arts organization with a **consistent statewide commitment**. Every year, we provide in-school programming to **4,000–5,000 students**. The public demand is overwhelming, yet funding has failed to keep pace. While more schools are eager to participate, current budget caps mean we must frequently turn them away.

Our clientele is nearly **60% Title I schools**, focusing heavily on students who lack the means or access to participate in such programs otherwise. A veteran Principal from a rural community describes this "arts gap" poignantly:

*"The Ko'olau mountains act as a literal and metaphorical barrier... Our students rarely travel 'over the mountain' to witness professional performances. This residency is vital because it provides an **equity of experience**. It is a venue for passion and self-discovery that bridges the gap between our rural reality and the global stage of imagination."*

This equity transforms individual lives. A student from **Honoka‘a High School** recently shared:

"As someone who struggles with anxiety, it took a lot for me to speak in front of the class... I'm absolutely more comfortable now and I'm glad I was given the opportunity to learn more about myself and what I can do through the drama program."

In the 2026 economy, we are training students for a workforce where **collaboration, creativity, and abstract thinking** are the most sought-after "human" skills.

- **The Innovation Gap:** Research from the **National Association of Colleges and Employers** indicates that nearly 50% of executives cite arts education as a primary contributor to their career success.
- **Economic ROI:** For every \$1 spent on social-emotional learning (SEL) through programs like AITS, there is an **\$11 return on investment** in improved classroom behavior and academic persistence (**CASEL, 2025**).

By passing HB 2437, you are ensuring that a student’s zip code—whether in Kapa'a, Honaunau, or the rural Ko‘olau corridor—does not determine their access to the skills required for a thriving future. I urge you to pass HB 2437 to close the "arts gap" and ensure every student in Hawai‘i has the opportunity to "dream as big as they want."

Mahalo,

Daniel A. Kelin, II

Director of Drama Education, Honolulu Theatre for Youth

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 6:59:49 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kathryn Lathrop	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Kayti (Kathryn) Lathrop and I am a teaching artist on the island of Kauai that's several schools and cultural community organizations, such as Hanalei school, Kilauea School, Namahana School, Kapa'a Middle School, Waipa Foundation, and Anaina Hou Community Center. I strongly support HB 2437. Through the Artists-in-the-Schools program and other arts and cultural grants, I bring mural making projects/residencies to local youth. I have seen firsthand how arts education increases student engagement, builds self-confidence, and supports critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and provides collaboration and the spirit of Lokahi. Our students benefit deeply from learning with professional artists. These experiences are obviously essential to the younger generations growth and success for anyone who is paying attention. When students are asked what their most memorable and meaningful experience was in all of elementary, middle, or high school, their answers are almost exclusively, making the mural, May Day celebration, Makahiki game day, or the school play. All of these are directly linked to inspiration of both art and culture and depend on the funding that supports this kind of true education. Increased funding for AITS ensures that students across Hawai'i have access to these meaningful learning opportunities. The inspiration on all levels that it creates for youth and their families and ultimately the greater community as a whole is absolutely invaluable.

Mahalo for taking time to hear my thoughts and to consider the impact that this small amount of funding for the arts, out of the larger budget for Hawaii can impact our local youth, families, greater community.

March 24, 2026

Aloha Esteemed Legislators,

I am writing to urge you to support HB2437 and fund the Artists In the Schools Program.

I am a resident of Waihe'e, Maui, and I am a professional artist, educator, and small business owner. I am on the teaching artist roster through the Hawaii State Foundation for Culture and the Arts. Through Artists In The Schools, I have brought art residencies to Hana Middle School, Kihei Charter School, Maui High, and the Hawaii Distance Learning Program, as well as provided professional development for teachers at each school.

