



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

March 2, 2026

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

PERSON TESTIFYING: Mitzie Higa, Licensing Specialist, on behalf of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB)

DATE: March 2, 2026

TIME 10:31 am

LOCATION: Conference Room 211 and Video Conference

TITLE OF BILL: SB 2875 J-1 Visa Program; Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board; Visiting International Educator Permit

POSITION: Opposes SB 2875

Chair Dela Cruz and Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) respectfully opposes SB2875, relating to education, which would require the HTSB to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned with the duration of the educator's J-1 visa program.

In the preamble of this bill, it states that the purpose is to expose Filipino children to Filipino educators, which, in turn, would inspire them to consider careers in education. This statement is conclusory and pigeonholes all ethnically Filipino children together, regardless of whether they have been born and raised in Hawai'i or in the Philippines.

The bill states that since the implementation of the J-1 Visa program, it has been a resounding success. The HTSB responds by questioning what is meant by the term "resounding success" as it applies to the increase in the number of internationally certified teachers currently employed in public schools statewide, as well as those set to arrive in 2026-2027. What are the measurable gains and improvements in the students' improved academic performance, and how is this attributed to the J-1 visa program instructors directly? This bill aims to increase students' productivity merely by increasing the number of teachers, qualified or not, in classrooms, rather than focusing on improving their intellectual development.

This bill incorrectly states that the State's existing rules limit the full potential of prospective international teachers participating in the J-1 visa program. The HTSB shall issue licenses, provided that the applicant meets the criteria set forth by law. Under the current policy, International applicants have applied for licenses and permits, and those who have met the requirements for licensure have been issued the appropriate licenses.

HTSB is tasked by law to establish licensing and certification standards that govern teacher licensing and certification in Hawai'i, ensuring that public school children are taught by teachers who are qualified to engage in the teaching profession without negatively impacting their pupils' educational process.

HTSB is only administratively attached to the Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE). The legislature intentionally separated HTSB from the HIDOE to ensure that the licensing body would not be the same department or entity as the employer, as this would pose an inherent conflict of interest. This bill deprives HTSB of its ability and autonomy to establish its own licensing and certification standards and instead mandates HTSB to lower its licensing requirements for internationally certified teachers.

HTSB notes that, while this bill was well-intentioned, it is not the answer to the problem. Part of the solution could be for individuals interested in teaching in our state to take their Praxis exams before they even come to the U.S., as Praxis is international and offers testing in their home countries. In fact, some individuals have started taking at least one Praxis test before they move here. The Praxis tests they struggle with most are the Praxis Core Reading and Writing tests, which are foundational skills aligned with our standards and taught in our schools. Currently, 34 J1 Visa holders have also been placed in classrooms that are outside their teaching license in their home country. For example, an individual might be licensed in their country in Secondary Mathematics, but in Hawai'i, they have been placed in a 2nd-grade elementary classroom. This is concerning for our students who need the foundational reading and writing skills. We are glad that HIDOE is now offering Praxis study support for these J-1 Visa holders, as they all need to take the Praxis Core, and the reading and writing tests are what they struggle with most. It has been reported that principals have also been reimbursing them for passed Praxis tests, but this is at the principal's discretion and depends on their Title II funding.

At the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) a few years back, there was a labor session and a resolution specifically addressing protections for those with J-1 visas. **They decided to add language to the NCSL resolution to protect J1 teachers from 3rd party companies offering J1 Visa holders these high-interest loans (up to 50% compounded interest loans).** These companies even charged J1 Visa holders a licensing fee even when states, such as ours, **have no licensing fee.** Other states have had major problems with this type of activity, before we even heard about it in Hawai'i, so these states have let us know. NCSL passed this resolution with those protections for J1 teachers. This is how our J1 visa holders should be protected. They need to be protected from these loan sharks.

Here are links to documents that explain more that were shared at NCSL. AFL-CIO [Use and Abuse of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Teacher Program — Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO](#) Note: Make sure you check out the articles they include citations as well at the bottom of this report. Here is also a report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) [Importing Educators: Causes and Consequences of International Teacher Recruitment](#) who is more aware of this problem as it hit them first. [Start on page 17 to see the fraud and the recruiting tactics that are being used.]

