

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 24, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Chris Todd, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 1872 HD1 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.**

Hearing: February 25, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this measure and defers to the University of Hawaii. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace a priority identified in the executive budget.

The purpose of this measure is to establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

The Department supports efforts to increase the supply of qualified early learning professionals and expand the State's child care capacity, as the early learning field faces growing demand for well-trained professionals and a significant workforce shortage.

Programs across the state are struggling to recruit and retain a qualified, well-compensated workforce, and that instability directly affects children and working families. Apprenticeships provide accessible training pathways that support the recruitment, retention, and professional development of early learning professionals. By integrating on

the job training with formal education and recognized credentials, apprenticeships strengthen workforce quality while reducing barriers to entry into the field. The first early learning registered apprenticeship program established in 2023 between Honolulu Community College and Keiki O Ka 'Aina Family Learning Center is evidence of a successful recruitment and retention strategy, and this measure, if passed, would expand opportunities for the early care and education workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Nathan Murata, Dean
College of Education

and

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD
Interim Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 1872 HD1 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony offering comments on HB 1872 HD1 which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program. We respectfully offer the following comments that College of Education believes that such an apprenticeship program provides the necessary financial support for early learning programs service providers in the State.

This bill offers a tangible solution to these pressing issues by:

- 1. Support and Develop Career Pathways:** The grant program will provide funding to support new early learning apprentices, with financial assistance to cover costs related to earning a credential or degree, on-the-job training while earning a wage, and wage increases when completing RA milestones. This investment will not only enhance the quality of care but also improve recruitment and retention in the early care and education field that has historically faced high turnover due to low wages and limited growth opportunities. By funding apprenticeships, the program will offer a structured pathway for career entry and advancement, that will enhance the recruitment of new individuals into the early learning profession.
- 2. Increasing the Supply of Early Learning Slots:** By incentivizing individuals to enter and advance in the field, this program has the potential to add many more slots for infants and toddlers under the age of three. These additional slots will directly benefit families who

are on waiting lists or forced to make difficult compromises in their work and other responsibilities.

3. **Strengthening Economic Stability:** For families in Hawai'i who struggle with the high cost of living, access to reliable child care is often the key to maintaining stable employment and achieving economic security. The proposed program will play a critical role in ensuring parents can participate fully in their jobs and careers, knowing their children are in safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate settings.

This legislation aligns with our shared vision of prioritizing early learning as a cornerstone of our state's future. By investing in the apprenticeship grant program, we are not only addressing immediate needs but also laying the groundwork for long-term systemic improvements in early care and education for our young children's success in school and in life.

**Testimony to the House Committee on Finance
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair**

**Wednesday, February 14, 2024, at 9:15AM
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference**

RE: HB1872 HD1 Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Program

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

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports House Bill 1872 HD1 (HB1872 HD1), which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

HB1872 HD1 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action by addressing a critical workforce bottleneck that affects both families and employers statewide. The early learning sector is experiencing significant shortages of qualified professionals, in part due to high labor costs and limited access to structured pathways for recruitment and retention.

The Chamber believes that quality early learning is foundational to Hawaii's economy. Investment in early learning workforce capacity through HB1872 HD1 represents an opportunity to catalyze diverse economic benefit by nurturing the Hawaii's future workforce, lowering labor cost barriers for early learning providers, enabling parents to more fully participate in the labor force, and improving labor stability for the companies that employ parents of young children. All these benefits contribute towards a more resilient economy, a more productive workforce, improved business sustainability, and overall quality of life improvement.

We respectfully ask to pass House Bill 1872 HD1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.



STATE OF HAWAII

Executive Office on Early Learning

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

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

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

SUBJECT: Testimony on H.B. No. 1872, H.D. 1 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

Committee: FIN
Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Location: Conference room 308

Executive Office on Early Learning Position: **SUPPORT**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments in support of H.B. No. 1872, H.D. 1, and defers to the University of Hawai'i regarding implementation and funding.

This measure aligns with the Early Learning Board's current framework of policy priorities, which are grounded in the Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan. Specifically, the bill advances State Plan Building Block 4: Early Childhood Workforce by expanding opportunities for early learning providers to participate in a state or federally approved Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Program.

Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs) create structured pathways for aspiring early childhood professionals to gain hands-on experience, earn credentials, and advance their careers through apprenticeships that integrate employer-paid classroom learning with on-the-job training and comprehensive wraparound support.

This bill creates a grant program to mitigate financial barriers to participation in state-approved or federally approved ELRAPs for licensed or registered early learning program service providers, with priority given to infant and toddler programs.

EOEL is committed to improving recruitment, retention, and career pathways for our early learning workforce and recognizes that our capacity to expand access to early learning opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki depends on our ability to grow and support our workforce. ELRAPs help build long-term capacity by:

- Addressing shortages through targeted recruitment and retention strategies;
- Offering competitive compensation and benefits that recognize and value educators;
and
- Creating clear pathways for professional growth and advancement.

EOEL would be happy to collaborate with the University of Hawai'i to develop the award criteria for this grant program, as directed in this bill.

We appreciate the Legislature's ongoing investment and shared commitment to strengthening Hawai'i's early learning system for our youngest keiki and their 'ohana. Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments in support of this bill.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



ROY M. TAKUMI
CHAIRPERSON

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

**House Committee on Finance
Wednesday, February 25, 2026
2:00 p.m.
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 308**

Measure: House Bill 1872 HD1, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Purpose of Measure:

Establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000.

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

The Board of Education (Board) supports House Bill 1872 HD1 as a means to recruit and retain the professionals who are paramount to the high-quality learning experiences needed to fulfill the promise of early education.

The ability to expand access to early learning opportunities also relies heavily on efforts to grow and support our early educator workforce.

The Board defers to the University of Hawaii regarding implementation and funding.

