



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
S.B. NO. 2091, RELATING TO SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS.

BEFORE THE:
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 **TIME:** 1:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 229

TESTIFER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Kim and Members of the Committee:

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

The bill: (1) requires the Department of Education (DOE) to establish a School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program; (2) establishes a School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund; (3) establishes a Repayment Signing Bonus Program; (4) establishes a School Bus Driver Outreach and Pathway Program; (5) requires a report to the Legislature; and (6) appropriates funds.

Appropriate Standards

As drafted, the bill may violate section 4 of article VII of the State Constitution ("No tax shall be levied or appropriation of public money or property made, nor shall the public credit be used, directly or indirectly, except for a public purpose. . . . No grant of public money or property shall be made except pursuant to standards provided by law."). See also *Spears v. Honda*, 51 Haw. 1, 9 (1968) (having determined that the use of public funds to provide bus transportation subsidies to sectarian and private school students was unconstitutional, the Court acknowledged the possible overlap between section 1 of article X of the State Constitution and what is now section 4 of article VII of the State Constitution).

Therefore, we recommend that the bill be amended to insert appropriate standards. Examples of existing statutes that provide standards for agencies to issue

Testimony of the Department of the Attorney General

Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026

Page 2 of 5

grants are part II of chapter 9 and sections 10-17, 210D-11, and 383-128, Hawaii

Revised Statutes (HRS).

We have attached draft standards to this testimony as a sample for your reference. The attached draft standards can be inserted on page 5, line 7, as a new subsection (c). We are happy to work with you on developing more specific standards.

Repayment of Grants

The Department also suggests that additional wording regarding the repayment of grants be included in this bill. The first new section to be added to chapter 302A, HRS, starting on page 4, line 6, can be revised to insert new subsections (d) through (h) (i.e., this would follow the new subsection (c) regarding standards for providing grants in the bill):

(d) If the recipient of a grant provided pursuant to this section fails to satisfy the work requirements in accordance with [include a subsection providing for work requirements following a grant award, or utilize the thirty-six month period to retain the signing bonus], the recipient shall repay the total amount of grant funds received as a loan repayable to the department. The repayment shall be subject to the terms and conditions set by the department, including circumstances under which recipients may be eligible for deferment or forgiveness due to hardship or inability to secure employment, as well as potential for fees for the collection of delinquent repayment.

(e) Grant funds repaid by a grant recipient pursuant to subsection (d) shall be deposited into the [an appropriate fund should be designated here].

(f) The department may accept federal funds to support the school bus driver recruitment grant program.

(g) In accordance with chapter 103D, the department may enter into written contracts with collection agencies to collect delinquent repayment of grants owed to the department pursuant to subsection (d). A collection agency that enters into a written contract with the department to collect delinquent grant repayments pursuant to this section may collect a fee from the debtor in accordance with the terms of, and up to the amounts authorized in, the written contract.

(h) The department may adopt rules pursuant to chapter 91 to implement and administer the grant program, including the terms of repayment pursuant to subsection (d).

Repayment of Signing Bonuses

Section 3 of the bill, starting on page 6, line 1, establishes a repayment signing bonus program to be administered by the DOE, authorizing and disbursing a one-time signing bonus of \$2,000 to an individual with a commercial driver's license at the time the individual is hired as a school bus driver with the DOE. The Department suggests that additional wording regarding the repayment of the signing bonus be included in the bill. The Department suggests replacing subsections (c) through (e) on page 6, lines 7 through 15, with the following:

(c) If the recipient of a signing bonus provided by subsection (a) leaves employment voluntarily or is terminated before completing thirty-six months of employment as a school bus driver with the department of education, the recipient shall repay the total amount of the signing bonus received as a loan repayable to the department. The repayment shall be subject to the terms and conditions set by the department, including circumstances under which recipients may be eligible for deferment or forgiveness due to hardship or inability to maintain employment, as well as potential for fees for the collection of delinquent repayment.

(d) Signing bonus funds repaid by a signing bonus recipient pursuant to subsection (c) shall be deposited into the [an appropriate fund should be inserted here].

(e) The department may accept federal funds to support the signing bonus program.

