



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: HB2168, HD2, RELATING TO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education to establish a program for the support of students experiencing homelessness. Requires the Department to designate a state coordinator position and state navigator positions to implement the program. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD2)

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) supports HB2168, HD2, which codifies and strengthens educational stability and access for students experiencing homelessness. The measure advances equitable access to education by addressing barriers to enrollment, attendance, and academic success that students without stable housing face.

HB2168, HD2, establishes a coordinated statewide framework to identify, enroll, and support these students, including a state coordinator, navigator positions, and complex-area liaisons to ensure effective implementation. The bill affirms students' rights to immediate enrollment, school stability, transportation, and full access to educational programs and activities, and provides a clear dispute resolution process to safeguard continuity of learning. By formalizing these protections in statute, the bill promotes consistent, timely, and equitable educational services for Hawai'i's most vulnerable students.

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



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Chair Todd
Vice Chair Takenouchi
House Committee on Finance

Tuesday, March 3rd, 2026
2:00 PM

**TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB2168 RELATING TO UNACCOMPANIED
HOMELESS YOUTH**

Aloha Members of the House Committee on Finance.

The Hawai'i State Youth Commission was first created through Act 106 in 2018, "to advise the governor and legislature on the effects of legislative policies, needs, assessments, priorities, programs, and budgets concerning the youth of the State." The Hawai'i State Youth Commission's Education legislative committee is in strong support of House Bill 2168.

Hawai'i's young people deserve stability, safety, and access to opportunity, especially those experiencing homelessness. H.B.2168 takes important steps to ensure that students facing housing instability are not denied educational access because of documentation gaps, transportation barriers, or systemic confusion.

Students experiencing homelessness are often navigating circumstances far beyond their control. Some are sharing overcrowded housing due to economic hardship. Others are living in shelters, motels, cars, or temporary arrangements that shift week to week. For many of these youth, school is the only consistent space in their lives. It provides not only instruction, but meals, mentorship, peer relationships, and a sense of normalcy.

When enrollment is delayed, when transportation is inconsistent, or when families are asked to produce documents they do not have, the message unintentionally sent is that stability must come before education. In reality, education is what creates stability.

This measure strengthens a coordinated, student-centered approach within the Department of Education to ensure that housing instability does not interrupt learning. By formalizing support

structures and clarifying responsibility at the state and complex-area levels, HB2168 helps ensure that protections are implemented consistently and compassionately across all islands.

As Youth Commissioners, we consistently hear from students that belonging matters. Students want to feel seen, supported, and treated with dignity, particularly in moments of crisis. Policies like HB2168 affirm that housing status does not determine a young person's worth or potential.

Education remains one of the strongest protective factors against long-term poverty and disconnection. When we remove barriers to enrollment, participation, and transportation, we are not offering special treatment; we are ensuring equal access to opportunity.

As a Commission charged with uplifting youth voices across Hawai'i, we believe this measure reinforces a simple principle: our schools must remain places of continuity and care, even when a young person's housing situation is uncertain.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

The Hawai'i State Youth Commission
hawaiiistateyc@gmail.com

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i

KAWAIILOA

March 3, 2026

House Committee on Finance

Hearing Time: 2:00PM

Location: House Conference Room 308

Re: HB2168 HD2, Relating to the Education of Students Experiencing Homelessness

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

On behalf of the Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i hui, we are writing in **strong support of HB2168 HD2, relating to the education of students experiencing homelessness**. This bill will require the Department of Education to establish a program for the support of students experiencing homelessness and designate a state coordinator position and state navigator positions to implement the program.

Homelessness continues to affect many communities across Hawai'i. It is especially harmful for children and youth. Homeless youth tend to experience mental health problems, substance use, victimization, criminalization, and unsafe sexual practices. Homelessness can also create significant barriers and harms for youth, hindering their ability to re-assimilate into society, depressing their motivation, and reducing their chances of becoming independent, successful, contributing members of society.

