

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



ROY M. TAKUMI
CHAIRPERSON

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

House Committee on Education
Thursday, February 19, 2026
2:00 p.m.
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 309

Measure: House Bill 1559, Relating to Education

Purpose of Measure:

Prohibits a student from using a telecommunication device on school grounds during the instructional day, with certain exceptions. Requires a confiscated telecommunication device to be released only to the student's legal parent or guardian, who then has three months to retrieve the device or subject the device to forfeiture.

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

The Board of Education (Board) appreciates the Legislature's concern regarding cellphone use in our schools, and respectfully offers comments on House Bill 1559.

The Board has been keenly interested in this subject, and has been proactively working to consider the best approach to policy, gathering input from stakeholders and the community, meeting with Department of Education personnel and others to better understand policy efforts in this area, and studying various approaches within and outside of the Department and the state.

As a result of this work and after considering further input from the community at the Board's February 12th general business meeting, including through the Board's student representative and via public testimony, the Board has adopted a policy regarding student cell phone use in the schools. The policy is a unified approach that reflects students' developmental readiness and maturity and aligns with current Board policy

related to technology use and instruction. It will help establish clear expectations at each school level.

The policy is intended to balance the benefits to student learning and engagement with the challenges posed by unregulated use, which can lead to learning disruption and impact student well-being.

In setting minimum requirements and possible exceptions to those requirements, the Board aims to provide the Department and schools with the flexibility necessary to respond to each local school context and students' developmental readiness, while also acknowledging parents' concerns around their students' safety. It should be noted that nothing in the policy prohibits the Department from permitting schools to establish more restrictive rules and regulations around the use of cell phones by students.

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



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

Date: 02/19/2026

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: EDN

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB1559, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Prohibits a student from using a telecommunication device on school grounds during the instructional day, with certain exceptions. Requires a confiscated telecommunication device to be released only to the student's legal parent or guardian, who then has three months to retrieve the device or subject the device to forfeiture.

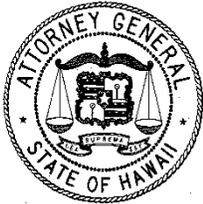
Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) agrees with the Legislature on the value of creating focused, safe, and high-achieving learning environments by reducing digital distractions as outlined in HB 1559, and offers comments on the bill.

On February 12, 2026, the Board of Education (Board) adopted a new statewide policy establishing consistent expectations for student cell phone use in public schools. This policy takes effect for the 2026–2027 school year.

The Department respectfully recommends that a statutory mandate is not needed at this time.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



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

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
H.B. NO. 1559, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

BEFORE THE:
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Thursday, February 19, 2026 **TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 309

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi or Randall M. Wat, Deputy Attorneys General

Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

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

The bill: (1) prohibits a student from using a telecommunication device on school grounds during the instructional day, with certain exceptions; and (2) requires a confiscated telecommunication device to be released only to the student's legal parent or guardian, who then has three months to retrieve the device or subject the device to forfeiture.

The Department is concerned that the exceptions set forth in new section 302A- (b)(1)–(3), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) (page 2, line 17, through page 3, line 6), may be too limited. Some students may require access to a telecommunication device as an accommodation pursuant to an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan, that may not fall within one of the exceptions (e.g., a student's IEP might require that the student use a telecommunication device when working with a speech-language pathologist). The policy should also account for accommodations required under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

To address this concern, the Department recommends revising proposed new section 302A- (b), HRS, by adding a paragraph, as follows: (1) delete "or" on page 3, line 3; (2) on page 3, line 6, replace the period with a semicolon and add "or"; and (3) add a new paragraph after paragraph (3), to read as follows:

- (4) When the device is required pursuant to a student's individualized education program or section 504 plan, or as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (title 42 United States Code, sections 12101 to 12213).

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



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Representative Justin Woodson, Chair; Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

HEARING DATE: Thursday, February 19, 2026

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

CONFERENCE ROOM: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE and Room 309

BILL: HB 1559, RELATING TO EDUCATION (Cell Phone/Telecommunication Policy)

TESTIFIER(S): Hawaii Department of Education Principals from all Complex Areas

POSITION: COMMENTS / SUPPORT INTENT

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

As principals representing every complex area across the state, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1559, which seeks to establish a uniform statewide policy for student telecommunication devices.

