

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



MAKALAPUA ALENCASTRE, ED. D.
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1100, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

FOR: HB 1561 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS
DATE: February 10, 2026
TIME: 2:15 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Education
ROOM: Conference Room 309 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

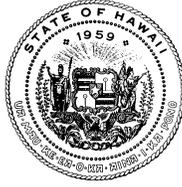
Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB 1561** which would:

1. Require public charter schools that participates in the National School Lunch Program to provide free school meals to students whose family income is no more than three hundred percent of the federal poverty level;
2. Requires the Commission to adopt rules or policies governing the collection of funds for student meal accounts with a negative fund balance, provided that the rules or policies shall not prohibit the feeding of a student; and
3. Appropriates funds for fiscal year 2026-2027 for meal subsidies for students at public charter schools whose family income is no more than three hundred percent of the federal poverty level.

The Commission is grateful to the Legislature and this committee for considering and moving this important legislation forward. Public charter schools serve many high need and vulnerable students who depend on school meals as their primary source of food. This measure greatly assists in ensuring that public charter schools have the means and support to provide these vital meals to students.

The Commission is committed to work with the Legislature and our public charter schools in implementing the requirements of this important measure. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
P.O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony COMMENTING on H.B. 1561
RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS**

REPRESENTATIVE JUSTIN H. WOODSON, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Hearing Date: February 10, 2026, 2:15 PM Room Number: Conference Room 309
and Videoconference

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health (DOH) defers to the State Public School Charter
2 Commission for fiscal implications of implementation.

3 **Department Position:** The DOH offers comments on the public health impacts of House Bill 1561
4 (H.B. 1561) which requires and appropriates funds for public charter schools participating in the
5 National School Lunch Program to provide free school meals to all students whose family
6 income is no more than 300% of the federal poverty level, regardless of a student's eligibility
7 for participation in the federal school meals program.

8 **Department Testimony:** Proper and adequate nutrition is essential for student focus,
9 classroom engagement, and academic success. Students who are food insecure and do not
10 have access to consistent, healthy meals are at increased risk for stress, anxiety and depression,
11 and chronic diseases. Providing universal free school meals enhances the nutritional intake of
12 students and promotes equitable access to the opportunity to learn and engage in school.

13 The National School Lunch program is vital but currently fails to reach every food
14 insecure child in need in Hawaii. One in three families in Hawaii is food insecure, and one in five
15 households had members who were hungry but did not eat because there was not enough

1 money for food.¹ Fifty percent (50%) of households in Hawaii with children earn below the
2 Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) Threshold and cannot afford the basics
3 needed to live and work in the modern economy.² Many students from ALICE households start
4 their schooldays hungry and nearly half (46%) of ALICE households struggle with consistent
5 food access.² Additionally, students themselves report going hungry because there was not
6 enough food in their home.³

7 The Department of Education’s (DOE) eligibility threshold for participation in the free
8 school meal program is 300% of the federal poverty level (\$113,000 for a family of four),
9 starting in the 2026-2027 school year. H.B. 1561 aligns public charter schools’ policies with the
10 DOE policy and ensures a greater number of children in need receive free school meals.

11 While a universal free school meal policy is ideal, providing expanded eligibility for free
12 school meals ensures that Hawaii’s keiki have increased access to healthy, nutritious meals and
13 drastically reduces the administrative burden on both families and schools caused by the
14 current requirement to demonstrate income and need.

15 Hawaii can help address the alarming food insecurity in our communities by expanding
16 eligibility for free school meals and ensuring our keiki have the support and access they need to
17 healthy, nutritious meals to enhance their health, well-being, and academic success across our
18 state.

19 **Offered Amendments:** None

20 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

¹ The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai’i 2024-2025. Hawai’i Foodbank. Accessed January 26, 2026.

[HawaiiFoodbank FoodInsecurityReport 2025-25.pdf](#)

² ALICE in Hawai’i: 2024 Facts and Figures. Aloha United Way. Accessed January 26, 2026.

https://www.auw.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024_ALICE-Report_Facts-and-Figures_v-25-01-09.pdf

³ Hawaii State Departments of Education and Health. Hawaii Health Data Warehouse, Hawaii School Health Survey: Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Nutrition/Health - went hungry, past 30 days by Year, 2023. Published September 20, 2024. Accessed January 26, 2026.



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96819
Tel: (808) 833-2711 • Fax: (808) 839-7106 • Web: www.hsta.org

Osa Tui, Jr.
President

Logan Okita
Vice President

Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Andrea Eshelman
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: HB 1561 – Relating to School Meals

Position: Support

Hearing: Tuesday, February 10, 2026, 2:15 pm, Room 309

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

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) **strongly supports** H.B. 1561, which requires public charter schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to provide free school meals to students whose family income is no more than 300% of the federal poverty level. This measure ensures that our keiki in charter schools have the same access to free meals recently established for public school students through the passage of S.B. 1300. By providing both breakfast and lunch, this bill directly addresses food insecurity and ensures that no student is denied a meal due to an inability to pay.