Particularly in education, the lack of a permanent, stable, and adequate residence directly disrupts homeless students' educational experience. Homeless students often face educational barriers involving enrollment, consistent attendance, and academic success when they must worry about securing a safe place to live. Homeless students find themselves moving from place to place because securing long-term, affordable, and adequate housing, especially housing that provides a stable and conducive environment for learning, is difficult. Balancing these challenges while attending school is extremely difficult.

Current federal law provides students experiencing homelessness with specific rights and protections designed to reduce educational barriers, including those related to enrollment and participation. However, given ongoing uncertainty at the federal level, it is critical that additional measures be put in place to safeguard children's rights, benefits, and protections, and to ensure their continued availability regardless of changes in federal policy.

By creating a program to support homeless students' needs, HB2168 HD2 gives them the opportunity to fully participate in school and thrive academically, rather than worrying about housing. This bill prioritizes the needs of students experiencing homelessness by providing additional supports and rights. These include the designation of a state coordinator to oversee the program, with state navigators to assist; the right to attend either the school serving the geographic area in which they reside or their school of origin, regardless of their availability of documentation, including birth certificates, immunization records, guardianship records, or school records; the right to choose a school that is in the student's best interest and that prioritizes educational stability; transportation to and from their school; access to available educational programs and services, including preschool and extracurriculars; and training for individuals involved in program implementation. Furthermore, even where a child's immunization records are unavailable, the child may still be permitted to attend school provisionally, allowing them to continue accessing and engaging in their education despite the circumstances. In further prioritizing a child experiencing

houselessness access to education, if disputes over the child's eligibility arise, HB2168 HD2 requires the child's immediate enrollment in the school they seek.

Addressing the needs of homeless youth can prevent or reduce the harmful effects of unstable housing on homeless youth in school. It is critical that homeless students receive the access and support they need to address their housing instability, because when these basic needs are met, students can focus more on school and engage in their education in ways that support their success. HB2168 HD2 prioritizes students experiencing homelessness or housing instability, underscoring the responsibility of those with authority and resources to ensure these youth have meaningful access to their education through strengthened support and responsiveness.

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i is a collaboration of organizations and individuals committed to reducing the harmful effects of a punitive incarceration system for youth; promoting equity in the justice system; and improving and increasing resources to address adolescent and young adult mental health needs. We seek to improve the continuity of programs and services for youth and young adults transitioning from minor to adult status; eliminate youth houselessness and housing market discrimination against young adults; and promote and fund more holistic and culturally informed approaches among public/private agencies serving youth.

1099 Alakea Street, Suite 2530 | Honolulu, Hawaii 96813 | (808) 447-1840

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i

KAWAIILOA

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Letter in Support of HB2168

February 27, 2026

To: House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness
Hawaii State Legislature
Hawaii State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Strong Support for HB2168 HD1 – Education Support for Students Experiencing Homelessness

Aloha Chair Kapela, Vice Chair Amato, and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Ryan K. Gomes, and I am a resident of Honolulu. I write to you today as a concerned private citizen in strong support of HB2168 HD1, which requires the Department of Education to establish a program for the support of students experiencing homelessness and to designate a state coordinator for homeless education.

The Crisis Facing Our Homeless Students

Hawai'i has one of the highest rates of homelessness per capita in the nation, and the impact on children is devastating. Students experiencing homelessness face barriers that most of us cannot imagine: lack of stable housing, food insecurity, absence of a quiet place to study or complete homework, frequent school transfers, and the trauma and stress that come with living in shelters, cars, on beaches, or in temporary housing.

These children are not just struggling to learn—they are struggling to survive. And yet, education is often their only path forward, their best hope for breaking the cycle of poverty and instability. HB2168 HD1 recognizes this reality and takes concrete steps to ensure that homeless students have access to the educational stability and support they desperately need.

