



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'UAO
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: SB2125, RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING.

Purpose of Bill: Removes 3-year employment limit for unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis. Requires that unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis make continuous and verifiable progress toward satisfying licensing requirements.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education supports SB 2125 and is committed to removing barriers that prevent capable and dedicated educators from remaining in Hawaii's classrooms while actively progressing toward licensure. The bill would allow the Department to continue employment of emergency hire teachers beyond the current three year limitation.

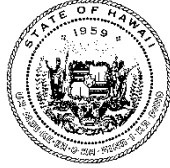
Hawaii continues to face teacher shortages in certain subject areas and geographic regions, particularly in hard-to-fill and rural schools. The Department relies on approximately 1,000 emergency hire teachers to meet teacher workforce needs. Emergency hire teachers have bachelor's degrees and are hired on a year to year contract. These teachers are supported with induction and mentoring, participate in professional development, and are evaluated annually. In response, the Department has prioritized recruiting career changers and local residents who are invested in their communities and committed to serving Hawaii's students. These individuals often bring valuable professional experience and strong community ties; however, many require additional time to complete coursework, testing, and programmatic requirements to become a fully licensed teacher.

The Department recommends that the statutory language of 302A-804 (3)(C) also be changed regarding "active pursuit of licensing in each year of employment."

Documenting the "active pursuit" for the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board has been an administrative burden on the emergency hire teachers, their administrators and the Department. The Department recommends removing the requirement entirely or to require demonstration of active pursuit after a number of years (e.g., five) rather than annually.

SB 2125 provides the flexibility needed to retain educators while they complete their licensure requirements. This bill protects instructional quality, improves teacher retention, and ensures Hawaii's investment in recruiting and supporting educators results in stable, committed teachers for our students.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2125.



STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD
650 IWILEI ROAD, SUITE 268
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

February 3, 2026

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

PERSON TESTIFYING: Felicia Villalobos, Executive Director, on behalf of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB)

DATE: February 4, 2025

TIME: 1:00 pm

LOCATION: Conference Room 229 and Video Conference

TITLE OF BILL: SB 2125 Teacher Licensing; Emergency Hire; Exemptions; Licensure Progress

POSITION: Opposes SB 2125

Chair Donna Mercado Kim; Vice-Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the House Committee on Education:

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) respectfully **opposes SB 2125**, relating to teacher licensing, which would remove the 3-year employment limit for unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis. Requires that unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis make continuous and verifiable progress toward satisfying licensing requirements.

HTSB's position is grounded in our **Vision** of a highly esteemed public education system supported by rigorous professional teacher standards that foster student success, and our **Mission** to collaboratively set high licensing and credentialing standards that:

- Ensure every child in Hawai'i has a qualified teacher
- Promote professionalism and teaching excellence
- Build public confidence in the teaching profession
- Strengthen accountability to the public

Extending Emergency Hire Permits beyond three years directly conflicts with these commitments.

High-quality, equitable education depends on **well-prepared teachers** who are equipped to persevere and grow during their early years in the classroom. Research and experience show that teachers who enter through fast-track or alternative routes—particularly in urban districts—often begin underprepared and leave the profession at higher rates. Hawai'i's Emergency Hire Permit structure is designed to mitigate this by requiring individuals to pursue an **official teaching degree** within the three-year window.

To qualify for an Emergency Hire Permit, individuals must already hold a **bachelor's degree**. Completing a post-baccalaureate program or master's degree typically requires only one to two years—well within the

existing three-year timeframe. Extending the permit to five years would allow individuals with any bachelor's degree, even in unrelated fields such as fashion design, to teach for an extended period without completing essential pedagogical preparation.

This is especially concerning because Emergency Hire teachers are frequently placed in **elementary and special education classrooms**, where strong foundations in literacy, numeracy, differentiated instruction, and support for multilingual learners are critical. In some cases, students have had Emergency Hire teachers every year of elementary school. As we continue to address learning loss from the COVID-19 years, further lowering preparation expectations would compound existing challenges.

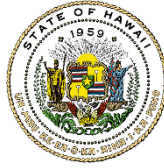
Other states that have reduced their qualification standards are now experiencing negative consequences from those policy shifts. Hawai'i should not follow that path. Doing so would be a disservice not only to our keiki, but also to individuals who aspire to become fully licensed, highly qualified teachers.

While Hawai'i faces significant teacher shortages—ranging from 1,000 to 1,200 vacancies at the start of each school year—**lowering standards is not the solution**. Instead, we should invest in strategies that strengthen the profession, including:

- Supporting teacher retention
- Expanding National Board Certified Teacher pathways
- Increasing mentoring and induction support, especially for those with Emergency Hire Permits
- Implementing a Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program with structured guidance and tuition support

These approaches uphold quality while addressing workforce needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. For the reasons stated above, the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board respectfully **asks the Committee to oppose SB 2125**.



STATE OF HAWAII
Executive Office on Early Learning

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

TO: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Education

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

SUBJECT: Testimony on S.B. No. 2125 – RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING.