As school leaders, we share your commitment to creating focused, safe, and high-achieving learning environments. We recognize the growing body of national evidence—supported by recent implementations in states like Florida and Indiana—suggesting that reducing digital distractions can improve student mental well-being and academic focus. However, based on the "lessons learned" from these mainland implementations, we offer the following comments regarding the significant operational and implementation challenges:

1. Board of Education (BOE) Policy vs. Statutory Mandate

We strongly advocate that the specific mechanics of cell phone management be handled via Board of Education (BOE) Policy rather than state statute. While we support the intent of a unified stance, a statutory mandate acts as a "blunt instrument" that inhibits the adaptability necessary to "operationalize" rules across diverse campuses.

School environments, technology, and student needs evolve rapidly; maintaining policy at the BOE level ensures the HIDOE can make agile adjustments without requiring legislative intervention. Furthermore, the BOE is already in the process of developing a policy tailored to Hawaii's unique community feedback. Implementing HB 1559 now would create a dual mandate, leading to conflicting requirements and undermining the "local buy-in" that states like California have found essential for successful implementation.



2. Implementation & Operational Concerns

Specifically, we ask the committee to consider the practical impact of the following sections:

- **Instructional Day (Section 2h):** While Florida's statewide ban includes instructional time, many districts found that total bans during lunch and recess in high schools created unnecessary friction. At the high school level, these windows are vital for students to coordinate work schedules and family logistics. More importantly, it denies us the opportunity to teach "ethical use" in a supervised setting before students enter adulthood where no such restrictions exist.
- **Mandatory Confiscation & Liability (Section 2c, d, f):** Requiring administrators to seize and secure devices creates a high-stakes liability chain. In Indiana, schools reported that the administrative burden of cataloging and storing devices diverted significant time from instructional leadership. In a school of 2,000 students, managing the retrieval of high-value electronics solely to parents is a massive clerical undertaking that creates an adversarial relationship between the front office and families.
- **The 90-Day Forfeiture (Section 2e):** The requirement to store unclaimed devices for three months and provide three separate notifications is a significant clerical mandate. We recommend a more streamlined process for device retrieval to avoid schools becoming long-term storage facilities for high-value electronics.

3. Mental Health and Social Integration

While we support the "bell-to-bell" intent to bring "Aloha" back to social interactions, research from the first year of Florida's HB 225 suggests that bans are most effective when paired with school-led social-emotional programs, rather than just punitive confiscation measures.

Conclusion: The HIPAC Principals stand ready to support a "Phone-Free" environment. However, for this to be sustainable, the policy must be flexible enough to be managed at the school level without overwhelming the administrative capacity of our campuses. We believe the BOE is the appropriate venue for this policy, and therefore, we respectfully recommend that a statutory law is not necessary at this time.

Mahalo for your leadership and for considering the voices of Hawaii's school principals.

Respectfully,

The Hawaii Department of Education Principals Advisory Council (HIPAC)



Mavis Tasaka, Principal, Dole Middle School, representing Farrington-Kaiser-Kalani

Sean Wong, Principal, Roosevelt High School, representing Kaimuki-McKinley-Roosevelt

Michael Jose, Principal, Aiea Intermediate School, representing Aiea-Moanalua-Radford

Kendrick Kakazu, Principal, Maj. S. Wheeler ES, representing Leilehua-Mililani-Waiialua

Bryan Rankie, Principal, Ho'okele ES, representing Campbell-Kapolei

Garrett Arakawa, Principal, Momilani ES, representing Pearl City-Waipahu

Rebecca K. Gebreyesus, Principal, Leihōkū ES representing Nanakuli-Waianae

Danny Garcia, Principal, He'eia ES, representing Castle-Kahuku

Allyson Doherty, Principal, Kailua ES, representing Kailua-Kalaheo

Kimberly Castillo, Principal, Chiefess Kapiolani ES, representing Hilo-Waiakea

Kim Williamson, Principal, Pāhoa High & Inter, representing Kau-Keeau-Pahoa

Janice Blaber, Kealakehe Inter, representing Honokaa-Kealakehe-Kohala-Konawaena

Gary Kanamori, Pukalani ES, representing Baldwin-Kekaulike-Kulanihakoī-Maui

Richard Carosso, Lahainaluna HS, representing Hana-Lahainaluna-Lanai-Molokai

Joseph Hicks, Kekaha ES, representing Kapaa-Kauai-Waimea

HB-1559

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 5:32:13 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

1559 HB RELATING TO EDUCATION.

February 19, 2026

**Testimony in Opposition to HB1559
RELATING TO EDUCATION**

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee,

My name is Luke Nohea Gee, and I am an 11th grader from Kealakehe High School. I am writing in opposition to bill HB1559, which would establish a uniform statewide policy restricting student use of telecommunication devices during the instructional day in public schools. I currently cannot support HB1559 in its current form.

