



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

**Date:** 03/03/2026

**Time:** 02:00 PM

**Location:** 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**Committee:** FIN

**Department:** Education

**Person Testifying:** Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

**Title of Bill:** HB1780, HD1, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Requires the Department of Education to establish a student bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for students who meet certain statutory requirements. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to express its concerns on HB 1780, HD1, which would require the establishment of a bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for students who meet certain statutory requirements and prioritizes these students for available seats. While the Department supports the Legislature's commitment to improving equitable access to student transportation, several operational considerations remain that warrant further discussion.

The Department recognizes the intent of HB 1780, HD1 to reduce transportation barriers for economically disadvantaged students. Prioritizing bus seats strictly based on free- or reduced-price meal eligibility presents potential equity challenges. Students who do not meet that criteria may nonetheless experience significant transportation hardship, including those who live far from their home school or lack safe walking or biking routes, qualify for protections under the McKinney-Vento Act (MVA), are in foster care or receiving specialized student support services, or were assigned to a school by Department direction for safety, programmatic, or other reasons. Because many of these circumstances are unrelated to household income, this suggested prioritization framework may unintentionally limit access for vulnerable student groups who rely on bus transportation for reasons other than income status.

The Department also notes operational and regulatory considerations related to both the School Food Services Branch (SFSB) and the Student Transportation Services Branch (STSB). Compliance with federal privacy laws, the unique data environment at Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools, and ongoing bus driver shortages statewide continue to constrain capacity across multiple complexes. As a result, any prioritization system must balance fairness, legal compliance, and operational feasibility.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 1780, HD1.

To: House Committee on Finance  
Re: HB 1780 HD 1-Relating to Student Transportation  
Hawai'i State Capitol room 303 & Via Videoconference March  
3, 2026, 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Respected Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks! I am submitting this testimony in **SUPPORT of HB 1780 HD 1**, which would provide free school bus transportation to students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

At its core, this bill is about educational access. When students cannot reliably get to school, every other investment we make in curriculum, teachers, and student supports is undermined. Attendance is directly tied to academic achievement, and transportation challenges remain a persistent and often overlooked cause of chronic absenteeism.

In Hawai'i, many working families live paycheck to paycheck. A significant share fall into the ALICE category, earning above the federal poverty level yet still unable to consistently cover basic expenses. For these households, transportation costs add up quickly. When families must choose between groceries, rent, childcare, and bus fees, something gives. Too often, it is consistent school attendance.

HB 1780 HD1 recognizes that students who qualify for meal assistance are already identified as facing financial hardship. Aligning bus access with that eligibility is both efficient and equitable. It reduces administrative burdens for families and schools while ensuring that those most likely to need support receive it without unnecessary barriers.

The bill's emphasis on proactive outreach and prioritization is particularly important. Systems that rely solely on first-come, first-served distribution can unintentionally disadvantage families with limited internet access, language differences, or inflexible work schedules. An equity-centered approach ensures that students are not left behind because of logistical hurdles.

Reliable transportation supports more than just attendance. It helps stabilize family routines, reduces stress on caregivers, and allows parents to maintain employment without scrambling for daily transportation solutions. For students in rural areas and on neighbor islands, where alternatives may be limited, access to a bus can be the determining factor in whether they arrive at school ready to learn.

If we are serious about closing opportunity gaps and strengthening long-term outcomes for Hawai'i's keiki, we must address the practical barriers that stand in their way. Providing free bus access to income-eligible students is a smart, targeted investment that promotes equity and strengthens our public education system. Please pass HB 1780 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB 1780 HD1**.



## HIPHI Board

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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: March 2, 2026

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Finance

Re: Support with Amendments for HB 1780 HD1, Relating To Student  
Transportation

Hrg: March 3rd, 2026 at 2:00 PM in Conference Room 308

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Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)<sup>1</sup> and the Healthy Eating + Active Living<sup>2</sup> (HEAL) Statewide Coalition are in **support with amendments of HB 1780 HD1**, which takes an important step toward improving educational access by requiring the Department of Education (DOE) to establish a student bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for students who are eligible for free school meals.

Transportation is a critical factor in school attendance, academic success, and family stability. For many families, even modest transportation fees create barriers that impact students' ability to arrive at school consistently and on time. By providing free bus passes to students facing financial hardship, this bill promotes fair access, reduces absenteeism, and supports the State's commitment to ensuring every child has meaningful access to public education.

## Provide Free Bus Passes for All Students

While HIPHI strongly supports the intent of HB 1780 HD1, we respectfully urge the Committee to amend the bill to extend free student bus passes to all DOE students, rather than limiting eligibility to only those who are eligible for free school meals.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.