Committee: EDU
Date: Wednesday, February 4, 2026
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Location: Conference Room 229

Executive Office on Early Learning's Position: **COMMENTS**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments for S.B. 2125, a bill to remove the time limit on the employment of emergency hire permit holders by the Hawai'i State Department of Education (HIDOE), and offers amendments.

Thanks to the support of the Legislature, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and our Ready Keiki partners, the number of public PreK classrooms has grown rapidly over the last several years, more than tripling since 2022. Highly qualified EOEL and HSPCSC Public PreK teachers must have graduated from a State-Approved Teacher Education Program (SATEP) and hold a teaching license in Early Childhood Education, a unique set of qualifications for which there had been no significant demand prior to the expansion of the Public PreK program.

As the system adjusts to these new opportunities, some candidates encounter challenges obtaining an initial Early Childhood Education license due to the limited number of approved pathways and the timing of enrollment opportunities for existing programs. This is particularly challenging for educators who already hold a Bachelor's or Master's degree in early childhood education from a non-SATEP program.

EOEL appreciates that S.B. No. 2125 seeks to address current workforce bottlenecks while maintaining the expectation that all educators progress toward full licensure. However, EOEL prefers the approach reflected in H.B. No. 1825, which extends the existing timeframe from

three to five years rather than eliminating the time limit entirely. EOEL supports maintaining a defined, time-limited structure to ensure that emergency hire permits function as temporary bridges to full licensure, not as parallel or permanent hiring pathways.

We respectfully request that this bill be amended to extend the timeframe from 3 to 5 years, rather than eliminating the time limit altogether.

We continue to work with the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board and higher education partners to ensure that these pathways are responsive, while reinforcing the shared goal of a fully licensed, well-prepared educator workforce.

We appreciate the Legislature's ongoing investment and shared commitment to strengthening Hawai'i's early learning system for our youngest keiki and their 'ohana. Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments on S.B. No. 2125.



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Andrea Eshelman
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: SB 2125 – Relating to Teacher Licensing

Position: Support

Hearing: Wednesday, February 4, 2025, 1:00 pm, Room 229

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

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

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association **supports** S.B. 2125 to help address the state's persistent teacher shortage. By removing the three-year employment limit for emergency hires, this bill allows schools to retain dedicated educators who are already established in their classrooms but may need additional time to complete the licensing process.

This change provides much-needed stability for students and schools without compromising professional standards. Instead of a hard time limit, the bill requires emergency hires to demonstrate continuous and verifiable progress toward full licensure through coursework, education programs, or mentorship.

S.B. 2125 maintains important protections by ensuring unlicensed individuals are only hired when no licensed teacher is available for an assignment. It also preserves transparency through regular reporting to the board regarding the progress of these hires and the status of teacher shortages across the state.

By focusing on actual progress toward licensure rather than an arbitrary deadline, we can support the growth of our workforce and keep committed professionals in our schools. We respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo.

Subject: Testimony in Support of S.B. No. 2125 – Relating to Teacher Licensing
Testimony in Support of S.B. No. 2125 – Relating to Teacher Licensing

To: Senate Committee on Education
Sunday, February 1, 2026

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

My name is Joanarace Lampa, and I respectfully submit testimony **in strong support of S.B. No. 2125**. I am currently a **first-year J-1 teacher here in Lanai High and Elementary School**, and I would like to share my personal experience to help illustrate why this measure is so important.

As a new teacher in Hawai'i, the first year is both rewarding and extremely challenging. In addition to learning how to effectively teach in a new education system, I am still adjusting to a new country, new community, and new expectations. Balancing full-time teaching responsibilities with personal concerns, cultural adjustment, and the complex teacher licensing process is overwhelming, especially during the first one to two years.

While J-1 teachers are committed to becoming fully licensed, the current three-year employment limit creates significant pressure that does not reflect the realities we face. Licensing requirements take time, guidance, and financial resources. Many of us are actively working toward licensure, but progress is not always linear during the early years of adjustment.

The **cost of required licensure exams** is also a serious burden. As J-1 teachers from the Philippines, many of us continue to carry loans at home and provide financial support to our families. After covering living expenses in Hawai'i and meeting our obligations abroad, there is often very little left. These financial pressures can make it difficult to complete licensing requirements as quickly as expected, even when we are fully committed to doing so.

S.B. 2125 provides a thoughtful and compassionate solution. By removing the rigid three-year cap while still requiring **continuous and verifiable progress toward licensure**, the bill supports teachers who are making good-faith efforts to become licensed without penalizing them for circumstances beyond their control. At the same time, it maintains accountability and professional standards.

Most importantly, this bill helps retain dedicated teachers and provides stability for students. Losing teachers who are already trained, experienced, and invested in their schools only adds to the challenges faced by our education system.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass S.B. No. 2125. This measure recognizes the human realities behind teacher shortages and supports both educators and students across Hawai'i. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanarace Lampa

TESTIMONY ON [HB1825](#) - RELATING TO THE HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD.

