JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAI`I
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA ʻOIHANA HOʻONAʻAUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAI`I 96804

Date: 02/17/2026
Time: 02:00 PM
Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Committee: EDN

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB2376, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires home schooled students to participate in certain annual in person tests at the public school that the student would otherwise be required to attend.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) provides testimony in support of HB 2376.

Updating the reporting requirements for homeschool students to participate in the Department's assessments will provide homeschool parents and the Department with information regarding the student's academic status at their grade level. This academic reporting will provide information on how homeschool students are performing relative to their grade-level peers and will serve as an accountability measure to indicate that students are progressing adequately in their academic program. As the parent is responsible for their child's total educational program, the assessment results may provide an indicator of their child s academic success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2376.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

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

February 17, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
House Committee on Education

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 2376 – RELATING TO EDUCATION.**

Hearing: February 17, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this measure, provides comments, and defers to the Department of Education (DOE). Annual in-person assessments with a student's area school may provide additional opportunity to identify a student's developmental and educational strengths and needs. Students and parents may also learn about other school activities and available government benefits and services that support their child's continued educational success and overall health and well-being.

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

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:31:57 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dr. Amy Bossler	O'ahu Inclusive Co-Op	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Representative Justin H. Woodson

Hawai'i House of Representatives Education Committee

H.B. 2376

February 17, 2026

2pm, conference room 309

My name is Dr. Amy Bossler. I am a former licensed and highly qualified Hawai'i DOE educator and completed a Doctorate of Education in Exceptionalities Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in 2015.

I am testifying on behalf of the O'ahu Inclusive Co-op, a group of 194 families located in central O'ahu. We STRONGLY OPPOSE H.B. 2376.

High-stakes assessments in public school settings places an unnecessary burden on homeschool students, families, and DOE public schools. Requiring homeschool students to take in-person high stakes assessments will create logistical challenges for schools and families and the unfamiliar testing locale and test proctors create challenges for homeschool students.

1. Requiring homeschool students to test in their school of record could create significant logistical challenges. According to the Hawai'i Smarter Balanced website, students enrolled in Hawai'i DOE public schools may take portions of the test over multiple time periods, including spread across multiple days. There is no official time limit, although teachers are given guidelines for how much time the assessment should take. However, if homeschool students are unable to finish during the available window, parents or caregivers would need to schedule additional sessions. This will take time away from educational activities and family obligations. Additionally, schools will face logistical challenges in planning for test administrators, computer availability, and classroom space for additional assessment days.
2. The unfamiliar testing environment creates unfair challenges for homeschool students. According to Walker (2010), an optimal high-stakes testing environment reduces anxiety

and maximizes performance through a calm, quiet, and well-organized, secure space that minimizes distractions. Key elements include familiar supportive proctors and environments. This bill would require students to test in unfamiliar environments with strangers, while facing the anxiety of high stakes. Students may struggle to focus, understand classroom expectations, and perform to the best of their ability.

In conclusion, the families of the O'ahu inclusive Co-Op oppose H.B. 2376. In order for homeschool students to do their best on standardized assessments, we feel that students should take assessments in their regular content classrooms administered by their usual teacher (i.e. homeschool classroom with home educator). Additionally, we feel that this bill will create unnecessarily logistical challenges for our families and schools. Thank you for taking the time to consider our position. We appreciate your commitment to promoting high quality free and appropriate public education for all students in Hawai'i.

Respectfully yours,

Dr. Amy M. Bossler

Representative of the O'ahu Inclusive Co-Op

HSLDA®

Home School Legal Defense Association

PRESIDENT James R. Mason III, Esq. DC, OR
LEGAL DIRECTOR Kevin M. Boden, Esq. WA
LITIGATION COUNSEL Peter K. Kamakawiwoole, Esq. MO, VA
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William A. Estrada, Esq. CA, DC
ATTORNEY Amy R. Buchmeyer, Esq. WI
Ralph F. Rodriguez, Esq. NY
PRESIDENT EMERITUS J. Michael Smith, Esq. VA
OF COUNSEL Tom Sanders, Esq. TX

February 16, 2026

Written Testimony in Opposition to HB 2376
House Committee on Education

Respectfully submitted by

William A. Estrada

Senior Counsel

HSLDA

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is a national nonprofit that advocates for the rights of homeschooling families across the United States. **We OPPOSE HB 2376—an unprecedented proposal that would impose serious burdens on families and school districts. This bill was drafted without meaningful input from local homeschooling families.**

Under current Hawai'i Department of Education regulations, homeschool families submit annual assessments, with standardized testing required at key grade levels. Parents may select from approved assessments, and principals may approve alternatives when standardized testing is inappropriate, including for students with disabilities. This system has operated well for decades. HB 2376 is a solution in search of a problem.

HB 2376 would disrupt the longstanding framework for Hawai'i homeschool families by mandating exclusive use of the state's assessment and requiring homeschoolers to take these assessments in person at their local public school.

For homeschool students and families, the bill eliminates flexibility that allows assessments to be scheduled, administered, and selected in ways that fit an individual child's unique educational needs. Requiring in-person testing at public schools creates transportation challenges, scheduling conflicts, and uncertainty—especially for families with multiple children, working parents, or students with special learning needs.

For public schools, the bill creates new obligations on our hard-working public school educators without providing resources, guidance, or capacity. Public schools would be required to accommodate homeschool students for testing across seven grade levels, plus kindergarten entry testing and universal screening in grades 1 and 2. Many of our public schools already struggle to administer optional assessments such as the PSAT, SAT, and ACT for homeschoolers, and even enrolled students. Expanding mandatory testing access to homeschoolers will compound existing capacity constraints and divert staff time and resources from enrolled students.

The bill would also replace flexibility with rigidity. Current regulations give parents meaningful options—ranging from nationally normed and well-established standardized tests (like the Stanford 10 or the California Achievement Test) to progress reports or teacher evaluations. Principals can also approve alternatives when testing is inappropriate (such as for students with disabilities).

HB 2376 replaces this workable system with a rigid approach that places schools in the position of administering assessments that parents may disagree with, or which may be inappropriate for or inaccessible to the child.

This is unprecedented. HB 2376 would make Hawai'i the first and only state in the nation to require homeschool students to submit exclusively to state testing, eliminate private alternatives, and mandate in-person testing at public schools—with no exceptions allowed. For many families, these requirements would make homeschooling significantly more difficult, if not impossible.

The bill does not identify any existing problem that would justify making Hawai'i a national outlier. There is no evidence that existing homeschool assessment options are failing, or that rigid in-person state testing improves educational outcomes for homeschool students.

Parents who choose to homeschool their children make sacrifices every day for their children. Many live on a single wage. They pay taxes for public education services they

don't use. They do this because they want what's best for their children, and believe homeschooling is what's best.

Unfortunately, this bill was drafted with no meaningful input from these families. Communities are built on conversation and cooperation, not silence and exclusion. When it comes to education, homeschool parents and public school administrators and teachers should be among the first who are consulted, not the last.

I hope today gives you a taste of the vibrant, active, and connected homeschooling community in Hawai'i. Homeschoolers come from all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic demographics.[1] They come from all faiths and none.[2] They come from across the political spectrum. They are united in seeking the most educational flexibility for their children and the best education for their children. The families here today have spent their school day laboring for a common cause while participating in a hands-on civics lesson. They deserve a seat at the table in any discussion about the future of home education in Hawai'i.

HB 2376 is not that future. I respectfully ask that you reject HB 2376.

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[1] *See, e.g.,* Alanna Bjorklund-Young & Angela R. Watson, "The Changing Face of American Homeschool: A 25-Year Comparison of Race and Ethnicity," (Nov. 12, 2024), available online at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15582159.2024.2422743.

[2] *See, e.g.*, Lynn C. Fote & Charles Fote, "Breaking homeschool stereotypes — Who homeschools and why?" (Jan. 28, 2026), available online at https://secularliberty.com/lamp-post-blog/f/breaking-homeschool-stereotypes-%E2%80%94-who-homeschools-and-why.

Formal Testimony in Opposition to HB2376

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Daniel Mather, and I serve as President of Christian Homeschoolers of Hawaii, a nonprofit organization that has supported homeschool families statewide since 1988. We currently serve more than 800 families through our mailing list, along with thousands more through our extended communications network. Our mission is to promote, protect, and provide support to homeschooling families in Hawaii.

I respectfully testify in opposition to HB2376.

Homeschooling in Hawaii is already governed by a comprehensive accountability framework under Hawaii Administrative Rules §8-12-13 through §8-12-22. Under §8-12-18, parents must submit standardized achievement test results in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, along with annual progress reports in all other years demonstrating educational progress.

Accountability is already established in law. This bill does not create accountability; it duplicates it.

The bill states its purpose is to require "annual in-person participation in certain tests by home schooled students to support student success." However, it expands testing into developmentally early grades, including the kindergarten entry assessment and universal screenings in grades one and two.

A substantial body of early childhood research cautions against reliance on formal standardized testing for young learners. Organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the American Academy of Pediatrics have noted that early academic testing often fails to produce reliable indicators of long-term learning outcomes and may misinterpret normal developmental variation as academic deficiency.

Many children at these ages are not developmentally suited for formal standardized testing, particularly in institutional environments.

The bill further mandates that homeschool students participate "at the public school that the child would otherwise be required to attend once a year." Homeschooling, however, operates as a lawful exception to compulsory public school attendance. Families who comply with HAR §8-12-13 through §8-12-22 have exercised their statutory right to educate their children outside of the public school system.

Conditioning that exemption on mandatory participation in public school institutional testing processes introduces a structural contradiction. It effectively imports public school compliance mechanisms into the homeschool exception, blurring the operational boundary between attendance and exemption.

Beyond the legal concern, this mandate raises significant questions regarding testing validity. Homeschooled students are educated and evaluated in familiar, individualized settings. Requiring them to test in unfamiliar institutional environments introduces situational stressors that can negatively affect performance.

Assessment research consistently recognizes that testing conditions materially influence outcomes. When a student is placed in an unfamiliar setting for high-stakes testing, results may reflect anxiety or environmental discomfort rather than academic mastery. Consequently, the data produced risks being inaccurate or misleading, undermining the bill's stated purpose.

The bill also requires participation in statewide assessments, including English language arts and math testing through the Smarter Balanced Assessment. Yet homeschool families frequently utilize mastery-based, multi-age, classical, and faith-integrated instructional models that are not calibrated to public school pacing frameworks.

Testing misaligned to instructional sequence does not yield meaningful measures of student progress. This stands in tension with the bill's stated purpose "to support student success and ensure access to appropriate educational support when needed."

Notably, the bill itself affirms that homeschooling is "a valid and beneficial educational option that offers flexibility, individualized instruction, and strong family engagement." Yet the mandate imposes specific tests, locations, and schedules that remove that very flexibility.

Finally, the State has presented no evidence that current accountability measures are failing. Homeschool families already submit periodic standardized testing data and annual progress reports. Additional in-person testing generates data without instructional application, as the Department does not direct homeschool curriculum.

Parents possess a fundamental constitutional right to direct the education and upbringing of their children, and Hawaii's existing homeschool framework appropriately balances that liberty interest with reasonable accountability.

HB2376 unnecessarily disrupts that balance while addressing no demonstrated failure.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to oppose this measure and preserve the regulatory framework currently in place.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Research Appendix and Footnoted Citations

In Support of Testimony Opposing HB2376

I. Testing Environment and Assessment Validity

Professional educational testing standards recognize that assessment results are only valid when administration conditions are appropriate and comparable across test-takers.

Key Principle: Changes in testing location, personnel, or setting can introduce construct-irrelevant variance factors unrelated to academic knowledge that influence scores.

Citations:

1. American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Psychological Association (APA), & National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME). *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing.* Washington, DC: AERA, 2014.
   -Establishes that test score validity depends on standardized administration conditions.
2. Lane, S., Raymond, M. R., & Haladyna, T. M. (Eds.). *Handbook of Test Development.* Routledge, 2016.
   -Discusses environmental and procedural factors affecting score reliability.
3. Zumbo, B. D. (2007). "Validity: Foundational Issues and Statistical Methodology." In C. R. Rao & S. Sinharay (Eds.), *Handbook of Statistics: Psychometrics.* Elsevier.
   -Explains construct-irrelevant variance and threats to score interpretation.

II. Test Anxiety and Performance Suppression

Extensive research demonstrates that anxiety during testing situations measurably reduces academic performance independent of subject mastery.

Key Findings:

- Anxiety consumes working memory resources.
- Worry and physiological stress impair recall and reasoning.
- Students may underperform despite adequate preparation.

Citations:

4. Putwain, D. W. (2008). "Test Anxiety and GCSE Performance: The Effect of Gender and Socioeconomic Background." *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 24(4), 319–334.
5. von der Embse, N., Jester, D., Roy, D., & Post, J. (2018). "Test Anxiety Effects, Predictors, and Correlates: A 30-Year Meta-Analytic Review." *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 227, 483–493.
6. Ramirez, G., & Beilock, S. L. (2011). "Writing About Testing Worries Boosts Exam Performance in the Classroom." *Science*, 331(6014), 211–213.
   -Demonstrates cognitive interference from anxiety.
7. Eysenck, M. W., Derakshan, N., Santos, R., & Calvo, M. G. (2007). "Anxiety and Cognitive Performance: Attentional Control Theory." *Emotion*, 7(2), 336–353.

III. Unfamiliar Environments as Stressors in Children

Educational and developmental psychology literature recognizes that children experience heightened stress responses in unfamiliar institutional settings.

Key Findings:

- Novel environments increase physiological stress.
- Evaluation by unfamiliar adults heightens anxiety.
- Performance may reflect situational discomfort rather than competence.

Citations:

8. Evans, G. W., & Wachs, T. D. (Eds.). *Chaos and Its Influence on Children's Development: An Ecological Perspective.* American Psychological Association, 2010.
9. Gunnar, M. R., & Quevedo, K. (2007). "The Neurobiology of Stress and Development." *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 145–173.
10. Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). "An Ecological Perspective on the Transition to Kindergarten." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21(5), 491–511.
    -Discusses stress responses in unfamiliar school environments.

IV. Early Childhood Assessment Limitations

Assessment experts caution that standardized testing in early elementary grades is developmentally sensitive and context-dependent.

Key Findings:

- Young children show greater score variability.

- Emotional regulation is still developing.
- Testing conditions strongly influence outcomes.

Citations:

11. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2009). *Where We Stand on Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation.*
    -Warns against overreliance on standardized testing in early childhood.
12. Shepard, L. A., Kagan, S. L., & Wurtz, E. (1998). *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments.* National Education Goals Panel.
13. Snow, C. E., & Van Hemel, S. B. (Eds.). (2008). *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How.* National Research Council.

V. Misalignment Between Standardized Tests and Instructional Models

Standardized assessments are calibrated to public school pacing frameworks and may not align with individualized instructional approaches.

Key Findings:

- Mastery-based progression differs from grade-level pacing.
- Multi-age instruction disrupts age-normed comparisons.
- Classical and faith-integrated curricula follow different sequences.

Citations:

14. Murphy, J. (2012). *Homeschooling in America: Capturing and Assessing the Movement.* Corwin Press.
15. Ray, B. D. (2017). *A Systematic Review of the Empirical Research on Selected Aspects of Homeschooling.* National Home Education Research Institute.
16. Gaither, M. (2017). *Homeschool: An American History.* Palgrave Macmillan.

VI. Existing Homeschool Accountability Framework (Hawaii)

Hawaii already requires periodic standardized testing and annual progress reporting.

Citations:

17. Hawaii Administrative Rules §8-12-13 through §8-12-22.
    -Establishes homeschool notification, recordkeeping, and assessment requirements.
18. Hawaii Administrative Rules §8-12-18.
    -Requires standardized achievement testing in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, or alternative evaluation.

VII. Constitutional Parental Rights Foundations

Parental authority in education is well established in U.S. constitutional jurisprudence.

Citations:

19. *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925).
    -Affirms the right of parents to direct the education of their children.
20. *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972).
    -Recognizes the fundamental liberty interest of parents in educational decisions.
21. *Troxel v. Granville*, 530 U.S. 57 (2000).
    -Reaffirms parental rights as a fundamental liberty interest.

Concluding Research Summary

The research base establishes that:

- Testing validity depends on administration conditions.
- Anxiety measurably suppresses performance.
- Unfamiliar environments heighten student stress.
- Early childhood testing is context-sensitive.
- Homeschool instructional models differ from standardized pacing frameworks.

Accordingly, mandated in-person public school testing of homeschool students risks producing data that may not accurately reflect academic mastery or educational progress.

My name is Ashley Oyama. I am a former parent, a former public school teacher, and the founder of a homeschool program on Hawai‘i Island. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong opposition to HB2376. I speak from experience inside Hawai‘i’s public school system and from years working with families who remain within it. I understand the pressures schools face under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), including the requirement that states maintain a 95% assessment participation rate. However, ESSA does not mandate that individual children must take the test, nor does it impose penalties on parents who refuse testing. When participation falls below the federal threshold, accountability consequences rest on the institution — not on families. Yet many parents are led to believe otherwise. The distinction between institutional compliance and parental authority is often blurred. Families are pressured into participation without clear explanation that refusal carries no statutory penalty for them or their child. HB2376 would create an unequal and coercive standard. Public school parents may refuse testing without jeopardizing their child’s enrollment. Homeschool families, however, would risk losing their exemption from compulsory attendance if they decline participation. That shifts the burden of institutional accountability directly onto families. This bill also cannot be viewed in isolation. In recent years, families have felt increasing encroachment into decisions involving their children — including medical decisions that many parents believed should remain within the family. Regardless of political perspective, trust between families and institutions has been strained. Low enrollment within the DOE is not random. Families are making choices based on lived experience. As a former public school teacher, I have seen overcrowded classrooms where individualized instruction becomes nearly impossible. I have seen long-term substitutes placed in classrooms for extended periods due to staffing shortages, sometimes without full teaching credentials. I have seen bus driver shortages and transportation disruptions that leave families scrambling and students missing instructional time. I currently work with families whose children have experienced bullying, intimidation, and fear within traditional school settings. Parents share that their children wake up anxious about attending school. These concerns are not abstract. They are real, and they influence family decisions. Families are not leaving public schools because they reject accountability. They are leaving because they are seeking safety, stability, consistency, and meaningful educational engagement for their children. Homeschool families in Hawai‘i already comply with the law. We submit notice of intent. We provide annual progress reports. We demonstrate academic growth through lawful methods, including standardized testing when we choose it. The current framework provides oversight while preserving parental authority. HB2376 expands state authority into the homeschool space at a time when trust is already fragile. Conditioning the homeschool exemption on mandatory in-person state testing transforms assessment from an institutional accountability tool into a compliance mandate imposed directly on families. I would also ask this committee to confront an uncomfortable but necessary reality. Hawai‘i public schools receive approximately **$20,000 per student per year** in combined state and federal funding. School funding is directly tied to enrollment numbers. When enrollment declines, funding declines. Each child represents a significant per-pupil allocation within the public school system. Families know this. When policies are introduced that expand state control over homeschool families — particularly at a time of declining enrollment — parents cannot help but question whether these measures are truly about academic improvement, or about protecting institutional funding streams. If this bill

were purely about academic accountability, the existing homeschool reporting requirements would suffice. Homeschool families already demonstrate progress through lawful and documented means. But HB2376 goes further. It ties the legal right to homeschool to mandatory in-person participation in the state testing system. That raises a serious question: Is this about student achievement — or about maintaining enrollment-based funding? Parents deserve transparency. Children are not funding units. They are not line items in a budget formula. No funding model should ever determine the limits of parental authority. No dollar amount should outweigh a family's right to prioritize their child's safety, mental health, and educational environment. If a child is thriving academically and socially in a homeschool setting — documented, compliant, and lawful — there is no justification for creating additional mandates that risk penalizing that family. If trust in public education is declining, it will not be rebuilt through expanded control. It will be rebuilt by addressing safety concerns, staffing stability, classroom conditions, and parental voice. I respectfully urge this committee to reject HB2376 and preserve Hawai'i's existing homeschool framework.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Ashley Oyama
Teacher, Hawai'i Island

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

Coalition for Responsible Home Education

Statement of Support for HB 2376
February 17th, 2026

I represent the Coalition for Responsible Home Education, a homeschool alumni founded and powered organization, including over 100 people who were homeschooled in Hawaii. As an organization we make policy recommendations - and are in full support of HB 2376 - alongside performing secular research and hosting direct programming that supports homeschool alumni and actively homeschooling families across the country.

As the Executive Director, it is my responsibility to look across a spectrum of homeschool alumni experiences and not just amplify the good outcomes, but realistically address the bad outcomes as well. Our work is child-centered, not parent-centered, and we believe that responsible homeschooling involves legislative guidelines like HB 2376.

At CRHE, we believe the children of Hawaii deserve the same access to an open future that their traditionally schooled peers have, and assessments for educational progress are a critical component of that. Homeschool alumni that participate in our regular focus groups overwhelmingly tell us that regular checkpoints, like the ones proposed in HB 2376, would have provided a more robust system of support for their future, and understanding their own progression and educational journey would have increased their confidence and ultimate access to college and career opportunities. Regular assessment, like HB 2376 proposes, is a reasonable and effective mechanism for ensuring homeschooled students are on pace with their peers.

Coalition for Responsible Home Education

Additionally, CRHE is in full support of the proposed legislation to increase the assessment intervals, and applaud Hawaii for requiring that those be performed in person. Homeschooled children do not have the same safety net of safe adults outside their immediate families that their traditionally schooled peers do, and this would provide a critical intervention opportunity for cases of abuse and neglect that are being hidden under the guise of "homeschooling". We have documented cases in which children are critically unwell, or even already dead for months, while caregivers continue to submit homeschooling paperwork. Responsible families who homeschool in their children's best interest should have no reason to fear their children entering a school facility to take an exam.