HSTA believes that student health and academic achievement are deeply intertwined, and the proposed appropriation is a vital investment in our school communities. Aligning the eligibility requirements for charter school students creates essential equity across Hawai'i's public education system. We urge the committee to pass this bill to ensure every public school student has the nourishment required to focus and succeed.

Mahalo.



**Parents And
Children Together**

**BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS
THAT MATTER MOST**

ParentsAndChildrenTogether.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1561 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

TO: Chair Woodson, Vice-Chair La Chica, & Members,
House Committee on Education

FROM: Trisha Kajimura, Vice-President of Strategy and External Affairs

DATE: February 10, 2026 at 2:15 PM

Parents and Children Together (PACT) supports HB 1561 Relating to School Meals, which appropriates funds for meal subsidies for students at public charter schools whose family income is no more than three hundred percent of the federal poverty level. PACT's support for this measure is two-fold:

1. In 2025, PACT founded Parkway Village Preschool, the first all Pre-K Charter School in Hawaii.
2. As a step closer to universal free meals for all public school students. Universal free meals would not only improve nutrition, academic performance and reduce food insecurity for students whose families are facing economic strain or hardship but also create a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Parkway Village Preschool is located in Kapolei and serves 80 three- and four-year-old students with high-quality early childhood education committed to ensuring that every child's unique potential is recognized and encouraged with play-based experiential learning that nurtures social, emotional and cognitive growth. Parkway Village Preschool's Governing Board sought to incorporate free meals into the school's offerings but was unable to fit it within the school's budget. In partnership with the board, PACT has been seeking grant funding to cover the cost of meals. Given that charter schools are public schools, charter school students should receive the same meal subsidies as Department of Education students.

Founded in 1968, PACT is a statewide community-based organization providing a wide array of innovative and educational social services to families in need. Assisting more than 15,000 people across the state annually, we help identify, address, and successfully resolve challenges through our 20 programs. Among our services are early education programs, domestic violence prevention and intervention programs, child abuse prevention and intervention programs, childhood sexual abuse supportive group services, child and adolescent behavioral health programs, sex trafficking intervention, poverty prevention and community building programs.

Through our programs, we are seeing the rise in food insecurity that our local families face. Even working families who have not previously needed help with food have started to need it. We saw this increase start during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and increase through the rise of inflation and the 2023 Maui wildfire crisis. In response, we have increased direct food and financial assistance to program participants in the Kalihi and Maui communities. Additionally, we support survivors of domestic violence through the financial impact of keeping their families safe, which often includes leaving their

abusive financial provider partner. Many of the survivors we serve struggle through houselessness and loss of income. Increased access to food assistance such as school meals would help these families achieve and/or maintain basic stability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact me at (808) 847-3285 or tkajimura@pacthawaii.org if you have any questions.





HOUSE BILL 1561, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

FEBRUARY 10, 2026 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 1561, relating to school meals, which beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, requires public charter schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to provide free meals to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

This bill closes a critical gap in equity between Hawai'i's traditional public schools and charter schools, ensuring that all students, regardless of school type, have reliable access to nutritious meals, which is foundational to learning and school success. **The measure builds on last year's historic passage of Act 139—which expanded free school meals to those earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty limit by the 2026-2027 school year—by including charter school students and families within the program.**

In Hawai'i, public charter schools serve a diverse body of students and many of them are families experiencing economic hardship. According to reporting on Hawai'i charter schools and school nutrition, at least 40 percent of students attending Hawai'i charter schools qualify for free or reduced-price lunch under federal eligibility standards, meaning a large portion of charter students face food insecurity risks comparable to their peers in traditional public schools.

Despite this clear need, many charter schools—many of which cater to underserved, remote or Native Hawaiian communities—struggle to provide meals at no cost to all eligible students. Without dedicated state funding support, some Hawai'i charter school principals must find creative solutions to serve lunches for students themselves because the financial and logistical costs of running meal programs can be onerous, particularly for smaller schools lacking cafeteria facilities or district infrastructure.

Research shows that consistent access to nutritious meals supports students' ability to learn, concentrate, and remain engaged in school. National studies find that when students receive reliable breakfasts and lunches at school, they are more likely to attend regularly, have better cognitive functioning, and demonstrate improved academic outcomes compared with students who experience hunger or inconsistent meal access. For example, evaluations of universal free school meal programs have shown benefits including increased meal participation, reduced stigma that can occur with means-tested meals, and better overall food security for students, all of which correlate with more positive classroom behavior and academic engagement.

