



JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM
HAWAII EMPLOYER-UNION HEALTH BENEFITS TRUST FUND
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

SETH S. COLBY, Ph.D.
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DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
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ADMINISTRATIVE AND RESEARCH OFFICE
BUDGET, PROGRAM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DIVISION
FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION DIVISION
OFFICE OF FEDERAL AWARDS MANAGEMENT

WRITTEN ONLY

TESTIMONY BY SETH S. COLBY, Ph.D.
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE FINANCE
ON
HOUSE BILL NO. 1890, H.D. 2

**March 3, 2026
2:00 p.m.
Room 308 and Videoconference**

RELATING TO EDUCATION

The Department of Budget and Finance (B&F) opposes this bill.

House Bill No. 1890, H.D. 2, provides an annual increment if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) pursuant to Section 89-9, and subject to the availability of funds, for teachers who have completed a year's satisfactory service and who have complied with the other requirements of Sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642 and 302A-701, as applicable and provides longevity step increases, subject to the availability of funds, for teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step and who have complied with the other requirements of Sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642 and 302A-701, as applicable.

B&F opposes this measure because the bill does not appear to impose a mandatory obligation on the Legislature to appropriate funds for the annual salary step increases. The phrase, "Notwithstanding any other law to the contrary," would permit the transfer of funds from other Department of Education (DOE) Program IDs to finance the annual salary step increases. Because this provision is not explicitly tied to a

specific CBA or corresponding legislative appropriation, it raises the possibility that other DOE programs may be required to absorb these costs. Further, the phrase, “and subject to the availability of funds,” is ambiguous because it does not specify who is responsible for determining such availability. When read in conjunction with the phrase, “Notwithstanding any other law to the contrary,” this language could reasonably be interpreted as authorizing the reallocation or transfer of funds from other DOE Program IDs to cover the annual salary step increases. Finally, this bill does not specify the amount appropriated to fund the annual salary step increases; consequently, the overall fiscal impact cannot be determined.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.



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

Date: 03/03/2026

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: FIN

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB1890, HD2, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Provides annual salary step increases for public school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, subject to certain requirements. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD2)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) respectfully provides comments on HB 1890, HD 2.

The Department appreciates the Legislature's continued efforts to improve the Department's ability to attract and retain quality employees to support Hawaii's K-12 public schools. Providing automatic step increases in teacher salaries for each year of satisfactory service completed has the potential to be a powerful tool to achieve that goal.

The measure explicitly provides automatic step increases for teachers for each year of satisfactory service. Bargaining Unit 5 (BU5) covers more than just teachers; it also includes librarians, counselors, and resource teachers.

If the Legislature proceeds with authorizing this measure, the Department recommends an adjustment to the language to include all members of BU5.

The Department believes that all of its employees serve diverse yet equally important roles to help ensure student achievement. In light of this, the Department encourages the Legislature to consider including all other Bargaining Units in acknowledgment of the tremendous team effort it takes to ensure a successful Department. Therefore, the Department urges the Legislature to consider including step movements for the following Bargaining Units to this measure:

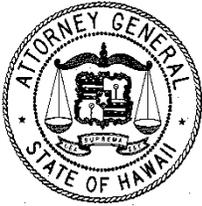
- Bargaining Unit 1 - Blue-Collar Non-Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 2 - Blue-Collar Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 3 - White-Collar Non-Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 4 - White-Collar Supervisory Employees

- Bargaining Unit 6 - Educational Officers
- Bargaining Unit 9 - Registered Professional Nurses
- Bargaining Unit 10 - Institutional, Health, and Correction Officers
- Bargaining Unit 13 - Professional and Scientific Employees

The Department notes that Section 89-9 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes, requires negotiations between the employer and the exclusive representative with respect to wages.

Finally, should the Legislature proceed with authorizing this measure, the Department respectfully requests that the Legislature simultaneously include the funds necessary to implement these step movements into the Department's base budget going forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1890, HD 2.