Permits the Department of Education and charter schools to hire unlicensed individuals as teachers on an emergency basis for five, rather than three, years. Requires the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to adopt rules.

TO: The House Committee on Education

FROM: Jackilou Himaya

POSITION: First-Year J-1 Teacher, Kalei'opu'u Elementary School

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

My name is Jackilou Himaya, I am writing to express my **strong support for HB1825**. I am a J-1 exchange teacher currently in my first year of teaching in Kalei'opu'u Elementary School, Pearl-City Waipahu. I would like to share my perspective on how the current three-year limit on emergency hire permits places unintended hurdles on qualified teachers like myself who wish to remain in the classroom and continue supporting our students.

Professional Value and Preparation

I am a Licensed Professional Teacher from the Philippines with a Bachelor's in Special Education, and I am currently pursuing my Master's. My credentials have been evaluated as equivalent to U.S. standards. Despite my qualifications and dedication to my students, the Praxis exam remains a significant barrier.

The current three-year limit places immense pressure on international teachers. We are trying to pass a difficult, culturally nuanced exam while adjusting to the high cost of living and the demands of a new education system. HB1825 would provide the time we need to meet these requirements without disrupting the education of our students

Why Extending the Permit to 5 Years is Critical Passage of HB1825 is essential for the following reasons:

1. **Alignment with Federal Visas**: The J-1 exchange visitor visa typically allows for a stay of up to five years (an initial 3-year term plus a 2-year extension). The current state permit limit of 3 years cuts our tenure short prematurely, forcing qualified teachers to leave the country even when the federal government allows us to stay.
2. **Realistic Time for Licensure**: While our transcripts are evaluated as equivalent to U.S. degrees, the PRAXIS exam presents a unique cultural and linguistic hurdle. A 5-year window acknowledges that capable international teachers may need more time to master the specific testing format of the PRAXIS without compromising their effectiveness in the classroom.

3. **Student Stability & Continuity**: Special Education students, in particular, thrive on routine and familiarity. Forcing a teacher to leave after three years disrupts the bond formed with students. Extending the permit allows us to see our students through critical developmental stages.
4. **Maximizing Recruitment ROI**: The state and districts invest significant resources to recruit and onboard international teachers. Losing us after only three years—just as we are becoming fully acclimated and most effective—is a loss on that investment. Retaining an existing, evaluated teacher is far more cost-effective than recruiting a new one.

The Goal: A Fair Path to Success

I'm not looking for a way around the standards—I truly value them. I'm just looking for a timeline that makes meeting them possible without burning out. We love these schools and these kids; they are the reason we're here. Many of us have big dreams to keep learning and growing professionally, but the 'three years or you're out' rule makes it feel like we're constantly racing against a clock. **It's hard to give my students 100% when I'm worried that my time here has an expiration date.**

By extending the permit to **five years**, you provide us with the necessary time to navigate the licensing process without the constant fear of displacement. It allows us to be the stable, high-quality educators Hawaii's students deserve.

I respectfully urge the committee to **pass HB1825** and support the teachers who have traveled across the world to serve the children of Hawaii and not just to us J1 but to all emergency hired teachers. **WE ALSO MATTER.**

Mahalo for your time and for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Jackilou Himaya

808-491-5852 | jackilouhimaya@gmail.com

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 6:47:23 AM

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

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Douglas Boyer	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

My name is Douglas Boyer, EdD, and I am the Principal of Lānaʻi High and Elementary School. I am writing in strong support of this bill relating to teacher licensing and emergency hires within the Hawaii Department of Education.

As a school leader serving a rural neighbor-island community, I see firsthand the serious and ongoing teacher shortage impacting our public schools. As we enter the in-state transfer period, Lānaʻi High and Elementary School currently has **20 of our 60 teaching positions open**, all of which were previously filled through emergency hires. To remain fully staffed and ensure students have consistent, high-quality access to instruction, schools like ours must rely heavily on emergency hires and alternative pathways into the classroom.

Many individuals hired under emergency provisions already hold bachelor's degrees, and in most cases even master's or doctoral degrees. In addition, our school relies heavily on the J-1 Visa program, through which teachers with advanced degrees, many years of experience, and backgrounds as master teachers or curriculum experts enter the State of Hawaii on an emergency certificate. Others bring valuable expertise in critical trade and career-related fields. Despite their qualifications and dedication, these educators are still working through Hawaii's complex licensure process while meeting the daily demands of full-time teaching.

At Lānaʻi High and Elementary School, we invest deeply in supporting these teachers. Through in-house mentoring, professional development, and instructional coaching, we help educators who are not yet fully licensed grow into highly effective teachers as they progress toward certification. These individuals are not stepping away from the profession — they are actively building their skills while serving our students in classrooms that would otherwise go unfilled.