Looking ahead, we encourage Hawaii to explore viable alternatives to standardized testing (like portfolio review processes) that may better meet the needs of students who are homeschooling for reasons related to neurodivergency or other unique needs. These should still be performed in person only, but may create a more equitable measurement system. However, we encourage HB 2376 to move out of committee as is, and would support further legislation to include this.

Hawaii is already a national leader in homeschooling protections, but it lacks key safeguards to ensure all homeschooled children receive a quality education in a safe home. The passage of HB 2376 would make considerable headway in closing these gaps, and encourage an open future for all children in the state.

Thank you for addressing this important measure for homeschooled children,



Tess Ulrey
Executive Director - Coalition for Responsible Home Education

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:45:38 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniel Douglass	Chairman of board of trustees of Saint Benedict Hall, Kailua	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to HB2376.

This bill would require homeschool students in grades K–8 and 11 to report to their local public schools for mandatory in-person assessments. It would also require 1st and 2nd grade students to attend public school three times per year for universal screenings, and kindergarten students to undergo an initial assessment upon entering school. These changes would take effect in the 2027–2028 school year.

While accountability and educational progress are important, HB2376 imposes unnecessary, burdensome, and potentially harmful requirements on homeschooling families without demonstrating a clear educational benefit.

1. Harm to Young Children

Many young children—especially those in kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade—are not developmentally ready for repeated standardized testing in formal environments. Homeschooling often allows parents to tailor instruction to a child's readiness and learning style. Forcing very young students into unfamiliar public school settings three times per year for screenings risks:

- Increased anxiety and stress
- Poor performance unrelated to actual ability

- Negative early associations with testing and education

For children who thrive in calm, individualized home environments, abrupt exposure to institutional testing settings may undermine rather than support learning.

2. Unnecessary In-Person Requirement

Current law already requires standardized assessment at specific grade levels (3, 5, 8, and 10), while allowing parents to choose from approved testing options. This system provides accountability while preserving flexibility.

HB2376 removes parental choice and mandates in-person testing at public schools. This adds regulation without evidence of improved outcomes. There has been no demonstration that current homeschool assessment practices are inadequate or failing students.

Moreover, no other state requires homeschool students to report to public schools for mandatory in-person standardized testing. Passing this bill would place our state in an extreme minority and create a regulatory structure more restrictive than anywhere else in the country.

3. Logistical and Financial Burdens on Families

For families with multiple children, this proposal creates significant practical burdens:

- Coordinating multiple testing dates
- Transporting children to public schools multiple times per year
- Arranging work schedules and childcare for siblings
- Managing disruptions to established homeschool routines

Homeschool families often operate on carefully structured schedules tailored to each child. Mandating repeated public school visits disrupts instructional continuity and places avoidable strain on parents.

4. Increased Regulation Without Clear Benefit

HB2376 adds layers of regulation without demonstrating measurable educational gains. Homeschool students consistently perform at or above national averages on standardized assessments. The existing framework already provides accountability through periodic evaluation.

Expanding state oversight in this way shifts from reasonable accountability to unnecessary control, without evidence of a problem that requires such a sweeping solution.

Conclusion

HB2376 would:

- Increase stress on young children
- Impose significant logistical burdens on families
- Remove parental choice without justification
- Create regulatory requirements unmatched by any other state

Homeschool families are not asking to avoid accountability. We are asking for reasonable flexibility that respects developmental readiness, family structure, and educational autonomy.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote NO on HB2376.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:20:33 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joli Hee	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

As a O'ahu homeschool family of 3 keiki

I strongly Oppose this bill HB2376, we need to keep the freedom and flexibility to homeschool without the government in our homes every year. Our kids do enough testing as is, this would cause unnecessary stress in our families and children.

Aloha e Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and committee,

My name is Kristie Duarte and I am a graduate from the University of Hawaiʻi with a Bachelorʻs Degree in Elementary education and I strongly oppose HB 2376.

In 2022, The legislature passed Resolution 102.

This Resolution cited the murder of a child in Waimanalo and in response… requested the State Auditor to conduct a performance audit of CWS.

The 82-page audit was released in April 2024 and the last sentence of the conclusion said

“ Worst of all, children were put at risk.”

The auditor gave 17 recommendations to develop policies and procedures to keep these children safer. None of those recommendations were associated with homeschoolers needing more testing, universal screening and regulation, because the children that have suffered are the children who were already wards of the state and already under the responsibility of CWS.

While I appreciate the intent and concern of the introducers of HB 2376 to help stop what has happened from happening again, HB 2376 does not solve the issue that the legislature and the auditor are attempting to solve.

Mahalo,
Kristie Duarte

THE SENATE
THIRTY-FIRST LEGISLATURE, 2022
STATE OF HAWAII

S.C.R. NO. 102 S.D. 1 H.D. 1

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR TO CONDUCT A PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE CHILD WELFARE SERVICES BRANCH OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES.

WHEREAS, the Child Welfare Services Branch of the Department of Human Services has a responsibility to protect the well-being of the children of Hawaii, including children who are wards of the State and children who have allegedly been neglected or abused; and

WHEREAS, in November 2021, two individuals who were resource givers with the Child Welfare Services Branch, as well as adoptive parents, were arrested and charged with child abuse and the murder of their six-year-old adopted daughter in Waimanalo, Oahu; and

WHEREAS, the Child Welfare Services Branch failed to pass the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families' periodic Child and Family Services Review to assess state performance in meeting certain safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children involved in the child welfare system during the last three reviews conducted, which were in 2003, 2009, and 2017; and

WHEREAS, the Child Welfare Services Branch experiences difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff, and at the start

of 2022 had eighty-seven vacant positions (a twenty-two-percent vacancy rate), forty-four of which were for social workers; and

WHEREAS, the Office of the Auditor may be able to assist the Child Welfare Services Branch in evaluating improvements made since the 2017 federal review and in improving the recruitment and retention of staff; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2022, the House of Representatives concurring, that the Office of the Auditor is requested to conduct a performance audit of the Child Welfare Services Branch of the Department of Human Services; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the performance audit is requested to include:

(1) The policies, procedures, and processes of the Child Welfare Services Branch to protect the safety and well-being of children in their own homes and in out-of-home placements, including foster care, guardianship, and adoption; and

(2) The recruitment and retention of social workers and other staff at the Child Welfare Services Branch; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Office of the Auditor is requested to submit its performance audit, including any findings, recommendations, and proposed legislation, to the Legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2023; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Auditor, Director of Human Services, and Administrator of the Child Welfare Services Branch of the Department of Human Services.

Dear Representatives,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my opinion on HB 2376. I oppose this bill.

To start, I would like to ask some questions. Why do you feel these changes are necessary? Has something happened in the Hawaii home school community that requires this stricter monitoring of home school students? Have they been unable to attend college in recent years or experiencing a large dropout rate? I believe the goal of education is to produce well adjusted, successful, contributing members of society. Are Hawaii home school students no longer being productive members of society? If so, what is your measure?

HB 2376 states "the department of education must be able to monitor student progress in a manner that respects parental choice…

This bill does not "respect parental choice". It is not giving parents a choice. When I homeschooled my four children, we could either present the principal of the school they would attend with a narrative and example of school work or some sort of testing. That was respecting a parent's choice. I chose to annually standardize test my children with either the Stanford or Iowa Achievement Tests.

HB 2376 also states that the annual testing will allow "for the early identification of developmental delays, learning differences, or other educational needs that may benefit from additional evaluation, resources, or supportive services offered by the department." Home school parents are with their children daily, evaluating how they are learning with many metrics, not merely an annual standardized paper test. I believe that parents know their children's needs far more than our schools will through a simple test. If you really want parents to know what you have to help send them the information and let them decide if they want to contact you.

HB 2376 further states, "Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to require annual in-person participation in certain tests by home schooled students to support student success and ensure access to appropriate educational support when needed." I do not believe requiring "in-person" testing is supporting home school children, especially in the younger grades. They are not accustomed to the public classroom setting. You will not be able to get a fair, balanced look at their true academic state and growth, which is what you say you want. I would compare this to having our public school students test at Ala Moana center stage. Would they perform at their best? Would you get a true picture of their learning? Students, especially in their younger years, should be evaluated in their natural learning environments, and their parents, who know them best, should decide where they should test at any grade level.

I also question the accuracy and efficacy of the DOE's kindergarten entry assessment. My granddaughter was evaluated and given a below average score because she didn't know her letters. That was not true. She actually could identify the alphabet by the ***sounds*** of all the letters, not the names, because we don't learn to read by using the names of letters but rather their phonetic sounds. Prior to going to kindergarten in public school she was reading beginning books. Sadly, she lost any gain she had at that time and is now in private school because she has fallen behind in reading and math in public school.

No facts have been given in this bill as to why it is even necessary to make any changes to Hawaii home school laws. There is no stated proof that our home school students are falling behind in academics, or near the bottom of our nation's school performance as our Hawaii DOE schools are. Perhaps more energy is better used fixing our failing Hawaii state public schools.

HB 2376 will not meet the stated goals. This bill just seems like another area where law makers want more unnecessary control over our lives. I oppose HB 2376 and ask that you do the same.

Mahalo,
Lisa Poulos

The legislature believes that the tests that should be required include the statewide testing program, including English language arts and math testing through the Smarter Balanced Assessment, given in the third grade through eighth grade and eleventh grade. Alternatively, a student learning in Hawaiian may take the alternative for Hawaiian immersion students through the Kaiapuni Assessment of Educational outcomes, also known as KĀʻEO. For those entering kindergarten, the test that would apply is the kindergarten entry assessment. For students in the first grade and second grade, they are given universal screenings three times during the school year, with the first universal screening to be required.

TESTIMONY IN STRONG OPPOSITION TO MANDATORY STANDARDIZED TESTING FOR HOMESCHOOLERS

Aloha Chair Woodson and the House Committee on Education,

My name is Brandy Simon, and I am submitting testimony in strong **opposition** to HB2376, that would expand mandatory standardized testing and restrict personal choice for homeschool students in the State of Hawai‘i.

1. Mandatory testing contradicts the intent and structure of Hawai‘i’s existing homeschool law

Hawai‘i DOE already has an established balanced accountability system. Parents must file a notice of intent (Form 4140), maintain records of curriculum and progress, submit annual progress reports and assessments for grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 and may choose from several assessment options, including nationally normed tests. This flexibility is intentional and recognizes that children learn in diverse ways outside the public-school system.

Requiring homeschoolers to take HIDOE’s standardized test, the Smarter Balanced Assessment, that is designed specifically for public-school curriculum alignment, would undermine the purpose and spirit of Chapter 12.

2. Homeschool families receive no services or support from HIDOE yet would be required to comply with HIDOE testing

As a homeschool parent, I am fully financially responsible for my children’s education.
This includes:
• Tuition for an accredited high school and middle school academic program and tutors for academic support
• Extracurricular courses through Brigham Young University’s Independent Study Program
• Activities, enrichment programs, and community-based learning
• Speech therapy covered by my health insurance
• All supplies, books, and materials needed

These expenses total approximately $28,000 per year out of pocket and are paid from our family’s income **after** paying taxes to the State of Hawai’i.
We receive no services, no stipends or financial assistance, no curriculum materials, and no resources from HIDOE.

Despite this, mandatory testing beyond what is currently required in Chapter 12 would require my children to participate in a system that provides them **nothing** in return.

3. My children are excluded from public-school opportunities, yet would be pulled into public-school accountability
My high schooler:
• Is not eligible for extracurricular programs at the nearby public high school
• Will not receive a State of Hawai‘i High School Diploma as a homeschooler
• Must pay 100% of the cost for dual-enrollment courses when she begins next year

My elementary school student:
• Is not eligible to participate in extracurriculars or activities at the nearby public school

If homeschoolers are excluded from public-school benefits, it is unreasonable and inequitable

to require them to participate in public-school testing.

4. Standardized tests do not reflect individualized, child-centered learning

We chose homeschooling because it allows us to:
• Curate education around each child's needs, interests, and pace
• Provide a safe, nurturing environment
• Preserve childhood and mental well-being
• Support mastery-based, experiential, and culturally grounded learning

Standardized tests measure alignment to HIDOE curriculum—not mastery, growth, creativity, or the holistic development that homeschooling supports.

5. HIDOE's current financial struggles raise questions about the true purpose of this proposal

HIDOE is currently facing well-documented financial challenges, including staffing shortages, budget constraints, and difficulty maintaining facilities and programs for public-school students. At the same time, homeschool families receive no services from HIDOE and bear 100% of their students educational costs.

This raises a serious and reasonable question:

Is this proposal truly about supporting the education of homeschool children, or is it an effort to collect additional student data to strengthen HIDOE's federal reporting and funding applications for programs that homeschoolers cannot access?

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), federal funding is tied to statewide academic data, achievement gap analysis, and evidence-based improvement plans. Homeschoolers are explicitly excluded from ESSA accountability systems, yet mandatory testing would pull our children's data into a system that does not serve them.

If HIDOE is seeking to expand its data pool to improve federal funding metrics, it is deeply concerning that homeschool families who receive no benefit from these programs, as they are outside ESSA law's accountability terms since they do not receive federal funds, that their data would be used to support funding for a system that does not include them

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to **oppose** any measure that would impose mandatory standardized testing on homeschoolers beyond the current state law and what is outlined in Chapter 12.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Brandy Simon
Pearl City, Hawai'i

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:56:27 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lora Burbage	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha,

I am opposed to HB2376.

In Section 1 of the bill, the first sentence accurately states that "homeschooling is a valid and beneficial educational option that offers flexibility, individualized instruction and strong family engagement." What other form of education exists that allows parents to meet the individual needs and learning styles of their own children while building a strong family bond. Along with flexibility for parents to create the best learning environment, homeschooled students have been excelling in Hawaii since 1988. That is the year my husband and I helped put the Homeschool regulation in place that still governs homeschoolers to this day.

Decades of statistics have consistently shown that homeschooled students average15 - 25 percentile points above public school students.

Nowhere in Section 1 is a problem presented with low test scores or underperformance in evaluations of homeschooled students. The problem does not exist!

Section 1, paragraph 2 states that the DOE MUST BE ABLE TO MONITOR progress of students. They already have this ability and responsibility! Each year parents must turn in a progress report for each child. This requirement can be met by a standardized test score, a report by a certified teacher or a written evaluation by the parent.

When we negotiated the rule back in 1988 both parties, the BOE and the homeschooling parents made sure that this obligation was going to be met. By the way no other state is requiring homeschoolers, to take their public school test nor to test at the local school. This is not the least restrictive means in which to satisfy the DOE's obligation.

Home education is a tutorial method, the last one that a school uses when all else fails, because it works. Especially with all the choices parents have in curriculum and methods to meet their childrens needs, the sky is the limit and students are succeeding!

What I have witnessed in the last 38 yrs is phenomenal!

In summary, the DOE has and continues to meet their responsibility to monitor student progress while respecting parental choice, through the homeschool regulations in Ch. 12 - Compulsory Attendance Exceptions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lora Burbage

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the House Committee on Education,

RE: STRONG OPPOSITION to HB2376 (Relating to Education) — Home Schooling; Students; Testing

My name is Partner Akiona, and I present my testimony to you not only as a working educator in Hawai‘i, but more importantly as a father to six children. I am submitting testimony in strong opposition to HB2376, which would require homeschooled students to participate in certain annual, in-person tests at the public school the student would otherwise attend. HB2376 would expand mandatory testing and restrict parental choice in a way that harms homeschool families and undermines the flexibility that makes home education effective.

1) HB2376 replaces parent-directed evaluation with a one-size-fits-all mandate

Homeschooling succeeds precisely because families can individualize instruction and assessment based on a child's needs, learning differences, and developmental pace. A blanket requirement for annual, in-person testing at a public-school site imposes a uniform "cookie cutter" model that does not fit the diversity of homeschool approaches and learners. Furthermore, mandating testing undermines the parent-led education by imposing an ideology that parents can only be teachers if the child's academic aptitude is measured by "State" created standards.

2) It removes meaningful options and shifts authority away from parents

Hawai‘i's current approach recognizes parental responsibility and provides flexibility. The Hawai‘i State Department of Education explains that homeschooled students may participate in statewide assessments at the request of the parent or guardian—a policy that respects family choice while still allowing access when desired. HB2376 moves from "may participate" to "must participate," narrowing family options and replacing choice with compliance.

3) In-person, school-site testing creates avoidable burdens and barriers

Additionally, mandating in-person testing at a specific public-school location creates real logistical hurdles for families—especially those with:

- multiple children,
- transportation constraints,
- rural or neighbor-island challenges,
- work schedule limitations,
- students with disabilities or anxiety around testing environments.

These burdens do not improve learning; they simply increase friction and reduce educational freedom. In general, parents will become more stressed due to these additional "hoops" they'll need to navigate. Also, it places additional burden on DOE schools who'll be forced to accept homeschool students on testing days. Causing administrators and teachers to hyper-focus on visiting homeschool students to ensure their accessibility, comfort, and safety. A student they

have no previous experience or knowledge about that will only be there for the single testing day. Not to mention the social anxiety you are injecting into the student as they'll be forced to navigate an environment completely foreign to them.

4) The bill is broader than necessary and does not show a clear benefit

HB2376's stated premise is "student success," but increased mandates do not automatically produce better outcomes—especially when homeschool families already monitor progress through curricula, portfolio work, and individualized evaluation practices. By implementing this bill you'll be driving a wedge between the parent/child trust that is cultivated through homeschooling.

What I'm asking you to do

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to HOLD or DEFER HB2376 and to protect homeschool families from unnecessary and intrusive mandates.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Hawai‘i's students and families.

Respectfully,
Partner Akiona
Honolulu, HI

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:29:36 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Theresa Armbruster	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

OPPOSE!!!

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:17:38 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angela Rathyen	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha

My name is Angela Rathyen and I would like to oppose HB2376.

This bill aims to increase the number of tests and require in person testing for homeschoolers, Both of which I think are unnecessary and unwarranted.

It is common knowledge that homeschooled children receive a far better, more meaningful education, than others.

Homeschooling is a labor of love that parents have taken on because the educational system has failed us and we don't want our children to fall victim to it. We spend countless hours choosing a curriculum and then diving into it to understand it, and be able to deliver it, maintain a home classroom and assess their progress. We know our sons and daughters and their pace, their readiness and their abilities. We can accomplish far more in one hour than the school system can in eight hours.

This bill seems like the state is trying to take back control from homeschooling parents and the choices they make so they can impose a focus on these tests rather than the curriculums that homeschooling parents are choosing.

in my view, as a High school teacher in the public system, standardized tests are not a reflection of a student's learning or intelligence. They can measure certain aspects of education, but those tests can be manipulated by how well a student is able to prepare for it and regurgitate what is necessary on those tests.

This bill is aiming to add excess burden to homeschooling parents who need to prepare for this test and also accommodate the in person requirement. There is already a testing schedule in place for homeschoolers. and homeschoolers are often at the leading edge of education compared to their peers so this extra testing is really unnecessary.

Therefore, I urge you all to oppose this bill.

Thank you,

Angela Rathyen and Jason Rathyen

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:08:16 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kalamaku Akiona	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Kalamaku Akiona. I am a 12 year old homeschool student and submitting my testimony in opposition to House Bill 2376 (HB2376). I've been homeschooled by my mom for the last four (4) years. During this time I've built better study habits and am able to focus on my work that I need to complete everyday. In a classroom setting I am easily distracted and unable to focus.

When it comes to being tested on things I learned, we play games that test our knowledge. Some people may feel this is an inaccurate way for a student to be tested, but I believe this style of testing plays to my strengths as a students instead of taking a written test. This is because when I take written tests I stress out and overthink about my answers. Requiring me to take a yearly test in a space that I've never been to would be very stressful for me as my focus would be on the strangers I'd be forced to interact with instead of doing my best on a test.

Furthermore, forcing me to take a test at an unfamiliar location would put unnecessary stress on my mom. The reason being is along with needing to take me for testin, she would need to do the same for my older sister who is 15 and younger brother who is 5. The unnecessary stress this causes would affect my mom's ability to care for my youngest sister who is 5 months old, and my oldest brother who is 22 and special needs.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to HOLD or DEFER HB2376 and to protect homeschool families from unnecessary and intrusive mandates.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Hawai‘i’s students and families.

Respectfully,
Kalamaku Akiona

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

Re: H.B. 2376
Position: In opposition

Aloha Members of the Committee on Education,

My name is Stephanie Chou. I was homeschooled from 1994 through 2008 and graduated summa cum laude with a master's degree in 2013. Today I am a proud home educator of two children. I'm writing on behalf of **124 families** on Oahu who are members of the Curious Keiki Homeschool Co-op. Our families **STRONGLY OPPOSE** H.B. 2376.

First, we want to say mahalo nui loa: thank you for upholding your kuleana to the children of your constituency. We recognize that this bill may stem from a desire to further protect school-age children from abuse and neglect. Notably, the heinous abuse leading to the deaths of Geanna Bradley and Isabella Kalua in our state is something we hope to never see repeated. We support effective legislation to safeguard the most vulnerable among us.

That said, as the legal maxim goes, **"Hard cases make bad law."** Or, as stated by Richard Wexler from the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform, "When horror story cases become the basis for public policy, we get horrible policies."

The Curious Keiki Co-op members believe H.B. 2376 and its companion bill are just that: bad law. Of note, no other states mandate in-person testing for homeschooled students. Requiring this yearly in-person testing will

- fail to mitigate the harm of child abuse,
- introduce significant harm to the homeschooling population, and
- further stress an already overstrained public school system.

Failure to mitigate child abuse

1. Research from the 1980s to present has found no statistically significant difference in abuse between homeschooled and non-homeschooled populations. Homeschooling itself is not known to be a risk factor for systematic abuse. Thus, using homeschooling alone as a criterion for additional oversight is unwarranted.
2. Most abuse ending in death occurs before children are school age. This is true nationwide, and the State of Hawaii DHS's Statistical Report on Child Abuse and Neglect in Hawaii for years 2016 through 2023 confirm this to be true in Hawaii as well.