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

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 1890, H.D. 2, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

DATE: Tuesday, March 3, 2026

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 308

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Amanda L. Donlin, Deputy Attorney General, or
Fiamma Rago, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Todd and Members of the Committee:

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

This bill seeks to provide automatic step increases in teacher salaries for each year of satisfactory service completed, subject to the availability of funds. However, the bill conflicts with section 89-9(a), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), which makes "wages" a mandatory subject of collective bargaining.

Pursuant to section 89-2, HRS, the term "wages" includes the number of incremental and longevity steps. As written, the bill would therefore conflict with chapter 89, HRS, because wages, including incremental and longevity steps, are subject to negotiation through collective bargaining. Further, where there is contrary legislation, section 89-19, HRS, provides that adjustments made in accordance with chapter 89 shall take precedence over all contrary legislation.

The bill's current wording is similar to section 302A-626, HRS, formerly section 297-34, HRS, which was enacted prior to Hawaii's collective bargaining laws for public employment. Section 302A-626, HRS, was repealed by Act 87, Session Laws of Hawaii 2016. That repeal promoted consistency within the law because section 302A-626, HRS, had been rendered obsolete by the collective bargaining law, which requires longevity steps and movement between salary steps to be negotiated through collective

bargaining. Reinserting similar wording in chapter 302A through this bill could again create a conflict with chapter 89.

Additionally, the phrase "**Notwithstanding any law to the contrary**" in the new section of chapter 302A at page 2, line 12, would permit the transfer of funds from other Department of Education (DOE) Program IDs to finance annual salary step increases. Because this wording is not expressly limited to a specific collective bargaining agreement or to a corresponding legislative appropriation, it creates the potential that other DOE programs could be required to absorb the costs of this action.

Further, the phrase "**and subject to the availability of funds**" in the new section of chapter 302A at page 2, line 14, is ambiguous in that it fails to identify the party responsible for determining such availability. Given this ambiguity, and when read in conjunction with the clause "[n]otwithstanding any law to the contrary," the wording of the new sections may be reasonably construed as authorizing the reallocation or transfer of funds from other DOE Program IDs to cover the annual salary step increases.

Finally, this bill does not specify the amount appropriated to fund the annual salary step increases; consequently, the total fiscal impact of the bill cannot be determined.

To promote consistency with chapter 89, HRS, and to address the above concerns, the Department recommends that the new section to be added to chapter 302A be deleted and replaced with this wording:

§302A- Salary increases; annual, longevity. (a) Teachers who have completed one year of satisfactory service and complied with the requirements of sections 302A-601.5 through 302A-642 and section 302A-701, as applicable, shall be entitled to an annual increment if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement under section 89-9, subject to subsection (c).

(b) Teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step pursuant to section 302A-624 and complied with the other requirements of sections 302A-601.5 through 302A-642 and section 302A-701, as applicable, shall be entitled to longevity step increases if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement under section 89-9, subject to subsection (c).

(c) Any collective bargaining agreement negotiated pursuant to section 89-9 that provides for annual increments or longevity step increases under this section and requires the expenditure of public funds shall be subject to funding

by a specific appropriation enacted by the legislature. The agreement shall not be effective or enforceable unless and until sufficient funds are appropriated for its implementation. The legislature may reject the agreement in whole by declining to appropriate the funds necessary to implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

JOSH GREEN, M. D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



J.N. MUSTO
CHIEF NEGOTIATOR
KE PO'O KUKĀKUKA

STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
OFFICE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
KE KE'ENA MĀLAMA LIMAHAHA AUPUNI
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA
235 S. BERETANIA STREET, SUITE 1201
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Statement of
J.N. Musto
Chief Negotiator, Office of Collective Bargaining

Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Tuesday, March 3, 2026
2:00PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 308

In consideration of
HB1890 HD2, RELATING TO EDUCATION

(WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY)

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

The Office of Collective Bargaining (OCB) appreciates the intent of HB1890 HD2, which would provide annual salary step increases and longevity increases for public school teachers, if those items are negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement under HRS §89-9 and if funding is available. However, OCB must respectfully oppose this measure.

OCB agrees with testimony provided by the Department of the Attorney General that the bill raises legal concerns under Chapter 89. In particular, wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment are subject to negotiations as provided under HRS §89- 9; this includes step movement and longevity steps. The Attorney General also noted that similar statutory language was repealed in 2016 because the legislature agreed that these matters must be negotiated through collective bargaining.