This bill strengthens the law by requiring emergency hires to demonstrate continuous and verifiable progress toward licensure each year. This is a reasonable, responsible, and necessary approach that promotes accountability while recognizing the realities schools face, particularly in hard-to-staff and geographically isolated communities.

It is also critical to acknowledge the significant burden placed on teachers navigating multiple Praxis examination requirements, coursework demands, and in many cases the need to travel to other islands to complete licensing steps. Even highly accomplished individuals with advanced degrees must undergo numerous testing and procedural hurdles while balancing the full responsibilities of teaching.

By emphasizing sustained progress rather than rigid limitations, this legislation reduces unnecessary pressure and allows educators to focus their energy where it matters most: supporting student learning and success, while continuing to move steadily toward full licensure.

This bill strikes the right balance between maintaining Hawaii's professional teaching standards and ensuring that schools — especially those in rural and neighbor-island communities — can meet staffing needs with qualified, committed educators who bring strong academic and content expertise.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this important measure.

Respectfully,
Douglas Boyer, EdD
Principal, Lānaʻi High and Elementary School



Testimony in Support of HB1825 / SB2616 and HB1840 / SB2125

Submitted by: The Teacher Lounge Team

Position: Support

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB1825 / SB2616 and HB1840 / SB2125.

Our organization works closely with schools and educators across Hawai'i, including J-1 teachers who are actively serving in classrooms while working toward full licensure. These educators play a critical role in maintaining instructional continuity, particularly in rural, neighbor island, and high-need schools where staffing challenges are most acute.

These teachers are fully committed to Hawai'i's students and are making documented progress toward licensure. However, the current licensure and permit timelines often do not reflect the practical barriers educators face. Required licensure exams involve multiple components that take significant time to prepare for, schedule, and complete successfully. The cumulative cost of exams and preparation materials can exceed \$1,000, creating a substantial financial burden.

Access challenges further complicate the process. On neighbor islands, limited in-person testing capacity can result in long delays that are outside a teacher's control. Virtual testing options are often not viable due to testing restrictions, technology limitations, or living situations that do not meet strict testing environment requirements.

When permit limits are rigidly applied without accounting for these realities, effective teachers may be forced to leave classrooms despite making steady progress toward licensure. This disrupts student learning, strains school communities, and can discourage educators from continuing to serve in Hawai'i.

While the J-1 teacher program allows educators to serve for up to five years, in practice the combined effects of licensure timelines, testing access, and permit limitations often reduce effective classroom service to no more than three years. This shortened window limits schools' ability to retain experienced teachers and undermines the stability that students and school communities need, as well as limits the cultural exchange and soft diplomacy impact of the J-1 teacher exchange program.

Students benefit most from stability—when teachers are able to remain in their classrooms long enough to build relationships, strengthen instructional practice, and support school culture. Policies that allow reasonable flexibility while maintaining licensure standards help ensure that schools can retain qualified, committed educators while safeguarding educational quality.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support of HB1825 / SB2616 and HB1840 / SB2125. Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Hawai'i's students and schools.

Respectfully submitted,
The Teacher Lounge Team

February 1, 2026

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee
Hawai'i State Legislature
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Testimony in Support of HB1825 / SB2616 and HB1840 / SB2125

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

I am a J-1 teacher currently serving in Hawai'i's public school system, and I witness firsthand how teacher shortages and uncertainty around permits and licensure deeply affect students, classrooms, and entire school communities.

As a J-1 educator, I am fully committed to my students and the schools I serve. However, policies that limit permit duration or create unclear licensure pathways can make it difficult for dedicated, effective teachers to remain in Hawai'i classrooms. When educators are forced to leave due to administrative barriers rather than performance or commitment, students lose trusted adults, instructional continuity is disrupted, and already overburdened schools are required to restart the hiring process once again.

These bills represent an important and necessary step toward improving teacher retention and ensuring classroom stability. Supporting reasonable permit durations and clearer licensure pathways allows teachers to focus on what truly matters—building strong relationships with students, supporting their academic and emotional growth, and contributing meaningfully to the school community. Stability is not a luxury for students; it is essential to their success.

I respectfully urge your support of these measures and encourage continued collaboration with educators who are directly impacted by these policies. Thank you for listening to the voices of those of us working daily to support Hawai'i's students.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to public education in Hawai'i.