3. Abuse goes undetected in children who are in school on a daily basis—for 1,080 hours each year—by teachers who know their names, their habits, their needs, their personalities. The abovementioned statistical reports indicate that on average, only 10.26% of *all* reports of abuse from mandatory reporters came from education professionals, and only 19% of those reports were confirmed. In contrast, social services, medical professionals, and legal and law enforcement personnel were each responsible, individually, for a higher percentage of all abuse cases *and* had a higher percentage of their reports confirmed. Thus, expecting teachers to effectively recognize abuse in strangers within a few hours at most, while they are also responsible for proctoring a test, is absurd.
4. Even when abuse is reported, the system is still failing these children.
    a. In the case of Geanna Bradley, officials ignored red flags when Geanna was withdrawn, such as the fact that her third grade teacher and school counselor both recommended she stay in school.
    b. Isabella Kalua was withdrawn from school under suspicious circumstances in the months preceding her death. A teacher reported in February 2020 that Isabella was exhibiting concerning behavior, like shutting down when asked about her home environment.

Causing harm to homeschooling families

1. Requiring children to test in an unfamiliar environment, in a room full of strangers, may impact their ability to perform at their best and could be anxiety inducing. A 2020 comprehensive review by Emma Howard, "Review of the Literature Concerning Anxiety for Educational Assessments," found that "high levels of test anxiety are associated with reduced performance," but even if "students [are] not negatively impacted in terms of grade outcomes, the experience of high levels of test anxiety can still have detrimental effects of mental health and well-being." As parents, we consider it our responsibility to teach our children that they can do hard things. But it's also our responsibility to safeguard their mental health from unnecessary harm, especially during the critical impressionable early years.

2. Related to this, it's no secret that the usefulness of standardized testing as a marker of student progress is a matter of hot debate. Jack Schneider, a historian and policy analyst who co-founded the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA), writes, "The current data used to measure student success… closely correlates to race, income, and family educational attainment. It really only tells us about advantage and disadvantage outside school, not what schools are actually doing." So requiring homeschoolers to take these tests is a double blow: kids have to go through this anxiety, for what? For a number on a page that's not even a reliable indicator of their abilities or predictor of future success.

3. Requiring children to perform at a standardized grade level negates the freedom parents have to tailor their child's learning pace and content of education to that child's needs and goals.
4. Requiring children to test on mandated dates could require homeschooling parents to shift their instructional calendar; not all homeschool parents follow the public school calendar.
5. Requiring children to appear in person is a burden on parents who must also care for other children in their household, and who may not have transportation during school hours. In addition, the format of the test could require this commitment over multiple days, keeping children and their caregivers away from other work, family, and school obligations.
6. Parents are already required to submit an annual progress report for each child at the end of their school year, which is more than sufficient to show academic progress—or, in terms of abuse, a lack of educational neglect.

Add stress to an overwhelmed system

1. According to the Pew Research Center's report titled "What's It Like to Be a Teacher in America Today?" from April 2024, teachers are already under immense pressure.
    - 77% say their job is frequently stressful.
    - 68% say it's overwhelming.
    - 70% say their school is understaffed.
    - 84% say there's not enough time during their regular work hours to do tasks like grading, lesson planning, paperwork and answering work emails.
        - Among those who feel this way, 81% say simply having too much work is a major reason.
    - 82% say that the overall state of public K-12 education has gotten worse in the last five years.
2. According to a 2025 report by Hawai‘i Scholars for Education and Social Justice, Hawaii schools are chronically underfunded and facing teacher shortages. This bill increases the workload of teachers and staff without creating additional funding for the schools. Homeschoolers' scores are not counted in schools' overall performance and our students will not be enrolled, so no more federal or state dollars will be allocated to schools to account for the influx of up to four thousand students who would now need to test in person.

Conclusion

Again, we respect legislators' desire to protect and care for the children of Hawaii. But attempting to do so through a bill that will cause stress to all parties involved, while failing to solve for purported harms, is not the best path forward. We urge you to spend your effort—and our tax dollars—where the need is greatest. Give public schools the support they need by increasing salaries and reducing class sizes, and work on giving at-risk families the social support they need to minimize risk factors for abuse.

Thank you for your consideration of our strong opposition to this bill.

Mahalo,

Stephanie Chou

Curious Keiki Homeschool Co-op

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:43:41 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alohalani Cayaban	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Assessment should be like a bridge between what is being taught and what the student is learning. Hi, my name is Alohalani Cayaban, I'm 12 years old, and I oppose HB2376. Both sides may agree, as stated in section 1 of HB 2376, that "monitoring student progress in a manner that respects parental choice" is important. Some people may support this bill, while others oppose this bill. I oppose HB 2376 for these three reasons: We are learning different things than the public schools, test taking is stressful and this bill would create additional homeschool restrictions.

The first reason I oppose HB 2376 is because we are learning different things than students in public schools. There are many different methods of learning but if you were to bring all of those different education styles and methods into one silent room to take the same exact test, it doesn't make sense. Students would perform quite differently. Parents should be able to choose how their children take tests because they know how and what we are learning at home. They are our teachers. Section 1 of the bill states that the testing would be through the "Smarter Balanced Assessment". This is something that is very unfamiliar to us and our current curriculum.

The second reason I oppose HB 2376 is because test taking is stressful. I would be unfamiliar with the people and space and it's unknown what would happen if I fail the test because I don't go to that school with those students and teachers. The bill doesn't state what would happen if I were to pass or fail. Like I said before, I am not learning the same thing as them so I wouldn't know what would be on the test! Would we have to change our whole learning process just to be able to pass a test? That's one of the reasons we are not in public school, because we are not comfortable with that learning process and method.

The third reason I oppose HB 2376 is because it would create additional homeschool restrictions. We are already required to take a standardized test in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10 and this bill would cause problems for school districts, including the staff and teachers. It seems more like the government will have control over parental control on test type, location and time.

I oppose HB 2376 for these three reasons: we are learning different things than the public schools, test taking is stressful and it would create additional homeschool restrictions. This bill applies to the school districts as well because of the added work it would cause them. And this applies to homeschool students and their families because the whole reason we choose to homeschool in the first place was so that we could have the freedom to choose the curriculum and the learning method that we use. The bridge becomes stronger when the teacher, or in my

case my parents, are able to choose and administer the test that I take. Help us build stronger bridges and oppose HB 2376.

Formal Opposal to HB2376

Andrew Higashi

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Andrew Higashi, and I have been homeschooled my entire life. Homeschooling is not an abstract policy issue for me; it is the environment that formed my mind, my character, and my ability to contribute to my community. The freedom my family had to direct my education is the reason I stand here today as an adaptable, self-motivated learner, not in spite of that freedom, but because of it.

From the very beginning, my education has been flexible and deeply personal. When I needed to slow down in one subject and accelerate in another, my parents could adjust instantly. When I showed interest in a topic, they could redesign my schedule to let me dive deeper. That adaptability taught me how to learn, not just what to memorize. It made me capable of navigating different materials, different expectations, and different environments because I had been given ownership over my learning, not pushed through a one-size-fits-all system.

That freedom is not just a matter of educational preference; it is a matter of constitutional liberty. For over a century, the Supreme Court has recognized that parents—not the state—hold the primary right and duty to direct the upbringing and education of their children. In Meyer v. Nebraska, the Court explained that the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment includes the right "to establish a home and bring up children" and "to control the education of one's children." In Pierce v. Society of Sisters, the Court went even further, saying it is "entirely plain" that a law which compels all children into one state-approved system "unreasonably interferes" with "the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control," and that "the child is not the mere creature of the state." The Court warned that "the fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only."

Homeschooling is one of the clearest, modern expressions of that principle. It is the opposite of standardization. It allows families to tailor instruction to a child's pace, interests, and needs while still meeting basic academic expectations. In Wisconsin v. Yoder, the Court recognized "the primary role of the parents in the upbringing of their children" and held that forcing Amish parents to submit their children to additional years of state schooling would "gravely endanger, if not destroy" their way of life. While my situation is different from the Amish community, the underlying truth is the same: when the state goes beyond ensuring basic protections and begins to dictate how a family structures its children's education, it threatens the very freedom that case law has repeatedly said must be preserved.

In Troxel v. Granville, a plurality of the Court called "the interest of parents in the care, custody, and control of their children" perhaps "the oldest of the fundamental liberty interests recognized by this Court." That is the level at which this debate sits for me. When the state starts to reach into the inner workings of a homeschool—dictating not just outcomes, but when, where, and how education must be

carried out—it is not just regulating education; it is re-ordering the family. That is exactly the area the Court has told the state to approach with the greatest restraint.

I want to be very clear: I am not arguing that the state has no role at all. Reasonable, neutral, and narrowly tailored safeguards can coexist with liberty. But using regulation to pull homeschool students back into public school buildings for testing, or to pressure families into conforming to institutional models, crosses a line. When my family has already fulfilled existing requirements, additional measures that functionally force us into the public system, even once a year, do not feel like accountability; they feel like an attempt to standardize us.

For me personally, homeschooling has meant that my home is not just where I sleep; it is where my education, my values, my relationships, and my intellectual life are integrated. The structure of our household—our schedule, our routines, the way we mix academics with real-world experiences—is part of that educational freedom. Any prohibition or restriction that targets that structure, that tries to dictate what the inside of my family's day must look like, goes beyond legitimate state interest and into an area that should be completely off-limits to the government.

When you consider measures that would tighten control over homeschooling, I ask you to remember both the constitutional principles and the human reality. The Court has said again and again that parents have a fundamental right to direct their children's education and that the state may not standardize children or treat them as its own products. I am the living result of what happens when that liberty is honored. I am adaptable because my education was free. I am responsible because my parents, not distant institutions, bore the primary duty for my upbringing.

Please uphold legal protections for homeschooling, not only to respect the Constitution, but to preserve the space where families like mine can continue to thrive, learn, and contribute to this state as free citizens—not as standardized outcomes of a single system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

February 16, 2026
Re: HB2376

Aloha,

My name is Hi'inae Tajon and I oppose bill HB2376. My primary reason for homeschooling my children is to have the freedom and flexibility of educating them according to their needs, interests, and abilities. Furthermore, it is so they do not have to conform to the practices, schedules, and obligations of the Hawaii DOE. The way we educate our children differs greatly from the public school system: our schedules, daily and yearly, are different; our curriculums are different; and the way we structure our education is different. Passing this bill and requiring us to do in-person testing at the convenience of the DOE undermines that freedom and flexibility, and forces us to conform to the standards of the Hawaii DOE system.

A system, I feel obligated to point out, that is currently failing their own students. It is curious that the DOE is requiring homeschoolers to conform to their standards when public school education in Hawaii ranks 42nd in the nation, while homeschooled students routinely outperform their public schooled peers by 40% or higher.

The current requirements imposed by the DOE are adequate enough for homeschoolers to comply with, if not already overreaching.

Please oppose this bill. Thank you.

The reasons I oppose HB2376 are the following:

- **This bill obstructs the freedom of choice homeschool parents exercise in selecting curricula.**
    - Much of public education is common core based and therefore does not align with the wide range of homeschool styles and curricula.
    - Homeschool education is highly individualized. Subjecting homeschool students to public school standardized testing discounts their individuality and customized learning.
    - Some of the different styles of homeschool include: Traditional, Classical, Charlotte Mason, Unit Studies, Montessori, Waldorf, eclectic, and many others (*What's My Educational Approach or Homeschool Style?*, 2019). I am certain that standardized testing in Hawaii state schools does not account for these methods.
    - Personally, I teach phonics at home resulting in my 6 year old becoming a strong, confident reader. A public school exam that does not teach phonetics would not accurately reflect her reading competence and likely cause undue mental stress if she tests poorly, simply because she was taught a different way.
    - Another fact about homeschool students is they often do not adhere to public school grade levels based on age. Home education recognizes a child's specific pace of learning regardless of birthdate.
- **Secondly are the unreasonable operations it would take to accomplish such testing.**
    - Arranging for thousands of homeschool families to attend testing on campus would be a logistical and financial nightmare for parents and faculty.
    - Who would proctor large groups of homeschoolers, and where? Additional test days may be required during school hours. This would negatively affect understaffed teachers and their current students. What if a family homeschools multiple children requiring simultaneous testing? How would this impact families with babies and toddlers with no means to hire a babysitter during testing?
- **Thirdly, there are some public school parents who reportedly opt their children out of annual standardized testing by appealing to their school's administration.**
    - Why is this possible for public school students, when HB2376 is clearly not extending the same courtesy to homeschoolers?
- **Lastly, Hawaii state law for homeschoolers currently includes options for testing and submission of reporting progress to state schools.**
    - If there is already a system in place to ensure educational accountability, then why is this bill necessary?

In conclusion, HB2376 dismisses other successful methods of education and denies homeschool families the independent choice of how they teach their children. The process to administer mass testing for home educated children is unfeasible and impractical for home and public school students alike. This bill fails to address the existing Hawaii homeschool laws nor the option of some public school students to forgo institutional testing. The bottom line is: relegating the diversity of home education to public school expectations is inconceivable; it is

especially inconsiderate to the majority of parents that made the thoughtful, difficult decision to educate and raise their own children at home. Please kindly vote no to HB2376.

Thank you very much for your time.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:27:32 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mikaia K DePeralta	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Chica, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mikaia Kawaiola DePeralta, and I am a 16 year old senior homeschooled student from Honolulu, Hawai‘i. I am here to respectfully oppose HB2376.

Homeschooling has shaped not only my education, but who I am as a person. It has allowed my parents to tailor my learning to my strengths and challenges. Through tools like the California Achievement Test, I have been able to test at higher academic levels and demonstrate measurable progress. The flexibility of homeschooling has allowed me to move ahead when I am ready and spend more time where growth is needed.

Beyond academics, homeschooling has prepared me for real life. It has taught me discipline, critical thinking, and the confidence to speak publicly, including standing before you today. I have been given opportunities to engage deeply with ideas, ask hard questions, and take ownership of my education. I truly believe that in a traditional public school setting, I would not have been able to thrive in the same way.

My parents take their responsibility to educate me very seriously. Under current law, we already comply with requirements.

While accountability matters, this bill removes flexibility from families who are already demonstrating educational success and shifts decision making away from parents who know their children best.

Homeschool freedom in Hawai‘i has worked for decades because it balances oversight with parental responsibility. Requiring in person public school testing places an unnecessary burden on families and limits the educational models that are clearly working.

As a student who has directly benefited from homeschool freedom and who hopes one day to homeschool my own children, I respectfully ask you to preserve the flexibility that has allowed students like me to thrive. Please vote no on HB2376.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:11:07 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pa'iau-Joy Faavi	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members,

My name is Pa'iau-Joy and I am 10 years old and I respectfully oppose HB2376.

I feel as if it does no good to the people of HAWAI'I. Especially the keiki of our island. I have friends that are very shy and introverted but, imagine putting them in a room full of strangers they don't even know! This would not help them, this would make them more nervous and focus more on their environment then the actual test.

A child can still be smart and still be abused at home.

Not only that but it's Hawai'i is expensive and some families do not have the money for transportation and care for younger siblings.

Also the teachers don't know them so if one of the keiki are having a bad day and is angry or if they played sports before and show up with bruises. Then what if the teacher makes a false report. This would cause a disaster for the family.

Home school also allows us to be flexible with our schedule and meet the student where they are so some families study their curriculum all through the year so they can do just a bit of work every day. They don't follow the public school calendar.

Ultimately, I believe that HB2376 will not help the homeschool keiki of Hawai'i.

Pa'iau-Joy Faavi.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:17:41 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kehaulani Akiona	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Kehau Akiona and I am a homeschooling mom of 6 and I oppose HB2376. This bill would impose unnecessary stress on homeschooling families like myself who already juggle managing my household, homeschooling my children of all different ages, taking them to extra curricular activities, and immersing them in alternative learning like field trips, etc. I also have an adult child whom I am the primary caregiver for.

First of all, testing a child does nothing to show the knowledge they have learned. In fact, what happens to a child in the DOE who fails these tests? Are they held back? Do they get extra resources? Testing is not a means to assess unless you take the whole child individually in mind and assess them that way, not in comparison to others.

This bill is also more government overreaching parental rights. My husband and I should have the right to teach our children how and what we want to. Our children do not learn what is taught in DOE schools. First of all, our curriculum is Christian based and we believe that what we are teaching them is setting them up to be successful adults that will be a great contribution to society. My husband is a teacher in a private school. We could be sending at least one of our kids there with free tuition but we choose not to because we believe they learn better in a home environment where they feel safe, loved, and get to be more involved in the things they love to do.

Again, I oppose HB 2376. Mahalo.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:29:27 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarai Akiona	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Sarai Akiona. I am 15 years old and I oppose Hb2376. I oppose it for three reasons one because I would be taking a test that is completely different from the work I do at home, I wouldn't want to be sitting in a classroom for many hours taking a test, and I don't believe this test will properly assess what I learn through homeschooling. For these reasons I oppose hb2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:36:26 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anela Kealakai	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

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

I am submitting testimony in opposition to HB 2367.

I understand and respect the intent behind this bill. Ensuring that all children in Hawai‘i are safe and receiving a meaningful education is a goal we all share. My concern is that HB 2367, as written, does not effectively accomplish that goal.

I am a homeschooling parent by choice, and I homeschool specifically because I teach my children differently than the public school system. Hawai‘i law already provides multiple ways for families to demonstrate educational progress, including parent prepared progress reports and alternative evaluations. In my experience, these existing options are functioning as intended.

If the current system were failing, I would ask: what specific problem is this bill designed to solve?

HB 2367 emphasizes participation in standardized testing rather than performance or outcome. There is no required score, benchmark, or educational standard tied to the assessment. As a result, compliance could be satisfied through minimal participation without yielding meaningful information about a child’s learning, progress, or wellbeing.

This creates the appearance of accountability without producing useful data.

If the intent is educational accountability, participation alone does not provide a reliable measure of learning. If the intent is child welfare, standardized testing is not an effective or appropriate tool for identifying neglect or abuse.

I want to be clear that my concern is not with teachers. I deeply respect educators and know many go above and beyond for their students. My concern is with policy design. Traditional schooling structures were developed during the Industrial Revolution, and while society, technology, and the workforce have evolved significantly, educational systems have struggled to adapt at the same pace. Homeschooling allows families to respond to those changes by teaching real world skills, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking in ways that are responsive to each child.

Requiring homeschooled students to participate in assessments administered by the very system families intentionally chose to leave- despite already complying with lawful reporting requirements- adds administrative burden without clear educational or safety benefit.

Hawai‘i already has mechanisms in place to ensure homeschooling families are educating their children. If the Legislature believes those mechanisms are insufficient, that concern should be clearly identified and addressed directly. A mandatory participation requirement without a defined purpose or measurable outcome does not strengthen education policy.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Committee to oppose HB 2367.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:59:29 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Talia K DePeralta	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

My name is Talia Kealoulapakoa DePeralta. I am 14 years old, and I have been homeschooled for my entire life.

I am here in respectful opposition to HB2376 and the restrictions it would place on homeschool families.
The regulations in this bill would not only create an added burden for my parents, but they would also place unnecessary restraints on homeschooled students like me who are fully capable of managing our own education.

I currently test at the 10th–11th grade level, even though I am only freshman age. I have achieved this through the freedom to learn at my own pace and to take evaluations in a way that fits my education.
Passing HB2376 would take away that freedom.

One of my greatest aspirations is to become a homeschool mother one day. There is almost nothing I want more. Bills like this worry me, because I hope to one day choose what is best for my own children. I want the freedom to provide them with the tools and assessments that truly serve them.

So I respectfully ask: will you give students like me the freedom to excel? Will you allow homeschool parents—present and future—the ability to educate and evaluate their children without unnecessary restrictions?

As a growing student and a future parent, I respectfully ask you to choose freedom.
Please vote no on HB2376.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:48:40 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Makanalei Francis	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Makanalei, and I am a homeschooled student in Hawai‘i. I am writing in opposition to HB 2367.

I am homeschooled because I learn best when school connects to real life. My mom teaches me in ways that help me understand how the world works, not just how to answer test questions.

Some of the things I learn are real estate, cryptocurrency, budgeting, critical thinking, survival skills, medical words, emotional intelligence, and problem solving. I also learn math, reading, and writing, but we use those skills for real things, like understanding money, researching topics, understanding contracts, and explaining my ideas.

Because of how I learn, taking a standardized test would not show what I actually know.

This bill focuses on students participating in a test, but it does not explain what the test is supposed to measure. If there is no score or goal, then the test does not show how a student is learning or growing. It would not show the kind of education I am getting at home.

Homeschooling helps me learn how to think for myself. I learn how to make decisions, ask questions, and understand important things I will need as I get older. These skills are important, but they are hard to measure on a standardized test.

Kids learn in different ways, and one test does not work for everyone. I believe families should be able to choose how their children learn, especially when that learning is working for them.

Thank you for listening to my experience. I respectfully ask you to oppose HB 2367.

Mahalo for your time.

Formal Testimony in Opposition to HB2376

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Maile Higashi, and I am a homeschool mother in Hawai‘i. My husband Michael and I have homeschooled our four children from the beginning. We have already graduated two of them, one will be graduating in just a few months, and our youngest is currently a freshman in high school. Over these many years, we have experienced firsthand the strengths, flexibility, and effectiveness of homeschooling in Hawai‘i.

I respectfully testify in opposition to HB2376.

Homeschooling in Hawai‘i is already governed by a clear and comprehensive accountability structure under Hawai‘i Administrative Rules §8-12-13 through §8-12-22. Parents are required to submit standardized achievement test results in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, as well as annual progress reports in all other years. These requirements already ensure that educational progress is documented and monitored.

This bill does not strengthen accountability; it duplicates what already exists.

HB2376 proposes to require annual in-person participation in public-school-administered tests, including assessments for very young children such as the kindergarten entry assessment and universal screenings in grades one and two. A substantial body of early childhood research cautions against formal standardized testing for young learners, noting that such assessments often fail to produce reliable indicators of long-term learning and may misinterpret normal developmental variation as academic deficiency. Many children at these ages are simply not developmentally suited for formal testing in institutional environments.