OCB recognizes that HB1890 HD2, provides language clarifying that increases would apply only if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement; however, it is important to be clear about what that means in practice: step movement and longevity increases are negotiated each time the parties bargain a new contract.

They are not automatic from one contract to the next contract, and they are usually part of larger negotiations that include many other pay and working-condition issues.

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



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Logan Okita
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Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Andrea Eshelman
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Item: HB 1890, HD2 – Relating to Education

Position: Support

Hearing: Tuesday, March 3, 2026, 2:00 pm, Room 308

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

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

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) **strongly supports** H.B. 1890, HD2 which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This measure is essential to addressing the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention.

Teachers in Hawai'i are financially struggling under the weight of the state's high cost of living. Once adjusted for these expenses, our educators are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes directly to a staggering turnover rate. Nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state altogether within five years of starting. This high attrition poses a significant problem for our students and the stability of our schools.

Establishing automatic step increases is a priority for our educators and aligns with our current Unit 5 collective bargaining agreement. The collective bargaining agreement explicitly states that "the parties recognize that annual incremental step movements are a viable recruiting and retention tool."

The negotiated language further specifies: "Teachers who are not at the top of the salary schedule and who have effective evaluations shall move to the next highest step of the corresponding class at the beginning of each school year. Annual incremental step movements are subject to funding."

H.B. 1890, HD2 establishes the annual step increases that mirror this negotiated agreement. It provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom by ensuring salary progression is a consistent part of their professional career.

The importance of this stability is also echoed in the *2025 HIDOE Teacher Compensation Report*. This study states: "Automatic annual step progression is the norm across most states and is strongly linked to teacher expectations of fairness...A shift to automatic steps would reinforce trust and potentially improve attrition."

By providing these increases, the State is sending a clear message that it values the experience of its educators. We respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo.



UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2026**

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Rep. Chris Todd, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Tuesday, March 3, 2026, 2:00 PM
Conference Room 30 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony on HB1890, HD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

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

The United Public Workers, AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO (“UPW”) is the exclusive bargaining representative for approximately 14,000 public employees, which includes blue collar, non-supervisory employees in Bargaining Unit 1 and institutional, health, and correctional employees in Bargaining Unit 10, in the State of Hawaii and various counties.

UPW provides comments on HB1890, HD2, which, pursuant to a negotiated collective bargaining agreement and subject to the availability of funds, provides annual salary step increases for public school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements.

UPW recognizes the issues that this bill is trying to address and strongly supports better compensation for members of Bargaining Unit 5. However, we are gravely concerned by any legislation that could potentially circumvent, or even undermine, the collective bargaining provisions in Chapter 89, Hawaii Revised Statutes. We believe that the Legislature is not the appropriate authority to approve such salary increases prior to being collectively bargained between the employer and exclusive representative.

Statutorily codifying annual wage increases could create a precedent where exclusive representatives feel compelled to seek better contract provisions through legislation rather than negotiating with employers.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

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HOUSE BILL 1890, HD2, RELATING TO EDUCATION

MARCH 3, 2026 · FIN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 1890, HD2, relating to education, which provides annual salary step increases for public school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, subject to certain requirements.

