

Hawai'i Psychological Association

For a Healthy Hawai'i

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

Thursday, February 19, 2026, 2:00 PM
Conference Room 309 & Videoconference

Comments and Proposed Amendment to HB1889, RELATING TO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

HB1889 would create a working group within the Department of Education to recommend actionable steps towards legislation for the licensing of school psychologists. **The Hawai'i Psychological Association (HPA) supports the establishment of a school psychologists working group so long as psychologists are added to the proposed working group. We propose that the bill be amended to include HPA in the working group.** Previous bills for a school psychologists working group did include psychologists, who are now excluded. **Psychologists are key stakeholders given the position by the Hawaii Association of School Psychologists that licensure should be under the Board of Psychology.**

All states except Texas and Hawaii have their State Education Agencies (SEAs) overseeing the credentialing of school psychologists. Texas licenses school psychologists under their Board of Psychology. They are still the only state to do so. (<https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/school-psychology-credentialing-resources/state-credentialing-faqs>). In a move towards deregulation, Texas has multidisciplinary Boards.

HPA encourages the state of Hawaii to adopt legislation consistent with 48 other states regarding school psychologist licensure. We also encourage the Hawaii Association of School Psychologists to delineate their scope of practice for the working group as a necessary step towards licensure. As HPA shared in meetings with school psychologists and testified in proposed legislation in 2025, we continue to present to support licensing school psychologists under the Board of Education.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this important bill.

Sincerely,



Alex Lichten, Ph.D.
Chair, HPA Legislative Action Committee



HB1889 Credentialing School Psychologists in Hawai'i

Aloha Chair Woodson and members of the committee:

The Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists believes that credentialing is important for all professionals that are entrusted to care for students, especially those with special needs. Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS) 465 protects the professional integrity of the term "psychology" by ensuring that non-licensed individuals cannot practice psychology. This public protection ensures that specialized training and expertise is required to practice psychology. Currently, School Psychologists are 'exempt' from needing such a credential to practice in the educational setting (HRS 465) and have no credentialing in the State. Hawai'i is the **only** State in the nation that allows this. This exemption has allowed individuals who do not have graduate training in school psychology and who do not meet the nationally accepted certification standard to practice "school psychology" within the educational setting. We are asking for the legislature's support to establish credentialing requirements for School Psychologists in the State, thereby ensuring that students receive services from highly qualified and properly licensed professionals. Additionally, recent updates to CMS now explicitly name licensed School Psychological services as billable, and would enable the DOE to generate additional funds under Medicaid. Finally, the proposed legislation aligns with the nationally adopted language and structure for credentialing School Psychologists.

Graduate training in school psychology and a supervised internship aligns with the Practice Model set forth by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). The Practice Model outlines the professional expectations of respecting the dignity and rights of all persons and maintaining professional competency and integrity in professional relationships to foster and maintain the public's trust. The NASP practice model outlines the training of school psychologists, which requires them to be forthright about their qualifications, competencies, and roles. We work in full cooperation with other professional disciplines to meet the needs of students and families and avoid multiple relationships that diminish their professional effectiveness. We maintain the public trust by respecting law and encouraging ethical conduct. When untrained and unqualified persons are employed as a school psychologist under this current exemption in HR 465, but do not meet the graduate level training requirements, the integrity of the profession is compromised and the public is not protected. The training of school psychologists is unique in that we have extensive training in cognitive, academic, social/emotional, behavioral, and adaptive assessment practices and training to ensure these measures are fair, reliable and valid. When these assessments are not utilized and administered as they were designed by properly trained professionals, the students are not being fairly assessed, which can result in inaccurate results. The research is clear that students who are identified with special learning needs are at a higher risk for a number of negative outcomes, such as dropping out of school, qualifying for lower-level jobs, or becoming involved in criminal activity. Raising the standards of practice for all school psychologists working in the state of Hawai'i will increase appropriate service delivery to those students most in need.

The Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists asks that you support the credentialing of school psychologists to ensure that all children in Hawai'i are afforded the same protection of a licensed and credentialed professional working within their scope of practice. This working group is the next step in this process.

Respectfully Submitted:

Leslie Baunach, NCSP
HASP Legislative Chair

To: House Committee Education
Re: **HB1889 – Relating to School Psychologists**
Hawaii State Capitol & Via Videoconference
February 19, 2026; 2:00 PM

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of HB1889**, which creates a School Psychologists Working Group within the Department of Education to recommend actionable steps or propose legislation for an immediate pathway to licensure for school psychologists that can be acted upon in 2027.