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

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA LAWELAWE KAIĀULU
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

222 NORTH SCHOOL STREET • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817
PHONE: (808) 768-7762 • FAX: (808) 768-7792 • WEBSITE: honolulu.gov/dcs

RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA



ANTON C. KRUCKY
DIRECTOR
PO'O
AEDWARD LOS BANOS
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
HOPE PO'O

TESTIMONY OF ANTON C. KRUCKY
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 02:00 PM
Conference RM 308 and Via Videoconference

TO: Rep. Chris Todd, Chair, Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee on Finance

RE: SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1872 HD 1

The Department of Community Services (DCS), City and County of Honolulu (City), **supports** House Bill 1872 HD 1, which would establish an early learning apprenticeship grant program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

Access to reliable child care is essential for Hawai'i families and the economy, particularly as the high cost of living requires most households to rely on stable workforce participation. Despite this need, our State continues to face a critical shortage of affordable, high-quality child care options.

DCS recently conducted a survey of 819 households on O'ahu, and 68% percent reported that they left a job, declined a job opportunity, or reduced their work hours due to a lack of child care. These impacts ripple beyond individual families, contributing to labor and workforce challenges and constraining economic growth across many industries.

House Bill 1872 HD 1 offers a meaningful and strategic solution by strengthening the child care workforce—the single greatest barrier to expanding child care capacity. By supporting apprenticeship opportunities, this measure creates an accessible pathway for individuals to enter the profession while equipping them with the training and experience needed to succeed. It also provides career advancement opportunities for those already in the field and it supports both recruitment and retention, helping to stabilize and grow the industry over the long-term.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support** of this measure.

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

DEREK S.K. KAWAKAMI, MAYOR

REIKO MATSUYAMA, MANAGING DIRECTOR



Testimony of Natalia Perry
Early Childhood Coordinator, County of Kauai

Before the
House Committee on Finance

February 25, 2026 at 2:00 PM
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

In consideration of
House Bill 1872 HD1, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Honorable Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The County of Kauai **strongly supports** House Bill 1872 HD1 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii.

The County of Kauai prioritizes Early Childhood Education (ECE) and understands how crucial this period of development in a child's life is. To support this period of development in children's lives we need to support and uplift our ECE teachers.

We recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train and support our early learning workforce. The Early Learning Apprenticeship offers a meaningful mechanism to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in advancing their career in ECE.
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early leaning professionals to enter and advance within the field.
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early-learning professionals.
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the fields, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots.

The Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure will play a critical role in addressing many issues currently facing local families with young children while also having a positive impact on growing the local early learning workforce.

For these reasons, we **strongly support** House Bill 1872 HD1.



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

FROM: Deanna D'Olier, Executive Director
Hawaii Association of Independent Schools

RE: **HB 1872 HD1 – Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program – In Support**

DATE: Wednesday, February 25, 2026; 2:00 p.m.
Conference room 308 & Videoconference

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

On behalf of the Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools (HAIS), I write in strong support of HB 1872 HD1, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers participating in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

HAIS supports policies that strengthen Hawai'i's early learning workforce and expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities for families across the state. HB 1872 HD1 is responsive to the Legislature's findings that early learning experiences support children's development, help working families sustain employment, and contribute to Hawai'i's broader economic vitality.

HB 1872 HD1 recognizes the value of registered apprenticeship programs as a proven workforce pathway while addressing a primary barrier for early learning providers: the high labor costs required to meet compensation standards, which can often disincentivize participation. By establishing a grant program to offset these participation costs, the bill bolsters recruitment, retention, and professional development within the early learning sector.

H AIS specifically appreciates the thoughtful design of this program, which bridges the gap between workforce development and operational feasibility for early learning providers. By tying eligibility to licensed or registered child care providers engaged in approved apprenticeship programs, the bill ensures that grants directly support high-quality workforce pathways.

For early learning programs that are working to recruit and retain qualified staff, apprenticeships can be a powerful “earn-and-learn” pathway, but only if the economics make participation feasible. HB 1872 HD1 directly addresses that feasibility gap and helps build a stable, well-prepared early learning workforce for Hawai’i.

H AIS respectfully urges the Committee to PASS HB 1872 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



Date: February 24, 2026

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

From: Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health, dba AIMH HI

Re: Strong Support of an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

The Association for Infant Mental Health Hawaii (AIMH HI) is a non-profit organization focused on growing a network of professionals and a system of care that supports and nurtures infant and early childhood mental health. AIMH HI works with partners across the complex early childhood system to grow understanding and acceptance of the infant and early childhood mental health field and ensure evidenced-based practices around first relationships become the norm in Hawai'i.

AIMH HI strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program through the University of Hawai'i. AIMH HI acknowledges the challenges that families across the State of Hawai'i face to access affordable, high quality early learning opportunities for their children. AIMH HI has recognized through our work with many partners across the early childhood system that a main contributor to the challenges families face to access early learning opportunities for their children is the limits in recruiting, training, retaining, and supporting early childhood workforce.

We feel strongly that this Bill represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Increasing the accessibility of entry into the early childhood workforce for those who are interested in nurturing the early learning of young children
- Creating clear pathways for early childhood professionals to enter and advance in the field which will help support and maintain professionals' investment in the field and their relationships with the children and families they work with



- Improve retention of early childhood professionals, leading to stronger relationships between professionals and families, which supports the relationships that shape children's mental health
- Growing and supporting the early childhood workforce will have a direct impact on families' ability to access early learning opportunities that support the social-emotional development and mental health of their children

AIMH HI believes that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in Bill 18732 would play a crucial role in supporting the social emotional development of Hawai'i's children. By growing and supporting the early childhood workforce, families and children are supported. For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

Mahalo for your commitment and support to improve the mental health, safety, and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their 'ohana.

Na'u nō me ka ha'aha'a,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erin Henderson Lacerdo', is positioned above the printed name.

Erin Henderson Lacerdo, LCSW, IECMH-E©

Executive Director, Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i



February 24, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT** of **HB1872 HD1**, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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

From: Llasmin Chaine, LSW, Executive Director, Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women

Re: Testimony in HB1872 HD1, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Hearing: Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

Thank you for hearing this important bill. The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women **strongly supports HB1872 HD1** and the establishment of an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program as proposed in this measure. **Access to high-quality early learning opportunities is a foundational issue for women and girls, as it directly impacts economic participation, workforce advancement, lifelong health and family well-being.** By supporting early learning service providers through financial assistance and professional development, this bill addresses ongoing needs and persistent barriers faced by women, who make up the majority of the early childhood education workforce and who often shoulder disproportionate caregiving responsibilities.