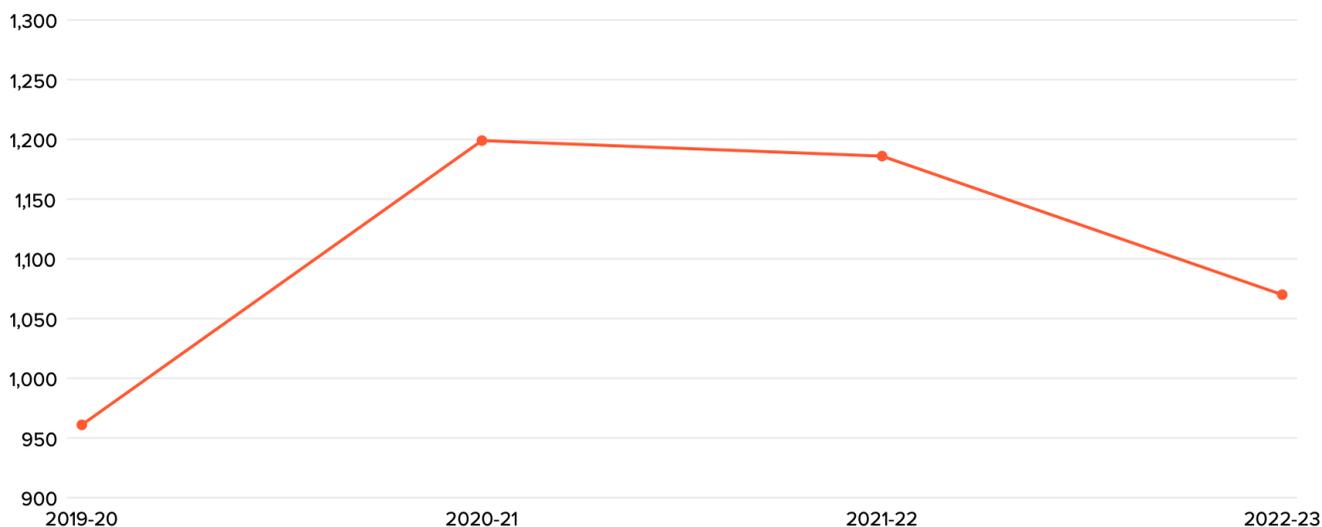
Teachers are the most important professionals in increasing student achievement. According to numerous studies, however, Hawai'i's average teacher salaries are the lowest in the nation when adjusted for cost of living. A 2020 study conducted by APA Consulting on behalf of the Hawai'i Department of Education found that when compared with other high-cost geographic locations, Hawai'i teachers are paid \$7,700 to \$26,000 less than their peers in school districts with similar costs of living, depending on length of service.

While that pay gap is decreasing because of the legislature's effort to fund differential pay increases and resolve salary compression in recent years, teachers are still underpaid compared to other professions that require a similar level of education. **Restoring guaranteed annual increments, more commonly known as "step increases," would significantly help to alleviate that gap.**

A 2022 survey by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University placed Hawai'i among the 10 states with the lowest teacher-to-population ratio. Moreover, as *Honolulu Civil Beat* reported in August of 2024, voluntary teacher separations remain high, at over 1,000 per year (see chart below).

Voluntary teacher separations, 2019 to 2023

The number of teachers annually leaving the DOE remains high but has started to decline following the pandemic.



DOE has not released data for the 2023-24 school year.

Chart: Megan Tagami/Civil Beat • Source: [Hawaii DOE](#)

These trends are further exacerbated by the aging teacher workforce. The Hawai'i State Teachers Association has repeatedly cautioned against being overly optimistic about positive teacher retention data, with a wave of experienced educators expected to retire in the next few years.

Moreover, the state is over reliant on unlicensed teachers to fill vacant positions. A December report found that 48 percent of new teachers in classrooms statewide are not fully licensed. As the Honolulu Star-Advertiser's editorial board recently wrote, "That is completely unacceptable." Strengthening teacher pay improves workforce retention. A Stanford University analysis found that raising wages by 10 percent reduces high school dropout rates by 3 to 4 percent. Similarly, a Florida study showed that pay raises reduced teacher attrition by up to 25 percent for hard-to-fill subject areas.

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

HB-1890-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 9:19:00 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kian Guan Au	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Bill: HB1890

Committee: House Committee on Finance (FIN)

Hearing Date: March 3

Position: Support

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

Aloha,

My name is **Kian Guan Au**, and I am a constituent from **Honolulu (ZIP 96821)**. I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support of HB1890**, which would establish **automatic annual salary step increases for public school teachers who meet satisfactory performance standards**.

As a **public school special education teacher**, I see firsthand how teacher retention directly affects student outcomes and system stability. From a fiscal perspective, frequent teacher turnover carries significant hidden costs, including recruitment, onboarding, professional development, and the loss of instructional continuity. HB1890 addresses these challenges by providing **predictable, earned salary progression**, which is one of the most effective tools for retaining experienced educators.