The bill also requires homeschool students to test “at the public school that the child would otherwise be required to attend.” Homeschooling, however, is a lawful exemption from compulsory public school attendance. Families who comply with HAR §8-12-13 through §8-12-22 have exercised their statutory right to educate their children outside the public school system. Conditioning that exemption on mandatory participation in public school testing introduces a structural contradiction and blurs the boundary between attendance and exemption.

Beyond the legal concerns, this mandate raises questions about testing validity. Homeschooled students learn and are assessed in familiar, individualized environments. Requiring them to test in unfamiliar institutional settings introduces stressors that can negatively affect performance. Assessment research consistently shows that testing conditions materially influence outcomes. Results obtained under these circumstances may reflect anxiety rather than academic mastery, undermining the bill’s stated purpose.

Additionally, the bill requires participation in statewide assessments such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment. Many homeschool families—including my own—use mastery-based,

multi-age, classical, or faith-integrated instructional models that do not align with public school pacing. Testing that is misaligned with instructional sequence does not yield meaningful or accurate measures of student progress.

The bill itself acknowledges that homeschooling is “a valid and beneficial educational option that offers flexibility, individualized instruction, and strong family engagement.” Yet the mandates it imposes remove that very flexibility.

Finally, there has been no evidence presented that the current accountability system is failing. Homeschool families already submit standardized test results and annual progress reports. Additional in-person testing would generate data with no instructional application, as the Department does not direct homeschool curriculum.

Parents have a fundamental constitutional right to direct the education and upbringing of their children. Hawai‘i’s existing homeschool framework appropriately balances that right with reasonable accountability. HB2376 disrupts that balance without addressing any demonstrated problem.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose this measure and preserve the regulatory framework currently in place.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:41:32 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caleia Cayaban	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

My name is Miss Caleia Cayaban and I am 10 years old and I oppose HB 2376.

I would not like to have to go to another school to take a test. I am not familiar with the work that would be on the test, the other kids and the teachers and the school room.

Who knows what would happen if I don't pass the test? The bill doesn't say what would happen.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:58:56 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Nakanelua	Moms for Liberty	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and Committe Members Amato, Kila, Evslin, Olds, Garrett, Muraoka and Kapela,

It is wth all due respect, that I write to express my serious concern regarding the heavy-handed approach and substantial new restrictions proposed in H.B. 2376.

These proposed measures would unduly burden Hawaii families exercising their constitutional and statutory right to homeschool their keiki, limiting the flexibility essential to tailored, effective home-based education.

First and foremost the state-run Hawaii DOE (HDOE) is already *failing our families:* Hawaii's public schools, managed by the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE), receive poor rankings in national assessments of overall quality of education. WalletHub's 2026 report on states with the best and worst school systems ranks Hawaii **42nd out of 51** (including D.C.) based on metrics like performance, funding, safety, class size, and instructor credentials. This places it in the lower tier nationally. I think we could safely call this an "F". And I do not lay this at the feet of our hard working teachers.

Now, this government monolith wants to make Hawaii the first state that would give homeschooling students no other option but to submit to state tests in-person, adding 6 years of additional testing requirements on homeschooled students at the Kindergarten and grades 1 - 7 levels. This is entirely unnecessary and a prime example of excessive and intrusive level of state oversight.

Hawaii law already requires an annual assessment for homeschoolers, with testing specifically required in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. That suffices given that current DOE rules already allow parents to choose between the state's testing program and third-party tests (like the Stanford Achievement Test).

But once again, the State of Hawaii wants to wrench freedom of choice from parents, restrict their constitutional rights and railroad Hawaii families through a state assessment program—A FIRST IN THE NATION.

These House and Senate bills would require:
• DOE testing take place *in person at the local school* - another *first in the nation,* posing severe logistical challenges for both homeschool families and local public schools.
• Force homeschooled students to undergo the Kindergarten Entry Assessment as well as Universal Screening at the start of grades 1 and 2 - an additional three years of tests not required by current Board regulations.

Current Hawaii law recognizes that homeschool curriculum should "take into account the interests, needs and abilities of the child" (Haw. Code R. § 8-12-15) but yet this bill would slap the uniform requirements on all homeschool students, limiting parents' ability to meet the individual needs of their kids.

Your constituents are already drowning under the burdens of higher cost of living, higher cost of consumer goods, lack of affordable housing and low level quality of public education by HDOE for our keiki.

I respectfully ask that you vote NO on the onerous restrictions and increased regulatory burdens that House Bill 2376 would place on Hawaii's families.

I also respectfully suggest that it would be much more encouraging for you, as our elected officials, to create and pass legislation that alleviates the sting of these burdens on hard working parents trying to raise their families in the Aloha State, rather than making life here more difficult.

With Aloha,

Laura Nakanelua

Member, Moms for Liberty

lauranakanelua@gmail.com

Dear Chair Woodson and members of the House Committee on Education,

H.B. 2376

IN OPPOSITION

My name is Rachel Kohatsu, and I have been homeschooling my 7-year-old daughter from the start. I am testifying to oppose H.B. 2376.

This bill contradicts the statement in Section 1 that the legislature finds homeschooling to be a valid and beneficial educational option by reducing the very benefits it notes of offering flexibility, individualized instruction, and strong family engagement.

- It takes a great deal of planning and time to homeschool a child. Being able to determine our own homeschool calendar year and schedule not only makes it possible but is one of the hallmark benefits of homeschooling that allows us to flexibly provide individualized instruction. **By requiring homeschoolers to conform to public school testing schedules, H.B. 2376 inhibits planning around major family transitions/crises, taking full advantage of opportunities for learning/enrichment (e.g., limiting travel), and pacing instruction to the child's educational needs.**

- **H.B. 2376 would impose testing requirements above and beyond what is already in place. Thus, whatever information is obtained from additional assessments would arguably have limited value, while also subjecting very young children to mandatory assessments that may be developmentally inappropriate for kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade.** We are already required to submit standardized achievement test results in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. In other years, we must submit an annual progress report demonstrating the child's educational progress, which may include standardized test results.

- We currently have the option to administer standardized assessments at home or in another familiar environment. It is reasonable to have the option to allow a child to focus on the test and not force them to manage additional anxiety of being in an unfamiliar environment. **I am concerned that H.B. 2376 may negatively affect my daughter's performance by requiring her to get tested at the public school. Additionally, introducing all five thousand plus homeschooled students during testing dates would likely be logistically challenging for schools. As a result, the performance of public school students may also be negatively affected.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in STRONG OPPOSITION to H.B. 2376.

Respectfully,

Rachel Kohatsu

Makiki, Oahu

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:58:03 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Cayaban	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

My name is David Cayaban I am a homeschooling parent and I oppose HB 2376.

I believe the government should never be involved in restricting the freedoms of it's people in such issues as educating one's own child.

This bill sets a precedent that violates the constitutional rights of home schoolers. We are being discriminated against because of how we choose to educate our children. Also this kind of legislation opens the door for many other possible unconstitutional practices in the future. This seems to be a play to discourage homeschooling in our country.

Since the creation of the department of education standardized test scores annually rank the USA students, with Hawaii freequently ranking in the bottom third, amongst the middle to lower tiers among OECD member countries(particularly low in mathematics) suggesting to me as a parent that any standards set by the department of education are not in the best interest of educating my child.

There is no proof that a standard test of any kind is the only way to measure a that certain level of educational success was achieved. And as a responsible parent/teacher I know better than the government what assessments are best suited for my child, this bill would remove the ability for me to decide on those assessments and again place it in the hands of an educational system that shows no evidence of excellence or superiority.

As a citizen of this country I am opposed to a government that would force me to adhere to policy set forth by an entity and system that is obviously broken.

Please vote to oppose HB 2376 and allow freedom for families rather than restricting consitutional rights.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:03:04 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Soon	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha mai kakou, I am writing to testify in opposition to this bill HB 2376. As a student who was homeschooled myself from first through 12th grade, I can attest that my mom and other homeschooling parents do their best to educate their children and that the testing that is currently in place is more than sufficient to track their progress. This bill would cause unnecessary hardship on parents and especially younger students by putting them in an unfamiliar environment that could significantly affect their testing performance. Please oppose this bill and continue to uphold parents' rights to follow educational pathways that best fit their individual situations. Mahalo nui

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:09:12 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacy K. Tumulak	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Good afternoon,

I am writing to oppose **Senate Bill 3193 / House Bill 2376**. As a parent of children who recently transitioned from public school to a homeschool environment, I would like to share our experiences and explain why this issue is so critical.

To begin, I'd like to highlight recent statistics from the **Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE)**, the **University of Hawaii**, and the National Center for Education Statistics. Currently, nearly 55,000 students in Hawaii public schools are unable to read at grade level, with many third and fourth graders reportedly struggling with basic literacy. Other concerning academic statistics for Hawaii public students include a 14% non-graduation rate—roughly 2,000 students this year—and an average of only 52% of graduates pursuing higher education.

On a personal note, when my sons, Asher and Wesley, were freshmen at **Campbell High School**, not a day went by without them expressing serious concerns over bullying, including threats of violence linked to racism and prevalent gang activity. These experiences are echoed in a February 2023 Honolulu Civil Beat article, which reports that 50% of both white and Black students face racial discrimination in Hawaii schools.

These are only a fraction of the serious issues facing our public schools. I share this to make it clear: this is a case of the "oxygen mask principle." Since transitioning to homeschooling, Asher and Wesley are now reading two grades above their sophomore level and actively engage in high-level literature. They can finally focus on academic pursuits because they are no longer under constant threat or fearing for their safety and mental well-being. Furthermore, they are now able to engage in constructive conversations and civil debate—something that was impossible in a public school setting with a 35-to-1 student-teacher ratio.

For the first time in their academic lives, they are excited to learn. Statistically, homeschool students pursue higher education at a rate 21% higher than their public school counterparts. The **HDOE** must first address the systemic issues within its own schools. We should allow current homeschooling families to maintain the advantages of this environment while ensuring future families have the freedom to choose what is best for their children.

Placing new restrictions or standardized testing requirements on homeschooled children—especially when the current system is failing to meet the needs of public school students—subjects this bill to far too much scrutiny to be justifiable.

Respectfully,

Stacy Tumulak

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:29:30 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gina Small	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

I was born and raised in Hawaii and attended Hawaii public schools growing up. I now homeschool my children and feel that they are receiving a far superior education in a less stressful environment. I have graduated one child that is now in his second year at Chaminade University and doing well. This year my second child will be graduating and I have one more that is 14 and still has a few years left.

There are so many reasons that I consider this bill government overreach and unnecessary but I will just listen to a few practical reasons that this bill is not worthy of passing.

1. Flexibility is one of the main reasons that we homeschool.

Many families, including my own, love to travel to learn about history, geography, science and literature amongst other things. We are not confined to the public school schedule and enjoy the freedom to create our own schedule that fits our lives and what is best for our children. Having a scheduled time once a year that we are to be finished with our studies and take a test in contrary to the style of schooling that we have chosen.

2. Standardized testing is not the best measurement of a child's abilities.

While my children have always tested above average on the standardized tests, I still don't feel that it is an accurate measurement of their abilities. If you just google homeschool kids test scores vs. public school kids test scores, it is clear that homeschool kids come our ahead. Homeschool kids are also more likely to go to college. A parent knows their children and their abilities much more than any standardized test can tell them. So making parents bring their children to an unfamiliar environment to test in a way that they are not familiar with and with people that they don't know can be a stressful situation that is not conducive to assessing any

child successfully. I feel that standardized tests are a poor apparatus for measuring how well a child is doing and will just lead to busywork for the schools and parents alike.

3. Requiring standardized testing for homeschoolers will not fix any problem.

As stated above, homeschoolers generally do better on standardized tests despite not teaching to the tests. There is not a problem here. I am not sure why we are just creating legislation to make people feel better. We already take standardized tests in specified grades to fulfill Hawaii's homeschool laws and have the option to take them at the school if we want to. Many like myself feel that early standardized testing is unnecessary and often not beneficial for young children.

So in conclusion I believe that taking standardized tests in a classroom siting is contrary to the style of schooling that we have chosen, It just leads to busywork for everyone and does not fix any problems.

Thank you for your concern for the homeschooling community and I hope that you understand that this bill is not beneficial for the homeschool or public school community.

Mahalo,

Gina Small

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:31:23 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ariel Osato	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

My name is Ariel Osato. I am a 15 year old homeschooler from Hawaii Kai. I am writing this to respectfully, yet firmly oppose HB 2376.

This bill would require in-person testing with the public school curriculum, as well as entry exams into kindergarten and submitting test scores. While I strongly agree accountability is crucial, this is not beneficial to either homeschoolers or our public school systems, which would be logistically burdened by an influx of testing for homeschoolers.

HB 2376 is restricting homeschoolers when many are already thriving academically. Research consistently shows that homeschoolers have been scoring **15-25 percentile points higher on standardized tests than their public school peers and enjoying higher college acceptance rates.**

Meanwhile, decades of increased testing in public schools has not improved educational outcomes. **Since the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act mandated extensive testing, results have remained stagnant or declined. By 2024, only 35% of 12th graders in public schools were proficient in reading and 22% in math—the lowest levels in 20 years.**

HB 2376 needs to fulfill the burden of proof, as does any other argument brought up for the reason of changing the status quo. The burden of proof means that there must be a significant harm in the system, that this bill provides a viable solution to that harm, and that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

There has been no noteworthy harm presented. This bill would produce more disadvantages for homeschoolers AND our public school systems.

Committee members, HB 2376 is restricting our freedom and rights as homeschoolers. Customizing the pace of one's education will optimize learning outcomes. *That* is why my parents chose this path. To ensure that I learn and I learn well.

It is for all these reasons that I urge you to cast no on HB 2376. Thank you for your time!
Mahalo!
Ariel Osato

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:42:11 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Huili Anderson	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Dear State Legislators,

I strongly opposed this bill as a parent of 2 middle & high school students, it is opposite of the constitutional rights as parent whom holds the main key decision maker & planner for their children's choice & path of educations, as they holds the best interest for them, not the State or by a bill. I firmly declare to reject this bill. Thank you for your time & attention in this matter. Aloha!

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:28:32 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Esther	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Representative Woodson and Representative La Chica and Education Committee Members:

My name is Esther McDaniel. I am a voting resident of Wahiawa and I OPPOSE HB 2376.

As a former homeschooling parent I believe in parents rights to choose public, private or home education for children and that right should remain without the added requirement of in person testing. My children are thriving adults who actively serve and contribute to our community.

The Hawai‘i Department of Education and our local public school staff have a great responsibility and adding in person testing of all homeschooling students will burden them more.

There is already a system in place of reporting standardized testing results at 4 different grade levels during a child's academic career and some homeschooling parents choose to submit more frequently than what is required.

Please allow homeschooling parents to continue with the current reporting policy and also not add monitoring of homeschool students' testing to our hardworking public school teachers.

Respectfully Submitted,

Esther McDaniel

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 6:07:57 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lorraine Yuen	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

My name is Lorraine Yuen and I OPPOSE HB2376 and its companion bill SB3193 for the following reasons:

1. This bill states "The legislature finds that home schooling is a valid and beneficial educational option that offers flexibility, individualized instruction, and strong family engagement." **Mandating SBA testing at the public schools DOES NOT offer this flexibility that is stated in the bill.**
2. Standardized Based Assessments given by the public schools are based on Common Core State Standards. **MAJORITY of homeschooling parents DO NOT teach their children based on Common Core State Standards, therefore the results of any SBA based on CCSS for a homeschooler will be inconclusive.**
3. The bill also states "The legislature recognizes that the department of education has a responsibility to ensure the educational well-being of all school-age children." and further states "DOE must be able to monitor student progress in a manner that respects parental choice" **For homeschoolers, the PARENTS are the ones who assume the responsibility to ensure the educational well-being of THEIR children, NOT DOE. This bill takes away that right and responsibility of homeschooling families to asses their children in a manner that is appropriate to their learning. This bill also DOES NOT respect "parental choice"**.
4. The bill states "the purpose of this Act is to require annual in-person participation in certain tests by home schooled students to support student success and ensure access to appropriate educational support when needed." **When a parent chooses to homeschool, the PARENT is the one giving the support to ensure student success, NOT DOE.**
5. **Why does the DOE want to monitor if a homeschooling child may have any "developmental delays, learning differences, or other educational needs that may benefit from additional evaluation, resources, or supportive services offered by the department" when the DOE forfeits these services to them in the first place because the child is NOT enrolled in the DOE?** And IF any services are offered (per IDEA??) to homeschooled children who have significant learning delays, etc. the parent may refuse BECAUSE the implementation of these services are NOT beneficial to the child, hence the reason WHY the parent has chosen to homeschool in the first place.
6. Hawai‘i public schools receive funding when the schools perform BELOW the average of other schools nationwide (per the Strive HI reports which are BASED ON RESULTS OF THE SBA TESTING GIVEN at ALL public schools.) This funding is used to help the school implement programs that help the students "catch up" to the level of their peers. However, **This funding is NOT extended to homeschoolers taking the test, yet**

THIS BILL will make their results be included with the numbers in the public schools that they are zoned to. It is NOBODY'S business how my child performs in relation to other children, which is why I choose to homeschool. This bill will make it EVERYBODY'S business.

7. Lastly, I oppose this bill because of the undue added stress that my child faces when testing at a place that is NOT familiar to her and also on a TIME LIMIT based on content that is NOT relevant to how I wish to educate my child.

Please don't take away the flexibility, individualized instruction, and strong family engagement offered to us homeschooling families. Please also RESPECT the PARENTAL CHOICE of homeschooling families by DROPPING this bill and focusing on other issues affecting students CURRENTLY ENROLLED in the Hawai'i DOE system, like issues of bullying, dealing with teacher shortage and burnout, and improving teaching methods for the children CURRENTLY ENROLLED in the public schools rather than impose on the freedom of how homeschooling families educate their children.

Mahalo you for your time in listening to my testimony.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:28:34 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bianca	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Bianca, and I am a homeschool mother of two here on Maui. I am writing in strong opposition to HB2376.

I chose to homeschool because I believe children are individuals, not statistics. In our home, education is personal, intentional, and rooted in real-life learning. My children receive one-on-one guidance, develop critical thinking skills, and grow through hands-on, nature-based experiences. Their progress cannot be measured by a standardized test aligned to a one-size-fits-all model.

Mandating standardized testing for homeschool families oversteps the very freedoms that allow homeschooling to exist. Parents have a fundamental right to direct the education and upbringing of their children. This right has long been recognized under the U.S. Constitution through the liberty protections of the 14th Amendment, and affirmed by the Supreme Court in cases such as Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925), which made clear that "the child is not the mere creature of the State."

HB2376 moves us toward unnecessary government intrusion into private homes and educational choices. It places compliance over trust and assumes that learning must look the same for every child. That is not freedom. That is control.

Tests are not for every student. For many children, high-stakes testing creates anxiety, fear, and pressure that undermines confidence. Homeschooling allows children to learn at their own pace, explore their interests deeply, and build mastery in ways that honor who they are. In our home, I have seen increased confidence, self-respect, responsibility, and strong social skills across all age groups. These are lifelong qualities that cannot be reduced to a score.

Freedom in education matters. The Constitution protects parental rights for a reason. Families should not be coerced into standardized systems that contradict their chosen educational philosophy. If the state truly wants to support homeschoolers, it should do so by respecting parental autonomy—not by imposing testing mandates.

Please stand for educational freedom, parental rights, and the constitutional protections that safeguard our families. I respectfully urge you to oppose HB2376.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,
Bianca

Michael Plowman
‘Ewa Neighborhood Board
Military Affairs Committee Chair
KoleaPalms@gmail.com

February 16, 2026

The Honorable Justin Woodson
Chair, House Committee on Education
Hawai’i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the committee,

My name is Michael Plowman, and I am an actively engaged citizen; ‘Ewa Neighborhood Board member, ‘Ewa Beach Little League head coach, and concerned advocate for educational freedom and parental rights, supporting homeschooling in Hawai’i. As a homeschooling parent, our family actively participates in the Curious Keiki Homeschool Co-Op, which meets weekly for educational adventures island wide. This thriving community offers a nurturing atmosphere with nearly a 1:1 ratio of adults to students—devoid of bullying, inappropriate behavior, and the poor food choices often found in institutional settings. Our children learn through creativity, exploration, and positive social interactions in safe, supportive environments tailored to their needs.

I strongly oppose House Bill 2376. This companion to SB3193 is unnecessary government overreach that **solves no documented problem**, while imposing rigid mandates that erode the core strengths of homeschooling. Hawai’i's current laws already ensure accountability—annual progress reports and testing in key grades with flexible options—yet principals are overreaching with unlawful demands and threats (see attached example of misleading letters fabricating deadlines and invoking improper intervention). HB2376 would only amplify this abuse by forcing annual in-person testing **without justification**.

Nationwide and in Hawai’i, homeschooled students thrive, typically outperforming public school peers academically and socially, with no evidence of a crisis among the state's 5,000+ homeschoolers. The bill's preamble claims a need for "early identification" and "supportive services," but it **cites zero data—no underperformance stats**, no neglect cases tied to current flexibility, **no proof the existing system fails children**. This is policy by assumption, not evidence.

The backward priorities are clear: Only 2 states mandate strict in-person homeschool testing, yet most freely allow homeschool participation in public school sports and extracurriculars. While this committee did not handle the recent deferral of related access expansions (SB2793), Hawaii's legislature continues to show troubling double standards—quick to advance restrictions like HB2376 while expansions of opportunities for homeschool families face delays, dismissals, or silence. This selective approach prioritizes control over inclusion and parental choice.

HB2376 restricts freedom by mandating in-person participation at the assigned public school, doubling the number of required tests—with **no details in the bill text on timing, scheduling, or flexibility**. Families would be forced to align with rigid public school testing windows, offering no accommodation for individual circumstances.