By providing financial support for early learning program service providers to participate in approved apprenticeship programs, **this bill addresses persistent workforce shortages and barriers to entry in the early childhood sector.** Research and best practices indicate that apprenticeship models are effective in supporting career advancement, improving retention, and increasing the quality of care. This approach not only benefits early educators, many of whom are women, but also **supports families who rely on stable, high-quality childcare to participate in the workforce.**

We respectfully urge this Committee to **pass HB1872 HD1**, strengthening Hawaii's early learning workforce and supporting the economic security of women and families.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

February 25, 2026

House Committee on Finance
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room #308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE



RE: HB 1872 HD1 Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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

My name is Kiran Polk, and I am the Executive Director & CEO of the Kapolei Chamber of Commerce. The Kapolei Chamber of Commerce is an advocate for businesses in the Kapolei region including Waipahu, Kapolei, 'Ewa Beach, Nānakūli, Wai'anae, and Mākaha. We work on behalf of our members and the broader business community to improve the regional and State economic climate and to help West O'ahu businesses thrive.

The Kapolei Chamber **strongly supports HB 1872 HD1**, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i. This measure provides critical financial support to early learning service providers participating in state or federally approved apprenticeship programs.

Hawai'i continues to face a dual challenge: families struggling to access affordable, high-quality early learning options, and providers facing severe workforce shortages driven by low wages, high costs, and limited career pathways. HB 1872 HD1 directly addresses both issues by supporting the early learning workforce while expanding access to care. By helping providers meet federally required wage standards and offset training, mentorship, and administrative costs, this program strengthens recruitment and retention for more than 500 early learning professionals statewide. Increased participation in apprenticeship programs also has the potential to expand childcare capacity, including new slots for infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children—relieving waitlists and improving access for working families.

This investment is especially critical for **West O'ahu**, the fastest-growing region in the state. With continued population and housing growth in Kapolei and 'Ewa, demand for early learning facilities and a qualified workforce will only intensify. Supporting apprenticeship-based career pathways ensures we are preparing a skilled, stable workforce to meet that demand.

The Kapolei Chamber is deeply committed to **workforce development and work-based learning, partnering with education institutions and employers across West O'ahu to strengthen pipelines from education into employment**. HB 1872 HD1 aligns directly with these efforts by creating sustainable, accessible career pathways in early learning—an essential sector for families, employers, and our broader economy.

We respectfully urge your support for **HB 1872 HD1** to strengthen the early learning workforce, expand childcare access, and promote economic stability for Hawai'i's families and businesses.
Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Best,

Kiran Polk
Executive Director & CEO

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 1872 HD1 Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program
DATE: February 25, 2026
TIME: 2:00 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Finance
ROOM: Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

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

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony with **STRONG SUPPORT on HB 1872, HD1**, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai‘i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state-approved or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

As charter schools prepare for the expansion of pre-K classrooms across the state, creating supportive pathways to develop HTSB-approved, licensed teachers and credentialed educational assistants is critical. The establishment of the grant program would provide financial incentives which not only contribute to livable wages but it also encourages participants to complete the apprenticeship program.

Kamaile Academy Public Charter School, located in the hard-to-staff area of Wai‘anae, is in the process of piloting this program. Participation in this apprenticeship program will help to support Kamaile in meeting the statutory staffing requirements which, in turn, supports the expansion of high-quality pre-K programs, a critical need for the Wai‘anae community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Date: February 25, 2026

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

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: House Bill 1872 HD1, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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 1872 HD1 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

ECAS recognizes that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train, and support a robust early learning workforce.

We feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

ECAS's position is that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families while also having a positive impact on the local early learning workforce.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872 HD1.



Date: February 25, 2026

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

From: Commit to Keiki

Re: House Bill 1872 HD1, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Commit to Keiki is a statewide, non-partisan, public-private collaborative to ensure a brighter start for Hawai'i's youngest keiki. Led by a diverse Steering Committee, Commit to Keiki's mission is to increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to early childhood.

Commit to Keiki strongly supports House Bill 1872 HD1 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

We recognize that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train, and support a robust early learning workforce.

We feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

Our position is that the proposed Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families and the early learning sector while also positively impacting the local early learning workforce.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872 HD1.

Our Mission

Increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to Hawai'i's youngest keiki and families.



Contact Info

700 Bishop Street, Suite 1701
Honolulu, Hawai'i 93813
info@committokeiki.org
committokeiki.org



STATE OF HAWAII
Early Learning Board
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

February 23, 2026

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

From: Elaine Yamashita, Chair
Early Learning Board

Re: HB1872 HD1 support

Aloha Honorable Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, and members of the House Finance Committee:

The Early Learning Board (ELB) formulates statewide policy relating to early learning, and directs the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL).

The Early Learning Board supports HB 1872 HD1, which will expand the current early childhood registered apprenticeship program. This directly affects and supports much needed expansion of the early childhood workforce. Recruitment and retention of our important early educators is key to providing high quality care and education for our youngest keiki.

It is a specialized body of knowledge and experience based on child development and effective relationships, and apprenticeships provide both. The bill would also allow community-based providers resources to provide incentives for apprentices to continue and for the program as a whole.

We realize that these are uncertain times and ask that you consider any funding for this program as an important investment in early educators who will have positive impact on keiki and their 'ohana.

Mahalo for your consideration and support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Elaine Yamashita
Early Learning Board Chair
elb@eoel.hawaii.gov



February 23, 2026

**Testimony in Support of H.B.1872 H.D.1
Relating to An Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program**

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

Aloha United Way supports H.B. 1872 H.D.1, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to strengthen Hawai'i's early learning workforce and expand access to childcare for working families.