Respectfully,

Charmaine Love Diyaya

J-1 Teacher

As part of the International Teachers here in Hawaii, my compatriots and I wholeheartedly serve our work as teachers to our students knowing that we share not only knowledge but love as second parents to them while they are at school. However, the need to prepare for multiple licensure exams while managing our teaching responsibilities places unnecessary stress on us and takes valuable time away from lesson planning and student engagement. As a teacher of young people with special needs, there are many subjects they must learn, especially the life skills that are important for them so that they can use them in their future life and so that they can have their own lives and abilities that expect nothing else but to be able to stand on their own feet. We teachers, although we teach a different race, our love for our work has not changed and our love for the students we teach is also there. We are also open to learning from our schoolmates as part of the Cultural Exchange Program and we are also ready to help as much as we can and learn the different methods and cultures that exist in the country of Hawaii. In my teaching now although it will take three to five years, I can say that my dedication to teaching will remain there no matter where I go not only the ability to share knowledge but to love my work, students and co-workers. My students today I can see, and I can tell that there is a change in them when it comes to cognitive, sociability, love for others and their readiness to stand on their own feet using their own abilities. I love my job, I love my School, I love my students and coworkers and most of all I love Hawaii so I am requesting the opportunity to continue teaching in Hawaii for up to five years under the Emergency Hire Permit. Teaching is my passion, and I promise to consistently provide the highest quality instruction. I am dedicated to instilling a love for lifelong learning in my students, particularly within my fully self-contained middle school classroom.

TESTIMONY ON [SB2125](#)- RELATING TO THE HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD

*Removes 3-year employment limit for unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis.
Requires that unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis make continuous and verifiable progress toward satisfying licensing requirements.*

TO: The House Committee on Education

FROM: Janica Mary Pogoy

POSITION: Second-Year J-1 Teacher, Lehua Elementary School

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

I am writing to express my **strong support for SB2125**, which proposes extending the emergency hire permit for teachers from three years to five years. I am a dedicated educator currently in my second year as a J-1 exchange teacher, and I am sharing my perspective to highlight the unintended obstacles the current three-year limit places on qualified professionals.

Professional Value and Preparation

I am a "full-fledged" Master's degree holder from the Philippines. I intentionally earned my advanced degree to prepare myself for the rigor of the American classroom and to share my culture with the community here in Hawaii. My transcripts were evaluated by nationally recognized agencies (such as SPANTRAN/CARREE) and deemed equivalent to U.S. standards. To be honest, it is frustrating that my Master's degree and evaluated transcripts don't seem to count for much when compared to the PRAXIS. I am a capable teacher, but this exam is a huge struggle for me. The current 3-year limit doesn't give us enough time to overcome this hurdle while also dealing with the high cost of living and the demands of our first years in a new country.

The Challenges of the 3-Year Timeline

The current three-year window creates an environment of high-pressure "survival" rather than professional growth:

- **Financial Burden:** Between the high cost of living in Hawaii and the expensive fees for the PRAXIS exams, the financial strain is immense.

- **Mental Health:** The pressure to pass multiple exams within a short window—knowing that our ability to stay and teach depends on it—is a significant burden on our mental well-being.
- **National Inconsistency:** Many of our colleagues teaching in the mainland U.S. are granted 5-year permits based on their evaluated credentials. We are simply asking for parity with our peers in other states.

The Goal: A Fair Path to Success

I'm not looking for a way around the standards—I truly value them. I'm just looking for a timeline that makes meeting them possible without burning out. We love these schools and these kids; they are the reason we're here. Many of us have big dreams to keep learning and growing professionally, but the 'three years or you're out' rule makes it feel like we're constantly racing against a clock. **It's hard to give my students 100% when I'm worried that my time here has an expiration date.**

By extending the permit to **five years**, you provide us with the necessary time to navigate the licensing process without the constant fear of displacement. It allows us to be the stable, high-quality educators Hawaii's students deserve.

I respectfully urge the committee to **pass SB2125** and support the teachers who have traveled across the world to serve the children of Hawaii and not just to us J1 but to all emergency hired teachers. WE ALSO MATTER.

Mahalo for your time and for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Janica Mary Pogoy

808-927-6685 | janicamarycartalla@gmail.com

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

My name is Mark Damo, and I submit testimony in support of this measure, which permits the Department of Education and charter schools to employ unlicensed teachers on an emergency basis for up to five years.

As a J-1 teacher currently serving in Hawai'i's public schools, I have firsthand experience balancing full-time teaching responsibilities while working toward licensure. The current three-year limitation creates significant challenges for educators in high-need positions. Extending the emergency hire period to five years provides a more reasonable and attainable pathway to licensure while maintaining continuity of instruction for students.

This measure supports stability in classrooms by reducing teacher turnover and ensuring students have consistent access to qualified and committed educators. Requiring the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to adopt rules ensures appropriate oversight and accountability.

This bill represents a practical response to Hawai'i's ongoing teacher shortage and supports the educational needs of students statewide. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully,

Mark Damo
J1 Teacher

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 5:05:25 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janet Teare	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for supporting this bill to hold accountable the educators hired on an emergency basis.

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 5:14:33 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abegail L Toledo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in support of SB2125. As an elementary teacher in Hawai‘i, I strongly believe that policies which strengthen our education system and support educators are essential to student success.

Teachers are on the front lines of learning, and legislation that promotes clear standards, professional support, and sustainability within the teaching profession helps ensure stability in our classrooms. SB2125 is an important step toward reinforcing these goals and addressing ongoing challenges faced by educators in Hawai‘i.