More than one-third of our state's youth struggle with depression, and 1 in 4 young teens report having suicidal thoughts.¹ To reduce increased rates of anxiety, depression, and potential suicides that have occurred since the pandemic, the U.S. Surgeon General recommended ensuring all children have access to high-quality and culturally competent mental health care in schools and other community-based settings.²

Yet in recent years, Hawai'i has employed only one school psychologist for every 2,800 students, which is over five times more than National Association of School Psychologists' recommended ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students.³ This shortage of accredited school psychologists has been an on-going issue for our state, and now is the time to address it.

Hawai'i is the only state that does not require certification or licensure for school psychologists,⁴ which creates a challenge for recruitment and retention. For example, professionals working as school psychologists in Hawaii cannot count their experience if they relocate to another state. Coupled with below-average salaries and heavy workloads, Hawai'i becomes a less appealing option.⁵

Creating a pathway to school psychologist licensure would help Hawai'i address our critical shortage of accredited school psychologists and support children and youth with high quality, evidence-based mental health practices.

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

Thank you,

Nicole Woo
Director of Research and Economic Policy

¹ <https://www.hawaiihealthmatters.org/indicators/index/dashboard?alias=MentalHealth>

² <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

³ <https://www.civilbeat.org/2022/09/hawaii-has-a-shortage-of-school-psychologists-national-research-says-thats-a-problem/>

⁴ <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/local-news/2022-02-17/senate-moves-forward-bill-for-school-therapist-credential>

⁵ <https://www.civilbeat.org/2023/11/beth-fukumoto-hawaiis-youth-need-more-mental-health-support>

HB-1889

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 8:15:27 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alec Marentic	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Dear Chair, Co-Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alec Marentic, and I am a trained school psychologist living and working on Big Island. I am writing in strong support of HB1889.

Title protections for Schools Psychologists is critical to ensure that our keiki receive high quality services by appropriately trained Psychologists.

School Psychology was first recognized as an area of specialization by the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1998, the same year that Clinical Psychology was recognized as an area of specialization. The APA defines specialties as "a defined area of psychological practice that requires advanced knowledge and skills acquired through an organized sequence of education and training."

In all other states, verification of the advanced knowledge and skills necessary to practice as a School Psychologist is completed through credentialing, which often includes completing a School Psychology advanced degree program, and obtaining a passing score on the Praxis School Psychologist Test.

Currently, Hawai'i allows for individuals with advanced degrees in other specializations in Psychology to practice as School Psychologists. This mismatch of specialization leave our keiki and the department of education vulnerable in a number of ways:

Misidentification of Learning Disabilities: Clinical Psychologists (as an example) are trained to diagnose disorders like ADHD. School Psychologists are trained to identify educational disabilities. Someone without school psychological training may recommend the wrong interventions for the school environment, and this could have deleterious impacts on the child's development.

Legal Vulnerability: School Psychology is governed by strict federal laws like IDEA, a law that School Psychologists receive extensive training on that other specializations do not. Someone who does not have that training might suggest an accommodation that is clinically sound, but legally unenforceable or disruptive to the school's Least Restrictive Environment mandate.

Systemic Mismatch: Most specializations of psychology are "person-centric" in the sense that they focus on the pathology of the person. School Psychology is "ecology-centric" in the sense that we are trained to examine the instruction, the curriculum, the classroom management, etc. A child may be inappropriately pathologized if the Psychologist does not know how to examine these areas in school contexts.

In short, having a Psychologist not specialized in School Psychology working as a School Psychologist is like having a Cardiologist running an Emergency Room. If a patient comes in with a broken leg or a rare allergic reaction, the Cardiologist can recognize they are in pain and treat the symptoms, but they won't have the specific training to set the bone or navigate the hospital's trauma protocols. In a school setting, a clinical psychologist might be great at discussing a student's depression, but they often have no training on how depression interacts with reading curriculum or how to ensure a Free and Appropriate Education amidst a child's disability.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify,

Alec Marentic,
Nationally Certified School Psychologist

Testimony Support for HB 1889
February 18, 2026

Aloha,

School psychologists offer a variety of services to support children's academic, social-emotional, and behavioral development. We collaborate with parents, educators, and other professionals to create safe and supportive learning environments and are specially trained to work in school settings. As a practicing school psychologist with the Hawaii Department of Education and an executive board member of the Hawaii Association of School Psychologists, I am writing in support of bill HB 1889, which advocates for the licensing of school psychologists in Hawaii.