Reliable childcare is essential economic infrastructure that allows parents to work and employers to retain staff. Yet many early learning providers struggle to recruit and retain qualified employees due to low wages and rising operating costs. According to Aloha United Way's ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data, nearly 40%¹ of Hawai'i households struggle to afford basic necessities, with many early learning professionals falling within the ALICE population.

Registered apprenticeship programs provide a promising pathway into early learning careers by combining paid on-the-job training with formal instruction. However, many childcare providers lack the financial capacity to meet the wage and training requirements needed to participate. This measure would help providers cover personnel, training, and mentorship costs, making participation more feasible.

Investing in the early learning workforce supports both the providers and the families who depend on them, while helping ensure Hawai'i's workforce can remain employed and economically stable.

Aloha United Way respectfully urges your support for H.B. 1872 H.D.1.

Mahalo,

Michelle Bartell
President & CEO
Aloha United Way

¹ <https://www.auw.org/about/alice-initiative/alice-reports/>



Hearing Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 9:00 AM , Rm. 308

To: House Committee on Finance
Rep. Chris Todd, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1872, HD1 Relating to Early Learning
APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM**

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

Members of AAUW of Hawaii thank you for this opportunity to testify in **strong support of HB 1872, HD1** which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

Hawaii has a shortage of qualified child care employees to fill these many vacant, but critical positions. Early childhood care and educational professionals are undervalued in Hawaii, averaging just \$13 to \$17 per hour wage. It is no surprise that the number of professionals in this sector has been decreasing, although they are in high demand.

Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAP) are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. AAUW of Hawaii supports this measure that will aid Hawaii in retaining and recruiting qualified child care workers, including women who want to work in the field, but cannot, or will not, due to the current low wage. An important feature in this bill will provide funding to eligible providers participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs to adequately compensate these workers in training as well as allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

Please pass this important measure and mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jean Evans".

Jean Evans
Public Policy Committee, AAUW of Hawaii
publicpolicy-hi@aauw.net

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Hawaii is an all-volunteer, statewide chapter of a national organization and is made up of six branches: Hilo, Honolulu, Kaua'i, Kona, Maui, and Windward Oahu. AAUW's mission is to advance gender equity through research, education, and advocacy. Our goal is economic security for women and their families.

Date: February 25, 2026

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Committee Members



From: Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers
Re: House Bill 1872, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers (KOKA) is a statewide Native Hawaiian non-profit organization whose mission is to educate children, strengthen families, perpetuate culture, and enrich communities. In support of increasing the capacity and quality of the early childhood education workforce, KOKA has developed the only Department of Labor approved **Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship Program** in partnership with Honolulu Community College.

KOKA strongly supports House Bill 1872 which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

KOKA recognizes that families around our state continue to struggle to find and access affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities for their young children. We further recognize that there is a distinct need to better recruit, train, and support a properly and specially trained early learning workforce.

We feel strongly that this measure represents a meaningful attempt to address these issues in the following ways:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

KOKA's position is that the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families when looking for preschool or infant-toddler child care, as well as, impacting the early learning workforce, and the economic stability for all here in the state of Hawai'i.

For these reasons, we strongly support House Bill 1872.

To: House Committee on Finance
Re: HB 1872 HD1-Relating to an Early Childhood Apprenticeship Grant Program
Hawai'i State Capitol Room 308 & Via Videoconference February 25, 2026, 2:00 PM

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB 1872 HD1**. This bill will establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i.

To ensure families have access to high quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten, we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

This bill would give priority to licensed and/or regulated child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai'i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access quality care from the time children need it most.

In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai'i's children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children, particularly mothers, stay in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable child care.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please **SUPPORT HB 1872 HD1**.



**Parents And
Children Together**

**BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS
THAT MATTER MOST**

ParentsAndChildrenTogether.org

TESTIMONY ON HB 1872 HD1 – IN SUPPORT RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM

TO: Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, & Members,
House Committee on Finance
FROM: Trisha Kajimura, PACT Vice-President of Strategy and External Affairs
DATE: February 25, 2026, 2:00 PM

Parents and Children Together (PACT) supports HB 1872 HD1, which would establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii.

Founded by residents of Kuhio Park Terrace 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 18,000 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.

PACT is an active member of the early learning community in Hawaii, operating Early Head Start and Head Start programs on Oahu and Hawaii Island. PACT also founded Parkway Village Preschool, the state's first Pre-K-Only public charter school in Kapolei. The workforce shortage in early learning is an everyday challenge for PACT. There is a pressing need to better recruit, train, and support a robust early learning workforce. This measure will:

- Create viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career
- Establish a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field
- Provide paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals
- Increase the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots

The proposed Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program laid out in this measure would play a critical role in addressing numerous issues currently facing local families and the early learning sector.

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

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:29:45 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deanna Cornelius	The Happy Bento	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB1872 HD1. Investing in early childhood apprenticeship programs strengthens Hawai'i's workforce, supports working families, and helps ensure our keiki have access to high-quality early learning.

As a small business providing healthy school lunches to over 900 keiki daily, over half are in preschool and we grow by 15-20% per year. Clearly, there is a need for early childhood education; as soon as a new school opens, it immediately fills up. Providing apprenticeship opportunities will help to maintain a steady flow of capable caregivers.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Deanna Cornelius, CEO



holomua

COLLABORATIVE

OUR MISSION

To support and advance public policies that make Hawai'i affordable for all working families.

OUR VISION

Collaborative, sustainable, and evidence-based public policies that create a diverse and sustainable Hawai'i economy, an abundance of quality job opportunities, and a future where all working families living in Hawai'i can thrive.

BOARD MEMBERS

Jason Fujimoto
Meli James, *Board Chair*
Micah Kāne
Brandon Kurisu
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827 Fort Street Mall, 2nd Floor
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

+1 (808) 542-4089
info@holomuacollaborative.org

HolomuaCollaborative.org

Page 1 of 2

Committee: House Committee on Finance
Bill Number: HB 1872 HD1, Relating to An Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program
Hearing Date and Time: February 25, 2026, at 2:00pm (Room 308)
Re: Testimony of Holomua Collaborative in support

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members:

We write in support of HB 1872 HD1, Relating to An Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program. The purpose of HB 1872 HD1 is to establish an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs. This Program will help with the recruitment, retention, and upskilling of our early learning workforce so parents can fully participate in the workforce.