In Hawai'i, broader hunger statistics underscore the need for expanded meal access: according to advocacy reporting and statewide data, nearly one in three households struggle with food insecurity, and consistent healthy meals are deeply connected to students' ability to focus, reduce anxiety, and remain present in the classroom. This bill would align charter schools with the spirit and benefits of federal meal programs that already support traditional public schools and help normalize universal access to school nutrition for students regardless of income.

Ensuring that charter schools can offer free meals to eligible students with state support would eliminate disparities that can disadvantage charter students academically and socially simply because of the school structures they attend. It would help reduce stigma around meal participation, increase attendance and readiness to learn, and support healthier, more equitable educational environments across Hawai'i.

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com · 808-679-7454



HIPHI Board

May Okihiro, MD, MS
Chair

*John A. Burns School of Medicine,
Department of Pediatrics*

Jennifer José Lo, MD
Vice Chair

Hawai'i Health Partners

Titimaea Ta'ase, JD
Secretary
Taase Law Office

Jonathan Ching
Kaiser Permanente

Tammy Ho
The Queen's Medical Center

Carissa Holley, MEd
Hale Makua Health Services

Joyce Lee-Ibarra, MS
JLI Consulting

Misty Pacheco, DrPH
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

Dina Shek, JD
*Medical-Legal Partnership
For Children in Hawai'i*

JoAnn Tsark, MPH
*John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native
Hawaiian Research Office*

Danette Wong Tomiyasu, MBA
*Retired, Hawai'i State Department of
Health*

HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &
Evaluation

Community Health
Worker Initiatives

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Climate Change and Health
Working Group

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Immunization Coalition

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: February 9, 2026

To: Rep. Justin Woodson, Chair
Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Education

RE: Support for HB 1561, Relating to School Meals

Hrg: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 at 2:15 PM, Conference Room 309

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Statewide Coalition² are in **support of HB 1561**, which expands free school meals to public charter schools participating in the National School Lunch Program for families earning up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.

One in three families in Hawai'i face food insecurity, leaving many students to go hungry throughout the school day. One in ten keiki in Hawai'i skip meals due to food insecurity. Hawai'i can help more students to eat by increasing income limits for free school meal eligibility.

Hunger is a Roadblock to a Strong Education

Many students who are food insecure are not eligible for free school meals. These students need help but are unable to get it because our program isn't inclusive enough.

Hungry students can't learn. Providing healthy nutrition to our students will ensure they have the resources they need to thrive. If we value education, it's important we decrease the number of students who face hunger every day.

Hungry Students Face Increased Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.³ By failing to ensure they have access to meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success.⁴

¹ Hawai'i Public Health Institute's mission is to advance health and wellness for the people and islands of Hawai'i. We do this through expanding our understanding of what creates health of people and place, fostering partnerships, and cultivating programs to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

² The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.

³"[Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress](#)". Candice A. Meyers.

⁴[Universal School Meals and Associations with Student Participation, Attendance, Academic Performance, Diet Quality, Food Security, and Body Mass Index: A Systematic Review](#)



Reducing Stigma Based on Economic Status

Lastly, increasing free school meals access can reduce the stigma that students feel when participating in free school meals programs.⁵ Economic situations should not play a factor in how students socialize with one another, but the existing program creates these dynamics. Removing economic status from a student's daily experience can create a more welcoming and comfortable environment for the entire student body.

Improved Academic Achievement

Hungry students can't learn. Providing healthy nutrition to our students will ensure they have the resources they need to thrive. Studies have shown that free school meal programs lead to improved student performance.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of expanding free school meals for charter school students..

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nate Hix". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

⁵ [Stop the shame and the hunger: the need for school meal program reform.](#)



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for HB 1561 – Relating to School Meals
House Committee on Education
Tuesday, February 10, 2026 at 2:15PM

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support of HB 1561**, which requires public charter schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to provide free meals to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

We are grateful to the legislature for passing legislation last session to expand the income limit for free meals to public school students under Act 139. However, we firmly believe that **this expansion should apply to all Hawai'i public school students, regardless of school type**. The proportion of students in public charter schools considered economically disadvantaged is on par with that of HIDOE schools,¹ yet these families still need to make under \$47,000 per year to qualify for this benefit.² Furthermore, **public charter schools serve the largest proportion of Native Hawaiian students in the public school system**.³ This bill would ensure these students receive equal treatment under Hawai'i's laws.

It is important to note that currently, only five of the 26 public charter schools enrolled in NSLP are not participating in the *Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)*, a federal designation that allows schools to provide free meals to all students based on a the percentage of students who are *directly certified* through means-testing.⁴ While we wholeheartedly support extending free meals to these five non-CEP charter schools, **the way this bill is currently written, it would not provide any assistance to the other 21 NSLP charter schools, many of whom are covering the additional gap cost to provide free meals out of their own funding**.

¹ State Public Charter School Commission, *2024–2025 Annual Report*, Hawai'i State Public Charter School Commission, 2025, p. 45. <https://www.chartercommission.hawaii.gov/images/Reports/24-25-Annual-Report-Final-reduced.pdf>.