Currently, Hawaii is the only state in the country that does not have a credentialing process for school psychologists. This is problematic for several reasons. First, without credentialing requirements, there is an increased risk of unqualified individuals being placed in school psychology positions. As school psychologists, we assist teams in evaluating and making educational placement decisions that impact the education and overall well-being of our keiki. It is crucial for school psychologists to have sound knowledge and expertise in evaluations and disabilities to help our school teams make appropriate eligibility and placement decisions. Without this knowledge, it opens the door to malpractice. I recently became aware of a situation where someone practicing in a school psychology role without a credential misinterpreted a cognitive assessment, which led to a student being misidentified as having an intellectual disability. Such errors can result in misidentification and inappropriate educational programming for a student, with lasting effects.

Another reason why licensing school psychologists is crucial because it enables us to seek Medicaid reimbursements for the services we provide in educational settings. This billing capability would benefit the department's overall operating budget.

Credentialing is important for all professionals, but it is crucial for professionals working with keiki with special needs. Our number one priority should be to protect our keiki.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Sherina Hironaka, M.S., P.P.S.

School Psychologist

Treasurer-Elect of the Hawaii Association of School Psychologists (HASP)

HB-1889

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 5:22:37 PM

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

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

1889 HB RELATING TO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

HB-1889

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 9:58:48 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keri Anacker	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Keri and I'm a School Psychologist on O'ahu. I'm writing in favor of HB1889 that would establish a working group to establish licensure for School Psychologists. Unfortunately, we remain the only state in the nation without a School Psychologist credential, despite two sunset evaluations conducted regarding Psychologists that clarified **all** Psychologists should be licensed. Because Hawai'i does not have a School Psychology license, individuals who do **not** have graduate training in school psychology and do not meet the nationally accepted certification standards are providing school psychological services in our schools across the islands; this is currently happening in my own district. Requiring School Psychologists to have the appropriate qualifications, will ensure that students receive services from highly qualified and licensed professionals, would decrease the risk of malpractice, and would enable us to bill for Medicaid.

Additionally, some may think that this would *decrease* the amount of applicants to our state by narrowing the requirements, but the **opposite is true**. I have spoken to many prospective school psychologists from the mainland who have the desire to work for our state, but they are shocked to learn about the absence of credentialing, and disappointed with the subsequent lack of protection for our keiki, which ultimately turns them away from applying.

Credentialing our School Psychologists would help recruit, retain, and give money back to the state. It is time.

Thank you.

Testimony Support for HB 1889
February 18, 2026

Aloha,

I'm writing to provide my support of HB 1889, to form a work group to focus on and create an actionable pathway for licensure for School Psychologists in the state of Hawaii. Hawaii continues to be the only state in the nation without a credential for school psychologists.

Two sunset evaluations were previously conducted on the profession of psychology with the recommendation that all psychologists be licensed (Report No. 81-6, 1981; Report No. 87-22, 1987); with the first conducted over 40 years ago. School psychologists *are* psychologists and should be credentialed as recommended by the sunset evaluations. As Hawaii does not have a pathway for licensure or credentialing of school psychologists through the Department of Education or through other bodies (such as the Department of Health, Board of Psychology, etc.), persons who do not hold proper education and training directly related to school psychology are able to be employed as school psychologists and deliver psychological services to our keiki in schools. This is extremely problematic given the sensitive nature of consultation with schools and families, evaluation procedures, and the high-stakes decision-making that comes with referrals for special education and related services. Lack of credentialing of school psychologists has the potential to result in untrained persons misinterpreting and misusing assessment information. This can have long-lasting and detrimental impacts on students who may end up being misidentified, provided incorrect or inadequate services to meet needs, and impact the student meeting minimum qualifications for high school graduation with a standard diploma.

As a school psychologist in my 10th year of service, I received my training as an intern here in Hawaii, on the Leeward coast. I have also worked in the states of Tennessee and Virginia and have first-hand knowledge of the licensure requirements of both states. These states require credentialing through the state Department of Education in order to ensure proper training, skill, and ethical standards are obtained and met by the school psychologist. I currently maintain those state credentials as to show that I, as a school psychologist, meet standards of educational knowledge, training, skills, and ethical standards. The fact that Hawaii still does not have minimum standards for personnel in a role as significant as school psychologist is incredibly troubling and indicates to the rest of the country that our children and most vulnerable populations are not deserving of services from qualified personnel.