Multiple studies have shown that a person's most dramatic brain development occurs in the first three years of their life. Making sure that the frontline early learning workers—who are in charge of molding the minds of babies and other young children during these critical years—are paid well enough to stay in the profession benefits: (1) the workers who can now stay in the profession; (2) the children who will receive professional care during critical years; (3) businesses whose employees depend on child care; (4) parents who can stay at their jobs because of greater access to child care; and (5) society as a whole, because a new generation of children will be better prepared to learn, grow, and thrive.

Hawai'i is having an increasingly difficult time retaining and recruiting infant and toddler childcare workers. The RAND Corporation¹ has noted that as of May 2021, the typical childcare worker in Hawai'i earned just under \$13.79 on an hourly basis. When adjusting for cost of living, this is lower than the national median hourly wage for childcare workers. This is unsustainable.

Indeed, between 2018 and 2020 Hawai'i lost 20% of its childcare workforce. When childcare workers leave the profession, it becomes harder for childcare providers to stay open. This ultimately makes it harder for families to get childcare as demand increases while supply shrinks. And this disparity between supply and demand for childcare is why families struggle to pay for facilities that charge \$20,000 per year per child, because that is what they must do to stay afloat.

We know that early learning program service providers operate on miniscule financial margins with fixed costs that can't be negotiated or reduced, like rent or electricity. This means that when they need to lower expenses they must turn to wages. And in turn, early learning professionals leave the state.

¹ See "Early Childhood Educators in Hawai'i: Addressing Compensation, Working Conditions, and Professional Advancement," at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1908-1.html.



The Grant Program established by HB 1872 HD1 will allow early learning program service providers to cover costs associated with participation in state- or federally-approved early learning programs, including personnel expenses and wages, training expenses, mentorship stipends, administrative costs, wage supplements, wage or salary increases, and other compensation enhancements to attract and retain qualified employees.

The establishment of the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program will help break this cycle of poor retention and recruitment, and put us on a path to greater affordability both for early learning workers and for those who need access to early learning. We are proud to support it.

Sincerely,

Matthew Prellberg
Policy and Communications Director

Date: February 24, 2027

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

From: Family Programs Hawaii

Re: House Bill 1872 HD1, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Family Programs Hawaii strengthens youth and families in the child welfare system through prevention, support, and transition services that foster resilience, well-being, and lasting relationships. Through our prevention and family support programs, we serve families experiencing housing instability, financial hardship, domestic violence, and elevated levels of parenting stress, conditions that place young children at increased risk for developmental and long-term challenges.

High-quality early learning environments serve as an important protective factor for children facing these stressors. Stable, nurturing early childhood programs provide consistency, support social-emotional development, and help mitigate the effects of trauma and adversity. Access to reliable childcare also enables parents to maintain employment, pursue education or training, and work toward greater financial stability, which strengthens the entire family unit. However, Hawai'i's ability to expand access to high-quality early learning is directly tied to the strength of its workforce.

House Bill 1872 HD1 addresses a critical workforce shortage by establishing an apprenticeship grant program that would:

- Create viable entry points into the early learning profession for individuals entering the workforce or pursuing a new career path;
- Establish a structured pathway for early learning professionals to gain credentials and advance within the field;
- Provide paid, on-the-job training that reduces financial barriers to participation; and
- Increase the number of qualified early learning professionals, expanding early learning capacity statewide.

By investing in apprenticeship pathways, this measure strengthens both workforce development and family stability. Increasing the supply of trained early learning professionals directly expands access to high-quality early childhood programs, which serve as evidence-based protective factors for families experiencing stress and adversity. As an organization deeply engaged in prevention within Hawai'i's child welfare continuum, we recognize that strong early learning systems are foundational to reducing long-term system involvement and supporting healthier outcomes for children and families.

For these reasons, Family Programs Hawaii strongly supports House Bill 1872 HD1.

Mahalo for your continued commitment to Hawai'i's keiki and families.



We help kids



HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:00:37 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB1872. Early learning educators need all the support they can get. An Apprenticeship Grant Program is one way to help. Please pass this bill.

Mike Golojuch, Sr.

Elaine Yamashita
105 Kamehameiki Rd.
Kula, HI 96790-8451
808-281-1216
elainey208@gmail.com

Feb. 23, 2026

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

From: Elaine Yamashita

Re: HB1872 HD1

Aloha Honorable Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, and members of the House Finance Committee:

While I serve as chair of the Early Learning Board, this is my personal testimony. I've been an advocate for early childhood care and education since the 1980s. I am professor emerita of University of Hawai'i Maui College, where I was the program coordinator for Early Childhood Education from 2000-2019.

I support HB1872HD1, which would expand the current early childhood apprenticeship program. This is a way to grow our important early childhood care and education workforce in a way that supports the specialized knowledge and relationship building that effective early educators utilize to optimize children's growth and development.

Equitable compensation to retain early educators is crucial, and apprenticeships support this.

Mahalo for your consideration and support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Elaine Yamashita
elainey208@gmail.com

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:35:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carol Wear	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of People Attentive to Children (PATCH), the State’s Child Care Resource & Referral agency, I am writing in strong support of HB1872 HD1, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program.

As Hawai‘i continues to address critical early childhood workforce shortages, the establishment of an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program is both timely and essential. Across all counties, child care providers report persistent staffing challenges that limit their ability to expand capacity, serve additional families, and sustain operations. Workforce shortages directly contribute to reduced available seats and longer waitlists for families seeking care.

An apprenticeship model provides a practical and equitable pathway into the early childhood profession. By combining paid, on-the-job learning with structured coursework and mentoring, apprenticeships reduce financial barriers for individuals entering the field while strengthening program quality. This approach supports career advancement, promotes workforce retention, and builds a sustainable pipeline of qualified early childhood professionals.