This ignores a primary reason many choose homeschooling: the freedom to travel extensively, immersing children in real-world, lived educational experiences across islands, states, and countries. Tying families to a single geographic location at specific times undermines this invaluable aspect of personalized, experiential learning—disrupting curricula built around worldschooling, family relocations, or seasonal opportunities. For rural Neighbor Island families, military households, especially those with multiple children, the logistical and financial burdens would be severe.

We are also deeply concerned that this bill would lock our children into a strange, intimidating public school environment—one that, in Hawai'i, lacks armed, on-site security capable of stopping a lethal threat, except for a recent pilot program placing armed officers at just **three public schools** on Oahu. Given Hawaii's documented rise in gun deaths over the past decade, it logically figures that this increase could find its way into school environments, amplifying risks in settings already lacking sufficient armed security.

Public schools nationwide remain among the softest targets for random gun violence, with prolific fatal gunfire incidents occurring in recent years, while home-based learning faces no comparable risks. Parents must retain the fundamental right to shield their children from these most exploited venues of mass violence.

If the intent is truly student success, offer voluntary resources and support—not coercive, in-person mandates that treat capable parents as suspects and force conformity to a highly criticized public testing regime.

HB2376 already faces overwhelming opposition from Hawaii's homeschool community. When the presumed beneficiaries of a bill unanimously reject it, so must the legislature.

Reject HB2376. Demand the DOE and Principals follow existing laws without inventing requirements, and protect Hawaii's homeschool families who succeed precisely because of their freedom.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.



Michael Plowman

'Ewa Beach

DAVID IGE
GOVERNOR

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Pohakea Elementary School
91-750 Fort Weaver Road
EWA BEACH, HAWAII 96706
PH: (808) 307-2000 Fax: (808) 689-1293

[redacted]

June 20, 2025

Dear Homeschooling Parent:

According to our records, we have not received the **Annual Progress Report** for which was due on May 30, 2025.

Please be aware that according to the Department of Education's Homeschooling Guidelines, you are required to submit an annual progress report by the last school day. In addition to the annual progress report, you are also required by Chapter 12, Compulsory Attendance Exceptions, to submit appropriate criterion or norm-referenced tests comparable to those used in our statewide testing program for children in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10. The test results can serve as your annual progress report.

Please submit the report as soon as possible. The reports are required as a means of documenting that adequate progress is being made in your child's educational development.

According to Chapter 12, §8-12-17, if there is reasonable cause for the school to believe that there is educational neglect, the Department of Education, in compliance with §302A-1132, Hawaii Revised Statutes, shall intervene and take appropriate action in accordance with established Department procedures.

If you have any questions or if your child is no longer being home schooled, please call the school at 808-307-2000.

Sincerely,

Dr. Corey Barton
Principal
Pohakea Elementary School

Department Notice of Non-Discrimination

The Hawaii State of Education (HIDOE) and its schools do not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, color, national origin, religion or disability in its programs and activities. Please direct inquiries regarding HIDOE nondiscrimination policies as follows: Beth Schimmelfennig, Director; Rhonda Wong, Compliance; Aaron Candaosen, Title VI; Toby Yamashiro, Title VII; Nicole Ise-Ijima, Title IX; Kysa Sukita, ADA/504; Civil Rights Compliance Office, Hawai'i State Department of Education, PO Box 2360, Honolulu, Hawaii, (808) 586-3307 or relay, Hawaii State Department of Education, PO Box 2360, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96804, (808) 586-3322 or relay, CRCO@k12.hi.us.

AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:36:32 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Spencer Lemer	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Spencer Lemer

HB2376

Tuesday 2-17-26

House Education Committee

Dear members of the committee,

My name is Spencer Lemer, and I stand in opposition to HB2376. The requirement for annual assessment for K-8 is unnecessary and potentially counter productive for homeschool students.

The public school context for young homeschool students is foreign, and would not be an ideal environment for assessment, causing undue stress by the very nature of its unfamiliarity. The current system already requires assessment for grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, and has proven sufficient as national averages for homeschool students' acedemic performance outpaces public schools by 15-30 percentage points on latter standardized testing. Homeschool children have higher average SAT/ACT scores and higher rates of college admission over public school children. There is no rational statistical reason to pass this bill. Furthermore, the philosophical difference in educational approach, particularly in the early years, for most homeschool families makes this measure seem an intrusive overreach. At best it is unnecessary.

Please oppose and shut down HB2376

Aloha,

Spencer Lemer

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:56:55 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raquel Werk	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I oppose HB2376.

The evidence speaks for itself: after years of additional mandates, Hawai‘i’s public schools are not delivering the academic results that this bill claims to address.

According to the most recent Strive HI Performance System data, statewide proficiency in mathematics hovers around 42%, and language arts proficiency sits near 54%. Attendance rates show only about 76% of students attending regularly. Achievement gaps persist year after year, and in some communities the math proficiency rate for Native Hawaiian students has been reported as low as 3% at certain campuses. These are not isolated data points—these are systemic outcomes.

Despite this, rather than addressing the real causes inside the system, this bill reaches outward—to impose additional mandates on families who have already withdrawn from that very system because it failed their children.

Let’s examine the facts. Homeschooling in Hawai‘i has grown significantly. There are more than 4,100 homeschooled children in the state. These families have chosen an alternative because they are dissatisfied with the status quo. National independent research consistently shows that homeschool students score 15–25 percentile points above public school peers on standardized measures. The evidence of success is clear, yet this bill treats homeschool families as though they are the problem.

I speak to you not only as a concerned parent, but as someone who served six years in Hawai‘i public schools. I stood in classrooms committed to raising achievement. What did I encounter? Confusion. Inadequate training. Constant changes in testing tools and measurements. What was required in one school was replaced in the next. Teachers were given shifting expectations without clear guidance. Administrators—dedicated though they were—did not have consistent tools or support.

Now this bill demands that homeschool students report to public campuses to take in-person state assessments. Logistics alone make this untenable. The very administrators who lack consistency on basic training will now be tasked with this added burden.

And let us speak plainly about environment. In a classroom setting, one careless or obscene comment by a student can expose other children to language and ideas parents would never willingly introduce. I have witnessed this firsthand. That experience, that risk, is precisely why many parents choose to homeschool—to protect their children's hearts and minds.

So I ask: why now? If the system has failed to deliver on its promises after decades of reform, why is the answer to expand its reach into homes that are succeeding? Does the state lack financing? That motivation is not consistent with academic standards.

This bill is not about academic improvement—it is about control. It expands oversight where it is neither needed nor welcomed. It penalizes families exercising their constitutional rights.

Homeschool freedom in Hawai‘i was hard-won. It is grounded in parental responsibility, not bureaucratic mandate. As a homeschool mom of 20+ years to two kids who are successful, high-achieving adults, I urge you to reject HB2376.

Thank you.

Raquel Werk

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:19:28 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nathan King	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

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

I respectfully submit testimony **in strong opposition to HB 2376**.
My name is Nathan King and I am a homeschooler and registered voter in the district. Please understand that if passed this legislation would be a very burdensome restriction of the freedoms Hawaii homeschoolers currently possess.

Hawaii has long recognized homeschooling as a lawful, effective, and accountable educational option. Under current law, families already provide annual documentation of educational progress through multiple assessment pathways. This system has functioned for decades without evidence of widespread failure, neglect, or harm to children educated at home.

HB 2376 would place Hawaii among **the most restrictive homeschool states in the nation**, despite **no evidence of systemic homeschool failure** that would justify such a dramatic shift in policy. Most states that require homeschool assessment preserve parental choice and do not mandate participation in public school testing systems. HB 2376 goes significantly further.

This bill does not merely regulate homeschooling—it **restricts the legality of homeschooling on mandatory participation in the public school testing system**. By requiring homeschool students to physically attend public schools for state-selected assessments, HB 2376 blurs the constitutional line explicitly protected by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, which affirmed that children are not "mere creatures of the State" and that parents retain primary authority over their education.

The removal of parental choice in assessment, combined with compulsory in-person testing at public schools, represents a substantial intrusion into family autonomy and educational independence. This shift from parent-directed accountability to state-controlled validation is not narrowly tailored, especially when less restrictive mechanisms already exist and are functioning effectively.

As a result, HB 2376creates **significant constitutional vulnerability**. Parental rights are recognized as fundamental rights under longstanding Supreme Court precedent, and legislation that burdens those rights must meet heightened scrutiny. HB 2376 fails to demonstrate a compelling state interest that cannot already be addressed through existing law.

Finally, it is important for the Legislature to understand that Hawaii has a **strong, organized, and engaged coalition of homeschooling families**. Should HB 2376 pass in its current form, the Legislature should reasonably expect a **legal challenge** based on parental rights, privacy protections, and constitutional overreach. This bill risks costly litigation and division where none is necessary.

Homeschool families are not seeking to avoid accountability. They are asking the State to preserve a balanced framework that respects parental authority, educational diversity, and constitutional boundaries.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **reject HB 2376**.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Written Testimony in Opposition to SB3193 & HB2376

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rachel Medeiros, and I am a Hawaii parent providing homeschool education for my child. I respectfully submit testimony **in opposition to SB3193 and HB2376**.

While I support accountability and the importance of ensuring children receive a quality education, I have significant concerns about the proposed requirement mandating homeschooled students to participate in in-person public school testing and additional universal screening measures.

Currently, homeschool families in Hawaii already comply with established accountability standards. Parents must submit annual reports and standardized achievement test scores for designated grade levels. These requirements provide measurable academic benchmarks while allowing families the flexibility necessary for individualized education. The proposed legislation would introduce additional mandates that are unnecessary and burdensome for families who are already demonstrating academic success and compliance.

Research consistently shows that homeschooled students perform strongly in academic outcomes. According to the **National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI)**– studies indicate that homeschool students, on average, score approximately **15–30 percentile points higher on standardized tests** and demonstrate **8–15% higher college admission and graduation rates** compared to national averages. These outcomes suggest that existing homeschool educational models are producing successful results without the need for additional public school-based testing requirements.

Mandating in-person testing at public school facilities also presents practical challenges. Homeschooling often involves customized learning schedules, alternative curriculum pacing, and specialized teaching approaches designed to meet a child's individual learning needs. Requiring participation in public school testing environments may disrupt these effective learning models without providing additional educational benefit.

Furthermore, public education systems in many areas continue to face ongoing performance challenges. Resources and legislative focus would be better directed toward strengthening and improving public education outcomes rather than imposing additional regulations on homeschool programs that are already demonstrating measurable academic success.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to **oppose SB3193 and HB2376**.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Rachel Medeiros

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:15:18 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nonohe Botelho	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I strongly OPPOSE HB2376. This bill serves to cast a wide net that distroys both keiki, opio and their entire Ohana! Narrow your scope. Please OPPOSE this poorly written bill by Rep. Marthen and Senator Favella.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:17:55 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Badat-Richardson	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 2376

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Sarah Badat-Richardson, and I am a resident of Waimanalo. I am testifying in strong opposition to HB 2376, which would mandate in-person testing at public schools for homeschooled children beginning in the 2027-2028 school year.

1. This Bill Creates an Unjust Double Standard

Current Hawaii homeschool law prohibits homeschooling families from participating in public school sports and extracurricular activities. HB 2376 would force homeschoolers to participate in public school testing while still denying them access to these other public resources. If the state wishes to require homeschoolers to use public school facilities for testing, it should also grant them access to other programs their tax dollars support.

2. The Bill Offers No Demonstrated Benefit to Homeschooled Children

The bill's text fails to explain how this mandate would improve outcomes for homeschooled students. Research consistently shows that homeschoolers already excel academically, scoring 15-25 percentile points higher on standardized tests than their public school peers and enjoying higher college acceptance rates.

Meanwhile, decades of increased testing in public schools has not improved educational outcomes. Since the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act mandated extensive testing, results have remained stagnant or declined. By 2024, only 35% of 12th graders were proficient in reading and 22% in math—the lowest levels in 20 years.

Hawaii's public education system currently ranks 42nd nationally, and the U.S. ranks 31st worldwide. Given these realities, it's unclear why homeschoolers—who are demonstrably succeeding—should be subjected to a testing regime that has failed to improve public school performance.

Current Hawaii homeschool law already requires regular testing, providing adequate accountability and state monitoring of student progress.

3. The Mandate Is Logistically Impractical

Implementation would create significant burdens for both families and the Department of Education:

- Do Hawaii's public schools have the capacity and resources to proctor tests for thousands of additional students?
- Families choose homeschooling specifically for its flexibility in scheduling and travel. This mandate would eliminate that core benefit.
- For large families, coordinating drop-offs at multiple school campuses while arranging childcare for younger children would be exceptionally difficult. I am personally unable to attend this hearing in person because we are a one-car family and my husband already had a meeting scheduled.

Conclusion

Current Hawaii homeschool law strikes an appropriate balance between respecting families' constitutional right to direct their children's education and ensuring reasonable accountability. This bill attempts to fix what is not broken while our state faces many genuine educational challenges that deserve legislative attention.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 2376. Please stand for the interests of homeschooling families.

Sarah Badat-Richardson
Waimanalo, Hawaii

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:00:14 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenna Oda	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Jenna Oda and I oppose this bill in its entirety. As parents to four autistic children, homeschool was our only option. The DOE does not have the resources to provide 1:1 for each of our children. Since being at home, our children have far exceeded academically and made immense improvements behaviorally. It's mainly in part that their curriculum is designed for them and not apart of the DOE. They were so stressed out in a class. Not getting the help and attention they needed and required because they didn't and couldn't understand. The schools do not support children attending their therapy. Therapy we pay out of pocket for because all they care about is attendance. Not the well being of our children. Requiring a standardized test is outrageous. We teach according to our curriculum, not the DOE. The DOE curriculum and structure has been seen so many times to be inadequate and failing our youth. Not just for our children but many children who attend DOE schools. Subjecting them to your test is unfair. As unfair as forcing them to sit in a class and try to learn for 6 hours with teachers who lack their special education degree. We love teachers but the DOE system is not designed to create successful children. And we do not agree with any system who feels it can control our children as if it is their property. We will teach according to what's best for our children and a standardized test would not be able to comprehend that. The curriculum we teach is not a one size fits all and that's why it works. There is also a fear that if our children don't meet your expectations that you can justify not allowing us to have the freedom to homeschool our children. They are special needs. You don't provide an adjusted test in the classroom, how would you make accommodations for a standardized test? The only accommodation given was passing our children to the next grade level knowing they did not meet the criteria or pass the standardized tests thus proving they were not ready to move on but did so because they were special. Again, ridiculous. We are more confident than ever that our special needs children will be productive, respectable, and successful members of our community and it's because they are not fit in to a box. We would like to continue raising and teaching our children without the government's interference on a subject that seems if enforced on would be an overreach of power. Mahalo nui loa for your time.

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the House Education Committee

My name is June Mather and I serve on the Board of Christian Homeschoolers of Hawaii. I am writing to express my opposition to HB2376.

The language of HB2376 suggests the Department of Education has concerns for the academic performance of homeschooled students. I would like to address that aspect of the bill first.

No hard data has been presented in the bill demonstrating that homeschool students are failing to make adequate academic progress.

Hawaii Administrative Rules Chapter 12 Compulsory Attendance Exceptions regulates homeschooling and **already** includes measures for the Department of Education to monitor student progress.

- Parents are required to keep records of the instructional start and end dates, as well as a bibliography of instructional materials used, Sec 8-12-15.
- In addition, parents must submit an annual progress report, which can take one of several forms, including:
  - "a score on a nationally-normed standardized achievement test which demonstrates grade level achievement appropriate to a child's age", Sec 8-12-18(b)(1).
  - "a written evaluation by a person certified to teach in the State of Hawaii that a child demonstrates appropriate grade level achievement or significant annual advancement commensurate with a child's abilities", Sec 8-12-18(b)(3).

Standardized achievement testing is **already** required for homeschooled students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, Sec 8-12-18(a). Testing can be done at the public school or parents, at their own expense, can choose from a variety of standardized achievement tests for their child. These tests are administered by a qualified test administrator as defined by the test publishers. Testing can be conducted in the child's home or in another familiar environment.

HB2376 would require mandatory entry assessment for kindergarteners and a universal screening for first and second graders. Again, the Chapter 12 Rule requires parents of homeschoolers of all ages to submit annual progress reports. Many parents **already** submit standardized test scores for kindergarteners and first and second graders for their annual progress reports.

The Chapter 12 Rule **already** includes safeguards if a child is not making satisfactory academic progress. Standardized test scores for homeschooled students must fall in the upper two-thirds stanines. If a principal determines that progress in not adequate, the principal shall meet with the parents to discuss an educational plan for improvement for the child, Sec 8-12-18(d).

HB2376 acknowledges that homeschooling "is a valid and beneficial educational option that offers flexibility, individualized instruction, and strong family engagement" and yet the bill restricts parental choice to direct the education for their child.

- Parents would no longer have the choice to select the assessments that are best suited for their child. Homeschooled children must participate in the Smarter Balanced Assessment that is aligned with Common Core, a curriculum not used by many homeschooling families.
- The homeschooled child would be tested in the public school, an unfamiliar environment that may negatively affect test performance.
- Parents would be required to align their homeschool calendar to that of the public school calendar for purposes of in-person public school testing.

I would now like to address the language of HB2376 concerning “in-person testing.” Is this an attempt for mandatory reporters (teachers) to identify abuse or neglect of homeschooled children? Can this be determined over a course of a few days of in-person testing? Would parents who abuse their children under the guise of homeschooling even bring their children to the public school for testing? HB2376 casts a large net and will not catch the “fish” that it is seeking.

Consider that research indicates that most child abuse begins in the toddler years (Child Maltreatment Report 2021, published 2024, pp. 21-22). These children would have already been identified and followed by Child Protective Services (CPS) before entering the educational system. The school should be informed if a child is being followed by CPS, so if there is a change in school status, e.g. a parent removes a child to be homeschooled, CPS would be alerted to take necessary action.

Children who experience abuse or neglect may also have a history of chronic absenteeism or truancy, an indication that education not taking place. Public schools document absences and have procedures for addressing this issue with parents. If a parent with such a documented history, withdraws a child to homeschool, the Department of Education could require parents to submit an instructional plan and monitor the child’s academic progress over a defined period of time. Such monitoring could include meetings with the child and parents to discuss the educational plan and the child’s academic progress.

The State of Colorado has a similar provision in their homeschool statute (CRS 22-33-104.5 subsection (b)).

Any legislation or revisions to Chapter 12 should protect parental rights to direct the education for their children and also protect children from abuse by their parents or guardians. HB2376 does not meet this criteria.

I urge members of the Education Committee to vote ‘no’ to HB2376 and instead consider legislation that would

- Notify CPS of a change in the child’s education status when the child is already being followed by CPS;
- Establish regulations or oversight for families to homeschool when there is a documented record of chronic absenteeism or truancy.

Again, I oppose HB2376.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
June Mather

DATE: February 16, 2026

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

RE: HB 2376
Position: Strongly Oppose

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

My name is Anuhea Maeda. I am a homeschooling mom of six on the Big Island. There are many reasons why our family has chosen homeschooling as our path of education and one of them is the freedom to tailor it to our children's specific needs. We're concerned this bill would stifle our ability to customize the education of our children.

I find statements in Section 1 concerning. It states that *"the department of education has a responsibility to ensure the educational well-being of all school-age children.*" I respectfully disagree. Parents, not the legislature, are responsible to ensure the educational well-being of their own children, be it through public school, private school or homeschool. I also find it ironic that it also states that the department of education must *"monitor student progress in a manner that respects parental choice."* This bill violates parental choice by undermining the parent's ability to customize the education to the best interests of the child. Forcing standardized testing on children with such diverse needs would be counter-productive and could diminish the rich, individualized learning experiences our children deserve. The current law already sufficiently monitors educational progress in homeschooled children.

According to the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), peer reviewed studies find that "*The home-educated typically score 15 to 25 percentile points above public-school students on standardized academic achievement tests,"* and *"78% of peer-reviewed studies on academic achievement show homeschool students perform statistically significantly better than those in institutional schools."*
https://nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/

On the other hand, KHON posted a study that found that Hawaii public schools ranked #42 out of 50 in overall performance on the national level.
https://www.khon2.com/local-news/education-report-ranks-hawai%CA%BBi-at-the-bottom/

Homeschooled students perform better nationally and that's without in person testing at the public school. The numbers speak for themselves that the benefits of homeschooling outweigh Hawaii's current public education system and requiring homeschooled students to succumb to the standardized testing of a system that is not performing well on a national level would damage rather than ensure their educational well-being.

HB 2376 is not in the best interest of homeschooled children and I urge you to vote NO.
Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Anuhea Maeda
18-4170 Hinuhinu Street
Mountain View, HI 96771
(808) 747-1165

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:03:26 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alex Day	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I will leave a comment regarding HB2376. I would be more than happy to provide studies if it helps as well. First, I want to say thank you for considering the well-being of the children of Hawai'i. That being said, I strongly feel, and the data strongly suggests, that this is a step in the opposite direction. Not only has there been strong opposition regarding standardized testing in Hawai'i, but Hawai'i's own faculty, but the data consistently shows us that homeschool students, decade after decade, perform better or significantly better than their peers in testing. This means that without narrowing the scope of teaching due to standardized testing, something that the parents are doing, is working time and time again. Regarding abuse, which it seems as if that is the concern, researchers at Harvard University released their findings of over 12,000 children showing that homeschooled children were about one-third more likely to engage in volunteering, higher levels of forgiveness, and more likely to attend religious services, which correlate to lower risks of alcohol, drug abuse, depression, and suicide. Their findings show that children develop into well-adjusted, responsible, and socially engaged young adults. This cannot possibly stem from a large portion of abusive homes. I don’t believe that if we have data showing that this system works and directly negatively impacts it, that we can truly say we are looking out for our children. I cannot support this bill as it does more harm on a greater scale than good.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

Tichael Nisa
91-440 Ewa Beach Road
Ewa Beach, HI 96706
(808) 393-8767
tamosa@westmont.edu

4th September 2026

Testimony Opposing HB2376
Submitted to the House Committee on Education

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Tichael Nisa, I am a 31-year-old wife, mother of four, a resident of the State of Hawaii, born and raised in Ewa Beach, HI. I attended Ewa Beach Elementary, transitioned to Ilima intermediate, and graduated with honor (magna cum laude, 3.8 GPA) from James Campbell High School. For my secondary education, I graduated from Westmont College-- a private education received in Santa Barbara, California--and from there I have earned my Bachelors of Science in General Biology. Currently, my husband is our sole income earner while I stay at home to care for our children ages 8, 7, 2.5, and 11-months. It is the elder two that I homeschool, and have homeschooled since Kindergarten.