There is no licensing fee for all who apply for a license or permit in the State of Hawai'i, since we are now funded by the legislature for our operations. HTSB used to rely on licensing fees, but now we have ZERO licensing fees, since being funded by the legislature. While these foreign certified teachers have to pay for testing fees, they do not have to pay any licensing or permit fees, as we do not charge any.

Other states, like Alaska, do charge a licensing fee (About \$200), along with Nevada, and North Carolina.

It is HTSB's understanding that J-1 teachers are being paid as provisional license holders, despite only holding an Emergency Hire Permit. They may also be paid at a higher rate because of their years of teaching experience, but you would have to find out from their employer, HIDOE, for more information.

Any other profession requires international license holders to meet the licensure requirements of the profession in that state. This is true of professions such as physicians, pilots, attorneys, engineers, nurses, and mental health counselors, and the list goes on. They must demonstrate proficiency in the language and pass tests that verify their skills and knowledge meet local standards.

Teaching is a profession that should be held to the same standards. Our students deserve quality teachers.

This bill undermines HTSB's authority to determine licensing and certification standards for all teachers in the State of Hawai'i, thereby ensuring that children in public schools are provided with qualified teachers. HTSB is fully capable of licensing and issuing permits to teachers from in-state, out-of-state, and other countries, in accordance with the current licensing and permit laws outlined in Hawaii Revised Statutes §302A and Hawaii Administrative Rules Chapter 54.

Therefore, we humbly ask this committee to **oppose** this bill.



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

Date: 03/02/2026

Time: 10:31 AM

Location: CR 211 & Videoconference

Committee: WAM

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB2875, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator's J-1 visa program. Repeals 6/30/2031.

Department's Position:

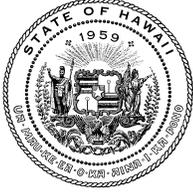
The Hawaii State Department of Education supports SB 2875, which would align Hawaii's emergency hire permit for international teachers with the full duration of the federal J-1 teacher exchange program. Federal law allows J-1 teachers to serve for up to five years, yet Hawaii's current three-year permit forces effective, authorized teachers out of classrooms early. Aligning state policy with the full J-1 term ensures students benefit from the complete period of service these educators are approved to provide.

Students benefit from stability when teachers can remain in classrooms without disruption, particularly in hard-to-staff schools. J-1 teachers are fully trained and licensed professionals in their home countries and are placed in high-need areas such as special education, secondary math and science, English language development, and rural schools. For many campuses, they serve as core instructional staff.

The Hawaii Administrative Rules §8-54-9. 6 "Limited duty special permit" allows for permits to extend past three years in both Career and Technical Education and Hawaiian Language Immersion fields. Providing a pathway for visiting international teachers recognizes the accomplishments of the teacher in their respective country, while recognizing the five-year federal guidelines of the J-1 system.

Allowing teachers to serve the full authorized term improves retention, strengthens workforce stability, and ensures Hawaii's students receive the greatest benefit from these experienced educators.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2875.



**STATE HEALTH PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO

JOSH GREEN, MD
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

JOHN C. (JACK) LEWIN, MD
ADMINISTRATOR

February 26, 2026

TO: SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair
Honorable Members

FROM: John C. (Jack) Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA, and Sr. Advisor to
Governor Josh Green, MD on Healthcare Innovation

RE: SB 2875 -- RELATING TO EDUCATION

HEARING: Wednesday, March 2, 2026 @ 10:31 am; Conference Room 211

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

Testimony:

SHPDA strongly supports SB 2875 with comments.

This bill is intended to strengthen Hawai'i's ability to use the BridgeUSA J-1 visa teacher program to address ongoing teacher shortages while also improving educator diversity and cultural exchange in our public schools. The bill does this by requiring the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to create an alternative "visiting international educator permit" that is aligned to the duration of a teacher's J-1 visa program, recognizing that current licensing requirements can be costly and difficult to complete within the typical three-year visa period. By better aligning the permit with the visa timeframe, the measure aims to improve teacher retention, maintain instructional continuity for students, and allow Hawai'i to benefit from the full period of service these qualified educators are eligible to provide

This bill would help classrooms and students by improving stability and continuity in hard-to-staff schools by reducing turnover and disruptions when visiting international teachers are otherwise forced out before they can complete Hawai'i's full licensure process. It also supports better student outcomes by strengthening educator diversity and representation, which the bill notes can help close achievement gaps and improve attendance and behavioral outcomes, while giving students more relatable role models in the classroom. Finally, by reducing costly and time-intensive testing barriers (often exceeding \$1,000) for already-qualified international educators, the measure promotes a more equitable pathway that can keep effective teachers in Hawai'i's public schools longer and maximize the benefit of their service.