When teachers are supported through thoughtful and well-structured policies, students benefit from consistency, quality instruction, and a positive learning environment. I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB2125.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Abegail L. Toledo

Elementary Teacher

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 6:50:35 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anngelu Acuna	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my **strong support** for this measure, which seeks to modernize the emergency hiring process for our educators. In the face of a persistent teacher shortage, our priority must be to keep qualified, dedicated individuals in the classroom while ensuring they remain on a rigorous path toward full licensure.

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 7:51:50 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jezreel Baldonado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Members of the Committee,

My name is Jezreel Baldonado, and I am currently teaching in Hawai‘i under an emergency hire permit. I am writing in support of SB2125 based on my direct experience teaching while working toward full licensure.

When emergency hires are discussed, they are often described as temporary solutions. From inside the classroom, they are something else entirely. They allow students to have a teacher who shows up every day, builds routines, and commits to their learning over time. I entered my classroom knowing that consistency mattered, and I have seen how students respond when they trust that their teacher will remain.

Teaching full time while completing licensure requirements is not a shortcut. It requires balancing lesson planning, student support, assessments, professional responsibilities, and certification tasks outside of contract hours. The current three-year limit does not always align with the realities of this process, especially for educators transitioning from other systems or teaching backgrounds.

Extending the emergency hire period to five years recognizes the effort of educators who are already meeting classroom expectations while steadily working toward licensure. It also helps schools retain teachers who are invested in their students and communities, reducing disruption and repeated transitions that affect learning and school culture.

SB2125 does not lower standards. It provides time—time for teachers to grow, complete requirements responsibly, and continue serving students without unnecessary interruption. From my perspective as an emergency-hired teacher, this balance is essential.

Mahalo for considering the voices of educators who are already in Hawai‘i classrooms, committed to students, and actively pursuing full certification.

Respectfully,

Jezreel Baldonado

Emergency-Hired Teacher, Hawai'i

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 9:32:36 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jane Aquino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Teachers are critical to the future of our State. I support this bill.

Thank you,

Jane Aquino, Indivisible HI and Hawaii J20

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 1:00 pm
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT - SB 2125 - RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING.

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, Sen. Hashimoto representing my district, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews, and I live in Wailuku, Maui. I submit this testimony to you today in support of SB 2125, Relating to Teacher Licensing. I am an attorney licensed in Hawaii for over 25 years. Early in my career I worked for many years at the Maui Economic Development Board's Women in Technology Project on gender equity in STEM as a workforce development issue. I focused on issues in recruitment and retention and wrote over ten peer-reviewed papers on best practices in the field.

One of the key workforce development areas I identified in my work with K-12 teachers and administrators and with professors and administrators of our institutions of higher education in Hawaii was the gaps in the education-to-workforce pipeline. This is an issue that we continue to see today when it comes to the education, recruitment and retention of teachers. Before attending law school, I attended the College of Education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, concurrently with a subject matter Master's degree program, to obtain a professional degree in teaching. I completed the coursework and practicum for the professional degree in teaching, but, in order to get a teaching license, at the time, required a one-year, unpaid, teaching practicum with the Department of Education. I could not afford to work for free for a year, so I went to work in a different field which later led me to law school.

That someone like me, who worked full-time while pursuing both a subject-matter Master's degree and a professional degree in teaching, should have switched career tracks away from teaching, after two years of graduate work, because of practical, economic barriers highlighted for me the education-to-workforce barriers between the College of Education at UHM and the Hawaii State Department of Education that contribute to our teacher shortage to this day. While this bill does not address all the barriers, and I would encourage the Committee to question the College and Department on that issue, I do wonder whether the content of this bill would have allowed me to make other choices.

A friend of my daughter's is an energetic and engaging young man with a Bachelor's Degree in Chemistry from the University of California. He does not have a teaching degree, he has a subject-matter degree in chemistry. After getting his degree in chemistry, he wanted to explore teaching science as a career, and applied as an emergency hire to teach science at Baldwin High School in Wailuku, Maui. In another sign of the dysfunction at the Department of Education, this young man was hired about one week before school started, although he had applied months prior. He had no

classroom management experience, there were no curricular materials provided, and yet, under the mentorship of the head of the Baldwin Science Department, he fully embraced his new job.

His first year as an emergency hire science teacher was not without its bumps in the road, but I had the wonderful opportunity to watch him as he found “his calling.” He would come home from school almost every day and say, “I love my job!” Over a year later, he still does. He understood that, under the current law, he would need to get his teaching license within three years to keep this job that he loved. He is currently just over a year and a half into his teaching career. Unfortunately, because he was hired just before the school year started, the uncertainty interfered with his ability to register for teaching degree programs within the UH system designed for emergency hires like him. It is also hard to get a teaching degree within the UH system as a full-time neighbor island teacher. When the end of his first year teaching at Baldwin was complete, there was some difficulty for him in retaining his position, even though the head of the Science Department was leaving for another school and there seemed that there would be no experienced science teachers at Baldwin for the coming year. Part of the barrier for him was that he was not yet enrolled in a teaching degree program, again due to the timing issues with the UH system, and there was pressure now for him to complete the UH system teaching degree within three years, so he instead enrolled in a more costly online teaching degree program out of state so he could keep his job. This is how the current three-year limit for emergency hires can create a barrier for people who want to stay and teach as a profession in Hawaii.