(f) In accordance with chapter 103D, the department may enter into written contracts with collection agencies to collect delinquent repayment of signing bonuses owed to the department pursuant to subsection (c). A collection agency that enters into a written contract with the department to collect delinquent signing bonus repayments pursuant to this section may collect a fee from the debtor in accordance with the terms of, and up to the amounts authorized in, the written contract.

(g) The department may adopt rules pursuant to chapter 91 to implement and administer the repayment signing bonus program, including the terms of repayment pursuant to subsection (c).

Typographical Errors

1. Section 2 of the bill provides that chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), is amended by adding two new sections to subpart C of part I. Page 4, lines 3-
4. However, there is no subpart C in part I of chapter 302A, HRS. We suggest

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Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026

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correcting this typographical error by replacing "part I" on page 4, line 4 of the bill, with "part II".

2. On page 4, line 7, insert "(a)" before "There".
3. On page 6, line 4 of the bill, we suggest replacing "disperse" with "disburse."

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

POSSIBLE STANDARDS FOR PROVIDING THE GRANTS IN THIS BILL

(c) Applications for grants shall be made to the department and contain the information as shall be required by rules adopted thereunder. At a minimum, the applicant shall:

- (1) Be a licensed driver;
- (2) Agree to use state funds exclusively for the purposes of this program;
- (3) Indicate capability to properly use the grant for the purpose of this program;
- (4) Comply with other requirements as the department may prescribe;
- (5) Comply with all applicable federal, state, and county statutes, rules, and ordinances;
- (6) Agree to indemnify and save harmless the State of Hawaii and its officers, agents, and employees from and against any and all claims arising out of or resulting from the use of grants for this program, and procure sufficient insurance to provide this indemnification if requested to do so by the department;
- (7) Agree to make available to the department all records the applicant may have relating to the grant, to allow state agencies to monitor the applicant's compliance with this section.



STATE OF HAWAI'I
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
STATE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
'A'UNIKE MOKU'ĀPUNI NO KA NĀ KĀWAI KULA
PRINCESS VICTORIA KAMĀMALU BUILDING
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96813
TELEPHONE: (808) 586-8100 FAX: (808) 586-7543

February 4, 2026

The Honorable Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senate Committee on Education
The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Senator Mercado Kim, and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: SB2091 Relating to School Bus Drivers

The Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities (DDC) submits testimony **in SUPPORT of SB2091**, which requires the Department of Education to establish a School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund. Establishes a Repayment Signing Bonus Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Outreach and Pathway Program. Requires a report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

Students with disabilities experience school absences **differently from their nondisabled peers** because missed days often mean the loss of legally required special education and related services, not just classroom instruction. Many students with individualized education programs (IEPs) receive time-sensitive supports such as speech therapy, occupational or physical therapy, behavioral services, and counseling. When transportation disruptions prevent attendance, these services are frequently not made up, delaying progress and undermining compliance with federally and state-mandated education plans. Inconsistent attendance can also disrupt routines that students with developmental disabilities rely on for emotional regulation, leading to increased anxiety, behavioral challenges, and further barriers to learning.

Transportation failures also impose disproportionate burdens on families of students with disabilities and limit access to inclusive educational environments. Caregivers may be unable to provide alternative transportation due to work, caregiving responsibilities, or financial constraints, resulting in repeated absences, missed meals, and loss of school-based supports. Over time, unreliable transportation can reduce students' access to peer interaction, inclusive settings, and transition services that are critical to long-term educational and life outcomes, including graduation, employment, and independent living.

Transportation disruptions do not merely inconvenience students with disabilities—they interfere with legally required services, destabilize learning environments, and compound existing inequities. Reliable school transportation is not ancillary; it is foundational to equitable access to education for students with disabilities.

For these reasons, the Hawai‘i State Council on Developmental Disabilities **supports SB2091**.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,



Daintry Bartoldus
Executive Administrator



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

Date: 02/04/2026
Time: 01:00 PM
Location: CR 229 & Videoconference
Committee: EDU

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB2091, RELATING TO SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education to establish a School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund. Establishes a Repayment Signing Bonus Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Outreach and Pathway Program. Requires a report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on SB 2091, proposing a range of State-administered initiatives to address the statewide school bus driver shortage. While the Department supports efforts to strengthen the driver workforce, there are significant structural limitations that affect implementation of the SB 2091 provisions.

