



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

**Date:** 02/10/2026

**Time:** 02:15 PM

**Location:** 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**Committee:** EDN

**Department:** Education

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

**Title of Bill:** HB2374, RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Authorizes the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Forestry and Wildlife, to establish the Shade and Fruit Tree Program to support educational activities and encourage propagation of native shade trees and fruit trees for planting in Department of Education schools.

**Department's Position:**

The Department of Education supports the intent of HB 2374 and recognizes the environmental and climate benefits of trees, including shade and heat mitigation on school campuses. The Department respectfully offers several practical considerations.

First, school participation should remain voluntary. Campus conditions vary widely, and additional trees may compete for limited space with instructional uses, play areas, accessibility, utilities, or existing school gardens. While trees and shade are beneficial, not all campuses are well-suited to increased tree coverage.

Second, trees create ongoing maintenance responsibilities, including pruning, root management, irrigation, and storm response. These duties typically fall on custodial and facilities staff, and adding more trees may increase the workload without corresponding staffing or funding.

Third, while fruit-bearing trees may offer educational and nutritional opportunities, any use of campus-grown fruit in school meals would require compliance with food safety standards, including Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification and approval from the school garden coordinator. Without these requirements, produce could not be served through School Food Services, and consumption would need to be carefully managed.

The Department supports the goals of HB 2374 and respectfully encourages the Legislature to ensure that implementation remains flexible, voluntary, and appropriately funded, while clearly recognizing the operational, space, maintenance, and food safety considerations unique to school campuses.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

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

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

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KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION  
LAND  
STATE PARKS

Testimony of  
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE  
Acting Chairperson

Before the House Committee on  
EDUCATION

Tuesday, February 10, 2026  
2:15 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 309

In consideration of  
HOUSE BILL 2374  
RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

House Bill 2374 authorizes the Department of Education (DOE), in collaboration with the Department of Land and Natural Resources, to establish the Shade and Fruit Tree Program for Hawai'i public schools. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) strongly supports this measure and offers comments.**

The Department agrees with the bill's goal to expand and maintain tree planting and management on school campuses to improve learning environments, reduce heat, and promote a culture of long-term environmental stewardship. Through its Urban and Community Forestry Program, Kaulunani, the Department already works statewide to increase the tree canopy for climate resilience, public health, and education—with schools as a key focus.

Statewide data reveal that only 21% of elementary school areas have a tree canopy of at least 30%, the minimum recommended to provide full shade and cooling benefits. As the number of extreme heat days rises, many campuses lack sufficient shade to protect students and staff during outdoor activities. This issue disproportionately impacts lower-income and Title I communities, where temperatures tend to be higher and cooling resources are limited, raising significant equity concerns.

Kaulunani has a proven history of supporting school-based tree-planting efforts, including the Fruit Trees for Schools project and the current Shade Trees for Schools pilot, implemented

under a 2025 Memorandum of Agreement between the Department and the DOE, using federal grant funds. These initiatives have demonstrated strong demand and effective interagency collaboration but are constrained by short-term funding and a lack of dedicated staff.

HB2374 creates a pathway to move beyond temporary pilots by building long-term capacity within the Department to support the Hawai'i Department of Education and schools statewide. Funded positions would allow the existing partnership to develop into a sustainable, accountable program that provides consistent shade, nutritious fruit, climate resilience, and educational benefits. For these reasons, the Department respectfully urges the House Committee on Education to support this bill.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

Date, 2026

To: Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and the House Committee on education

Subject: **HB 2374**

Aloha,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2374, which establishes the Shade and Fruit Tree Program within the Department of Education. As Hawai'i continues to experience the intensifying effects of climate change, our public school campuses are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the "heat island effect," where high temperatures in outdoor areas negatively impact student health and academic focus. This bill provides a proactive, sustainable solution by leveraging a partnership with the DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife to increase the tree canopy on DOE grounds. By focusing on native shade and fruit-bearing trees, we are not only cooling our campuses through natural transpiration and shade but also enhancing local food security and biodiversity.

Furthermore, this program offers invaluable educational opportunities by transforming school grounds into "living laboratories." Integrating tree propagation and care into the DOE's existing agriculture and natural resource programs allows students to gain hands-on experience in forestry, indigenous cultural practices, and environmental stewardship. Because the DOE has already completed a thorough professional inventory of campus trees as of 2025, the infrastructure is already in place to identify high-need areas where new plantings can be safely managed without damaging school facilities. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure to invest in a cooler, greener, and more resilient future for Hawai'i's keiki. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,  
Carlin McFadden  
#fixourfoodsystem

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**The Food+ Policy internship** develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.