I am writing to respectfully yet passionately oppose HB2376, which would, "...require annual in-person participation in certain tests by home schooled students...including English language arts and math testing through the Smarter Balanced Assessment, given in the third grade through eighth grade and eleventh grade...For those entering kindergarten,the test that would apply is the kindergarten entry assessment. For students in the first grade and second grade, they are given universal screenings three times during the school year, with the first universal screening to be required."

The following explains my opposition to HB2376:

First and foremost, the second paragraph of HB2376reads that, *"The legislature recognizes that the department of education has a responsibility to ensure the educational well-being of all school-age children."* I strongly disagree with this statement, yet only to an extent. In my humble opinion, the educational well-being of any child is first and foremost the responsibility of parents, and not the Department of Education (DOE). However, in situations where parents are unfit/unwell to care properly for the child's education (e.g.

under the consistent influence of alcohol/drugs, and/or mentally unstable), and/or in situations where it is unsafe for a child to be educated at home (e.g. due to child abuse/neglect), then perhaps the DOE can step in to assist by providing the child with a proper education, and resources at the their (not the child's) expense. But if the latter is not the case, then as I've stated before, my child's educational well-being is my responsibility first and foremost. In this case then, HB2376 oversteps my innate authority as a mother who wants and will give the best for her children. Moreover, in lieu of this, HB2376 begins to decompose in that it was constructed upon an incomplete premise--i.e. That it is the DOE's responsibility to care for the educational well-being of my child. I'll have it known, and I'm sure many other homeschooling families will agree with me: there is no one who desires my children's educational well-being and future success more than me. Not the DOE, not the state, not anyone else, except my husband, the father of my children--and it is and should always be our right to decide what is best for them as long as they are children (below 18 years of age).

Secondly, the HB2376 undermines the Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) 8-12-15, HRS 8-12-18, and HRS 8-12-19. The HRS 8-12-19, states that, "A parent teaching the parent's child at home shall be deemed a qualified instructor." Thus, since I am a qualified instructor by HRS 8-12-19's definition, shouldn't I have the right to determine how to test my child in a manner that reflects his/her growth and progress based on what has been taught in our home? Well, in fact, I do have that right according to HRS 8-12-15. The HRS 8-12-15 allows the parent educator to choose a "curriculum…structured and based on educational objectives as well as the needs of the child…" taking into account, "…the interests, needs and abilities of the child." Furthermore, HRS 8-12-15 states that, "The record of the planned curriculum should include the following…(4) The method used to determine mastery of materials and subjects in the curriculum…" Thus, not only is it our right under HRS 8-12-15 to freely choose a curriculum for our child, taking into account his/her interests, needs, and abilities, but it is also our right under HRS 8-12-15 to choose a method for the determining of their mastery of materials and subjects in the curriculum.

The HB2376 revokes these rights by essentially demanding we bring our children to the public school they would otherwise be required to attend, and have them tested via a Kindergarten entry assessment, 1st and 2nd grade universal screenings (3x a year, the first being required), and 3rd-8th and 11th grade statewide testing through the Smarter Balanced Assessment. In other words, we don't get to choose anymore. Kindly keep in mind that homeschoolers are already required to submit test scores for the third, fifth, eight, and tenth grades. Yet, under HRS 8-12-18 our rights as far as where our children test and what test we choose to have them take is preserved (i.e. so long as the principal has approved the parent's form of testing the child). So,

why is HB2376 different? Under the HRS 8-12-18, we the parent, "...may elect to arrange for private testing at the parent's own expense. The tests used shall be comparable to the appropriate criterion or norm-referenced tests used by the department in the grades concerned. The parent may request and the principal may approve other means of evaluation to meet the Statewide Testing Program requirements." So, to be clear, my issue isn't with testing my child, it's SB193 revoking my freedom and right to choose how, when, and where.

Finally, paragraph two of HB2376, following the incorrect premise that the responsibility of a child's educational well-being is the DOE's continues with, "To fulfill this responsibility, the department of education must be able to monitor student progress in a manner that respects parental choice while allowing for the early identification of developmental delays, learning differences, or other educational needs that may benefit from additional evaluation, resources, or supportive services offered by the department."

As a start, and I say this humbly and with concern, if parental choice is respected, homeschooling parents should always have the freedom to determine what is best and needed/appropriate for their child(ren). After all, we know them best. After all, we are qualified instructors. And after all, they are our children, and not the DOE's. Furthermore, I would like to add that if there are services that the DOE would like to extend to homeschooling families, i.e. parent teachers, I welcome those services as options and as resources--but not as a requirement, or via an intrusion of my right to care for and be responsible for my child's educational well-being.

I'd like to share a story. My third child is 2.5 years old today, and shortly after he turned 2, I noticed he wasn't expressing many words as his siblings would at that age, or that the average 2.5-year-old would. So, what did I do? I sought out resources that would benefit him. I made contact with a friend of mine in the Keiki o Ka'Aina program, who then referred me to People Attentive to Children (PATCH), where my son is now receiving in-home visits and services to help him in his expressive language. Furthermore, I made contact with another friend of mine in the Partners in Development Foundation (PIDF), who then assisted me in registering my 2.5-year-old and 11-month-old at Ka Pa'alana in Kalaeloa, where Preschool staff provide nationally accredited comprehensive family education, and Home Visiting staff provide personal follow up and support. I did this because I want the best for my child and it is my responsibility, first and foremost, to care for the educational-well being of him. The point I am trying to make is this: I am very resourceful, I welcome the DOE's resources, but I will always oppose a bill that takes away my freedom of choice when it comes to educating my children.

In conclusion then, I oppose HB2376 for the following reasons:

1. HB2376 was constructed on the false premise that it is the DOE's responsibility to care for school-aged children, when It is first and foremost the responsibility of every able parent,
2. HB2376 undermines homeschooling families rights under HRS 8-12-18 and HRS 8-12-19 to select a method of determining mastery of materials and subjects in our child's curriculum, and to request other means of evaluation to meet the Statewide Testing Program (with the principal's approval), and
3. HB2376 does not truly respect parental choice.

Today it is HB2376 saying, "more tests on our timeline and through our approved administrators." But next year, there might arise another proposed bill saying, "homeschooling families may now only use x, y, and z approved curriculums for homeschooling." Respectfully, it's a "no" for me. Allow us parents our parental right and freedom to choose by not passing HB2376 to the next level.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Tichael Nisa

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:25:43 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kupaa Homeschool	Kupaa Homeschool Academy	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I am testifying on behalf of my school, Kupaa Homeschool Academy, as the founder and homeschool educator on Hawai‘i Island. I stand in strong opposition to HB2376.

Low enrollment in public schools is not happening because families reject accountability. It is happening because families are responding to lived experience.

Parents do not want their children in classrooms where violent or chronically disruptive behavior is tolerated without meaningful consequences. They do not want their children subjected to bullying that goes unaddressed while academic instruction suffers. Families are seeking safe, stable environments where learning can actually take place.

They are also seeking transparency and respect for parental authority in deeply personal areas — including religious beliefs, moral instruction, and medical decision-making.

The United States Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that parents have a fundamental liberty interest in the care, custody, and control of their children. In Pierce v. Society of Sisters, the Court made clear that “the child is not the mere creature of the State.” In Wisconsin v. Yoder, the Court upheld parents’ rights to direct their child’s education consistent with their religious convictions. And in Troxel v. Granville, the Court reaffirmed that parental authority over child-rearing decisions is a fundamental constitutional right.

Homeschooling in Hawai‘i exists because that right is recognized in law.

Under Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, states must meet testing participation targets, but individual parents are not legally compelled to force their child to take state tests. Public school parents may lawfully refuse without penalty to their child. Yet HB2376 would threaten the lawful exemption of homeschool families who decline participation.

If parents may choose public, charter, or private school without this additional condition, why are homeschool families being singled out?

That is unequal treatment.

Hawai‘i public schools receive approximately $20,000 per student per year, and funding is tied directly to enrollment. Families understand that reality.

So we must ask — is this about academic improvement, or about expanding state control in response to declining enrollment?

Children are not funding units. No funding formula should override constitutional parental rights.

Homeschool families are lawful. We are documented. We are accountable.

HB2376 expands state control where constitutional liberty has long protected families.

I urge you to reject this bill.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:46:49 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tara Rojas	Individual	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I am testifying in STRONG OPPOSITION to HB2376.

I am a homeschooling parent. This bill directly impacts my keiki, my kuleana as a parent, and the educational path we have intentionally chosen.

While the bill acknowledges that homeschooling is a valid and beneficial educational option, it simultaneously imposes a requirement that undermines that very recognition by mandating annual in-person testing at a Department of Education school site.

This is not a neutral requirement.

This is a shift toward increased state control over home education.

Homeschooling families in Hawai‘i already operate under existing Department of Education requirements, including notification and accountability. HB2376 goes further by forcing participation in a system that many families have consciously chosen to step outside of - for reasons that include educational philosophy, safety, cultural alignment, and the ability to provide more individualized and relevant learning.

Additionally, requiring young children - including kindergarten through grade 2 - to participate in institutional assessments is developmentally questionable and disregards alternative, holistic approaches to learning.

If the State’s intent is to support children, then the approach should be resources, optional support, and access - not mandates and compliance structures.

Education is not one-size-fits-all.

Parents are not the problem. Families are not the problem.

Centralized systems that fail to meet the needs of all learners are the reason many of us chose this path in the first place.

I respectfully urge this Committee to VOTE NO on HB2376.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:02:32 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hadassah Lau	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Hadassah Lau. I am currently homeschooling two of my children, both in Kindergarten. I am new to being a homeschool parent, however I, myself, was homeschooled from K - 12 and found many benefits to being homeschooled.

There are a few reasons I chose to homeschool my children: First, and most importantly, is to have a say in what and how they are learning. I am able to customize the lessons for each according to what they need. Therefore they may be ahead in some subjects and need extra challenge to continue growth, knowledge & attention; whereas, in other subjects we are able to take a slower approach to learn, focus and perfect areas they struggle in. Secondly is being able to schedule schoolwork according to our own family's schedule. This means I can adjust our schedules to match with all of our other life events without it hindering our kids' learning process. And thirdly, I love any opportunity for my kids to socialize and make friends, however, I find that the less people around there are less distractions and they are able to focus and learn better.

Taking these reasons as to why I choose to homeschool into consideration, I hope you can understand my concerns. That if this bill were to pass, the testing wouldn't fully show my kids' understanding and knowledge, it would disrupt and conflict with our ability to control our own schedule and with the in person testing it can sabotage our kids' testing as they wouldn't be familiar with the environment not to mention the distractions. I find that this bill dismisses homeschool freedoms and adds unnecessary constraint and obligations to homeschool families. Please vote no to HB2376.

Thank you,

Hadassah Lau

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/13/2026 1:46:40 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Goforth	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Opposition to SB3193 and HB2376

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong opposition to SB3193 and HB2376.

My family is a military family. When we were assigned to Hawai‘i, we were required to live in a hotel for more than 30 days while awaiting housing. During this unstable period, homeschooling was not a convenience—it was a necessity. It gave our child continuity, stability, and emotional safety at a time when everything else was uncertain. These bills would make that kind of responsible, adaptive parenting far more difficult.

Homeschooling allows families like ours to meet our children’s needs in ways the public school system cannot. The reality is that Hawai‘i’s public school system is deeply struggling. Families should not be forced into an underperforming system or one that pushes ideological content that does not align with their values. We chose to homeschool our fourth grader because we did not want our child exposed to divisive, politicized “woke” ideology, and because we wanted an education focused on academics, critical thinking, and character.

Homeschooling also transformed our family life for the better. Instead of constant stress—rushing out the door, battling over homework, and watching our child grow anxious—we gained time for learning, meaningful conversations, and connection. Our child is thriving academically and emotionally.

SB3193 and HB2376 would impose unnecessary, intrusive, and burdensome regulations on families who are already doing a good job educating their children. There is no evidence of widespread failure among homeschoolers that justifies this expansion of government oversight. These bills would harm military families, working parents, and families who rely on flexibility and parental involvement to provide a quality education.

Parents, not the government, are best positioned to know what their children need. Please do not punish families who are responsibly exercising their right to direct their children’s education.

I urge you to reject SB3193 and HB2376.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Anne Goforth

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:30:40 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Summer Butindaro	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Summer, and I am a homeschooling parent from Kona. I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to HB2376.

While I understand the stated intent of ensuring student progress and identifying learning needs early, I do not agree that expanding mandatory in-person state testing for homeschool students is necessary. Homeschool families in Hawai‘i already comply with existing reporting and assessment requirements. Adding compulsory in-person state assessments removes parental choice and places additional burdens on families who have chosen a different educational path precisely because it allows individualized pacing and flexibility.

This bill makes something mandatory that should remain optional. Many homeschool families intentionally choose alternative standardized tests that align better with their curriculum, values, and children’s developmental readiness. Requiring participation only in the state assessment at public school campuses limits flexibility and shifts authority away from parents, who hold primary responsibility for directing their children’s education.

I am also concerned that the language of the bill is broad and leaves room for future expansion of regulation beyond what is currently written. Increased oversight often builds incrementally. What begins as a testing requirement can easily grow into additional mandates that further restrict homeschool autonomy.

If the Legislature truly desires to support homeschool families and provide equal opportunity, a more meaningful place to begin would be financial fairness. Homeschool families bear the full cost of curriculum, materials, and instructional time while still contributing tax dollars to the public education system. Tax credits or tax relief would demonstrate tangible support without restricting educational freedom.

I respectfully ask that my representatives serving Hawai‘i County, particularly those representing Kona, consider the needs and voices of homeschool families in our community and oppose HB2376.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Summer

Aloha, my name is Mile. I am a Hawai‘i resident, a registered voter, and the parent of three children. I am submitting this testimony in strong opposition to SB3193 and HB2376. These bills would require homeschooled children to participate in public school–based assessments and statewide testing, including in-person kindergarten entry assessments, universal screening in first and second grade, and Smarter Balanced Assessments in grades 3–8 and 11. These requirements would apply to all homeschoolers, regardless of individual circumstances. I did not choose homeschooling lightly or out of convenience. I chose it because my children’s experiences in public school demonstrated that the system was not meeting their academic, emotional, or developmental needs. Last year, my daughter was being bullied at school. Instead of being protected, she became the one who was suspended. When I raised concerns, I was directed to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) supports, described as opportunities for students to talk with staff when they were struggling. While emotional support is important, it did not stop the bullying or protect my child. During this same period, my daughter also experienced bullying from her own teacher. She was only eight years old. My son was also struggling. He was failing his classes, and the behavior and character issues he was bringing home began to affect our entire household. Academically, he was not improving, and emotionally, he was deteriorating. These experiences made it clear that a one-size-fits-all system was not serving my children as whole individuals. I gave the schools time. I communicated concerns. I researched academic performance data for Waipahu Elementary and Waipahu Intermediate, including funding levels and outcomes. Despite significant taxpayer investment, there was no measurable improvement and no evidence that these environments were helping my children thrive. Homeschooling allowed me to provide individualized instruction, address character development, restore emotional safety, and guide my children according to our family’s values. It strengthened our family and gave my children the stability and support they needed to grow. These bills undermine parental rights and educational authority by forcing homeschool families to participate in public school systems they have lawfully chosen not to enroll in. Homeschoolers do not use public school resources and should not be compelled to validate their education through public school mechanisms. There is also no evidence-based justification for increased regulation. Hawai‘i homeschoolers consistently graduate, pursue higher education, and contribute positively to society. Regulation should be driven by demonstrated need, not assumption. Mandating in-person participation places unnecessary burdens on families with multiple children, working parents, rural families, and those who homeschool due to medical, developmental, or safety concerns. These requirements defeat many of the very reasons families choose homeschooling. Homeschool education is intentionally not one-size-fits-all. Children learn at different paces and through individualized methods that parents are already responsible for monitoring. Requiring standardized public school

testing ignores this reality and imposes inappropriate measures on families whose educational goals and methods differ by design. Parents are a child's first teachers. Families who homeschool are already deeply involved, accountable, and invested in their children's learning and development. These bills would disrupt stable, effective learning environments and introduce unnecessary stress and confusion where structure and care already exist. For families like mine, SB3193 and HB2376 do not represent support. They represent government overreach into lawful, responsible home education. I sincerely urge you to oppose SB3193 and HB2376. Finally, I would like to note that I submitted my homeschool notice for my daughter in the fall of last year. Despite multiple follow-up calls, I have been told that confirmation was emailed or mailed; however, I have not received a copy to date. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Mile

Parent and Hawai‘i resident

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/13/2026 8:12:10 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kellsey Kelley	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a homeschool mom to my 7 and 5 year old. I do not agree with this bill that proposed homeschooled children to be required to attend in person tests. I believe if you homeschool, you should have a right to choose how your child will be educated and also the way they will be testing. There are many resources that allow homeschool children to take these test online. Everyone should have a choice to do what they think is best for their children.

Mahalo,

Kellsey

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/13/2026 11:10:54 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Corrina Campbell	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Corrina Campbell and I am a homeschool mom of two elementary-aged children here in Hawai'i. I'm writing in opposition to this bill and to ask that you please reconsider how it affects families like mine.

It grieves many of us parents to see mandatory standardized testing being proposed for homeschooled children, especially as young as kindergarten. Many young children are not developmentally ready for that kind of testing. At such young ages, the test results usually reflect anxiety and unfamiliar environment rather than true learning.

I'm also deeply concerned about the loss of parental choice in selecting an appropriate assessment and the requirement that testing be done in-person at a public school. One of the reasons homeschooling works for our family is the ability to assess my children in a comfortable, familiar environment where they can truly show what they know. Requiring in-person testing in an unfamiliar setting for homeschoolers will cause our children stress, negatively affect their performance, and places logistical burdens on families who are already educating responsibly.

Homeschool families in Hawai'i are not avoiding accountability. We are actively engaged, resourceful, and invested in our children's education. This bill adds layers of regulation without any benefit.
No other state requires in-person standardized testing for homeschool students. Hawaii should not move in a more restrictive direction at the expense of children and families who are already working hard to do what's best for their education.

As a mother, I ask you to please consider the real damaging impact this bill would have on young children and homeschool families and to oppose this legislation.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Corrina Campbell

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:08:10 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley Edens	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm against the government forcing my child to show up for testing at a public school for the following reasons:

Putting a child in an environment that they are unaccustomed to would not reflect their abilities well on a test score.

The tests are forced at a certain time. My child furthers her education into the summer as she has a late birthday and she would be held accountable for similar test scores of a peer that is six months to a full year + older than her. This is unacceptable as we all know how much knowledge can be learned in that time frame.

Safety. My child's safety is a top priority and she is safest with known people (not strangers). This is a gross overreach of government officials to say that the public school has a right to my child for any length of time.

Fully against HB2376,

Ashley Edens

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:30:24 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bronson Teixeira	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha representatives of the committee, I stand in strong opposition to this bill. Mahalo

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 9:35:07 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeff Juett	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Representatives,

I am writing to formally express my strong opposition to Bill HB2376, which seeks to introduce new testing requirements for homeschooled students.

This legislation proposes that homeschooled children participate in certain annual in-person tests at their local public schools. I believe these requirements infringe upon the privacy and autonomy of homeschooling families. Parents who choose to homeschool often do so to take the initiative in providing a tailored, high-quality education for their children that avoids the standardized "dumbing down" often found in institutional settings.

The current system allows families to successfully manage their children's academic progress. Introducing these mandates would undermine the independent efforts of parents who are dedicated to teaching their children important lessons and fostering critical thinking outside of the public school framework.

I urge you to respect the will of the homeschooling community and vote against the passage of HB2376.

Sincerely,

Jeff Juett

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 9:45:11 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tyler McMurry	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Dr. T. Scott McMurry. I am a Hawai‘i resident, a parent, and part of a homeschool family. I am submitting this testimony in strong opposition to HB2376.

My spouse and I homeschool our four children, and we invest substantial time, money, and effort into their education. We do this because we believe it is the best learning environment for our children—academically, emotionally, and developmentally.

HB2376 would create a new requirement beginning in the 2027–2028 school year that homeschool students must participate in person at their assigned public school in annual testing, including the kindergarten entry assessment, first/second grade screenings, and statewide testing depending on grade level.

While the bill states that homeschooling is “valid and beneficial,” the proposed requirements would place an unnecessary and unfair burden on homeschool families.

Key concerns

1. This creates a major logistical burden for families.
Homeschooling is not “free time.” It is a full-time educational commitment. Requiring families to bring children to public schools for mandatory in-person assessments adds scheduling burdens, travel burdens, and work disruptions—especially for families with multiple children.

2. The state already has standardized testing requirements in place.
Hawai‘i already has mechanisms for educational accountability and periodic standardized assessment. This bill does not fill a clear gap—it adds an additional mandate and an additional burden.

3. It undermines the purpose of homeschooling.
Many families homeschool specifically because their child learns better outside of institutional settings, including settings that cause anxiety, distraction, or poor performance. Requiring in-person testing at the local public school contradicts the very flexibility and individualized education the legislature claims to support.

4. It is a one-size-fits-all approach.
HB2376 assumes homeschool families require annual monitoring by default, rather than recognizing that most homeschool families are already highly engaged and attentive to their children's learning progress.

5. We are empathetic to concerns about children falling through cracks under the guise of homeschooling.
As parents, we understand and share the concern that there may be rare situations where a child is labeled as "homeschooled" while actually experiencing educational neglect. These are legitimate child welfare concerns and should be taken seriously.