² Hawai'i State Department of Education, "Free and Reduced Price Meals Program," 2025. <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Food Research & Action Center, "Community Eligibility (CEP) Database," *Food Research & Action Center*, June 2025. <https://www.frac.org/research/resource-library/community-eligibility-cep-database>.

For this reason, we would like to encourage the committee to consider amending HB 1561 by adding two additional clauses under HRS §302D:

(b) Going forward, this income limit expansion shall be aligned to match that of public schools, in accordance with HRS §302A-404.

(c) The State shall cover any remaining costs for Charter schools enrolled in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) that fall below 62.5 percent Identified Student Percentage (ISP) (or the percentage needed to achieve the full federal reimbursement rate, subject to the multiplier required by 7 CFR 245.9(f)(4)(vi)).

The first clause intends to ensure that public charter schools will receive the same extended eligibility as other HIDOE schools going forward; the second clause addresses the gap faced by schools enrolled in CEP, and avoids the potential unintended consequence of disincentivizing enrollment.

In case it is of interest, we have put together some cost estimates based on possible scenarios of this bill. The cost estimates for these two proposals are as follows:

	<i>Estimated cost</i>
HB1561 (non-CEP schools only - CURRENT BILL VERSION)	\$206,526
HB1561 w/ suggested amendments (assumes \$1 to CEP schools)	\$616,026
HB1561 w/ suggested amendments (assumes \$1.65 to CEP schools)	\$882,202

Thank you for considering our testimony.



2026 Network Members

Aloha Harvest
Aloha United Way
Chef Hui
City and County of Honolulu
County of Hawai'i
Hawai'i Alliance for
Progressive Action (HAPA)
Hawai'i Appleseed
Hawai'i Children's Action
Network
Hawai'i Dept. of Agriculture
Hawai'i Dept. of Health
Hawai'i Food Bank
Hawai'i Food Bank - Kaua'i
Branch
Hawai'i Good Food Alliance
Hawai'i Public Health Institute
Kōkua Kalihi Valley
Lanakila Pacific
Mālama Kaua'i
Maui Department of
Agriculture
Maui Food Bank
Parents and Children Together
Supersistence
The Food Basket
The Pantry, by Feeding Hawai'i
Together
Wai'anae Coast
Comprehensive Health Center

hawaiihungeraction.org

House Education Committee

Tuesday, February 10, 2026 at 2:15PM

RE: Support for HB 1561, Relating to School Meals

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

The Hawai'i Hunger Action Network, a coalition of more than twenty local organizations with the mission to advocate for food security for Hawai'i households, would like to express **strong support** for HB 1561 which would expand free school meals to charter schools for families whose income is under 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

All Hawaii students, regardless of school type, should have equal access to nutritious school meals. Currently, Hawai'i's costs of living require that a family of 4 makes over \$107,000 to simply survive. This expansion would support ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) households, who often earn too much to qualify for free meals but struggle to afford the rising cost of living in Hawai'i.

Additionally, free school meals are proven to improve academic performance in other states by ensuring children receive proper nutrition necessary for healthy development and learning.¹ In Hawai'i, where 34 percent of children are reported to experience food insecurity, free school meals are not just beneficial—they are essential to students' health, learning, and well-being.²

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of this important legislation because keiki cannot learn when they are hungry.

With aloha,
Hawai'i Hunger Action Network membership

¹ Amy E. Schwartz & Michah W. Rothbart, "Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance," Maxwell School Center for Policy Research, July 2019.

https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/working-papers/wp-203-let-them-eat-lunch.pdf?sfvrsn=efae783d_8

² Hawai'i Foodbank, "[The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i](#)," 2025.



1050 Bishop St. PMB 235 |
Honolulu, HI 96813
P: 808-533-1292 | e:
info@hawaiiifood.com

Executive Officers

Kit Okimoto, Okimoto Corp., *Chair*
Jayson Watts, Mahi Pono, *Vice Chair*
Jill Tamura, Tamura Super Market, *Secretary/Treas.*
Lauren Zirbel, HFIA, *President and Executive Director*
Paul Kosasa, ABC Stores, *Advisor*
Toby Taniguchi, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*
Joe Carter, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, Odom, *Advisor*
Eddie Asato, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*
Gary Okimoto, Safeway, *Advisor*
Maile Miyashiro, C&S Wholesale, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Education
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 10, 2026
TIME: 2:15pm

RE: HB1561 Relating to School Meals
Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of free school meals for all keiki and we hope the Committee will pass legislation to make that a reality.

As the State moves towards that goal we support expanding the range of students who have access to free school meals to include students at public charter schools whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level, regardless of a student's eligibility for participation in the federal school meals program. This measure is a step in the right direction and we encourage the Committee to pass it, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

To: House Committee on Education
Re: **HB1561 – Relating to School Meals**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
February 10, 2026, 2:15 PM

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of HB1561**. This bill would require public charter schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to provide free meals to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level, beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, and appropriates funds.