PATCH’s statewide work in workforce development, professional training, and registry data tracking confirms the need for structured “earn while you learn” opportunities. Many prospective educators face challenges balancing employment, education, and financial obligations. Apprenticeships offer a solution that aligns compensation, credential attainment, and hands-on experience, ensuring that new educators are both prepared and supported.

Importantly, strengthening the early learning workforce has broader economic implications. Child care is foundational infrastructure that enables parents to participate in Hawai‘i’s labor force. Expanding apprenticeship pathways will increase workforce supply, support small child care businesses, and enhance stability for families and employers alike.

PATCH respectfully urges your support for HB1872 HD1.

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:27:29 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelsey Floyd	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I stand in strong support of HB 1872

February 23, 2026

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

Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Measure H.B. No.1872 HD 1 – Relating to the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of H. B. No. 1872 HD1

Aloha,

My name is Dr. Terry Lock. I am the Director of the Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Excellence and Equity (ECE³) Project at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa College of Education. Since 2022, the ECE³ Project has been gathering, reviewing and disseminating research on apprenticeship programs in the early learning industry.

Families across our state are struggling to find affordable, high-quality early learning programs that support their young children's development while families maintain their own economic stability. At the same time, there is a desperate need to support the recruitment, retention, and stabilization of our specially trained early learning workforce.

HB 1872 HD1 offers a tangible solution to these pressing issues by establishing an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State who participate in state- or federally-approved early learning registered apprenticeship programs or ELRAPs.

1. **Creating Career Pathways for Early Learning Apprentices:** Growing studies show that state- or federally-approved early learning registered apprenticeship programs or ELRAPs are associated with increases in employment, skills, and earnings for apprentices and with greater retention and recruitment of skilled staff for employers and the broader economy. The grant program will provide funding to support new early learning apprentices, with financial assistance to cover costs related to earning a credential or degree, on-the-job training while earning a wage, and wage increases when completing ELRAP milestones.
2. **Increasing the Supply of Early Learning Slots:** By incentivizing individuals to enter and advance in the field, this program has the potential to increase slots for infants and toddlers, and increase slots for three- and four-year-olds, in early learning program services

providers, who are Department of Human Services (DHS) licensed group child centers/ homes and registered family child care homes. The additional slots will directly benefit families with young children, who are on child care center/homes' waiting lists or forced to make difficult compromises in their work and other responsibilities.

3. **Support Early Learning Program Services Providers and the Early Learning Industry:** The grant program will not only help early learning program service providers recruit new early learning apprentices, but also retain existing early learning professionals by addressing their low wages with wage supplements. This investment will support the early learning industry.
4. **Strengthening Economic Stability:** For families in Hawai'i who struggle with the high cost of living, access to reliable child care is often the key to maintaining stable employment and achieving economic security. The proposed grant program will play a critical role in ensuring parents can participate fully in their jobs and careers, knowing their children are in safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate settings.

For example, in the summer of 2023, Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers' (KOKA) gained approval as our state's first ELRAP. Recently, I spoke to one of KOKA's apprentices, who is employed at KOKA's Ka Pua Preschool, located in Mā'ili, 'Oahu. This apprentice, a mother of four children, shared, "To be in a job, while going to school, has made a huge difference. This apprenticeship program fits the type of learner that I am. I love that I get to apply what I learn from my mentor and my college instructors, while interacting with preschool children." She also credits her "very encouraging" early childhood education instructors at Honolulu Community College (HonCC). At the end of this Spring 2026 semester, she will complete her second milestone, a certificate of achievement in early childhood education from HonCC.

HB1872 HD1 will help to grow our ECE workforce and aligns with the shared vision of prioritizing early learning as a cornerstone of our state's future. By investing in this early learning apprenticeship grant program, we are not only addressing immediate workforce development needs but are also laying the groundwork for long-term systemic improvements in early learning for our young children's success in school and in life.

Mahalo for your support of H. B. No.1872 HD1.

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:42:30 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support the INTENT

1872 HB RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

TO INCLUDE TRAINING NOT ONLY FOR ENTRY LEVEL, BUT TRAINING IN
NUTRITION, HEALTH, TEACHER, DIRECTOR POSITIONS AS WELL.

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:39:01 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
B. Noelani Iokepa-Guerrero	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program. The grant program will provide financial support to early learning program service providers to participate in an approved early learning apprenticeship program.

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

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: February 24, 2026

RE: House Bill 1872 HD1
Measure Title: RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP
GRANT PROGRAM.
Report Title: UH; Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program; Childcare; Early
Learning Opportunities; Reports; Appropriation (\$)

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 1872 HD1. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:55:27 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raya Tan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and committee members,

I am testifying in support of HB 1872 HD1, which would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai‘i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).

To ensure families have access to high-quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten, we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work toward earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.

I was a preschool teacher for three years, and though I loved my job, I often struggled to make ends meet. I had to take on multiple jobs to supplement my income and earn a livable wage; oftentimes, the toll of working numerous jobs left me exhausted and unable to provide the quality care my kids deserved. At the time, I was living under my parents’ roof, and so I did not have to pay for rent. But if I had to account for housing expenses, there would have been no possibility for me to fulfill my vocation as an early childhood educator. An early learning apprenticeship program would have been perfect for me—allowing me to earn higher wages while gaining valuable education credits and on-the-job learning without needing to leave the classroom.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

Furthermore, this bill would give priority to licensed and/or registered child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai‘i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access

quality care from the time babies need it most. Additionally, many community-based programs are at risk of shutting down due to a lack of public investment, causing critical staff shortages. This has huge consequences for families seeking I/T care since the majority of programs that serve I/T are in the community-based sector. Since this bill would support community-based programs' participation in ELRAPs, it has the potential to strengthen our mixed delivery system and maintain or create more I/T slots.

Innovative recruitment and retention strategies such as apprenticeship programs are especially important because early learning programs depend on staff to maintain their operations. If more and more early childhood education professionals leave the field because of low wages, we will have no one to care for our keiki, and early learning programs may be forced to shut down. This will have devastating outcomes for children, who deserve safe, stable, and nurturing environments, particularly in the formative years of their lives.