Furthermore, having been away from Hawaii for 7 years, I was surprised to see that this issue continues to be unresolved by the legislature to enact a licensure/certification of any kind, despite the introduction of similar bills to HB 1889 year after year. Meanwhile, other states across the country are making great strides to ensure not only that their professionals serving their most vulnerable children are served by individuals who are trained in the profession but also that those individuals are highly qualified to meet the unique needs of students. Not only do all other states have a credential/licensure, many provide additional stipends for holding national certification to recruit and retain highly qualified personnel.

I urge the committee to ask why Hawaii has not addressed the credentialing of school psychologists when a recommendation was made over 40 years ago to take such action. I also ask the committee to consider all other professions, both within and outside of the HDOE, which do have a credential. Finally, I ask the committee to consider the immediate and long-term impacts unqualified personnel will have on our keiki and to take decisive action to make a pathway to licensure for school psychologists.

Mahalo for your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Iris Mackey, M.S., CAGS
School Psychologist
President of the Hawaii Association of School Psychologists

Testimony Support for HB1889
February 18, 2026

Aloha,

School Psychologists work to provide effective services to help children and youth succeed academically, social-emotionally, and behaviorally, by providing direct educational and mental health services for our keiki. Additionally, we work with parents, educators, and other professionals to create supportive learning and social environments for all children. As a practicing School Psychologist for the DOE and an executive board member of the Hawai`i Association of School Psychologists (HASP), I am writing in support of licensure of School Psychologists in Hawai`i. Currently, Hawai`i is the *only* state in the country that does not have a credentialing process in place for School Psychologists, despite two sunset evaluations conducted regarding Psychologists that clarified all Psychologists should be licensed (Report No. 81-6, 1981; Report No. 87-22, 1987). There are a couple of reasons this is extremely problematic. First and foremost, having no credentialing requirements may result in unqualified individuals working in School Psychologist positions, which could potentially cause harm to our keiki. Sometimes, individuals will be put into a School Psychologist position, even if they have not received adequate training to be working in these positions, due to the state not having credentialing requirements in place. It is clear that the state of Hawaii has a severe shortage of School Psychologists, and because of this, it is not surprising that unqualified individuals may be fulfilling School Psychologist roles; however, it is imperative to understand that this causes more harm than benefit to our keiki, as it places them at particular risk for malpractice.

The reason this is problematic is showcased in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which recognizes School Psychologists as “specialized instructional support personnel”. School Psychology programs are unique from other mental health programs in their focus on the interpretation of assessment results, formulating educational implications from the results, and then linking those results to effective, research-based interventions that can be implemented in the school setting. School Psychologists also receive specific training in special education law and are trained in the special education eligibility process. They are trained as Psychologists who are specifically trained to practice within the school, rather than a clinical setting. Although any mental health professional can be trained to administer assessments, the interpretation can be very problematic for anyone who is not trained, yet is placed into a School Psychologist position, and this can result in damaging consequences for students. For instance, I was made aware of a past case in our state where an unqualified individual working in the role of a School Psychologist had misinterpreted the cognitive (IQ) scores of a student who spoke English as a second language, when the cognitive test had been administered in English, a language in which this student was not fluent. The student scored within the extremely low range when tested in English, resulting in an educational classification of Mental Retardation at the time (now called Intellectual Disability), and the student consequently began to receive intensive special education services to meet what were determined to be his needs, based on the evaluation results. Unfortunately, this was very inaccurate, as the student apparently had average intellectual abilities when tested years later in his dominant language. Therefore, it appears this student received inaccurate programming for years until the error was realized, and by that time, he had missed years of receiving appropriate instruction/curriculum in school. This is just one example

to highlight how an individual unqualified to practice as a School Psychologist may not be able to make accurate decisions to assist our keiki, as this professional had not received the appropriate and specialized training necessary to do so. It is critical to have qualified professionals working in our field.

Second, the state's failure to require licensure of its School Psychologists means that, by law, the state is unable to seek warranted reimbursements from the federal Medicaid program for direct services provided by School Psychologists in an educational setting. If we had a licensing process in place, we would be able to bill for our services, other than just administrative work, and this money would be used to support the department's overall operating budget.