Automatic step increases are **not discretionary bonuses**; they are a structured and predictable component of compensation that supports long-term workforce planning and budget stability. By reducing turnover—particularly in high-need areas such as special education—HB1890 represents a **cost-effective, long-term investment** in Hawai‘i’s public education system.

For students with disabilities, continuity of instruction is especially critical. Retaining experienced teachers improves educational outcomes while reducing the long-term financial strain caused by repeated vacancies and staffing shortages.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB1890 as a fiscally responsible measure that strengthens both the educator workforce and the efficient use of public funds. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your thoughtful consideration.

Mahalo,
Kian Guan Au
Honolulu, HI 96821

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

Bill: HB1890 Relating to Education

Hearing: Tuesday, March 3, 2026, 2 pm, Room 308

My name is Shylla Cook, and I am a student at the UH Manoa and currently in the Social Work program. I am testifying in support of the Bill HB1890 relating to education because I believe that our students in Hawaii deserve the best education from among the best teachers.

Unfortunately, teachers in Hawaii have the lowest average salary, and with the high cost of living here, many feel that they can't afford it. I know many teachers who have to work a second job to be able to support themselves, and it is not only physically straining, but I'm sure mentally as well. Some of them would actually purchase things out of their own pocket to do certain class activities, and they do it because they care.

The number of teachers leaving the state or even the profession altogether is alarming. Within 5 years, half of the teachers just can't do it anymore. With the high cost of living, our educators feel almost forced to relocate to the mainland for higher wages, and not only our teachers but also our children are missing out.

Please support our very deserving and hard-working educators. Our children deserve the best education, and they are our future.

Mahalo,

Shylla Cook

HB-1890-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 12:58:34 PM

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

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

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of this measure to provide annual salary step increases for public school teachers. Honestly, this should already be standard practice, like other professions in Hawai‘i, teachers deserve predictable pay increases for each year of experience. We build futures, shape communities, and stay in classrooms year after year, yet some people in leadership positions, like Keith Hayashi, get HUGE automatic pay raises and aren’t even in the classroom!

Teachers’ dedication should be recognized with the same respect and fairness. Step increases aren’t a bonus, they’re the minimum that professionals who educate our keiki should receive. Hawai‘i’s students deserve experienced, stable educators, and our teachers deserve pay that reflects their hard work.

Mahalo for your consideration and support of this long-overdue measure.

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

Leeward Distrcit

HB-1890-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 10:53:55 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paul McDonnell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Paul McDonnell, and I am a public school teacher in Hawai‘i. I am writing in strong support of SB2391 / HB1890, which would implement automatic step pay increases for educators who complete a year of satisfactory service.

Automatic step increases are the norm across the country and are a basic expectation for teachers entering the profession. In Hawai‘i, however, step movement is uncertain, negotiated irregularly, and dependent on funding decisions that are often beyond an individual educator’s control. This unpredictability creates confusion, undermines morale, and directly contributes to the state’s ongoing recruitment and retention crisis.

The independent teacher compensation study completed last fall clearly confirmed what educators already know: once adjusted for cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers are among the lowest paid in the nation. At the same time, nearly half of new teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. These outcomes are not sustainable for our students, our schools, or our communities.

Automatic step progression is not a bonus or reward—it is a foundational structure that recognizes experience, promotes fairness, and builds trust in the system. Teachers should be able to plan their financial futures with reasonable certainty, especially in one of the most expensive states in the country. When step increases must be bargained year after year, it creates instability that discourages talented educators from staying in Hawai‘i long term.

As a Special Education teacher, I see firsthand how turnover disproportionately harms students with the highest needs. Continuity, experience, and institutional knowledge matter. Retaining skilled educators is not just a workforce issue—it is a student equity issue.

This bill aligns with existing contract language that already recognizes annual step movement as a vital recruitment and retention tool. Codifying automatic step increases, subject to available funding, would improve transparency, reduce confusion, and bring Hawai‘i in line with national standards.