Under the Department school bus transportation contracts, services are provided by private school bus companies that supply drivers, vehicles, maintenance, training, and operational services as bundled capacity. Because school bus drivers are employees of these private contractors, the Department cannot directly administer or enforce hiring incentives, signing bonuses, repayment provisions, or employment-based requirements contemplated in SB 2091.

SB 2091 initiatives assume an employment relationship between drivers and the Department that does not exist. Implementing such measures would require restructuring the entire Departmental student transportation model to shift drivers into State employment - an action that would significantly impact procurement processes, labor obligations, and operational responsibilities.

The Department supports legislative efforts to expand the driver pipeline; however, any statutory framework must reflect the contracted service model and be designed to operate through the private carriers who employ and manage school bus drivers.

The Department thanks the Committee for the opportunity to comment on SB 2091.

Michelle M. Galimba
Council District 6
Portion N. S. Kona/Ka‘ū /Volcano



Phone: (808) 323-4277
Cell: (808)430-4927
Fax: (808) 329-4786
Email:
Michelle.Galimba@hawaiicounty.gov

HAWAI‘I COUNTY COUNCIL

*County of Hawai‘i
West Hawai‘i Civic Center, Bldg. A
74-5044 Ane Keohokalole Hwy.
Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i 96740*

February 3, 2026

Honorable Donna M. Kim, Chair
Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Education
Conference Room 229 and Videoconference

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

Re: S.B. No. 2091– Relating to School Bus Drivers

Honorable Chair Kim and Vice Chair Kidani:

On behalf of myself and as Councilmember representing the rural districts of South Kona, Ka‘ū and Volcano Village (Council District 6), I express my strong support of S.B. No. 2091 relating to school bus drivers.

I concur with the intent and purpose of S.B. No. 2091 relating to school bus drivers.

Mahalo a nui loa for your favorable consideration.

Very truly yours,

Michelle M. Galimba, Council Member
Council District 6, S. Kona, Ka‘ū, and Volcano Village

TAX FOUNDATION OF HAWAII

735 Bishop Street, Suite 417

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813 Tel. 536-4587

SUBJECT: MISCELLANEOUS, Establish School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund

BILL NUMBER: SB 2091

INTRODUCED BY: KANUHA, CHANG, DECOITE, HASHIMOTO, INOUYE, MCKELVEY, SAN BUENAVENTURA, Wakai

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Education to establish a School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund. Establishes a Repayment Signing Bonus Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Outreach and Pathway Program. Requires a report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

SYNOPSIS: Adds two new sections to chapter 302A, HRS, to establish the school bus driver recruitment grant program and a school bus driver recruitment special fund.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026.

STAFF COMMENTS: The 1989 Tax Review Commission noted that use of special fund financing is a “departure from Hawaii’s sound fiscal policies and should be avoided.” It also noted that special funds are appropriate where the revenues to the funds maintain some direct connection between a public service and the beneficiary of that service. The Commission found that special funds which merely set aside general funds cannot be justified as such actions restrict budget flexibility, create inefficiencies, and lessen accountability. It recommended that such programs can be given priority under the normal budget process without having to resort to this type of financing.

This bill creates a new special fund for school bus driver recruitment. The fund is fed by appropriations. The program is to be administered by the Department of Education.

Special funds are pots of money that exist for a specific purpose and largely bypass the legislative appropriation process. The existence of hundreds of these special funds has often confounded those who seek answers to simple questions like “How much money does the State have?”

Our Legislature is supposed to be the steward of all state moneys, but special funds make it very easy to lose track of where the money is and how it is being spent. Departments are supposed to tell the Legislature if they have special funds and how much is in them, but let’s just say they don’t always. Recently, in Report No. 20-01, the State Auditor took DBEDT to task for failing to report \$6.5 million in non-general fund moneys. DBEDT’s response? Just that they’ll “take corrective action.” This followed closely on the heels of Report No. 19-16, where the Auditor found that \$1.04 million in non-general fund moneys administered by the Attorney General wasn’t reported. That department responded that they “shall establish procedures to assure

required reports are issued.” Is it any wonder that it’s getting harder and harder to follow the money and rein in government spending?