**Universal access to student transportation would:**

- Remove stigma and administrative barriers tied to income-based eligibility,
- Ensure students from working families just above the threshold are not excluded,
- Increase overall attendance, retention, and educational opportunity statewide<sup>3</sup>
- Reduce traffic vehicle crashes, air pollution, and associated respiratory illnesses, and increase physical activity levels<sup>4</sup>
- Simplify implementation and reporting for the Department of Education.

Transportation should function as a basic educational support service, not a financial obstacle. Expanding this program to all students would create a more equitable, efficient, and inclusive system that benefits families, schools, and communities across Hawaii.

For these reasons, HIPHI supports HB 1780 HD1 and respectfully requests that it be amended to provide free bus passes for all DOE students who utilize school transportation services.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your continued commitment to Hawaii's keiki.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patti Hatzistavrakis".

Patti Hatzistavrakis  
Active Transportation Specialist

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Transportation, Fact Sheet: Bolstering Daily School Attendance Through Safe, Accessible, Reliable Transportation. (2024).  
<https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2024-09/Fact-Sheet-Bolstering-Daily-School-Attendance-Through-Transportation.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> CDC. (2026, January 14). Improving Health Through Transportation Policy.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/transportation/php/about/index.html>



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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
Tuesday - Mar 3, 2026 - 2:00pm

**Hawai'i Bicycling League Strongly Supports HB1780, HD1, relating to Student Transportation, with suggested amendment**

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

My name is Eduardo Hernandez and I am the Advocacy Director of the Hawai'i Bicycling League (HBL). We are a non-profit organization founded in 1975 with the mission of enabling more people to ride bicycles for health, recreation, and transportation. We strive to create communities across our islands that have safe, accessible, and inclusive environments for people to bike, walk, and roll.

HBL strongly supports HB1780, HD 1, with the shared goals established as a priority measure of the legislature's Keiki Caucus. It would provide essential financial relief for families, especially low-income families who depend on public transportation; support a reduction in the State's dependence on fossil fuel, imported oil, and other imported energy resources; improve youth access to schools, jobs, extracurricular activities and health and community services and; reduce the number of motor vehicles on the roads, and corresponding reductions in traffic, improved road safety, and a better quality of life for everyone.

**Notably, HBL suggests HD1 be amended so that it applies universally to anyone under 18 without language referencing a means test, as noted in the Transportation Committee's report, or only those covered by section 302A-404.** This will reduce stigma and ensure that more people avail themselves of public transit and thereby rely less on private cars. The benefits of universal access outweigh the costs associated with implementing a means test.

Biking, walking, rolling, and using public transit are threads of a public safety net that protects everyone. By establishing a fare-free youth transit program in coordination with the counties, the state is creating practical solutions for youth and families to adopt multimodal transportation routines, and develop life-long skills for better physical and mental health. Even more, this program has potential to ease pressure on school bus operations, support youth independence, and advance the state's climate commitments under the Navahine Settlement by reducing emissions and traffic congestion.

I urge you to support this bill and help leverage the economic, health, and environmental benefits it presents so that individuals and families can not only survive, but truly thrive.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

S/Eduardo Hernandez

Advocacy Director, Hawai'i Bicycling League



To: The House Committee on Finance (FIN)  
From: Sherry Pollack, 350Hawaii.org  
Date: Tuesday, March 3, 2026, 2pm

### Comments on HB1780 HD1

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and FIN Committee members;

I am Co-Founder of the Hawai'i chapter of 350.org, the largest international organization dedicated to fighting climate change. 350Hawaii.org **provides comments for HB1780 HD1** that would require the Department of Education to establish a student bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for students who meet certain statutory requirements.

While 350Hawaii strongly supports the intent of HB 1780 HD1, we respectfully urge the Committee to amend the bill to extend free student bus passes to **all DOE students**, rather than limiting eligibility to only those who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

In 2024, the Hawai'i Department of Transportation (HDOT) reached an unprecedented settlement in *Navahine v. HDOT*, with a commitment to protect children's constitutional rights to a life-sustaining climate system and to preserve Hawai'i's public trust resources for present and future generations. The settlement requires HDOT to develop and support strategies that reduce carbon pollution, including expanding and improving public transit. This measure could, if amended to allow **all DOE students**, represent a common-sense solution that directly addresses this mandate.

Transportation expenses place a heavy strain on family budgets that rely on public transit. Offering a fare-free youth transit program for all students would not only significantly increase youth transit ridership statewide, it would also reduce household transportation costs, lightening the financial burden on families.