I respectfully urge you to support SB2391 / HB1890 and take a meaningful step toward stabilizing Hawai‘i’s public education workforce.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully,
Paul McDonnell

Testimony in Strong Support of HB 1890, HD2

Relating to Education

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

From: Corey Rosenlee

Date: March 3, 2026

RE: SUPPORT

The Compression Fix Repaired the Past

In 2022, this body took a historic and necessary step by funding the "compression fix." That action was critical because it corrected years of pay stagnation that had left veteran teachers earning nearly the same as new hires. It was a one-time "repair job" for a broken system, and it successfully stabilized our most experienced workforce.

HB 1890 Fixes the Future

While the 2022 fix addressed the problems of the past, **HB 1890 is what we need going forward.** Without a statutory requirement for automatic step increases, we risk falling right back into the same compression trap.

My main argument is simple: **We cannot keep coming back to "fix" compression every decade.** We need a permanent system where teachers can count on predictable career growth. This bill is the single biggest way to fix the teacher shortage crisis for several reasons:

1. **Stop the Exodus:** Hawaii's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation when adjusted for the cost of living. Currently, nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. Predictable, automatic pay increases give them a reason to stay and build a career here.
2. **End the "Step Freeze" Cycle:** For too long, step increases were a bargaining chip that often got frozen during lean years. This bill ensures that a teacher's experience is valued automatically, providing the financial stability necessary to live in Hawaii.
3. **The "Phase 2" of Recruitment:** Recruiting new teachers is only half the battle. Retaining them is the other. This bill completes the work we started with the compression fix by ensuring that once a teacher is in the system, they have a clear and guaranteed path to a livable wage.

Conclusion

HB 1890, HD2 is the structural solution to a structural problem. By making annual and longevity step increases a matter of law (subject to funds), you are sending a clear message to our educators: "We value your experience, and we want you to stay."

I strongly urge the committee to pass this measure to ensure the long-term health of our schools and the success of our students.

HB-1890-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 7:23:42 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Fitzpatrick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I apologize for submitting my homework late! This one is important to me, my fellow educators, and my students.

My name is John Fitzpatrick and I am a teacher at Kūlanihāko‘i High School. I stand in **strong support of HB 1890**, which would finally provide automatic annual step increases to our educators.

If you pass this measure it would be the first time this century that educators received the annual step increases that we earn!

“Article XX

N. The parties recognize that annual incremental step movements are a viable recruiting and retention tool. Teachers who are not at the top of the salary schedule and who have effective evaluations shall move to the next highest step of the corresponding class at the beginning of each school year. **Annual incremental step movements are subject to funding.”**

The Financial Reality vs. The Rainy Day Fund We often hear that there is "no money" for teachers, yet the fiscal landscape suggests otherwise. In 2024, the legislature passed historic income tax cuts. While tax relief for working families is important, we cannot prioritize tax cuts while leaving our classrooms underfunded. Furthermore, the state currently has over **\$1.6 billion** in the Emergency Budget Reserve Fund ("Rainy Day Fund").

How can we justify hoarding nearly \$2 billion in reserves or passing massive tax cuts, while telling the teachers who educate our future workforce that we cannot afford the estimated \$25 million needed for annual step increases? We are not asking for a handout; we are asking for the state to prioritize the retention of the professionals who show up for our keiki every day.

The "Every Other Year" Myth & The 24-Year Climb Our current contract (2023–2027) and the salary schedule (Exhibit B) are designed with 12 steps to reach the top of the pay scale. In a logical system, a career teacher would reach the top in 12 years. However, because we only receive step increases every *other* year—if we are lucky enough to negotiate them—it actually takes a teacher **24 years** to reach the top, and nearly 30 years to maximize their retirement.

By the end of this current contract, many teachers will have faced three years without step movement (no step in 2024–2025, and likely no step in 2026–2027). This wage compression

demoralizes experienced teachers and makes teaching in Hawai‘i financially unsustainable. HB 1890 would fix this by ensuring movement happens annually, allowing a teacher to reach the top of the scale in a reasonable 12 years—a powerful recruiting tool.