Perhaps as the result of the foregoing concerns, the Legislature has itself established criteria for when a special fund may be maintained (HRS section 37-52.3). Those criteria are that the special fund:

- (1) Serves a need, as demonstrated by:
 - (A) The purpose of the program to be supported by the fund;
 - (B) The scope of the program, including financial information on fees to be charged, sources of projected revenue, and costs; and
 - (C) An explanation of why the program cannot be implemented successfully under the general fund appropriation process;
- (2) Reflects a clear nexus between the benefits sought and charges made upon the program users or beneficiaries or a clear link between the program and the sources of revenue, as opposed to serving primarily as a means to provide the program or users with an automatic means of support that is removed from the normal budget and appropriation process;
- (3) Provides an appropriate means of financing for the program or activity that is used only when essential to the successful operation of the program or activity; and
- (4) Demonstrates the capacity to be financially self-sustaining.

Here, there is no indication that the proposed fund can be financially self-sustaining. Furthermore, the activity sought to be funded appears to be a core function of the DOE. There is no explanation of why school bus driver recruitment cannot be funded out of general appropriations as it is now. Establishing this special fund is thus inappropriate, as is the proposed method of financing the fund.

Digested: 1/31/2026

SB-2091

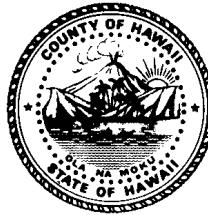
Submitted on: 1/30/2026 12:51:28 PM
Testimony for EDU on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Honorable Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee,

As a constituent of Senate District 1, I strongly support SB 2091. This measure will address the persistent and severe shortage of qualified school bus drivers on the neighbor islands and increase access for students and their families to safe, reliable, and affordable transportation to school. Thank you.



HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL

*County of Hawai'i
West Hawai'i Civic Center, Bldg. A
74-5044 Ane Keohokalole Hwy.
Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740*

February 2, 2026

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

RE: **Support for SB2091, RELATING TO SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS.**

Requires the Department of Education to establish a School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund. Establishes a Repayment Signing Bonus Program. Establishes a School Bus Driver Outreach and Pathway Program. Requires a report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

Hearing: **Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.**

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

On behalf of Council District 8 in North Kona, I am writing in strong support of **Senate Bill 2091**, which seeks to address the critical shortage of school bus drivers across Hawai'i — a challenge that has real consequences for students, families, and school operations statewide.

The Need for Action. Safe and dependable school transportation is foundational to ensuring equitable access to education for all students in our state. Delays in routes, cancellations, and service disruptions caused by driver shortages harm student attendance, place undue burdens on working families, and disproportionately impact rural communities — including those on the Big Island — where distance and limited labor pools amplify workforce challenges.

Support for Recruitment, Training, and Retention. SB 2091 establishes a *School Bus Driver Recruitment Grant Program* and a *School Bus Driver Recruitment Special Fund* to lower financial and logistical barriers for prospective drivers. The bill also provides for a *Repayment Signing Bonus Program* to attract applicants into this essential profession and an outreach and pathway initiative to build long-term recruitment pipelines, particularly benefiting neighbor island residents who may otherwise face geographic barriers to training and licensing.

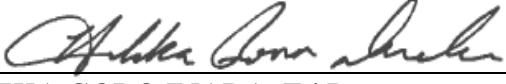
On Hawai'i Island, we see firsthand how critical localized training and workforce support are for addressing workforce gaps — and how limited access to training opportunities (often

centralized on O‘ahu) places undue burden on neighbor island residents. SB 2091’s outreach and pathway provisions — including community-based partnerships and mobile training units — would make meaningful progress toward equity in workforce development across counties.

Benefits to Families and Communities. Reliable school bus service is a lifeline for parents who cannot otherwise arrange transportation due to work schedules, economic constraints, or geographic isolation. By investing in recruitment, training, and retention of bus drivers, this bill helps keep students safe, supports workforce mobility, and strengthens economic and educational outcomes for our communities.