In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai'i's children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable child care.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo,
Raya Tan

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:04:39 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
J. Kehau Lucas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing in *strong support* of **HB1872 HD1**, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to build and sustain Hawai‘i’s early childhood workforce.

Research and statewide data clearly demonstrate that **high-quality early learning experiences produce long-term educational, economic, and workforce benefits**. The Legislature itself affirms that “quality learning experiences during a child’s earliest years improve long-term, multi-generational outcomes and contribute to a strong, skilled workforce.” High-quality programs not only support children’s growth, but also strengthen working families and generate substantial revenue for the State. [\[A BILL FOR...hawaii.gov\]](#)

Hawai‘i is currently facing a **severe early childhood workforce shortage**. Many early learning centers have been forced to shorten hours or close classrooms due to lack of staff, and there is licensed capacity for **only about one-quarter** of Hawai‘i’s children under age five. This has resulted in waitlists “hundreds deep,” placing significant strain on families and employers across the state. [\[khon2.com\]](#)

HB1872 HD1 responds to this crisis by expanding **registered early learning apprenticeship pathways**, a proven model that effectively recruits, trains, and retains early childhood educators. Registered apprenticeship programs are recognized as **high-quality, industry-driven career pathways** that combine paid, on-the-job learning with classroom instruction. These programs ensure employers have access to well-trained professionals while enabling participants to “earn while they learn,” a critical factor in making career transitions possible for working adults. [\[A BILL FOR...hawaii.gov\]](#), [\[khon2.com\]](#)

Hawai‘i’s first federally approved early learning apprenticeship program—launched through Honolulu Community College and Keiki O Ka ‘Āina—has already demonstrated success: apprentices earn higher wages, gain stackable credentials (CDA, ECE certificate, AS degree), and receive comprehensive wraparound support services. This model has been shown to improve educator preparation, compensation, and program quality while helping stabilize the workforce. [\[coe.hawaii.edu\]](#)

State agencies, including the Board of Education and the Department of Human Services, also **formally support** HB1872 HD1, recognizing its essential role in expanding the supply of

qualified early learning professionals and strengthening Hawai‘i’s childcare capacity. [[OFHI](http://www.hawaii.gov)»].
[w...hawaii.gov](http://www.hawaii.gov)]

For these reasons, **HB1872 HD1 is a strategic, evidence-based investment** that addresses workforce shortages, strengthens family economic stability, and ensures our keiki have access to the high-quality early learning environments they deserve. Expanding apprenticeship opportunities is both an urgent necessity and a smart, long-term investment in Hawai‘i’s future.

I urge the Committee to pass HB1872 HD1. Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Hawai‘i’s keiki and families.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Aloha ‘āina,

J. Kēhau Lucas

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:05:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joell Edwards	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joell Edwards. I am a resident of Wainiha on the North Shore of Kaua‘i, a small business owner, and a community organizer with HCAN. I write in strong support of HB1872 HD1.

On Kaua‘i, we are living the reality of a childcare desert. In rural communities like mine, access is not just limited — it is often nonexistent. Families are driving long distances, piecing together informal care, adjusting work schedules, or leaving the workforce entirely because there simply are not enough early learning providers.

As a small business owner, I see firsthand how the childcare shortage impacts working families and our local economy. When parents cannot find reliable care, they cannot consistently show up for work. Businesses struggle to hire and retain employees. Families experience stress that ripples through our entire community.

HB1872 is a practical and forward-thinking solution. By investing in early learning apprenticeships, we create a clear, supported pathway for local residents to enter and stay in the early childhood workforce. This bill helps providers cover the real costs of training, mentorship, and compensation — all of which are critical to stabilizing and growing the field.

For rural islands like Kaua‘i, especially communities serving infants and toddlers, this could be transformative. It opens the door to expanding capacity, strengthening quality, and creating good jobs rooted in place.

We cannot solve our childcare crisis without investing in the workforce. HB1872 does exactly that.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB1872 HD1.

Mahalo for your consideration

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

FROM: Robert G. Peters, EdD
Past Chair, Early Learning Board

SUBJECT: HB No. 1872, HD1– Relating to An Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

DATE: Wednesday February 25, 2026
TIME: 2:00 pm
PLACE: Via Videoconference
Conference Room 308

POSITION: Support

Aloha Chairs and Members of the House Finance Committees:

My name is Robert G. Peters, Past Chair of the Early Learning Board (ELB) and retired Head of Hanahau`oli School.

Mahalo for the opportunity to supply testimony in support of HB No. 1872, HD1 which is designed to incentivize early learning providers to participate in apprenticeship programs (Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs, or ERLAPS). It seeks to help address critical recruitment and retention challenges in the early learning field and target one of the most critical needs for Infant & Toddler workforce development.

Recent efforts in Hawaii and nationally support the effectiveness of ERLAP programs, offering higher compensation, on-the-job training and improved quality experiences for children and families. The results also indicate this is an effective strategy to both attract and retain qualified staff. This bill would help to address the barrier that many current providers encounter who wish to participate but are unable to afford to pay higher wages required by apprenticeships while guaranteeing wage parity for current staff members.

Ultimately, the primary beneficiaries of the provisions of HB No. 1872 will be Hawai`i's keiki and their families, particularly those seeking infant and toddler settings for their very young children. Apprenticeship programs of this type will help to support affordable child care services while also assisting providers in keeping their programs open and available. The additional training and education directly in the early care setting will also equip staff to deliver quality services for enrolled children.

And not to be overlooked is that such apprenticeship programs, by expanding and enhancing staff growth and development for infants and toddlers, can contribute to general workforce employment needs by offering affordable child care. In a state like ours, with such a low unemployment rate, the need for workers is pronounced.

I respectfully ask your support for HB No. 1872, HD1 in support of the bill's proposed early learning apprenticeship grant program in recognition of the critical role early childhood care and education play in a sustainable future for the state of Hawai'i.