Recruitment and Retention: A Broken Pipeline I previously served as a head faculty representative at Maui Waena and frequently mentored new hires. I vividly remember two teachers recruited from Chicago who were shocked to learn we do not have annual step increases. In Chicago, annual movement is the standard. Those teachers have since moved back to the mainland.

We are competing in a national market. When we cannot promise consistent salary growth, we lose talent. This turnover has devastating effects on our schools. Vacancies mean students are often taught by long-term substitutes who may lack subject-specific certification.

Real Impact on Haumāna The lack of retention hits our students the hardest. I currently teach science to 9th graders. Recently, during a lab that required calculating averages, I realized many students didn't know how to do the math—a skill usually mastered in elementary school. This gap exists because they have lacked consistent, qualified teachers in their earlier years.

Last year, a student told me, *"Mister, you are the best science teacher I have ever had. All my science teachers in middle school dipped out on us."*

That statement broke my heart, and sadly, the cycle continues. Just this year, my fellow science teacher left two weeks into the school year to teach at Kamehameha Schools, where he could get better pay and smaller class sizes. I had to scramble to cover his AP Biology classes so those students wouldn't be left with a substitute for the entire year. The despair on my 9th graders' faces when I had to switch classes was real—they thought they were being abandoned again.

Solidarity with Our Schools I also want to voice my support for our principals, vice principals, custodians, office staff, and cafeteria staff. They, too, deserve annual step increases. Our principals are managing "impossible puzzles"—trying to run schools with 20 classroom positions but only 15 teachers, and constantly losing staff to the hospitality industry where they can make more money with less stress. They deserve a raise for managing these crises daily.

A Legislative Solution is Necessary I often hear that step increases should be handled in collective bargaining. However, we are stuck in a cycle where the employer claims "no funding" during negotiations. **We need the Legislature to break this cycle.** By passing HB 1890 and earmarking the funds specifically for annual steps, you ensure that our pay is predictable, competitive, and sufficient to keep local teachers in local classrooms.

Please pass HB 1890. Help us stop the exodus of talent, solve the "impossible puzzle" for our principals, and give our haumāna the qualified, consistent teachers they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and support,

John Fitzpatrick

Science Educator, Kūlanihāko‘i High School

HB-1890-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 7:48:11 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa Tom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB1890 and stand firmly with Hawai‘i’s teachers. This bill is a critical investment in retaining dedicated educators, which directly benefits students and strengthens our public education system. Competitive and sustainable compensation reduces costly teacher turnover, preserves instructional continuity, and ensures students have consistent access to experienced, highly qualified educators.

When teachers are adequately supported, they are able to focus fully on delivering high-quality instruction and meeting students’ diverse needs, rather than struggling with financial uncertainty. Investing in teachers is a fiscally responsible decision that yields long-term returns through improved student outcomes and a more stable workforce.

My husband is a Deaf educator who is deeply committed to his students. By building strong, interactive relationships, he creates an inclusive and engaging learning environment where students thrive. His work demonstrates how retaining skilled, passionate educators directly impacts student success and the effective use of public education funds.

Mahalo for your time and thoughtful consideration of my testimony.

HB-1890-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 8:51:35 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Misella Tomita	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1890

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

My name is Misella Tomita, and I am a **special education teacher** in Hawaii. I am submitting this testimony in **strong support** of HB1890, which would provide automatic annual step increases in teacher salaries for those who complete satisfactory service.

As a teacher — especially working in special education and with students who are deaf — I have seen firsthand how challenging it is to recruit and retain qualified educators in our state. Hawaii’s high cost of living makes it difficult for teachers to stay long term, and on isolated islands it’s even harder to attract and keep certified teachers. This bill acknowledges these challenges and takes an important step toward fairly compensating teachers for their experience and commitment.

By helping retain experienced teachers, especially in hard-to-staff areas like special education and rural islands, HB1890 will improve continuity for students and strengthen our public education system. Mahalo for your consideration and support.

Respectfully,

Misella Tomita

HB-1890-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 9:00:32 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bryce Takaki	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1890

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

My name is Bryce Takaki, and I am writing in strong support of HB1890.