I have not just taught the students to draw or paint. I have visited classrooms 8-12 times, bringing students through all the steps of a project, which was designed to meet the needs of the teacher, school, and students, and which reinforces chosen curricular standards. These arts-integrated place-based experiences have allowed students to do the following:

- Nature journal in the school garden (Hana 2022-2023)
- [Observe and express native species and their habitat \(Kihei Charter 2022-2023\)](#)
- [Explore the human impact to our coastlines, and their personal connection to them \(Hawaii Distance Learning Program 2022-2023\)](#)
- Create self portraits expressing their gifts to their community (Hana 2023-2024)
- [Use drawing and painting to look closely at marine species, including envisioning the evolution of whales, as well as to zoom in and look closely at Maui's marine species \(Maui High 2024-2025\)](#). Their artwork was displayed at the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary in Kihei, Maui.

I would have done another residency in the Maui High Marine Science class this school year, with students creating collaborative paintings that communicated their solutions to caretake Maui's nearshore waters. However, funding shortfalls impacted the Artists in the Schools grants, and I was not able to.

I am currently in talks with teachers at Waihe'e Elementary school to collaborate on a grant application for a 2026-2027 residency. The lessons and overall projects will be fully outlined in the grant, and the experience designed to meet needs and standards identified by the teachers. Students will create drawings and paintings of people helping the community and expressing their family's culture. Students will come away with the skills to draw a person with realistic proportions, in action. They will all be able to illustrate people running, dancing, harvesting a lo'i, helping a neighbor, or whatever they wish to express. Please help these students have this enriching creative experience.

The arts teach close observation. They teach creative problem solving. The arts illuminate and give meaning to learning. The arts give us a way to express how we see the world, and they allow us to appreciate how other people see the world.

The arts are not a luxury. They are how we help our haumana grow up into creative, curious, confident, and empathetic adults.

Please support HB2437 and fund the Artists In the Schools Program.

Mahalo nui loa,

Maggie Sutrov

[Teaching Artist Bio](#)

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 1:08:01 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tara Iden	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an arts educator I strongly support HB 2437 and the continued investment in arts education across Hawai'i.

I have witnessed the transformative impact that arts learning has on our students. One student in particular comes to mind—a quiet, reserved child who rarely spoke in class and often kept to themselves. Participating with the Artists in the Schools & Capitol Modern's Art Bento Program, something remarkable happened. As they began creating their own artwork and participating in discussions about their ideas, they gradually opened up. Their confidence grew with each session, and their voice—once barely heard—became an essential part of our classroom community. Watching that student light up while sharing their work was a powerful reminder of how meaningful these experiences are.

Arts education fosters engagement, builds confidence, and strengthens critical thinking and collaboration skills. Learning alongside professional artists provides students with unique opportunities to express themselves, take creative risks, and see new possibilities for their futures.

These experiences are not optional—they are essential to student growth and success. Increased funding for the Artists-in-the-Schools program ensures that students across Hawai'i can continue to access these impactful and inspiring learning opportunities.

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 3:34:16 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steven Kean	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Steven Kean (the students know me as Mr. Kean). I'm a working professional artist based in Waialua on the North Shore of Oahu. I have also been fortunate to be on the Teaching Artist Roster with the Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts since 2016. I want to express how valuable the Artist in the Schools program has been for the keiki, the teachers, the schools, the communities, myself, and many others these past 10 years. I have seen children benefit and grow in a multitude of ways through the creative process. We have been thinking, speaking, and creating art inspired by works of art studied from the Art in Public Places Catalog and the masters like Van Gogh and Picasso. There is tremendous value in an arts education; it provides students with an opportunity to express themselves, safely share their emotions, build confidence, and develop creative and critical thinking skills that will benefit them beyond their school years. I am a product of it at 45 years old. Art was fostered and encouraged from a very young age by my mother, Linda, and then, eventually, the various art instructors I've had the privilege of studying under. It's been a joy to have the opportunity to become a positive role model and share my passion for art with the keiki, faculty, and various communities here on Oahu. Creativity is life. Art is life. I hope to continue on this creative journey for years to come on these islands; to cultivate some of the knowledge I have and educate the youth of this incredible place I've been fortunate to call home since 2008. Increased funding for the AITS program will pave the way and ensure that an arts education continues and hopefully expands for our children, our future. Mahalo and Aloha - Steven Kean

Jamie Simpson Steele
1515 Pualele Pl.
Honolulu, HI 96816

As an educator, artist, parent, researcher, and community member, I strongly support HB2437 HD1 RELATING TO ARTS EDUCATION: Arts Education; Artists in the Schools Program; State Foundation on Culture and the Arts. Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts has always prioritized education and access for the arts. For the past 25 years, Artist in the Schools (AITS) grants support both teaching artist professionals, and standards-based services to children and teachers throughout the state. Hawaii Community Foundation matches the state funds and as a result, millions of Hawaii children have experienced learning with, in, through, and about the arts. As a critical leader in the ARTS FIRST legislation, HSFCA anchors community partners and art in public places so that communities that are hard to reach can still experience access and equity in the arts.