Conclusion. For these reasons — ensuring safe, reliable transportation for students, empowering neighbor island workforce pathways, and reducing undue strain on families and school systems — I respectfully urge the Committee to **pass SB 2091 with favorable recommendations.**

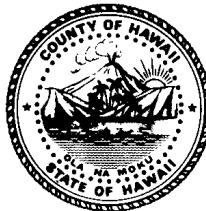
Sincerely,



HOLEKA GORO INABA, Ed.D.,
Council Chair, District 8, North Kona

HGI.wpb

HEATHER L. KIMBALL
COUNCIL DISTRICT 1
(North Hilo, Hāmākua, and portion of
Waimea)



Phone: (808) 961-8828
Fax: (808) 961-8912
Email: Heather.Kimball@hawaiicounty.gov

HAWA'I COUNTY COUNCIL
25 Aupuni Street, Ste. 1402, Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

January 30, 2026

Senate Committee on Education
Honorable Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Honorable Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Submission via online testimony only

RE: **Support of SB2091**

Dear Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee on Education:

As the sitting Council Member for Hawai'i County Council District 1, I thank you for the opportunity to submit **testimony in SUPPORT of SB2091**, which addresses ongoing challenges with student transportation, particularly in rural and neighbor island communities.

For many families in District 1, dependable school bus service is essential. Our district includes large rural areas where keiki rely on school buses as their primary means of getting to and from school. When transportation services are inconsistent or unavailable, students experience increased absences and tardiness, and families are forced to take on additional responsibilities, often placing significant strain on working parents and kūpuna caregivers.

A coordinated, statewide approach is necessary to ensure that rural school districts are not left behind. Targeted support for neighbor island communities is critical to closing long-standing gaps in transportation access and ensuring that all students have a fair opportunity to succeed.

SB2091 advances practical, community-based solutions that reduce barriers to entering the profession and encourage local residents to serve their own communities. By investing in recruitment support, financial incentives, and workforce pathway efforts, the State can strengthen the reliability of school transportation while creating meaningful employment opportunities on all islands.

For the keiki and families of Hawai'i County Council District 1, this measure represents an important investment in educational access, family stability, and community well-being. I respectfully urge your favorable consideration and support.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue. If you would like to discuss my knowledge of this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather L. Kimball".

HEATHER L. KIMBALL

SB-2091

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 1:49:47 PM
Testimony for EDU on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Kaleo K | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I **strongly support** SB2091. Reliable school bus service is essential for families like ours. **For disabled parents**, transportation can be a major barrier to ensuring our keiki attend school consistently. This is even more challenging for Kaiapuni families, as limited program sites require long-distance travel. Strengthening driver recruitment is critical to ensuring equitable access to education.

In addition, I respectfully request consideration of an amendment to establish a clear point of contact for parents and greater transparency regarding how routes and schools are prioritized, as families often experience little response from the Student Transportation Branch.

Marketing the role to parents as a position that follows their child's school schedule, and promoting it through PTA newsletters and local mom groups, could significantly strengthen recruitment efforts. Offering on-site childcare during CDL training, reaching out to retired teachers, and creating clear pathways for existing DOE staff such as cafeteria workers would further expand and diversify the pool of potential drivers.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Chair Donna Kim
Senate Committee on Education
IN SUPPORT of SB2091: Relating to School Bus Drivers
Feb. 4th, 2026 at 1:00pm in Conference Room 229

Aloha Legislators,

My name is Sarah Teehee and I am a constituent residing in Senator Kanuha's district. My written testimony is in support of SB2091.

I am a mother of two elementary children who attend public school at Holualoa School. Both of my children ride the school bus. In September 2025 bus service for their route (IR103A) was interrupted and suspended "due to lack of drivers". This left myself and other bus-dependent families scrambling for several weeks to cobble together school pick ups, safe transportation, and the unexpected need for earlier supervision. Disruptions like these have a negative impact on school attendance and many working families. During this time some parents reportedly faced friction with their employers when they had to alter their work schedules in order to pick and drop their child from school during this bus service disruption. Holualoa's school day goes from 7:40am-2pm. Accommodating these drop off and pick up times cuts into most full time weekday jobs.

Our school is rural and due to the location and surrounding topography my children have NO safe ways to walk to school. Our school doesn't even have sidewalks for miles to the south. The after school pick up traffic is long, congested, and dangerous.