It has been a great experience to witness someone who, like me, wants to pursue a teaching career here in Hawaii. We have chronic shortages of teachers, filled now with teachers on J-1 visas. It is important to have skilled, knowledgeable, professional teachers. Allowing people like my friend five rather than three years to complete their teaching degree is more practical, especially for neighbor island emergency hires who are teaching full time. I **request your support of HB1825** because it will allow people, especially neighbor islanders, with desirable subject-matter degrees a more appropriate amount of time to get their teaching degree so that they can remain in their schools, avoid them having to pay for expensive online programs instead of going through the UH system simply because of a shortage of time under the current law, and help build the pipeline of experienced teachers like my friend to provide an excellent education for our students.

Thank you for your time and for supporting teachers and students by supporting SB2125.

Mahalo nui,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.
Wailuku, Maui

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 10:52:43 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Martha Nakajima	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. Thank you. Martha Nakajima, Honolulu, member of Indivisible

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 11:25:43 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James E Raymond	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you -- I am a member of Indivisible Windward.

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 12:29:21 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amber Kanehailua	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB2125 for continuous and verifiable progress towards licensing requirements for teachers that are emergency hires.

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 2:31:48 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Kuzmier	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I am writing in support of SB2125 to help with our teacher shortage here in Hawai'i. Mahalo for your consideration.

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 3:31:02 PM

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

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

Comments:

I am writing in support of SB2125 both personally and as a member of the Indivisible Hawaii State Network (IHSN).

I believe it will improve Teacher Hires and add protection for work Visas

Mahalo, Karen Valasek

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 3:49:53 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tim Huycke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB2125.

To: The Senate Committee on Education

Measure: SB2125

Position: Strong Support

Testimony from: Amy Ancheta, Science Department Head, Baldwin High School

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

My name is Amy Ancheta, and I serve as the Science Department Head at Baldwin High School. I am writing in **strong support** of this measure, which seeks to provide much-needed stability to our classrooms by extending the pathways for our emergency hires.

In our Science Department, we are currently facing a critical staffing shortage. We also have five J1 teachers and a second-year teacher who joined us immediately after earning his Chemistry degree. He was hired as an emergency hire. In a field as specialized as Chemistry, finding a content expert is incredibly difficult.

While he is currently enrolled in teacher training, the reality is that the dual workload of a full-time teaching load and certification coursework is immense. Under the old 3-year cap, we would be forced to let him go just as he hits his "stride" as an educator. This bill allows us to keep his expertise in the lab while he completes his professional requirements.

When a science teacher is forced to leave due to a licensing "expiration date," the damage to the department is twofold:

1. **Instructional Loss:** It takes years for a teacher to master the duties of teaching and the art of teaching. Replacing the emergency hire teachers means starting from zero with a new hire who may not even have a science background. It also could mean a long term substitute teacher.
2. **Student Impact:** Educational success is built on relationships and continuity. When students face the yearly uncertainty of whether their teachers will return, it erodes their sense of stability and engagement. Our students deserve a consistent learning environment, not the anxiety of an uncertain school year to come.

Requiring "continuous and verifiable progress" toward licensure—rather than an arbitrary 3-year cutoff—is a fair, common-sense solution. It ensures quality while honoring the commitment these teachers have made to our keiki.

I urge you to pass this measure to ensure that our science labs remain staffed by the passionate experts our students deserve.

Mahalo,

Amy Ancheta

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 7:56:13 PM

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

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

Comments:

As a member of Indivisible Hawaii, I support **SB2125** .

Thank you!

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 4:43:26 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy D Moser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:13:41 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christopher Davis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

thank you for supporting this bill

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 10:09:19 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nanea Lo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Nanea Lo, and I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of SB2125. I am also a board member of Hawai‘i Workers Center.

The work of Hawai‘i Workers Center is rooted in advancing economic justice, worker protections, and fair labor standards for working families across the Hawaiian Kingdom. We regularly see how workforce shortages, licensing barriers, and immigration-related uncertainties can destabilize essential services and harm both workers and the communities they serve. For that reason, our organization’s mission closely aligns with the intent of this bill.

This measure addresses several practical barriers facing Hawai‘i’s public education system—particularly teacher shortages, licensing delays, and the ability of the Department of Education to responsibly use emergency hires and J-1 visa educators to fill urgent classroom needs.

Across the state, students are experiencing the consequences of chronic staffing shortages. Vacant positions and rotating substitute teachers disrupt learning, strain school communities, and place additional burdens on existing educators. SB2125 offers tools to help stabilize classrooms while maintaining appropriate oversight and accountability.