If this bill passes there would be several positive impacts on the education, culture, and the arts for keiki in Hawaii. Extensive research from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Brookings Institution, and various university studies indicates that arts education has a profound and measurable impact on students. These benefits generally fall into three categories: academic performance, social-emotional development, and long-term life outcomes.

Academic Performance. Contrary to the idea that the arts are "extra," research suggests they are foundational to core academic success.

- a) **Literacy and Writing:** A large-scale randomized controlled trial by the **Brookings Institution (2019)** found that students with increased arts experiences saw a significant improvement in standardized writing scores (13% of a standard deviation).
- b) **GPA and Graduation:** Longitudinal studies show that students with high arts participation have higher GPAs and are less likely to drop out. High school students who earned few or no arts credits were **five times more likely** to not graduate than those with multiple arts credits.
- c) **Memory and Retention:** Cognitive research has demonstrated that drawing can have a more dramatic effect on memory than writing or visualizing alone, as it forces the brain to process information through multiple "channels" (visual, motor, and semantic).

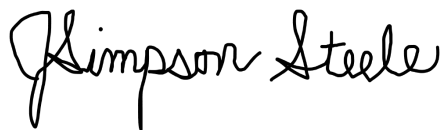
Social-Emotional Development. The arts provide a unique environment for developing durable skills that are difficult to teach in traditional lecture settings.

- **Empathy and Compassion:** Students in arts-rich schools show an increase in "compassion for others." Research indicates they are more likely to want to help people who are treated badly and show a greater interest in how others feel.
- **Reduced Disciplinary Issues:** Increased arts engagement is correlated with a **3.6 percentage point reduction** in disciplinary infractions. It often improves school climate, making students feel more connected and safe.
- **Self-Regulation:** Participation in theater, music, and dance requires high levels of focus and patience. Students learn to manage performance anxiety and regulate their emotions through creative expression.

Life Outcomes. One of the most consistent findings in arts research is the "leveling" effect it has on students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

- **Closing the Gap:** For students in high-poverty areas, intensive arts involvement is linked to academic and civic engagement levels that match or even exceed those of the general population.
- **College Aspirations:** Low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are **twice as likely** to graduate from college as their peers with no arts education.
- **Civic Engagement:** Adults who had significant arts exposure as youth are more likely to volunteer, vote, and participate in local politics.
- **Workforce Readiness:** A 2024 survey of employers found that the top skills sought—such as problem-solving, teamwork, and taking initiative—are precisely the skills strengthened through collaborative artistic projects.

Thank you for considering the many ways this bill would have a positive impact with respect to education, the arts and culture in the Pacific.



Jamie Simpson Steele

LATE

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 11:36:36 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Fae Yamaguchi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a teaching artist of 25+ years and I strongly support HB 2437. I am currently at Lanakila Elementary - a Title I school Through the Artists-in-the-Schools program, I have seen students become more confident in their abilities to create and voice their opinions. Each project embraces critical thinking and problem solving. As a professional artist I can teach each student how to think like an artist. To be able to have multiple perspectives and creative ideas are essential to their growth and success. Increased funding for AITS ensures that students across Hawai'i have access to these meaningful learning opportunities.

LATE

HB-2437-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/25/2026 12:17:31 AM
Testimony for WLA on 3/25/2026 1:11:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sean-Joseph T.K. Choo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill, and look forward to continued efforts to expand arts education in the pae 'āina of Hawai'i, and instituting more initiatives to expand access to not just arts education, but artist cultivation, resourcing creatives here in Hawai'i.