SB 2875: testimony of SHPDA (2026), continued.

In closing, this bill is a practical, time-limited step that gives the State a clearer framework to support qualified visiting international educators and the schools that rely on them. By setting up a defined permit option with a sunset date, the bill allows Hawai'i to test and refine this approach while keeping accountability in place.

Thank you for hearing SB 2875.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

■ -- Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA

SB-2875

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 5:37:15 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/2/2026 10:31:00 AM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry OPPOSE

WHY, TO PREVENT OUR CHILDREN FROM BEING TRAUMATIZED BY ICE RAIDS -
WHITE HOUSE UNREGULATED

2875 SB RELATING TO EDUCATION.

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Monday, March 2, 2026 at 10:31 am
Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2875 - RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, Senator Hashimoto for my district, Senator DeCoite for Upcountry Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I am also an attorney licensed in the state of Hawaii for over 25 years and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui – The People in Action Maui. I am writing today in **strong support of SB 2875**, Relating to Education, which requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator's J-1 visa program.

Early in my career I worked on gender equity in STEM as a workforce development issue for many years. 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 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.

In my work I identified risks to our community presented by unnecessary barriers to recruiting and retaining teachers for our schools on Maui. One such barrier is lack of consistency between federal and state standards for visiting international educator permits for educators on the J-1 visa program. Senate Bill 2875 would help remedy this situation and improve the pathway for longer retention of teachers on the J-1 visa program by adding a new Section 302A-802 to the HRS requiring the Teacher Standards Board to adopt policies which would make it easier for foreign teachers to extend their visa status from three to five years. The federal J-1 program standards provide for a three year visa term that can be extended to five years if certain criteria are met. Senate Bill 2875 would require the Teacher Standards Board to fully implement the federal program and facilitate visa extensions from three to five years.

Senate Bill 2875 seeks to adopt and facilitate the federal standard that allows for J-1 visa extensions from three to five years, helping foreign teachers at our schools stay longer, reducing teacher turnover and building more integrated school communities with more experienced teachers. For this reason, **I respectfully request that you vote in support of SB 2875.**

Mahalo for supporting our schools and our valued J-1 visa teachers,

Christine Andrews, JD
Wailuku, Maui



COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

HEARING:
Monday, March 2, 2026 at 10:31 am
Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2875 - RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, Maui Senators Hashimoto and DeCoite, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Veronica Mendoza, Founding Executive Director of Roots Reborn and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui - *The People in Action Maui*. Roots Reborn **strongly supports SB 2875**, Relating to Education, which requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator's J-1 visa program.

Roots Reborn is a grassroots, multicultural immigrant-justice and disaster-response organization serving migrant and immigrant communities on Maui and beyond. Born out of the August 2023 wildfires, we immediately stepped in to move aid, navigate systems alongside families, and build the trusted relationships that still anchor our work today. What began as wildfire response has grown into essential infrastructure for immigrant communities facing overlapping crises—from recovery and housing instability to shifting federal policies, increased enforcement, and rising fear.

In our work we have identified risks to our community presented by unnecessary barriers, such as the current limitations for a visiting international educator permit for educators on the J-1 visa program. Senate Bill 2875 would add a new Section 302A-802 to the HRS requiring the Teacher Standards Board to adopt policies which would make it easier for foreign teachers to extend their visa status from three to five years. The federal J-1 program offers foreign teachers an opportunity to teach grades K - 12 in accredited schools, and federal standards provide for a three year visa term that can be extended to five years if certain criteria are met. Senate Bill 2875 would require the Teacher Standards Board to fully implement the federal program and facilitate visa extensions from three to five years.

Senate Bill 2875 seeks to adopt and facilitate the federal standard that allows for J-1 visa extensions from three to five years, helping foreign teachers at our schools stay longer, reducing turnover and building more integrated school communities. For this reason, Roots Reborn respectfully requests that you vote **in support of SB 2875**.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica Mendoza', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Veronica Mendoza
Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*
El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*