Hawai'i public schools, including over two dozen charter schools, provide students with nutritious meals through the federal National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.¹ The federal income limit for free school meals is 130% of the federal poverty level and for reduced-price meals is 185% of the federal poverty level.

Many families who have incomes above the cutoff still can't make ends meet. For example, a family of four that makes \$70,000 per year is above the 185% eligibility limit,² while the ALICE household survival budget to afford the "bare-minimum costs of basic necessities" for that same family is nearly \$108,000.³ If that family pays full price for two students eating breakfast and lunch at school, it would cost them about \$1,300 per year for those meals.

Last session, you and your colleagues expanded free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch, and next school year it will be further expanded to students whose family income is up to 300% of the federal poverty level,⁴ which is just about the ALICE income level.

This bill would extend this free school meal coverage to charter schools, ensuring public school students — regardless of school type — have equal access to this basic nutritional support.

Research shows that well-nourished students have higher cognitive performance, improved attention spans, and better test scores. Free meals reduce stress on families, increase school attendance, and help students focus on learning instead of hunger during the school day.⁵ This bill would strengthen our educational system by investing in our children's most basic needs so they are ready to learn and thrive.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please pass this bill.

Sincerely,

Nicole Woo
Director of Research and Economic Policy

¹ <https://hcnp.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/October-Data-2026-SY25-26.pdf>

²

<https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

³ <https://www.auw.org/about/alice-initiative/alice-reports/>

⁴ https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/archives/measure_indiv_Archives.aspx?billtype=SB&billnumber=1300&year=2025

⁵ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 10:40:51 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sonia Blackiston	Hawaii Youth Services Network	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson and Vice Chair La Chica,

Hawai'i Youth Services Network supports HB 1561 which would ensure that all public charter school youth have access to free meals if their family income is no more than 300 percent of the federal poverty level. All youth deserve to opportunity to focus on learning and ensuring youth are fed supports their ability to focus on their education.

Sincerely,

Sonia Blackiston, Executive Director, HYSN



9 February, 2026

To: Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and Members of the House Committee on Education

Subject: HB1561, Relating to School Meals

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

Hawai'i Food+ Policy **strongly supports HB 1561**, which establishes a state-funded mandate for public charter schools to provide free breakfast and lunch to students at or below 300% of the federal poverty level beginning in 2026. This legislation ensures that "school meals" are defined as both morning and midday nutrition, provided to eligible students regardless of their participation in federal programs.²

Technical data highlights the necessity of this intervention, as USDA Thrifty Food Plan costs are 52% higher in Honolulu than on the U.S. mainland, leading 44% of Hawaii households to report difficulty affording balanced meals³. With 21% of local households experiencing very low food security where food intake is actively reduced due to financial lack. This bill directly targets the extreme economic volatility of Hawaii's food environment.³

Evidence from a survey by the Nutrition Policy Institute Universal (NPI) found that similar programs implemented in California showed significant benefits, including a 46% drop in student stigma around unpaid meal charges and increased graduation rates in 77.6% of observed counties.¹ Crucially, HB 1561 provides a legal safeguard prohibiting the denial of a meal based on an inability to pay, while protecting existing federal revenue streams through a specific modification clause for the governor.²

Extending free school meals to public charter schools reflects a shared commitment to supporting all students and addressing food insecurity statewide

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo,
Brandon Kinard & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

[1] Fenn, C. (2024, June 28). *Nourishing young minds: The effect of access to free school lunches on student achievement*. UC Office of the President: Student Policy Research Papers. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6sb744x4>

[2] H.B. 1561, 33rd Leg., Reg. Sess. (Hawaii 2026).

[3] Hawaii Foodbank. (2025). *Food (in)security of households in Hawai'i between mid-2024 and mid-2025*.

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 12:46:16 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan B Roberts Emery	Green Party of Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Susan RobertsEmery, as Co Chair of the Green Party of Hawai'i , we would like to offer our support for HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai'i's public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat. It is time to expand this safety net to those families who have children enrolled in public charter schools.

Times are tough right now for families in Hawai'i. We are all being squeezed emotionally and financially. This bill can help reduce some of the stress on parents of public charter school children.

Green Party of Hawai'i asks that you pass HB1561.

Our best to you,

Susan RobertsEmery

Green Party of Hawai'i

Paauilo

Date: February 10, 2026

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: House Bill 1561, Relating to School Meals

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) is a statewide cross-sector collaborative designed to improve the system of care for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. ECAS partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

ECAS strongly supports House Bill 1561 which would require public charter schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to provide free meals to students whose family income is no more than three hundred percent of the federal poverty level.