As an alumnus of Hawaii School for the Deaf and the Blind (HSDB) and someone who worked there for a short time, I understand firsthand the life-changing impact that dedicated special education teachers have on students and families. The specialized skills, patience, and commitment required to serve deaf, blind, and other students with complex learning needs cannot be overstated.

I also write as the husband-to-be of a special education teacher. I see the long hours, the emotional investment, the paperwork, the advocacy, and the unwavering commitment she gives to her students every day. These educators do far more than teach — they support families, coordinate services, and ensure that each child receives the education they deserve.

Hawai‘i’s high cost of living and geographic isolation make it challenging to retain highly qualified teachers, particularly in specialized fields like special education. Providing consistent annual step increases is a fair and practical way to honor their experience, sustain their careers, and help families like ours remain in Hawai‘i.

HB1890 supports teacher retention and ultimately supports our keiki. I respectfully urge you to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Bryce Takaki

HB-1890-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/3/2026 9:36:55 AM

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

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joshua Smith, and I am a public school teacher in Hawai‘i. I am writing in strong support of HB 1890, which would provide automatic annual step increases for teachers who complete a year of satisfactory service.

I have worked in my school for over 13 years, and I have personally seen many excellent teachers leave because they could not afford to continue living in Hawai‘i. These are dedicated, hardworking educators who cared deeply about their students and their schools, but the high cost of living and unpredictable salary growth made it impossible for them to stay. This kind of turnover hurts students, schools, and our entire community.

Automatic step increases are not a bonus—they are a basic and fair part of a professional salary system. In many other states, teachers can count on predictable step movement each year. In Hawai‘i, this uncertainty makes it hard for educators to plan their lives, support their families, and commit long-term to teaching here.

With automatic step increases, teaching becomes a more sustainable career. It would help retain experienced teachers, improve stability in our schools, and reduce the constant cycle of losing good educators and trying to replace them. Most importantly, it helps ensure that our students have consistent, qualified teachers in their classrooms.

HB 1890 is a meaningful step toward valuing educators and strengthening public education in Hawai‘i. I respectfully urge you to support HB 1890.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

Respectfully,

Joshua Smith

Date: March 3, 2026

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

From: Kylie Adamany

Subject: Testimony in Strong Support of HB1890 – Relating to Education (Teacher Salary Step Increases)

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

My name is Kylie Adamany, and I am writing in strong support of HB1890. As a public school student in Hawai'i who hopes to major in elementary education, this bill is deeply personal to me. If we want strong schools and stable classrooms, we must support the teachers who show up for us every single day.

The bill correctly identifies a serious issue: when adjusted for cost of living, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. According to the National Education Association, Hawai'i consistently ranks near the bottom in teacher pay when cost of living is factored in. While the raw salary numbers may appear average nationally, Hawai'i's extremely high housing, food, and transportation costs dramatically reduce what teachers actually take home. If we expect highly qualified educators to live and work here, their salaries must reflect the real cost of living in our state.

Teacher retention in Hawai'i is alarming. As stated in the bill, nearly half of teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. Data from the Hawaii State Department of Education shows ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention, especially in hard-to-fill areas and neighbor island schools. When teachers leave, students lose stability, mentorship, and continuity in learning. High turnover disrupts school culture and academic progress. Automatic annual step increases provide predictable financial growth, which can encourage teachers to stay and build long-term careers here.

Research from the Learning Policy Institute highlights that competitive compensation is one of the most significant factors in teacher retention. States that implement structured salary growth and longevity incentives experience improved retention rates and stronger teacher morale. HB1890 supports exactly that approach, rewarding satisfactory service and long-term commitment. This is not just about raises; it is about valuing experience, encouraging stability, and investing in student success.

In closing, I respectfully urge you to pass HB1890. If we truly care about the future of education in Hawai'i, we must care about the people leading our classrooms. Automatic step increases for satisfactory service show teachers that their dedication matters and that the state recognizes their commitment.

As someone who hopes to become a teacher here one day, I want to see a system where educators are supported, respected, and able to afford to stay. Supporting this bill is an investment in our teachers, our students, and Hawai'i's future.

Mahalo for your time and for your service to our state.