Streamlining aspects of teacher licensing—without compromising standards—can help qualified educators enter Hawai‘i classrooms more quickly. Additionally, clarifying and improving the Department of Education’s emergency hire authority ensures that schools can respond swiftly when unexpected vacancies arise, especially in hard-to-staff areas and rural communities.

The bill’s attention to the use of J-1 visa teachers is also important. International educators have long contributed meaningfully to Hawai‘i’s schools, particularly in subject areas facing shortages. Ensuring that the state’s policies align with federal visa requirements while protecting both students and teachers promotes continuity in instruction and reduces uncertainty for school administrators.

SB2125 represents a thoughtful approach to addressing immediate workforce needs while working toward long-term stability in our education system. By reducing unnecessary barriers while upholding labor protections, this bill supports both educators and the students they serve.

me ke aloha ‘āina,

Nanea Lo, 96826

Hawai‘i Workers Center Board Member

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 11:17:23 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JON BRODZIAK	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Jon Brodziak, and I support **SB2125**, which addresses teacher licensing flexibility and the Department of Education's emergency hire authority.

Hawai'i continues to face persistent teacher shortages that disrupt instructional continuity and burden school administrators. SB2125 provides targeted flexibility in licensing and hiring while maintaining oversight and accountability.

The bill is particularly important for its impact on **emergency hires and J-1 visa teachers**, who currently play a critical role in staffing classrooms where licensed teachers are unavailable. Clarifying licensing pathways and employment authority would reduce administrative uncertainty, support workforce stability, and help ensure that qualified educators can remain in classrooms serving Hawai'i's students.

By aligning licensure requirements with operational realities, SB2125 supports timely hiring decisions without lowering educational standards. This approach strengthens DOE's ability to meet staffing needs while protecting students' access to consistent instruction.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB2125.

Sincerely,
Jon Brodziak

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 11:58:40 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lily Troy MD	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB2125

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 2:48:17 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcela Montalto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill related to teacher's licensing

LATE

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 7:33:27 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Judith White	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass!

Judith White, Psy.D.

Member, Hawaii Indivisible

LATE

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:03:02 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kiku catania	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

I am a veteran teacher of 20 years and I oppose this bill. I too started as an emergency hire teacher. During this time we had no longer than 3 year to get our certification. 3 years was more than enough time for me to finish my teacher degree and certification. If we want better for our keiki we have to do better. Thanks for listening.

LATE

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:10:44 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carlton Ho	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Whom it May Concern,

I am submitting this written testimony to express my disappointment in learning that there are proposals put forth to allow Emergency Hires to teach our public school children. Why is it even being considered? Having someone who is not qualified, or have gone through the process to become a certified teacher is ludicrous! The lowering of standards will further erode the future potential of our keiki. With testing scores already being below where they should be, why would our government and/or leadership even entertain the thought of perpetuating the compromising of standards for the sake of convenience? What lessons are we teaching by entertaining these types of negligent, knee jerk reactions instead of working to strengthen the qualifications of those individuals who are hired to teach, nurture and develop the future leaders of our 'aina? Please vote NO on this bill,

Respectfully yours,

Carlton S. Ho

LATE

LATE

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 10:10:58 AM
Testimony for EDU on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lori Kizer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill and ask my elected officials to approve/pass. Mahalo.

LATE

SB-2125

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 10:18:51 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ma. Belinda Calabucal	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 2125 :Teacher Licensing; Emergency Hire; Exemptions; Licensure Progress

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

My name is Belinda, and I am an educator in Hawai‘i’s public school system. I am writing in strong support of this bill, which removes the three-year employment limit for unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis and ensures that they continue making verifiable progress toward full licensure.

As someone who has worked closely with students in classrooms where there are teacher shortages, I can personally attest to the impact continuity has on learning and growth. Students thrive when they have a consistent teacher who knows them, understands their challenges, and celebrates their successes. Emergency-hire teachers, even if not yet fully licensed, are often passionate, highly capable educators committed to giving their best every day.

The current three-year limit can force schools to lose dedicated teachers who have built strong, trusting relationships with their students—relationships that are difficult to replace. This bill recognizes the reality that licensure can be a complex process, and that commitment and growth in the classroom matter just as much as meeting formal timelines.

By allowing unlicensed teachers to continue teaching while making verifiable progress toward licensure, we are prioritizing the stability, well-being, and success of our students. We are keeping dedicated educators in classrooms, preserving continuity, and ensuring that students continue to receive the care, guidance, and quality education they deserve.

Education is more than a job—it is a calling. Teachers who step into classrooms during emergencies do so because they care deeply about students’ futures. This bill honors that dedication and safeguards the hearts and minds of the children we serve.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support this measure. Passing this bill is not only a practical step for our schools but also a compassionate recognition of the teachers who make a difference in students’ lives every single day.

Mahalo nui loa for your consideration and for supporting Hawai‘i’s educators and students.

Respectfully,
Belinda