ECAS recognizes the economic situation that many families in our community face each day. It is expensive to live, work, and raise a family in this state, and this results in numerous families living at or below the federal poverty level. Furthermore, these economic factors often lead to food insecurity that affects countless local families and their children.

Moreover, we would like to particularly emphasize that the cost of providing these meals is vastly outweighed by the impact it could have on keiki in our schools. A wealth of research into school meal programs has continued to show that access to free meals has a marked impact on student test scores. If we are committed to providing our keiki with the best educational opportunities possible, supplementing their school day with free, nutritious meals is an absolute necessity.

For these reasons, ECAS strongly supports House Bill 1561.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony.



House Committee on Education

Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA) **Strongly Supports: HB1561**

Tuesday, February 10, 2025 at: 2:15pm.; Conference Room 309

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

HAPA strongly supports HB1561 which, beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to every student enrolled in a public charter school whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. HB1561 also stipulates that no student shall be denied a meal solely for failure to pay for the meal.

Last year, Act 139, SLH 2025 expanded free school meal coverage to public schools within the Hawai'i Department of Education for those students whose families qualify under the 300% of the federal poverty designation. HB1561 seeks to expand the same coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawaii report food insecurity, two-thirds of these families experiencing the most extreme version of this in the form of reducing food intake, skipping meals, or going whole days without eating,¹ and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity². Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals³. Implementing free school meal coverage for these families for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.⁴ This large assistance gap leaves behind many ALICE families who are struggling to make ends meet. As a result, countless students go hungry throughout the school day, impacting their health, well-being, and ability to learn.

¹ <https://hawaiifoodbank.org/food-insecurity/>

² <https://www.auw.org/auw-alice-report-2024/>

³ <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/APECIII-Vol1.pdf>

⁴ "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census.
<https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702&g=040XX00US15>



Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai'i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai'i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch" programs, and also removes a huge burden from parents who will no longer have to worry about making sure their children are able to eat while at school. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Please support HB1561 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Frederick', is written in a cursive style.

Anne Frederick
Executive Director

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 6:33:38 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Roxanne	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chairs and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support HB 1561 and appreciate the effort to expand access to free school meals for public charter school students. As someone who cares deeply about the well-being of keiki and families in Hawai‘i, I see how food insecurity and the high cost of living affect households across our communities.

The federal poverty guidelines do not reflect Hawai‘i’s unique costs, and many families who work hard and earn just above eligibility limits still struggle to afford groceries. No child should be distracted in school because they are hungry, and no parent should have to worry about whether their child will have enough to eat during the school day.

I respectfully encourage the Committee to consider how opportunities to expand free or reduced-cost meals for all public school students could further support students’ health, learning, and dignity. Providing meals at school helps to support academic success and ensures that all keiki have the nourishment they need to thrive.

Mahalo for your time and for your commitment to Hawai‘i’s students and families.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 11:57:00 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

This is a kind and common sense measure that will directly help students. Please pass,

Judith White, Kapaa

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 12:07:44 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pam Murphy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Pamela Murphy, Kilauea, Kauai

[Submit Testimony](#)

Support [SB2334](#) : Support Healthy Soils

What Does This Bill Do?

Creates a funding mechanism to support a healthy soils program and other incentives for agricultural conservation programs by requiring the payment of an Agricultural Land Conversion Fee by the buyer or lessee in a transaction for any agricultural land that will be converted from agricultural production for certain purposes. Requires all state lands used in the commercial production of agricultural commodities, including any lands under lease agreements with the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, to use an established metric to advance the adoption of conservation practices.

Why Is This Important? Sample Testimony:

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Chair Lee, Vice Chair Richards, Vice Chair Inouye and Members of the Committees,

Currently, agricultural land is converted to non-farming uses without any offsetting fee. SB2334 introduces a per-acre Agricultural Land Conversion Fee to ensure that when productive lands leave agricultural use, resources are reinvested to help conserve and restore what remains.

This legislation aims to collect a fee on agricultural lands intended to be converted to a solar energy facility, a wind farm, an industrial park, a commercial area, a single-family or multiple-family dwelling that is not a farm dwelling, or any other uses that prevents land classified as agricultural from being used specifically as agricultural land.

The agricultural land conversion fee will be collected under the agricultural land conversion fee fund established under the state treasury by this legislation with explicit purposes in directly supporting soil and water conservation districts in addition to supporting the healthy soils programs.

This legislation shall also use an established metric to advance the adoption of conservation practices to improve the agricultural land we are stewarding through conservation practices to improve holistic cultivation.

Please support SB2334 to strengthen Hawai'i's commitment to regenerative agriculture and soil stewardship.

Mahalo for your consideration!