Every fall rural schools like ours continue to experience a shortage of qualified school bus drivers. It is clear to many of us that these school transportation contracts are NOT effective and have been FAILING Big Island residents for 4 years running now. With such a poor recent track record with Roberts Hawaii - at what point could "breach of contract" go into effect? This bill attempts to devote more action to begin fixing this ongoing and now predictable problem.

Kona is a prime example of a rural location with significant hurdles to bus driver recruitment and retention. It is challenging to obtain a CDL license on this island. For most testing, applicants have to fly to Oahu and often have an additional handicap of attempting to pass a licensure test while driving vehicles they have never before driven on unfamiliar roads in conditions very different to what they will drive on the Big Island. My children's bus driver may not be used to driving on the smaller, busier lanes in Honolulu, but every day she safely navigates 3 hairpin turns with a bus brimming full of rambunctious elementary kids. That is an exceptionally valuable skill to the families in our community and these bus drivers deserve to be fairly compensated for their dedication and reliability because they carry the most precious cargo...our keiki.

To further complicate the situation, once those determined few Big Island drivers actually obtain a CDL they are often poached with higher pay offers from the private-sector for commercial driving opportunities. The high cost of living (specifically rent and groceries) in Kona makes the choice to abandon a school route in favor of a tourist gig a simple math-motivated no-brainer.

This bill is a step in the right direction towards recruitment and retention. The signing bonus and sections relating to repayment if the employee does not stay for 36 months can **help** with this, though I would personally encourage a **higher** signing bonus or a “thanks for staying” end-of-school-year **loyalty bonus**. I would also encourage the authors of this bill to look into if there needs to be an exception for drivers who take the two months of summer break off or if that would count against the 36 months accumulation count.

Mahalo to our senators for hearing the ongoing frustration of our local families and for attempting to provide solutions. I urge you all to support this bill so we don’t find ourselves in the same predicament again this fall.

Sincerely,

Sarah Teehee
Hawaii resident
Pualani Estates
Kona, HI 96740

SB-2091

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 10:56:24 PM
Testimony for EDU on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|------------------|--|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Janette Snelling | Testifying for Hawaii Department of Education | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

I am writing to express my support for the intent of SB2091, which seeks to address a critical issue for our schools and families in West Hawai‘i. As the SB 2091 correctly identifies, school transportation is not just a convenience—it is a prerequisite for equity.

The current situation is urgent. All nineteen schools in the Honoka‘a-Kealakehe-Kohala-Konawaena (HKKK) Complex Area have seen bus routes significantly reduced every year. Even when routes are added back, it does not come near to meeting the need. The compounded loss of bus routes severely impacts student attendance and causes high levels of burden on our families.

The HKKK Complex area spans large geographic boundaries; the daily commute to schools can be in excess of 30 miles for students. Without accessible public transportation in our rural communities, bus transportation is the only option.

In three of our four sub-complexes, have to share bus routes. As an example, in one complex area, one bus is able to serve seats for 18 elementary, 15 middle, and 15 high school. This example, illustrates the extreme shortage of services to our families. Each year, schools are flooded with parent complaints of being able to secure a seat on the bus. I know we need to find solutions to do better for our families.

As such, I support any efforts to increase the number of bus drivers to service our schools. I would defer to the Office of Campus Operations and Support in the Department of Education in regards to whether SB2091 can be implemented by the Department.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

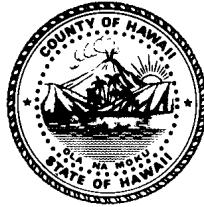
SB-2091

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 8:54:11 AM
Testimony for EDU on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Kaili Swan | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

I am in strong support of this measure because people with disability need access from home to school or use a holographic card program that the school provided to the student please pass this bill thank you



HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL - DISTRICT 2

25 Aupuni Street • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

DATE: February 3, 2026

TO: Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Jennifer Kagiwada, Council Member
Council District 2

SUBJECT: SB2091

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

I strongly support SB2091. Hawaii's ongoing school bus driver shortage has created serious and inequitable barriers to students' access to education, particularly for families in rural and neighbor island communities where school bus routes are delayed, reduced, or eliminated altogether.