Mahalo,
Robert G. Peters, EdD
Past Chair, ELB

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:15:26 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristy Arias	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill HB1872

Mahalo

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:56:08 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lukas Petersons	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB1872 HD1. Investing in early childhood apprenticeship programs strengthens Hawai'i's workforce, supports working families, and helps ensure our keiki have access to high-quality early learning.

As a father of 2 young keiki and seeing the need in our communities, please vote YES on HB1872.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Lukas

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:24:39 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Manca Sustarsic	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing to express my support for HB1872 HD1. Investing in early childhood apprenticeship programs strengthens Hawai‘i’s workforce, supports working families, and helps ensure our keiki have access to high-quality early learning.

This measure represents a meaningful attempt to address the following key areas:

- Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career;
- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field;
- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals; and
- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Manca Sustarsic

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:49:39 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Traci Garma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 25, 2026

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

From: Traci M. Garma

I stongly SUPPORT House Bill 1872 HD1

Having this Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program is needed to help grow the workforce here in the State of Hawaii through:

-Creating viable entry points to the early learning profession for individuals whether they are brand-new to the workforce or interested in pursuing a new career

- Establishing a proven and structured pathway for early learning professionals to enter and advance within the field

- Providing paid, on-the-job training for early learning professionals

- Increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals by incentivizing them to enter and advance within the field, thereby increasing the overall supply of early learning slots.

Thank you

Traci M. Garma

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 308 and Via Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1872, HD1 - RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, Reps. Miyake and Yamashita of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I write to you today in **strong support of HB 1872, HD1**, relating to an early learning apprenticeship grant program. HB 1872, HD1 establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

HB 1872, HD1 would:

- Help pay for training and education to become or stay an early childhood teacher
- Create career pathways so teachers can grow and stay in the field
- Helps programs hire and keep more qualified teachers
- Increase the number of child care and preschool spots for local families
- Improve quality of early learning for keiki
- Strengthen the local workforce

Based on the foregoing benefits, I request that you **vote in support of HB 1872, HD1**.

Mahalo for all you do in support of Hawai'i students and families,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.

Wailuku, Maui

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:27:24 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tinoi Cady	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB1872 HD1. Investing in early childhood apprenticeship programs strengthens Hawai'i's workforce, supports working families, and helps ensure our keiki have access to high-quality early learning.

As a preschool teacher I recognize the value of early childhood education. Our workforce is dwindling and we need these apprentices.

Mahalo for accepting my testimony.

Tinoi Cady

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:24:48 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Kailiawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members

I am in Strong Support of this bill.

Please pass this bill

With gratitude

Leilani Kailiawa

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

From: Brenda Watanabe
Date: February 24, 2026

Subject: TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB 1872 HD1, Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Grant Program

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

My name is Brenda Watanabe and I am a parent, grandparent and early childhood educator deeply committed to the future of our keiki. I am writing to voice my strong support for HB 1872 HD1. We often talk about how important the first five years of a child's life are, yet the people we entrust with those years are often among the lowest-paid workers in our state. We cannot expect to build a quality education system on the backs of a workforce that can barely afford to live here.

Why the Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Program is a solution for Hawai'i needs:

- A Promising Start: The 2023 partnership between Honolulu CC and Keiki O Ka 'Āina (KOKA) provides starting wages of \$17–\$19 per hour. This isn't just a "pay raise"; it's a path to dignity.
- Growing from Within: Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs) allow our community-based programs to grow their own talent. By using an "earn while you learn" model, staff can stay employed while earning their CDA and/or college degree.
- Lifting Everyone Up: This bill doesn't just help the new apprentices. It provides grants so employers can raise the wages of existing staff too. It supports the current workforce and honors the knowledge and experience of our dedicated early childhood educators.

The ripple effect on our families: When early learning programs can't find staff, they close their doors or hike tuition. This forces parents to make the impossible choice between their careers and their children's care. By stabilizing the workforce through this bill, we are keeping tuition affordable and keeping Hawai'i's parents in the workforce.

This bill is a win for the teachers who deserve a living wage, a win for the businesses that need reliable employees, and most importantly, a win for the children who deserve well-prepared, well-qualified and well-compensated educators.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 1872 HD1 to ensure Hawai'i's early learning programs can thrive.

Mahalo for your time and for your commitment to our community.

Sincerely,



Brenda Watanabe

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:47:09 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chloe Pua'ena Vierra-Villanueva	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB1872 because early childhood educators are essential to Hawai'i's families and economy. Investing in apprenticeship programs will help grow and strengthen the workforce so more families can access quality child care. Supporting these educators supports our keiki, working families, and our communities statewide. Please pass this measure. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1872.

Me ke aloha,

C. Pua'ena Vierra-Villanueva

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:47:10 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Barbara DeBaryshe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I write in **strong support** of HB 1872, the early learning apprenticeship program. Our state has a child care shortage, which is especially severe for infant-toddler care. Child care providers are generally operating at about 85% capacity and extreme difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff is a primary reason for this state of affairs. Our early learning staff perform a critical professional service, yet they are very much underpaid. The apprenticeship program will help the early childhood community grow and retain a qualified workforce.

Barbara DeBaryshe

Kaimuki

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:54:32 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paula Yanagi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of the Early Childhood Apprenticeship Grant program. It is a wonderful program that supports the field of Early Childhood by increasing qualified and quality staff all around, including financially. This will help schools to continue to service children and families with great quality. There is a lack of qualified teachers, and by having this apprenticeship program, we can help the field grow and continue to care for children. Mahalo for your time. I am in support of bill HB1872 HD1.

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 2:02:04 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marion McHenry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB1872 HD1. Investing in early childhood apprenticeship programs strengthens Hawai'i's workforce, supports working families, and helps ensure our keiki have access to high-quality early learning. This bill offers a wonderful opportunity to working early childcare providers to expand their education and our keiki will reap the benefits!

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Marion McHenry

Princeville, Kauai

HB-1872-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 2:16:52 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB1872 HD1. Investing in early childhood apprenticeship programs strengthens Hawai'i's workforce, supports working families, and helps ensure our keiki have access to high-quality early learning.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Erin Hagan

Waiialua