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 12:21:18 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Valerie Weiss	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Let's be sure all of our students are fed a free healthy lunch.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 12:24:11 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shay Chan Hodges	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Shay Chan Hodges, Haiku, Maui

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 12:57:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

I am testifying in strong support of HB1561, which would expand Hawai‘i’s free school meals program to include public charter school students, beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. This is a critical and necessary step toward ensuring that *all* public school students in our state have equal access to the nutrition they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

Last year’s passage of Act 139 was a landmark victory for students and families in our Department of Education schools. However, it created an unacceptable disparity, leaving behind thousands of children who attend public charter schools. Hunger does not discriminate based on school type. The same food insecurity crisis that affects one in three households in Hawai‘i impacts families with children in every public educational setting. HB1561 corrects this inequity by applying the same, vital support to charter school students.

This bill wisely expands eligibility to families earning up to 300% of the federal poverty level, acknowledging our state’s punishingly high cost of living. Many working families struggle to make ends meet yet still earn too much to qualify for traditional assistance programs. For their children, school breakfast and lunch are often the most reliable, nutritious meals of the day. By providing free meals to this broader group, we eliminate the “benefits cliff” and ensure that no child is forced to learn on an empty stomach because of bureaucratic income thresholds.

The benefits of this policy are profound:

- **Educational Success:** Nutrition is directly linked to cognitive function, concentration, and academic performance. Feeding our students is one of the most effective investments we can make in their education.
- **Eradicating Stigma:** A universal free meal program removes the shame and stigma associated with “free and reduced-price lunch,” allowing every child to eat with dignity.
- **Family Relief:** In a time of persistent inflation and high costs, this program provides substantial financial relief to struggling families, freeing up resources for housing, utilities, and other essentials.
- **Public Health:** Consistent access to healthy meals establishes lifelong positive nutritional habits and supports the overall well-being of our keiki.

Providing free meals is not merely a service; it is a foundational requirement for a functional and equitable education system. We have a moral obligation to feed every child in our public schools, regardless of their ZIP code or which public school they attend. HB1561 fulfills that obligation for our charter school communities.

I urge you to pass HB1561 and ensure that our commitment to ending student hunger in Hawai'i is truly universal.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 1:04:50 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Perle Besserman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Perle Besserman, Oahu

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 1:13:02 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Georgia L Hoopes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Georgia Hoopes, Kalaheo

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 1:56:48 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
cheryl burghardt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

With aloha, Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and Members of the Committee,

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

I am amazed as a retired public school teacher that we still have not made school meals free for ALL students. The research proves that it is a positive path for health and learning. The investment is worth it. So, yes, this Bill starts but let’s somehow take the final step to fund all students for free meals.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students

Yes, I support this bill HB 1561 but isn’t it time that ALL students have free meals?

Mahalo for your consideration!

CHeryl Burghardt

Nuuanu Oahu

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 2:18:19 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
KEALA FUNG	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Keala Fung, Honolulu HI

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 3:17:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
kimdonghyeon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

kimdonghyeon

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 4:32:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ruta Jordans	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strongly support.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 5:10:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Teri Corpuz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Teri Corpuz (Pukalani, Maui)

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 7:30:47 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann Dorsey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Thank you

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 7:50:42 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

Expand free school meals!

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 8:21:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jasmine Balangitao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hi chair and committee members I'm writing to you in support of this bill. It should be a no brainer for the kids and help the hard working local families.
Thank you , Jasmine Balangitao, Kaimuki

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 8:54:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaleiheana-a-Pohaku Stormcrow	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Kaleiheana Stormcrow, Mountain View

February 8th, 2026

To: Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Madison J Barker, Kailua

Subject: HB1561, Relating to School Meals

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

I strongly support HB1561, which would expand free school meal coverage to Hawai'i's public charter schools for families earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. This bill helps ensure that students who might otherwise go without meals have consistent access to nutritious food.

Last year, Act 139, SLH 2025 expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai'i Department of Education. HB1561 builds on that progress by extending the same benefit to students attending public charter schools, creating greater equity across our public education system.

One in three households in Hawai'i experiences food insecurity, and nearly half of ALICE households report difficulty accessing enough food. Despite this, two out of three financially vulnerable families remain ineligible for free school meals. These challenges affect students in both DOE and public charter schools, yet only some students currently receive this support.

Adequate nutrition is essential for children and adolescents and is closely linked to improved academic outcomes, focus, and overall well being. In Hawai'i, up to one in four children regularly lacks access to enough nutritious food at home. For many students, school breakfast and lunch are the most reliable and nutritious meals they receive each day. Providing meals at no cost to all students helps eliminate stigma associated with free or reduced price lunch and ensures that no child is singled out.