Removing fare barriers would make getting to school easier, as well as enabling participation in after-school activities. The increase in ridership among younger age groups is especially important, as research shows that if they use public transit from a young age, they are more likely to become life-long transit users.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, switching to public transit is one of the most impactful personal changes for individuals to take to lower their carbon emissions. And shifting trips from private vehicles or rideshare services to public transit not only lowers emissions, it reduces traffic, improves air quality, and supports safer roadways.

Transforming transportation from a financial hurdle to a universal support service is crucial. Making this service accessible to all students promotes equity and strengthens communities across the state. To help protect our climate and future, we respectfully request that HB1780 HD1 be amended to provide free bus passes for all DOE students who utilize school transportation services.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Sherry Pollack

Co-Founder, [350Hawaii.org](http://350Hawaii.org)

Aloha, Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Christian, and I am a high school student from O‘ahu, **testifying in support of HB1780**, which establishes a student bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for students who meet certain statutory requirements.

As a keiki growing up in Hawai‘i, I’m always glad to see the State take initiatives that invest in youth. I believe that this bill has the potential to benefit the State in the long run, as keiki who grow up using the bus are more likely to ride it as adults.

For these reasons, I believe this bill, HB1780, should be passed. Thank you for your consideration.

Me ke aloha,

Christian K.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christian K." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

**HB-1780-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 8:08:50 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Carolyn Eaton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Carolyn Eaton. I am a resident of Honolulu, and I strongly support this measure.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify and for your hard work to consider equity and safety for the large, diverse population of students in our public schools.

**HB-1780-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 12:46:42 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Rain K. Kahula Yong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of this bill relating to student transportation and the establishment of a bus fare rate system that includes free bus passes for qualifying students.

Reliable transportation is not a luxury, it is a basic requirement for consistent school attendance and academic success. When students cannot get to school safely and consistently, their learning suffers. By providing free bus passes to students who meet statutory requirements, this measure removes a significant barrier for many families across Hawai‘i.

Too often, transportation challenges disproportionately impact students from working families and rural communities. Ensuring access to free or reduced-cost transportation promotes equity and helps level the playing field so that all students have a fair opportunity to succeed.

Investing in student transportation is an investment in attendance, engagement, and long-term educational outcomes. I strongly support this effort to prioritize access and opportunity for Hawai‘i’s students.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully,  
Rain Yong, teacher at Ka Waihona o ka Na‘auao

Leeward district

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Committee on Finance

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: March 1, 2026

RE: House Bill 1780 HD1  
Measure Title: RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.  
Report Title: DOE; Student Transportation; School Bus Program; Fares; Report;  
Appropriation (\$)

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 1780 HD1. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

**HB-1780-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 9:08:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Emma Waters	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Writing in strong support of this important bill that would help families afford bus fare for their keiki. Transportation to school should not be a struggle.

Mahalo.

**HB-1780-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 10:48:44 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Younghee Overly	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for this opportunity to support HB1780 HD1. Please pass this measure to remove transportation barriers for students to participate in educational opportunities.

**HB-1780-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 12:59:45 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
S Dyel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I believe all children in Hawai'i whose families are having a hard time financially should have free bus passes and free school lunch/meals.

**HB-1780-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 2:17:12 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Terri Yoshinaga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

**HB-1780-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 5:03:17 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dori Sparlin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the current online bus application system.

I am writing to express concern about the significant system limitations that occur during each bus application submission period. Many families experience repeated error messages, system timeouts, and failed submissions due to website capacity issues. As a result, applicants must often attempt to submit their applications multiple times before successfully completing the process.

The system frequently requires hours of continuous monitoring and repeated submission attempts. Compounding this issue, families are currently required to submit a new application each quarter. This creates an unnecessary and recurring burden on working families, many of whom must take time off from work or postpone other responsibilities in order to secure bus service for their children.

The process disproportionately impacts families without flexible work schedules, reliable internet access, or the ability to remain online for extended periods of time. Access to school transportation should not depend on a family's ability to navigate system congestion or dedicate hours to refreshing a webpage.

Transportation is essential to ensuring students can attend school safely and consistently. The application process should be reliable, efficient, equitable, and accessible to all families.

I respectfully request that the Legislature explore improvements to the system, including increasing server capacity during peak registration periods, implementing staggered registration windows, reducing the frequency of required applications, or utilizing a queue-based system to ensure fair and orderly access.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to supporting families and ensuring equitable access to student transportation services.

**Sincerely,**  
Dori Sparlin  
Mililani Complex, Central District



**HB-1780-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 9:45:23 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ted Meehan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this important bill. Thank you.

Ted Meehan