It would make the most sense for School Psychologists to be licensed and registered through the Board of Psychology to ensure the delivery of quality service to students and the community, as it is a consumer protection agency. It would be the most seamless transition because School Psychology has already become a part of the Board of Psychology. It is important to consider that all Psychologists are indeed Psychologists, regardless of the setting we work in (i.e., school, private practice, hospital). Why should School Psychologists be the only area of Psychology exempt from having to follow professional standards in our practice? Licensure is a requirement for all other Psychologists. As School Psychologists, we work with children with special needs, as we have specialized training to do this. We must have credentialing standards in place to be held to higher standards and to protect our children.

In summary, credentialing is important for all professionals, but it is critical for professionals who work with keiki with special needs. Our keiki need to be protected through the implementation of a credentialing process.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Garrett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amanda Garrett, Psy.D., NCSP
Nationally Certified School Psychologist
Treasurer of the Hawaii Association of School Psychologists (HASP)

Testimony Support for HB1889
February 18, 2026

Aloha,

School Psychologists work to provide effective services to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally by providing direct educational and mental health services for children and youth. Additionally, School Psychologists work with parents, educators, teachers, and other professionals to create supportive learning and social environments for all children. As a practicing School Psychologist for the DOE and a member of the legislative committee for the Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists (HASP), I am writing in support of licensure of School Psychologists in Hawai'i. Currently, Hawai'i is the *only* state in the country that does not have a credentialing process in place for School Psychologists, despite two sunset evaluations conducted regarding Psychologists that clarified all Psychologists should be licensed (Report No. 81-6, 1981; Report No. 87-22, 1987).

First and foremost, having no credentialing requirements may potentially result in unqualified individuals working in School Psychologist positions, which could potentially cause harm to our keiki. This means that individuals within the state of Hawaii who have earned a degree in a similar field, such as Counseling, Industrial/Organizational, or Clinical Psychology, are hired into School Psychologist positions, even though they have not received adequate training to work in these positions. It is clear that the state of Hawaii has a severe shortage of School Psychologists, and because of this, it is not surprising that unqualified individuals may be fulfilling School Psychologist roles; however, it is imperative to understand that this causes more harm than benefit to our keiki, as it places our keiki at particular risk for malpractice.

The reason this is problematic is showcased in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which recognizes School Psychologists as “specialized instructional support personnel”. School Psychology programs are unique from other mental health programs in their focus on the interpretation of assessment results, formulating educational implications from the results, and then linking those results to effective, research-based interventions that can be implemented in the school setting.

School Psychologists also receive specific training in special education law and are trained in the special education eligibility process. They are trained as Psychologists, with the difference between their program and other Psychology programs being that they are specifically trained to practice within the school, rather than clinical setting. Although any mental health professional can be trained to administer assessments, the interpretation can be very problematic for those who are not trained, yet placed into a School Psychologist position, and this can produce damaging consequences for students.

For example, a student who has not had appropriate research-based interventions implemented prior to special education, might be made eligible by an unqualified clinician who has not had the university training in pre-referral interventions, such as School Psychologists receive in their graduate studies. This student might have been ablaze to succeed educationally without the need for special education services with the correct response to intervention efforts made by the team

and implemented by School Psychologists. This is just one example to highlight how an individual unqualified to practice as a School Psychologist may not be able to make accurate decisions to assist our keiki, as this professional had not received the appropriate and specialized training necessary to do so. It is critical to have qualified professionals working in our field.

Second, the state's failure to require licensure of its School Psychologists means that, by law, the state is unable to seek warranted reimbursements from the federal Medicaid program for most services provided by School Psychologists in an educational setting. If we had a licensing process in place, we would be able to bill for our services, and this money would be used to support the overall operating budget of the department.

It would make most sense for School Psychologists to be licensed and registered through the Board of Psychology to ensure delivery of quality service to students and the community, as it is a consumer protection agency. It would be the most seamless transition because School Psychology has already become a part of the Board of Psychology. It is important to consider that all Psychologists are indeed Psychologists, regardless of the setting we work in (i.e., school, private practice, hospital). Why should School Psychologists be the only area of Psychology exempt from having to follow professional standards in our practice? Licensure is a requirement for all other Psychologists. As School Psychologists, we work with children with special needs and we have received specialized training to do this. We must have credentialing standards in place to be held to higher standards and to protect our children.

In summary, credentialing is important for all professionals, but it is critical for professionals who work with keiki with special needs. Our keiki need to be protected through the implementation of a credentialing process.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Traci Effinger, M.S., NCSP
Nationally Certified School Psychologist