These shortages disproportionately impact working families, kūpuna caregivers, and students who rely on school bus transportation as their primary means of getting to and from school. System-level obstacles such as limited local access to licensing and training opportunities make it especially difficult for neighbor island residents to enter and remain in the profession. Without coordinated statewide support, these disparities will continue to widen, leaving already underserved communities without reliable and safe student transportation.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jenn Kagiwada".

Jenn Kagiwada

SB-2091

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 11:20:30 AM
Testimony for EDU on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
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| Leah Herbert | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Leah Herbert, and I am a parent in Kona and part of the Holualoa Elementary School community. I strongly support this bill to establish a recruitment and retention program for school bus drivers.

In our community, bus driver shortages have resulted in overcrowded buses and unreliable transportation, creating stress for students and families who depend on this service every school day. Safe and consistent transportation is essential for our children's education and well-being.

This bill provides a practical solution by supporting the recruitment and retention of school bus drivers and helping stabilize transportation for our schools. I respectfully urge your support.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,
Leah Herbert

SB-2091

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 11:49:35 AM
Testimony for EDU on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Kamala Galletes | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Kamala Galletes, my family and I have resided in Holualoa for the past 15 years and rely on the school bus system for transportation. We have three (now two) children that ride the bus and the school bus driver shortage has directly affected our family.

I testified today in support of SB 2091-Relating to School Bus Drivers for many reasons. We have dealt with canceled bus routes (with and without notice) and have been left scrambling for rides to and from school. We have dealt with our children going to school late and unable to eat breakfast, and have to show up to school/classes embarrassingly late; no way for them to start their day, repeatedly. The tardy's are on their record although "excused." We have dealt with our children coming home extremely late because their driver has to take on several routes before theirs.

My husband's medical condition prohibits him from driving, I am his caregiver and he needs my care more than ever in the morning hours. Our family relies on the bus system more than I can express.

Mahalo nui loa to Senate Committee on Education Chair, State Senator Donna Mercado Kim and EDU Committee members for your time and help. Let's get these bus drivers recruited, trained, and retained.

Mahalo,

Kamala Galletes

LATE

SB 2091

Hearing Date: February 4th, 2026

Written Testimony In Support

My name is Audra Zook, and I am submitting testimony in strong support of SB 2091. I am a parent, community member, and education advocate with firsthand experience in how this issue affects families and schools.

My children go to public school on Hawai'i, and utilize the bus system. For the past several years, the bus service has been inconsistent, and my children have been affected by missing school days. I often leave for work before they catch the bus in the morning. Many, many times, a school bus driver quits or does not have a substitute, and parents find out the morning of via text or sometimes not at all. My children will go to the bus stop and wait long past their pick up time, only to turn around and go back home. This happens so often that it would affect my job if I left work every time a scheduled bus pickup was missed because there was no bus. For years, if my youngest's bus was missed, her older sibling would need to stay home and miss school as well to watch her.

The situation I described occurs all over Hawai'i every single week. In some cases, when drivers quit, the bus service stops entirely. My daughter did not have a bus for her entire sophomore year. She caught the Hele On to school every single morning and after school. The unfortunate fact about this was that the Hele On arrived at her school two and a half hours before school started, and left the school area two to three hours after school had ended. This left my daughter having to find somewhere safe to stay every single day before and after school for a total of five hours. Sometimes, there was an employee at the school who would be available to pick up students; for this we were very grateful, but unsure of their paid status.

What makes the situation even more frustrating is that parents are paying for school bus service, but are not reimbursed when buses are repeatedly canceled. Families are essentially paying for a service that is unreliable or unavailable, while still having to absorb the cost, stress, and lost work time caused by transportation failures. The DOE and the bus companies refuse to reimburse parents for even weeks of missed routes; they point fingers at one another and shrug their shoulders.

As an education advocate and prior DOE teacher, I know that one of the main reasons drivers do not stay is the low wages. They are not offered full-time work, which is a must for most workers here in Hawai'i. Other comparable driving jobs pay significantly more and include benefits. As a result, many drivers choose to leave school bus jobs for better opportunities.

This is an education, workforce, and family stability issue. Without better pay, working conditions, and support for drivers, the system will continue to struggle and student and families will continue to suffer the consequences. Bus drivers are essential for our community; their pay should reflect that.

Mahalo,

Audra Zook