However, those situations should be addressed through targeted investigation and enforcement of existing child welfare and education laws, rather than creating broad new requirements that place additional burdens on families who are already educating their children well and responsibly.

6. The state should prioritize support over additional regulation.
If Hawai‘i truly wants to improve outcomes for homeschool students, the most meaningful help would not be additional testing mandates. Instead, homeschool families would benefit from à la carte access to public school opportunities that are difficult to reproduce in the homeschool setting, such as:

- band and music programs
- athletics and sports teams
- science labs
- specialized electives (robotics, shop, art, etc.)
- other structured group learning experiences

This kind of access would strengthen educational opportunity without undermining parental responsibility or imposing unnecessary oversight.

Conclusion

Homeschooling is a legitimate and proven educational choice. My family takes this responsibility seriously. HB2376 would impose an excessive burden on homeschool families and would move Hawai‘i toward being one of the most restrictive states in the country for homeschooling.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to OPPOSE HB2376.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,
Dr. T. Scott McMurry, DO
Parent and Hawai‘i Homeschool Family (4 children)

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 9:57:58 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deron Akiona	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose the Hawai'i State Legislature's infringement into the rights of Hawai'i's parents to homeschool their children. HB 2376 is vague on the outcomes and benefits this Legislature is attempting to achieve with this measure. It would be wise to defer this measure at this time.

Mahalo

Testimony in Opposition to SB3193

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Natalie Posey, and I am a mother to a son with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. I am writing in strong opposition to SB3193.

My son is a bright, kind, and creative child who loves to learn. Due to a lack of appropriate resources and repeated experiences with bullying, we were forced to remove him from private school. We have also chosen not to enroll him in public school for similar reasons. Those environments were not safe for him emotionally or academically.

Because of these experiences, he now struggles with severe anxiety surrounding testing and traditional school settings. Homeschooling has been a lifeline for our family. It has allowed us to rebuild his confidence, restore his love of learning, and make meaningful progress without fear or panic.

This bill would force children like my son out of their safe learning environments and into unfamiliar, stressful settings simply to take a standardized test. For a child with learning disabilities and anxiety, this is not a neutral request — it is harmful.

It would be the equivalent of removing every child in Hawaii from their classroom, placing them into a random building with strangers, and demanding they perform on the spot. We would never do this to traditionally-schooled children, and we should not do it to homeschooled children.

This legislation places an unnecessary burden on families who have already made tremendous sacrifices to homeschool their children. Forcing families to arrange transportation, miss work, and disrupt carefully structured learning plans just to comply with a one-size-fits-all standardized testing model is unreasonable and dismissive of special education families.

Homeschool families are not avoiding accountability. We are choosing educational paths that meet our children's individual needs — especially when traditional systems have failed them.

SB3193 does not protect children. It does not support learning differences. It does not respect families. It punishes vulnerable children for learning differently.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose SB3193. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Natalie Posey

Natalie Posey

Date: 2/14/26

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 11:17:42 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Benjamin Moore	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Mahalo for all that you do for us as our local representatives. Our ohana appreciates you.

We are a homeschool family and we were recently made aware of the proposed bills that would make it mandatory for all K-8 and 10 homeschool students to have manditory testing on a DOE campus.

We believe there are adequate testing for homeschooling families already to ensure there students are thriving. In addition, this is especially damaging for young children, as many are not developmentally ready to take these tests. Requiring in-person testing in an unfamiliar setting for homeschoolers will cause stress, negatively affect their performance, and places logistical burdens on families with multiple students.

This bill adds layers of regulation without any benefit and no other state requires in-person standardized testing for homeschool students.

We are thriving as a homeschool family and have a vibrant homeschool community in Kailua and Kaneohe. Our community believes this legislation threatens the quiet and simple lifestyle we have built.

We love Hawai'i. We love our keiki. We love our homeschool community. Please allow us to continue without these proposed testings.

Mahalo nui,

Ben Moore

45-703 Wainana Street

Kaneohe, HI 96744

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 11:26:53 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristina Goetzman	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Members of the House,

The proposed House Bill 2376 significantly impacts freedom and parental choice of homeschoolers in Hawai'i. Mandating statewide testing for homeschoolers would not only create a substantial administrative burden, it undermines the very essence of personalized education that draws families to this path. I have special needs learners that are not accommodated by a 504 or IEP as they are not enrolled in DOE and there is no need. Therefore they would be required to show up in person, to an anxiety inducing, sensory overload situation, inside a school building they are not familiar with and zero testing accommodations in place. Then they'll be asked to take a standardized test they are not accustomed to. It's not only unfair it's a threat to my child's safety and security. The freedom to tailor learning experiences is crucial, especially for children with unique learning styles or specific talents that require a flexible approach.

Our current laws rightly recognize the importance of allowing parents to guide their child's education in a way that aligns with their individual needs and aptitudes. This bill's intention to impose generic statewide standards risks stifling the creativity and individualized attention that make homeschooling such a valuable option for many. It's about preserving the ability for parents to truly customize their child's educational journey, fostering a love of learning that standardized testing often diminishes. Our current laws allow flexibility in our school year start and ends dates, which is an important reason many families choose to homeschool. With mandated in person testing on the DOE's timeline, we lose all freedom of choice in our school year dates.

We believe in nurturing the strengths of every child and allowing parents the autonomy to do so effectively. I urge you to consider the profound impact this bill could have on families and to reject measures that would diminish the freedom and effectiveness of homeschooling in our state.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 12:49:09 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Suzanne Mulitalo	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB 2376. Homeschool families, just like private education institutions, have autonomy to determine their own curriculum and educational standards. They are allowed to choose what aligns with their mission and educational goals. How then, can you require homeschooled students be tested based upon what is being taught in the public school system?

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:06:23 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Raasch	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am testifying in opposition of HB 2376. HB 2376 will place an unnecessary burden on homeschool families to comply with subjecting their children to unfamiliar settings, people, and formats of evaluation. This could be especially detrimental for younger children who are being educated in the home by family and friends.

As a mother who homeschooled two children from preschool through graduation, I can only imagine the emotional strain this would have put on them during their younger years. It is conounterintuitive to why we homeschooled and how we supported the develoment of our children.

On top of homeschooling our own daughers, we played an integral role in our community homeschool cooperative program. I taught younger children while other parents poured into my children in areas where I felt they desired more depth and needed instruction from someone with more experience in particular subjects. Through this exposure we were able to witness the best of the homeschool world. Families worked together to support one another. We also worked with each other to honor family standards and visions families had for the education of their children.

These are not the children you are trying to help and protect. This Bill endeavors to keep kids from falling through the cracks. The intention is good, but will only punish the families who are doing right by their children. The families who are neglecting to properly educate their children simply won't comply.

In closing, I strongly oppose HB2376 because it will not accomplish it's goal, will further tax an already overburdened state education system, and will punish families succesfully homeschooling to their own rhythm.

Thank you for your time,
Jennifer Raasch

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:10:31 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicole Harbottle	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

This is my first year homeschooling my child who is in sixth grade. While I would not see it being a problem for us to go to a public school to take the test (my student is proficient in math, I have a flexible schedule and she is is well socialized outside the home), I feel for my fellow homeschool parents, colleagues and students; therefore I oppose this requirement of going to a public school for testing. One of the reasons we choose home school is to not have to be in a public school. Mahalo.

Representative Karl Rhoads, Chair
House Committee of Education

HB2376

February 17th, 2026
Hawaii State Legislature, Oahu

IN STRONG OPPOSITION

Hello Representative Rhoads and Education Committee Members,
My name is Halley Hewitt. I am a resident of Oahu. I grew up on these islands. I am now a mother and teacher of the next generation.

I'm opposed to bill HB 2376 relating to home-educated assessments.
I'm testifying against this educational bill because of the direct violation of parental rights. The opportunity to homeschool is to allow the parents to choose the appropriate mode and timing of assessments based the child's educational and personal development.

"Parents are already required to submit standardized achievement test results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. In all other years, parents must submit an annual progress report, which may include standardized test results or other forms of assessment demonstrating the child's educational progress. SB3193 and HB2376 would impose additional testing requirements, including mandatory assessments for kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade students. Children at these ages may not be developmentally ready for formal standardized testing." (CHOH, 1)

Having to force public assessment and additional education is not in the best interest of the child. In addition, it will add further burden on Hawaii's families, who already seek multiple resources and assessments best suited for their student.

Growing up in Hawaii, I started my education in the public school system. Soon, my parent chose the right alternative for my academic and emotional development was through home-educational programs. I was able to flourish in my understanding of the world around me and learn my academic benchmarks on my own pace.

I testify before you today, a college graduate who as continued to received her teaching credential and masters. I am also a mother to a beautiful little boy and continually have the ability to partner with parents in the education of their children through my teaching position at Saint Benedict Hall.

We cannot move forward without the partnership and wisdom of Hawaii's parents. Our community, not the government knows what's best for our keiki.

Mahalo nui for considering my testify and voting NO on HB 2376!

Halley Hewitt
Homeschool Mom and Saint Benedict Hall Teacher

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:42:51 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Cheng	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Representatives,

My name is Jessica Cheng and I am a homeschool mom of four. I write to you on behalf of my family, Christian Homeschoolers of Hawaii, and Classical Conversations Hawaii, to express our strong opposition to HB2376/SB3193. This legislation is an unnecessary and unwarranted burden to place upon our students and families as the current state law requires we submit annual assessments and test scores for grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 to our local school. This bill goes far beyond what DOE regulations require and is an overreach of government control on homeschooling families. According to the bill, the reason for the changes being proposed is that *"the department of education must be able to monitor student progress in a manner that respects parental choice while allowing for the early identification of developmental delays, learning differences, or other educational needs that may benefit from additional evaluation, resources, or supportive services offered by the department."* While I want believe the intent behind this bill is the wellbeing of the child, the actual need for it is unwarranted in light of current state requirements for homeschool families. In addition to that, this will not help identify developmental delays, learning delays, or education needs better than what the parent who is educating their child on a daily basis would already recognize. You are asking a student to sit in an unfamiliar testing environment, with unfamiliar teachers, to take an unfamiliar test format, and expecting this to be an accurate assessment. It is well known that testing produces anxiety for many students, whether they are in a public school, private school, or homeschool- how can we expect that this proposal will actually help identify these developmental delays, learning delays, or education needs? It may very well misdiagnose a student and cause unnecessary stress and worry for students and parents. Most homeschool families use the same standardized tests year after year and have been able to track their child's progress successfully this way; you are now telling families they must switch to something completely different and take away parental control of what test their child completes, disrupting the continuity and flexibility of their homeschool. The stress of required in person testing will not only be placed on the homeschool student and family, it will also be thrust upon the public-school teacher who already has a full class and high student to teacher ratio, leading to more strain and logistical problems on the department of education.

Our family has been homeschooling since 2015 when our oldest child was 4 years old. We are very purposeful to fill our home with books and instill a love of reading by example. So, when it was time to teach him to read, he was eager and picked it up easily, much to my delight. I assumed when our second son was around the same age he would learn to read as easily as our

first, however, this was not the case. He loved books and being read to or looking at them on his own, but the actual act of reading was not something he was interested in yet. I determined his learning style and readiness was different than his sibling and switched the reading curriculum to one that fit him better. His reading journey was a slower process, however with patience, perseverance, and consistency his reading skills strengthened and he is now a voracious reader like his older brother. What I learned from this experience with my own children is that each student is unique; we cannot force them into a mold or be quick to label them with a delay or disability. Some need more time and attention than others and that is something that homeschool teachers are well equipped to give. This is one of the many reasons I'm so grateful we homeschool- I was able to identify his need, tailor his education to fit his learning style, and help him learn in a way that led to success. This is a result of daily education and interaction, not a test in an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people.

The current homeschool law requiring annual reports and test results in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 to be sent to the public school is sufficient and does not need to be changed. This legislation places a burden not only on homeschool students and families, but also on the overcrowded public schools with high student to teacher ratios. This is an overreach of government control and an attack on parental rights. For these reasons I urge you to leave the current homeschool law as is and not support HB2376/SB3193.

Sincerely,

Jessica Cheng

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:44:12 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Donna Miller	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

H.B. 2376 goes far beyond what current DOE regulations require and would mark unprecedented government control over homeschooling families.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:46:04 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Terry Bowdler	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I am a primary educator for my three children whom we homeschool. Though our kids were enrolled at school at one point my wife and I made the decision to homeschool our kids. Now seven years later with our kids in 7th, 8th, and 9th grade they are thriving and excelling in their respective grades. I believe strongly that all parents should have the right to educate their kids as they believe is right and fitting. I would argue that homeschooling children gives them each more focused personalised attention. In my situation it's 3 kids to 1 or 2 teachers versus a classroom setting when a teacher can have 20 or more children to attend to.
having read through the proposed bill and the desire to start testing kids for kindergarten I find that highly unnecessary as that places An expectation of performance from a 5 year old that is not needed at such a young age. Not all 5 year old children are reaching the same milestones and we especially have found that even if one of our kids was ever behind they actually have caught up later and quickly with development.

I strongly oppose this bill and feel it is a government overstepping of the rights of parents over their children. It does not have the best interest in mind for the children or parents. Testing is already required and adding more testing would not be necessary and it would remove the validity of the current testing options.

NO to HB 2376!!!!!

Mahalo for taking the time to read this.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:57:35 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janice Bowdler	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I am a homeschool mom and teacher for my three children, and there is no greater privilege. The benefits of having this time with them, the flexibility of schedule, travel, and how we do curriculum is so important to us as a family.
They are in grades 7, 8 and 9. Your push to add in more testing and in person meetings is the opposite to the freedom of homeschool.

I believe strongly that all parents should have the right to educate their kids as they believe is right and fitting. I don't believe that earlier testing will be helpful, and would probably cause more stress then help. I can't imagine having had to do that with little ones. We are now in highschool and I want to protect my kids and my future grandkids education opportunities. It seems like the bills are giving more limitations and not more support for homeschool families.

I strongly oppose this bill and feel it is a government overstepping the rights of parents over their children. It does not seem to have the best interest in mind for the children or parents. Testing is already required and adding more testing would not be necessary and it would remove the validity of the current testing options.

I testify no to HB 2376!

Mahalo, for this generation and for future generations of homeschool kids.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:06:41 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dawn Poiani	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I Oppose HB2376

This bill places unnecessary regulation on homeschooling by treating it as though it must mirror the public school system. Homeschooling is not always structured around standardized pacing, grade-level benchmarks, or conventional classroom methods. Many families intentionally choose alternative educational approaches that prioritize mastery, individualized pacing, experiential learning, and real-world application over standardized testing.

The implication that standardized testing is the primary measure of educational quality does not fully reflect the diversity of learning models used in homeschooling. While testing can be one metric within public education, homeschool education often follows a different cadence and utilizes varied resources tailored to the child's needs, interests, and developmental readiness.

Research has shown that, on average, homeschooled students perform at or above national averages on standardized academic measures and often demonstrate strong independence, self-directed learning skills, and adaptability—qualities that can serve them well in higher education and careers. Families who homeschool frequently emphasize life skills, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and community engagement alongside academics.

Public education operates within a standardized institutional framework designed to serve large populations. Homeschooling, by contrast, is intentionally flexible and individualized. Regulations should ensure basic educational access and child welfare, but they should not impose institutional models onto fundamentally different educational approaches. Preserving reasonable autonomy allows homeschooling families to maintain the flexibility that makes this educational model effective for many students.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:16:03 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Madison Lemer	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello, I am testifying as a married mother of two children, currently in grades 1 and 3. I have homeschooled both of my children since their preschool year, so 5 years now. We made the choice to homeschool our children with the goal of giving them a robust education while preserving the best parts of childhood. I can say with confidence that both of my children, and our family as a whole, is thriving using home education.

As any parent or educator knows, all kids, especially at young ages, grow and mature at very different paces. They are also exploring different levels of independence and autonomy, regardless of education level. My foremost concern with this bill is that is does not take natural child development into consideration for the nature and frequency of the testing. In my opinion, it is completely unnecessary and is more likely to damage and skew the test results, simply because of the test environment and frequency.

The bill also does not take into consideration the difficulty this places on families with multiple children at multiple grade levels, not to mention caretaker and parent work schedules. One standardized test every few years is one thing, multiple standardized tests a year is unrealistic and unreasonable. The reason I use the word "unreasonable" is there is no evidence that this is a necessary action step for homeschooling families to ensure education standards. There are current checkpoints in place, this bill is likely to cause much more harm and challenges for the children.

I implore the governing bodies of Hawai'i to consider the character and integrity of our families, the quality of education we provide to homeschooled children, and reject this bill. Thank you for your time.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:17:53 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason Zeager	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am opposed to this bill as it will create more stress on the parents and children as many hoomeschool parents create their own homeschool schedule for the year. The in school testing could interfere with existing schedules.

Additionally this would take away parents choice to give assessments that might be best suited for their kids.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jason Zeager

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:31:13 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Renee Hall	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Renee Dacanay, and I am a parent in Hawai‘i. I respectfully oppose HB2376 and SB3193.

These bills would require mandatory standardized testing for homeschooled students. Homeschooling allows parents to provide individualized education tailored to their child’s needs, learning style, and pace. Standardized testing does not accurately measure that kind of personalized progress and may create unnecessary stress and barriers for families who are successfully educating their children at home.

Parents are already responsible for ensuring their children are learning and progressing. Additional mandatory testing requirements would reduce flexibility and interfere with educational approaches that work best for each child, including those with unique learning needs.

Hawai‘i should support diverse educational paths while maintaining trust in parents who are actively engaged in their children’s education. I respectfully ask that you oppose HB2376 and SB3193.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Renee Dacanay

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 3:48:56 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lexi Zuo	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to OPPOSE HB2376. This proposed bill is incredibly restrictive to homeschoolers and seems to be targeting them above and beyond families who chose any other learning methods.

I am specifically opposed to the excess restrictions proposed regarding testing. Hawaii already has some of the most restrictive homeschool laws in the nation, this new bill goes above and beyond.

It seems to be incinuating that the DOE cares more about the quality of education that homeschool children receive than the parents themselves. Nothing could be further from the truth!!

My husband and I have 5 children ages 17-4 years old. We have been actively homeschooling for the last 13 years. My husband has just recently completed his PhD in Hebrew and Semetic Languages and I have completed both a BA in French and Religious Studies and 2 years of Masters level course work in Counseling. We care deeply about providing a high-quality education for our children to set them up for a lifetime of success. I work tirelessly day in and day out to achieve that goal. I want them to follow their passions, have an individualized education, and achieve all their future goals.

Our process as homeschoolers seems to be working. We are getting ready to graduate our oldest daughter from high-school next year. She has spent the last 4 years taking college level classes online. She excells in both art and writing. She has competed locally in speech and debate and has worked a part-time job for the last year. After high-school, she hopes to become a certified phlabotomist and work to serve families in our community.

Our next daughter is 12 years old and currently in the 6th grade. She loves science and is passionate about criminal justice. She hopes to become a police officier and serve Honolulu. Even though she is only 12 years old, this month she started taking her first college science class online through Arizona State University. In her free time she competes in speech and debate and she loves serving our church family.

Our sons are ages 10, 7 and 4. Our oldest son is passionate about computer programming and coding. He is currently working one grade level ahead in math and has already taught himself how to code and create multiple online video games. He loves STEM and hopes to become an

accountant or computer programer when he's an adult. He is currently on track to begin college classes at 12-13 years old like both his sisters did before him.

My 7 year old son loves all things nature, animals, and science. He doesn't love school, but works hard to complete his work daily and is already a grade level ahead in mathmatics. He wants to channel his passion for animals and nature into becoming a National Parks Ranger when he grows up.

My children are not special. They are not unique in the homeschooling world. Homeschooling provides incredible freedom for children to work at their own paces, excell with their passions, and work ahead as they desire. Every homeschool child in our community is like my own children and every homeschool parent I know is passionate about helping their children succeed. We all want our children to become intelligent, hard-working adults who better our society!!

Homeschool parents do NOT need more barriers or hoops to jump through while educating their children here in Hawaii. They need LESS rescrictions and oversight. They need MORE support and encoouragement.

Praying for GOD to work in your minds and hearts to see the increible work homeschool families are doing in our state! Please stop actively opposing us. We are working hard for our children and our community!!

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 4:06:03 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katja Bajema	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable chair and committee members,

My name is Katja Bajema, mother of 2 school going children and 1 homeschooled child on Oahu. I am writing to express my strong opposition to **HB 2376**, which seeks to mandate that all homeschooled students participate in specific, in-person state assessments at public schools. This bill represents a significant and unnecessary shift in Hawaii's educational policy, moving away from a system that respects parental choice toward one of unprecedented government overreach.

Key Concerns and Arguments

- **Elimination of Parental Choice in Assessment:**
  Currently, Hawaii families can choose from several methods to demonstrate academic progress, including nationally-normed standardized tests, written evaluations by certified teachers, or parent-led portfolio reviews with work samples. **HB 2376** effectively bans these private third-party options by requiring participation in the statewide testing program (such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment) or mandatory universal screenings at public school sites. This removes a parent's right to select an assessment tool that best fits their child's unique learning style or specific curriculum.
- **Unprecedented Government Overreach:**
  The bill mandates that homeschooled children, who are legally excused from compulsory public school attendance, must physically report to public schools for:
  - The kindergarten entry assessment.
  - Universal screenings in 1st and 2nd grade.
  - Statewide English language arts and math testing in grades 3 through 8 and 11.
    This level of state-mandated physical presence at public institutions for children who are intentionally educated elsewhere is an intrusion into the private lives of homeschooling families.
- **Incompatibility with Homeschooling Flexibility:**
  Homeschooling is a parent-initiated alternative where the parent accepts complete responsibility for the child's education. Mandating specific state tests at specific times forces families to align their individualized instruction with the traditional Department of Education (DOE) calendar and the Common Core standards reflected in state

assessments. This undermines the very flexibility and individualized instruction that the legislature acknowledges as a "valid and beneficial educational option".