Why HB2168 HD1 is Critical

This bill addresses the unique needs of homeless students by:

- **Establishing a dedicated program** within the Department of Education specifically designed to support students experiencing homelessness, ensuring that their needs are prioritized and addressed systematically rather than as an afterthought.
- **Designating a state coordinator for homeless education** to oversee compliance with federal McKinney-Vento Act requirements, coordinate services across schools and districts, and serve as a single point of accountability for the educational rights of homeless students.

- **Ensuring educational stability** by providing resources and support that help homeless students remain enrolled, attend school regularly, and succeed academically despite the instability in their home lives.
- **Removing barriers to enrollment and participation** such as lack of documentation, immunization records, or proof of residency that often prevent homeless students from accessing education in the first place.

Who This Bill Benefits

HB2168 HD1 is designed to benefit the most vulnerable children in our state—students who are experiencing homelessness through no fault of their own and who deserve every opportunity to succeed.

- **Homeless students** gain access to dedicated support services, advocacy, and coordination that can make the difference between dropping out and graduating.
- **Families in crisis** are assured that their children's education will not be sacrificed because of housing instability.
- **Schools and educators** receive clear guidance, resources, and state-level coordination to help them better serve homeless students.
- **Our community** benefits when we ensure that every child, regardless of housing status, has the opportunity to learn, grow, and contribute to society.

This is not a bill that benefits corporations, special interests, or government bureaucracies. It is a direct investment in our most vulnerable keiki and a recognition that education is a right, not a privilege dependent on having a stable home.

The Moral and Practical Imperative

When we allow homeless children to fall through the cracks of our education system, we fail them, and we fail ourselves. We lose the potential, the talent, and the contributions of an entire generation of young people who could have succeeded if only we had given them the support they needed.

HB2168 HD1 is a recognition that we can and must do better. It is a modest but essential step toward ensuring that every child in Hawai‘i—regardless of where they sleep at night—has access to the education they deserve.

Addressing Concerns

Some may worry about the cost of establishing a new program and hiring a state coordinator. But the cost of not acting is far greater. When homeless students drop out, struggle academically, or fail to graduate, the long-term costs to society—in lost potential, increased social services, criminal justice involvement, and generational poverty—far exceed the investment required to support them now.

Moreover, HB2168 HD1 ensures compliance with federal McKinney-Vento Act requirements, meaning that the state is already obligated to provide these services. This bill simply formalizes the structure, coordination, and accountability needed to do so effectively.

Conclusion

HB2168 HD1 is a necessary, compassionate, and practical measure that ensures educational access and stability for students experiencing homelessness. It recognizes that every child deserves the opportunity to learn and succeed, regardless of their housing situation.

Our homeless keiki are not statistics—they are children with dreams, potential, and the right to an education. HB2168 HD1 ensures that right is protected and that the systems and support they need are in place.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB2168 HD1.

Mahalo nui for your commitment to the well-being and future of all of Hawai'i's children, especially those who need our support the most.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Ryan K. Gomes
Honolulu, Hawai'i

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

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: March 1, 2026

RE: House Bill 2168 HD2
Measure Title: RELATING TO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.
Report Title: DOE; Education; Student Services; Students Experiencing
Homelessness; Program

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 2168 HD2. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

Judith F. Clark

48-218 Kamehameha Highway

808-499-9966

Judithforceclark@gmail.com

Kaneohe, Hawaii 96744

March 3, 2026

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Finance

**Testimony in Support of HB 2168 HD 3 Relating to the Education of Students
Experiencing Homelessness**

As a community advocate, a homeless youth service provider for 25 years, and a person with lived experience of youth homelessness, I strongly support HB 2168 HD 2.

Homeless students experience many challenges and barriers in obtaining educational services. The supports and services mandated by the federal McKinney-Vento Act and implemented in Hawaii Schools through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Office enable many homeless students to participate in school.

This bill will ensure that these critically needed services will continue even if federal mandates and funding are ended. This bill provides a safety net for our most vulnerable children and youth.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Judith F. Clark, MPH