Extending free school meals to public charter schools demonstrates a unified commitment to supporting all students and addressing food insecurity across our state.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

References

- Hawaii State Legislature. (2026). *H.B. No. 1561: A bill for an act relating to school meals...*
- Hawaii State Legislature. (n.d.). *House Committee on Education*. <https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/legislature/committeepage.aspx?comm=EDN>.
- Pirkle, C. M. (2025). *The state of food insecurity in Hawai'i 2024-2025*. Hawai'i Foodbank. https://hawaiifoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/HawaiiFoodbank_FoodInsecurityReport_2025-25.pdf,...
- Schwartz, A. E., & Rothbart, M. W. (2020). Let them eat lunch: The impact of universal free meals on student performance. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 39(2), 376–410. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam>

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 9:24:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
B.A. McClintock	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 10:28:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

I strongly support expanding upon last year's legislation, which provides for free school meals for children of families earning below a certain income level.

Many students in Public Charter Schools represent a group for which adequate daily nutrition is often lacking.

Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB 1651!

Mahalo!

Cheryl Ho, Nu'uano

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 4:25:37 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jodi Rodar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Thank you.

Sincerley,

Jodi Rodar

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 8:02:05 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!
Erin Hagan, Waialua

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 8:29:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Taylor McKenzie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

TK McKenzie,

Honolulu, O‘ahu

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 8:50:53 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emma Waters	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Writing in strong support. Mahalo.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 9:12:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
pamela burrell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Warmest Aloha,

Please support the effort to feed our children in school. With federal funding collapsing . We need to stand up and feed the keki.

Mahalo,

Pamela Burrell, Kalihiwai, Kaua'i

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 9:17:41 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leo Nahe Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawaii report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Leo Nahe, Nu'uauu

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 10:38:56 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackie Keefe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

my name is Jackie Keefe and I am writing in **strong support of HB1561**, which expands the free school meals program to include public charter schools.

Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawaii's public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat. This number of 300% helps bridge the gaps for families who earn above the poverty line but still struggle to afford essentials. The federal poverty line is also incredibly low when considering the cost of living in Hawaii, so please do not consider any modifications to this number.

One in three households in Hawaii report food insecure, while almost half of ALICE households report food insecurity. We should be doing everything we can to provide our keiki with food in schools, as not only is nutrition essential to growing children and teens, but it has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Jackie Keefe, Lahaina

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 11:04:39 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Regina Gregory	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

strong support

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 11:25:58 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha, I am writing in support of HB1561. No kid should be going hungry. This is a good bill. Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 11:50:03 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherry Pollack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB1561 that requires public charter schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to provide free meals to students. We need to end child hunger and food insecurity. In addition to impacting the ability of a child to learn, students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. They deserve better from us. Hunger in this state and our country is a disgrace.

I urge you to pass HB1561.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical measure.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 11:54:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hayley Peter-Contesse	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Hayley Peter-Contesse, Makaha

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 12:17:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
gayle goodman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

House Education

2/09/2036, 2:15

RE: Support for HB1561

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

My name is Gayle Goodman. I am writing as an individual citizen to express strong support for HB, a pivotal piece of legislation that has the potential to improve access to free school meals, ultimately strengthening our state's food security landscape. This bill will ensure more keiki receive nutritious by:

Free School Meals by 2030 ([SB3058](#), [HB1779](#))

Eliminating social stigma:

- UFSM creates a more inclusive and supportive school environment.
- By making school meals universally free, all students can access nutritious meals without fear of judgment or embarrassment, fostering a positive and nurturing school culture.

Improving academic performance:

- Studies of UFSM in other states have shown large test score improvements and improved academic performance.

- Research consistently shows that proper nutrition is linked to improved healthy development and academic performance.

Mahalo for your leadership and for your consideration of HB. This bill is essential to building a thriving, food-secure Hawai‘i, which ensures our keiki are fed.

Gayle Goodman

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 1:47:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacey Alapai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Feed all the kids regardless of what school they go to. I support all efforts to expand free school meals, including HB 1561 that expands the program to include charter schools.

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 2:12:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annalise Hart	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Annalise Hart

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 2:26:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noelle Lindenmann	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I write today in support of HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai'i's public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai'i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai'i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai'i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for this opportunity to provide testimony today!

Noelle Lindenmann, Kailua-Kona

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 3:38:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Nelson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly support this legislation. It has been documented many times that children learn best when they have adequate nutrition, especially breakfast.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Nelson

Kaneohe

HB-1561

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 4:31:26 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/10/2026 2:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charlene Casserley	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB1561. Expanding coverage for free school meals in Hawai‘i’s public charter schools to support families earning no more than 300% of the federal poverty level supports students who may otherwise be unable to eat.

Last year Act 139, SLH 2025 was passed which expanded free school meals to schools within the Hawai‘i Department of Education. HB1561 proposes to expand coverage to those students in public charter schools.

One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. This statistic is indiscriminately affecting department public school students as well as public charter school students.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai‘i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch." Applying the same benefits to those students in our public charter schools also shows a unified effect to indiscriminately provide food security to all students.

Please support HB1561.

Mahalo for your consideration!

Charlene Casserley

Kula, Maui