There is no question that cell phones are a major distraction in classrooms. Many students use their phones during class instead of paying attention and learning from the instructor. As a student, I can say that many of my classmates and I are guilty of this.

However, as written, HB1559 is overly restrictive in its implementation. The definition of "instructional day" includes lunch, recess, and transitions, which removes flexibility for schools to manage device use outside of class time. Schools should be allowed discretion to regulate device use during non-instructional time in ways that reflect their campus culture and needs.

Additionally, the bill's confiscation-specific policy creates unintentional hardships for families and students. For working families without flexible schedules or reliable transportation, and for students without a responsible guardian, this creates hardships for both students and administrators.

I respectfully recommend the following amendments, aligning with the [Board of Education's Proposed Cellphone Policy Draft](#).

- Allows schools to exercise discretion in the use of telecommunication devices outside instructional time, including but not limited to lunch, recess, and before- or after-school hours.
- Allows schools to exercise discretion for the use of telecommunication devices as learning tools.
- Release a confiscated device to its original owner if the parent/guardian has not retrieved it within 30 days.

Without proper amendments, I cannot support this bill. HB1559 can protect education and keep students focused in classes while remaining practical and realistic with its implementation.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB1559.

Luke Gee

HB-1559

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 3:11:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Pcola_Davis	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha

The February Board of Education meeting voted and approved the "Cell Phone" usage policy. Much appreciation to the board and department working together to develop a well thought out policy

HB-1559

Submitted on: 2/19/2026 9:14:40 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexx Meas	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Committee on Education and Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs,

My name is Alexx Meas, and I am a sophomore at Kalāheo High School. I respectfully oppose HB1559 as it is written and request that it be amended.

I understand that the actions of this bill is to reduce distractions during the school day. However, I believe this bill does not fully consider students who rely on their phones for important reasons beyond social use. Many students use their phones to manage medical conditions such as diabetes or other health concerns. Others depend on accessibility features on their phones to support learning disabilities and communication needs.

From my personal experience, I receive notifications throughout the day from my parents to make sure I'm safe and find out my transportation or after-school activities. If I stay late on campus for a test, tutoring, or club activity, would I still be prohibited from using my phone? That raises concerns about student safety and communication with families.

Phones are just part of everyday life now, especially in school. A lot of students don't use them to cheat or waste time, we use them to check assignments, look things up when we're confused, work on group projects, or stay organized. I understand that phones can be distracting, but a complete ban with strict rules feels too extreme. I believe there should be clearer guidelines that allow responsible use instead of taking them away entirely.

I respectfully ask the Committee and the bill's introducers Representatives Matayoshi, Amato, Evslin, Hussey, Ilagan, Kila, Kusch, Lowen, Marten, Olds, Perruso, PoePoe, and Tarnas, to consider amendments that allow structured, responsible use rather than a total ban.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Alexx Meas

Sophomore, Kalāheo High School

HB-1559

Submitted on: 2/19/2026 1:10:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Olivia Heltsley	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Education Chair Justin H Woodson and Vice Chair La Chica Trish,

My name is Olivia Heltsley, and I am a 10th grade student at Kalaheo High School. I am writing in respectful opposition towards HB1559.

I understand that phones can definitely be distracting. I see it everyday in my classes. However, I don't think a complete statewide ban during school hours is the right solution. As students, we're still learning how to manage our time and responsibilities, and part of that includes learning how to use technology appropriately and not just having it taken away from us.

Phones are not just for social media. In many of my classes here at Kalaheo, we use our phones to check assignments, look up information, take pictures about notes, and communicate with other classmates about group projects. Banning them completely, even with exceptions, could make things harder and more confusing for both teachers and students in means of reaching out and doing assignments.

I also wanna mention safety. Living in Hawaii, we know that emergencies can happen, whether it's a natural disaster or something happening on campus. Being able to quickly text a parent we're okay or reach out to them for help can make a huge difference in how safe we feel. Even if schools have official systems, having personal communication gives students and families peace of mind.

Another concern I have is that this bill takes away flexibility from individual schools. Every school is different, what works at one school might not work at another. Schools should be able to create their own policies based on what their students and teachers actually need instead of following one statewide rule.

Instead of banning phones starting in the 2027-2028 school year, I think we should focus on teaching students how to use their phones responsibly. Phones are a part of our generation and we're going to use technology in college and our future careers. Schools should help us learn how to manage it properly, not avoid it completely.

I respectfully ask you to reconsider HB1559 and think about solutions that teach responsibility instead of enforcing a full ban. Thank you for listening to my perspective as a student.

Olivia Heltsley