- **Loss of Portfolio and Private Testing Options:**
  Under current rules (Haw. Admin. R. § 8-12-18), a parent may provide a written evaluation including work samples to demonstrate progress. **HB 2376** moves toward a one-size-fits-all model by requiring the same statewide testing program used for public school students, essentially banning the use of popular and effective alternatives like untimed tests or comprehensive portfolio reviews.

Conclusion

HB 2376 creates an environment of excessive state control over a demographic that is already successfully achieving academic progress through diverse methods. By mandating in-person, state-specific testing, the legislature is ignoring the established rights of parents to direct their children's education.

I urge the committee to **defer** this measure and maintain the current regulatory framework that balances state oversight with the essential freedoms of homeschooling families.

Thank you for your time,

Katja Bajema

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 4:26:07 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Edens	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I don't support this because it doesn't take into account each child unique reasons for homeschooling, such as anxiety in testing in a public environment with strangers. Alternative testing just as is currently required should would be the only acceptable alternative to annual testing instead.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 4:31:05 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Krystal DeGuzman	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a homeschool mom of 2 girls in the Hamakua district. I oppose HB 2376. As a citizen I have the right to choose my child's education- public, private or homeschool. The Hawaii public school is ranked #42 out of the 51 states recorded and tests below average nationally. As a homeschool parent I choose to teach my daughters to master and excel in each subject and once they do we continue to study and learn beyond their grade level. My daughters are not held back by a failing school system. Therefore it makes no sense for my daughters to be FORCED to take a public school standardized test. This test wouldn't improve their learning environment or outcome. Instead it would make the public school system have an unfair advantage to their overall ranking. I comply with all of Hawaii requirements for my daughters to be homeschooled which is one of the strictest nationally. I oppose HB 2376 as it would only add restrictions to homeschool families and not aid in their learning or improve the public school system.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 4:45:03 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Linda	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly disagree with this bill.

Having had kids in the school system for over 10 years now I must strongly urge you not to have this pass.

In public schools teachers drill kids 2 weeks before the tests begin so they will score well. Non of it sticks because it is drilled in their short term memory.

It is a waste of time in public school since it won't actually show students achievements.

My youngest kid is homeschooled and I really don't want her to be exposed to such nonsense.

Having grown up in Switzerland and seeing the school system here in hawaii in comparison truly saddens me. It makes it hard on parents that we can't trust the public schools to do what's in the kids best interest and not in the interest of some politicians.

I truly belive this should be the last thing that needs to be stronger enforced.

I strongly oppose this Bill.

Linda Jenkins

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 4:51:45 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Rzonca	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 4:58:29 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malia Guild	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Representative. Justin H. Woodson, Chair,

My husband and I write to formally address the profound implications of proposed legislation that would impose standardized statewide testing upon homeschooling families at local public schools. This approach, embodied by measures such as HB 2376, risks fundamentally undermining the very essence of why families in our community choose the homeschooling path: to cultivate educational environments tailored precisely to their children's individual learning styles and developmental needs.

Hawaii already requires an annual assessment, including standardized tests in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. H.B. 2376 goes far beyond what current DOE regulations require and would mark unprecedented government control over homeschooling families. The bill eliminates parental choice by banning third-party standardized achievement tests (like the California Achievement Test (CAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford). H.B. 2376 would require that all testing be done in person at public schools, imposing burdens on families and creating major logistical problems for school districts. Mandating seven years of state testing would undermine homeschooling flexibility, especially for students with special learning needs.

The flexibility inherent in homeschooling is not merely a convenience; it is a critical component that enables parents to respond with precision to the unique academic and personal progress of each child. For families who have successfully navigated the complexities of educating at home, including those with children who possess distinct learning profiles or require specialized support, the current framework allows for an unparalleled level of individualized attention and curriculum adaptation. The imposition of a rigid, externally mandated testing regimen would inevitably curtail this capacity, potentially hindering the very educational flourishing we seek to foster.

We humbly request your serious consideration of these concerns. It is our deeply held belief that robust educational opportunities are best served by approaches that empower parents to exercise their informed judgment in meeting their children's educational aspirations, rather than by policies that introduce unnecessary constraints. Preserving the autonomy of homeschooling families ensures that education remains a dynamic and responsive endeavor, uniquely suited to the diverse needs of our future generations.

We respectfully ask you to oppose HB2376 and to preserve parental choice, flexibility, and the successful accountability framework already in place for homeschool families in Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and for considering the perspectives of homeschool families in our state.

Yours sincerely,
Malia and Kenneth Guild
87-1710 Mokila St
Waianae, HI 96792
guild1710@protonmail.com

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 5:08:55 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
M S	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I respectfully oppose HB2376. As a homeschooling parent in Hawai‘i, I am deeply committed to providing a high-quality, standards-aligned education for my child. Mandatory public school standardized testing in a public school setting does not reflect the individualized and intentional nature of homeschool education.

Homeschool families already demonstrate accountability through compliance with existing state requirements. Please preserve educational freedom and parental rights by allowing homeschool families to choose assessment methods that best meet their child’s needs.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 5:20:25 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sophia Gugliemelli	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sophia, and I am a Hawaii homeschool parent of five children. I am submitting testimony in strong opposition to this bill.

Homeschool families choose to homeschool specifically because we are not part of the public school system. We educate differently—through individualized learning, mastery-based progress, project-based education, and flexible pacing. Requiring homeschool students to report to public schools for in-person standardized testing directly contradicts the very purpose and structure of homeschooling.

There is no evidence or data showing that homeschool students require this level of oversight or that in-person public school testing provides added educational value. In fact, decades of research consistently show that homeschool students perform as well as or better than their public school peers academically and demonstrate strong long-term outcomes.

Hawaii already has reasonable accountability measures in place for homeschool families, including notice requirements and annual progress reporting. This bill adds unnecessary government intrusion into families who are already meeting educational standards successfully.

Parents have a fundamental right to direct their children's education. Mandating in-person testing at public schools infringes on that right and sets a concerning precedent for increased regulation of private family education without justification.

Homeschooling works. It has worked for our family, for thousands of families across Hawaii, and for millions nationwide. This bill does not improve education—it restricts parental choice and undermines educational freedom.

I respectfully urge you to oppose this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully,
Sophia

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 5:22:14 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raechel Wilson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Justin H. Woodson

Chair of House Education Committee

RE: HB2376

Hearing: Tuesday, February 17, 2026

Time: 2 p.m.

Position: **IN OPPOSITION**

Dear Mr. Woodson,

I am a homeschool parent of two special needs children and a member of Hilo Classical Conversation Homeschool Community. I am testifying **in opposition** against HB2376.

- Parents are already required to submit standardized achievement test results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. In all other years, parents must submit an annual progress report, which may include standardized test results or other forms of assessment demonstrating the child's educational progress. **HB2376 would impose additional testing requirements**, **including mandatory assessments for kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade students. Children at these ages may not be developmentally ready for formal standardized testing.**
- I have always promptly submitted our notice of intent and standardized achievement test results and/or annual progress reports to the elementary school in our district within the time frame required under the law (Hawaii Administrative Rules Title 8 Department of Education Chapter 12 Compulsory Attendance Exceptions). However, even though I am following the legal requirements, the school never responds with an acknowledgement of my submissions as required on their part. Therefore, if they cannot fulfill their part of the current Hawaii homeschool law by acknowledging homeschool documents submitted to

them, how will they suddenly have the capability to fulfill a massive influx of yearly in person testing and evaluations?

- Parents currently have the option to test their children at home or in another familiar environment. **HB2376 would require homeschooled students to be tested in person at a public school**, **an unfamiliar setting that may negatively affect student performance.** For example, my eldest child tested almost four grade levels above his current grade in math in his CAT testing last year, which was taken via the computer, early in the morning at home in a quiet room. He tested a grade level above his current grade in parts of his language arts testing. I do not believe he would have scored so high had been forced to go to an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people and in a potentially uncomfortable environment.
- Parents also establish their own homeschool calendar year. **HB2376 would require homeschooled students to conform to public school testing schedules**, **which could interfere with established homeschool instructional plans.**
- The way H.B. 2376 is currently written, it presumes that parents are not taking their children to well-child visits with the pediatricians, or obtaining necessary referrals for developmental screenings and learning disabilities through their medical providers. As a parent of two special needs children, I have always utilized medical providers for the "Screenings" and "Evaluations" referred to in HB 2376 for Kindergarten through Third Grade. The pediatricians have always given me a survey and screening sheet at each well-child appointment to make sure the children were not missing milestones or to alert the doctor if further testing was necessary. Having a school do what pediatricians are already doing is duplicative and burdensome on both the parent and the child, not to mention on the school system, who is already overburden with special needs children and required evaluations of children enrolled in their schools.
- Finally, the whole reason I homeschool is because the local elementary school did not have the resources or staff to fulfill my son's IEP from our prior elementary school run by the DOD on a military base. Therefore, I was forced to purchase all of the adaptive devices and special curriculums for him with our own money and homeschool him according to what was recommended in the IEP. If the school cannot afford to fulfill his IEP, then how can they afford the staff and resources to have an influx of thousands of students now needing in person testing and screenings and evaluations? Frankly, this bill would be a staggering burden on the local schools, not to mention an undue burden on parents who are already fulfilling their legal requirements and successfully schooling their children at home.

For all of these reasons, namely due to the staggering burden placed on schools and parents**, I oppose HB2376.**

Sincerely,

Raechel Wilson

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 5:35:32 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steven Gugliemelli	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Steven Gugliemelli. I am an active-duty service member, a husband, and a father. I have sworn an oath to defend the Constitution and the rights it protects for all citizens. It is from that position that I submit firm opposition to this bill.

Every child has the right to an education. However, an education does not mean one system fits every child or every family. Public education is a right and an option—but it is not the right fit for all families. Homeschooling is a lawful, deliberate, and constitutionally protected choice that many families, including mine, make after careful consideration.

Homeschooling was not a casual decision for our family. It was a serious choice made together as parents, supporting one another in our roles as husband and wife and as the primary educators and protectors of our children. We believe deeply that parents—not the state—are best positioned to determine what educational environment is appropriate for their children.

We did attempt the public school system with our eldest child. Unfortunately, it failed her. While there are many dedicated teachers doing their best, there are serious and systemic deficiencies within the Department of Education that go far beyond academics. When our daughter attended public school, she was exposed to vaping among sixth-grade students, bullying, and frequent fights. We were told by school administration that vaping at that age was “common.” That response alone was unacceptable to us as parents.

Teachers are overwhelmed, and issues like substance use, bullying, and violence are not isolated—they are symptoms of a system that is stretched beyond what it can responsibly manage. These realities directly affect learning, safety, and student development.

Requiring homeschool students to test in person at public schools is an unnecessary and unjustified intrusion into families who have intentionally chosen a different educational path. Homeschool families do not educate the same way as public schools, and there is no evidence that forcing homeschoolers into public school testing environments improves educational outcomes. On the contrary, homeschool students have consistently demonstrated strong academic and life success without such mandates.

I will also say personally: I was never a strong standardized test taker. That did not reflect my intelligence, discipline, or capability, nor did it limit my ability to serve my country or to earn and hold two college degrees. I would not impose that flawed measure as a determining factor on my children's education or future.

We homeschool to provide our children with strong foundations—not only academically, but in character, responsibility, critical thinking, and life skills. Our goal is to equip them for adulthood, not simply to condition them to sit at a desk and perform on a test.

I am grateful for my wife's dedication to homeschooling our children and for the legal freedoms that allow us to do so. As someone who serves to protect the rights of American families, I find it deeply troubling to see legislation that infringes upon parental authority without evidence of need or benefit.

I respectfully urge you to oppose this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully,
Steven Gugliemelli

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 5:46:43 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David E Shormann	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I want to thank the legislature and bill writers for acknowledging that home schooling is a valid and beneficial educational option in Hawaii. But, Hawaii ranks 42nd, at the bottom of state school systems (https://wallethub.com/edu/e/states-with-the-best-schools/5335). Respectfully, the state should leave homeschoolers alone, wasting tax dollars keeping up with them, and focus instead on improving academics for those who choose to use the state system.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 5:54:45 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hope Mayo	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to oppose Bill 2376. I do not think children need to come in for in person testing. These days, proper testing can be done at home. Testing services offer in home testing and proctoring.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 6:17:34 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vernelle Oku	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill.

Children learn differently and this bill does not seem to take that into account for testing homeschooled children.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 7:01:05 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Courtney Whitney	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose HB2376 as it directly seeks to dislodge autonomous parental rights over their own children and the unparalleled freedom we enjoy in this country to educate our children in the way the parent, not the state, sees fit.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 7:15:31 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aubrey Aea	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to oppose HB-2376.

We are residents of Hawai'i and have chosen to homeschool our keiki for the past 8 years. One of the many reasons we homeschool is because we know what is best for our keiki.

This is a sloppy, ill-defined bill that is missing many details. It is complete overreach and a waste of money for the Department of Education.

For starters, there are already guidelines in place for measuring progress for homeschoolers. We are required to submit progress reports to our district school every year and participate in existing testing requirements.

Freedom of going at our own pace on our own schedule is another reason why we homeschool. With three children of different schooling ages, this will also present logistical challenges for us for testing. We do not want to be at the whim of the public school's scheduling. What if the tests are scheduled on the same day for all three children? What about families with even more children? This would be a logistical nightmare. It would also be a huge disruption to our learning schedule and would negatively affect our keiki to have to take a test in an unfamiliar environment.

This bill does not include the cost in money and time for the school system. Who would be administering the homeschoolers' tests, setting them up, etc? There is a teacher shortage already, would another person be hired for this task? Would it take away time from current public school children who are already starving for individual attention at school in large classes?

Testing choice is also removed with this bill. We are thankful that as far as state testing goes, we have a choice on which tests our children take. The State currently requires students to take the Smarter Balance Assessment (SBA). It has received much criticism in recent years. The SBA has been found to have significant flaws, including poor technological design and inadequate assessment of student knowledge, which can show misleading results. Standardized testing presents only a snapshot in time of a child's knowledge. So many factors can affect their results. It also has no bearing on their education, pass or fail - they move on to the next grade. They are solely to provide data to the school system. Hawai'i ranks near the bottom in education in the USA; homeschoolers' data would help inflate school scores.

This bill fails to include any specifics on passing, failing, or consequences for not participating. It also does not define "participating". The way I see it, my keiki could go in, circle one answer on the test, leave, and that could count as "participating". Why participate in this circus that has no bearing on their education? Public school students take the tests and move on to the next grade, regardless of score. Why are homeschoolers going to be inconvenienced in this way under the guise of "helping"? If the score does not matter, the test becomes a formality. When a law requires participation with no standards attached, it creates a system where the data becomes meaningless.

As homeschoolers, we are very adept and resourceful. We have to go above and beyond already to seek out curriculum and adapt to our keiki's educational needs. When there is an issue, we know to slow down and reinforce, seek additional resources, or look to outside tutoring. Thankfully, our keiki get our full attention and do not get left behind. We are very capable, and we certainly do not need the State of Hawai'i to step in and meddle with our educational processes and schedules.

I urge you to oppose this bill, for Hawai'i's current homeschool families as well as future families. Mahalo.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 7:27:13 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lynn-Marie Rodrigues	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Lynn-Marie Rodrigues and I am a homeschooling parent in Hawai‘i. I am writing in strong opposition to any proposed changes that would require homeschooled children to report to public schools for mandatory testing.

My family made the decision to homeschool after my daughter experienced ongoing bullying in the public school system. As a special needs child, she was particularly vulnerable. Instead of receiving meaningful support, we were repeatedly encouraged to consider medication rather than addressing the root causes of her struggles.

At the same time, her health was declining. Despite providing doctor’s notes, the school still recorded her necessary medical absences in a way that added stress and pressure to an already difficult situation. Rather than partnering with us to support her health and learning needs, the system made us feel penalized for prioritizing her well-being.

Homeschooling has allowed my daughter to learn in a safe environment. Her anxiety has decreased, her health has improved, and she is finally able to focus on learning without fear. Forcing her to return to a public school campus — even just for testing — would reintroduce trauma and undo the progress she has made.

Children with special needs often require flexibility, consistency, and emotional safety in order to thrive. Mandating that homeschooled children report to public school sites for testing disregards the reasons many families choose homeschooling in the first place — especially those escaping bullying, medical hardship, or inadequate accommodations.

I respectfully urge you to protect parental rights and preserve flexible homeschooling options for families like mine. Policies should support children’s well-being, not create additional barriers or retraumatize vulnerable students.

Mahalo

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 7:31:28 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrea Coffman	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a homeschooling parent and I am writing in opposition to HB 2376.

Our family has homeschooled for many years and across multiple grade levels, and we have consistently met educational requirements without state-mandated in-person testing. We homeschool because we value the freedom to choose what works best for our children — including our curriculum, our schedule, and our school calendar. Requiring homeschool students to report to a public school site for state testing removes that flexibility and forces homeschool families to conform to a system that does not reflect how we educate.

For families homeschooling multiple children, coordinating travel to public school testing sites adds unnecessary logistical and financial strain. We continue to follow the process for submitting end-of-year progress as required. Homeschool families are not asking to avoid accountability — only the freedom to choose appropriate and effective methods of assessment, which homeschooling parents are fully capable of providing.

There is no clear reason why homeschool students need to be required to attend public school testing sites. This bill concerns me because it establishes a new level of state involvement in homeschooling. Allowing the state to determine when and where homeschool students must test could make it easier to expand requirements in the future, which raises concerns about preserving parental choice and flexibility over time.

Please allow families to continue choosing assessment options that work best for their children, without being forced into public school settings.

I respectfully ask you to oppose HB 2376 and preserve homeschooling freedom in Hawaii.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,
Andrea Coffman

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 9:16:53 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Camil Buentello	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

i oppose this bill because homeschooled children shouldn't have to participate in annual testing. The government out public school shouldn't have anything to do with homeschooled kids hence the name. This messed up modules that we are teaching the necessary learning not the extra fluff needed just to pass a test homeschooled children are hundred times more smarter and don't need a annual test stop trying to control us and our children's education

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 9:30:28 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leona Leialoha	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose this! Homeschooled children shouldn't be mandated to take any DOE standardized tests.

mahalo nui

Leona Leialoha

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 10:11:56 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alana Sooriyakumar	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Representatives of the House Committee on Education,

I am writing to you today to voice my opinion in **strong opposition to HB2376.**

I am a married homeschooling mother of 4 children (2 elementary and 2 preschool) here in Kalihi Valley. My objections to this bill are as follows:

- The authors/introducers of this bill have not made a clear case as to any evidence supporting there being a need to further regulate homeschoolers by requiring annual in-person participation of tests. The bill states its aim is to "support student success and ensure access to appropriate educational support when needed" (HB2376, Page 1, Line 17).
    - How does in-person testing do that?
    - Is there any evidence showing that homeschooled children in our state are faring off worse than children enrolled in the DOE?
    - Per Page 8, Section §8-12-18 of the current legislation regarding homeschool in Hawai'i, homeschooled children in our state already provide ample information demonstrating the well-being and the educational growth of each child through both the annual progress report we submit as well as submitting the results of a "criterion or norm-referenced standardized achievement test" demonstrating grade-level achievement for each individual child for grades 3, 5, 8, & 10.[i] Have those results indicated over the years that homeschoolers are not reaching educational success? I find it hard to believe that that is the case when studies show on a national level that regardless of the degree of state control or regulations on homeschooling, homeschooled children are performing better academically (& socially for that matter) than public school children.[ii]
    - It is my belief based off both my own experience and that of many other homeschooling families, that if we need additional support we will find and utilize it ourselves because nobody knows, cares about, or loves our children more than we do. Also, on Page 7, Section §8-12-14 of the current legislation regarding homeschool already states that a home-schooled child having been evaluated and determined to need additional support may receive such support from the public school site they would be enrolled in upon request.[iii] My point being, the current law is already providing for access to appropriate educational support when needed.

- Financially, is this the most pressing educational issue that needs new legislation and funds allocated to it?
    - What is the cost burden associated with implementing this bill and how is the state going to pay for the cost of administering an additional 5,000 tests on different days across the state. How is the state going to provide suitable accommodation for those that need specialized care?
    - I live in Kalihi Valley…Everyday there are kids roaming the streets that should be in school and they are not homeschooled kids. Perhaps finding a way to ensure kids are not truant would be worth looking into.
    - My friend has a mildly autistic child who was enrolled in public school in Kapolei. She advocated and advocated for her child to receive the additional support she felt was needed for her son. The school system could not provide the support she felt her son needed. Fortunately, she could work a flex schedule in her position with St. Francis, and she ended up pulling him from the school program to work with him privately and now he is thriving. Perhaps finding a way to ensure the children enrolled in our schools who need additional support receive that support is something worth looking into.
    - Our schools are consistently ranked among the worst in the nation, currently we sit at 33 out of 51 (DC included).[iv] It would seem that if the aim is to "support student success and ensure access to appropriate educational support when needed" (HB2376, Page 1, Line 17), then it would be the legislators due diligence to use any moneys our state does have to benefit the people they represent (us, the citizenry) by further supporting the DOE to provide student success for those children currently enrolled in the DOE who are struggling to achieve success. It would seem those children could greatly benefit from additional assistance (e.g. academic, emotional, mental health, life skills training programs, etc.) which would benefit our state on a larger scale as those students would have a chance to become contributing members of our society. Just to be clear, I am not saying that all kids enrolled in our schools are struggling to achieve success, obviously that is not true. I am only referring to the ones who are struggling.
    - My husband or his mother is my "childcare" if I need someone to watch our kids. Both are full-time working individuals. As you know it is expensive to live in Hawai‘i and many families live paycheck to paycheck, taking any additional day(s) off to accommodate this bill would be a big loss and a source of financial strain for my own and many other homeschooling families.
- Logistically, this bill is a headache.
    - How are homeschooling families expected to take one child to test when they often have many other children they are homeschooling too? Are all the tests for every homeschooled child going to be administered on the same day, or will we be expected to show up on different days for different grades?
    - Many homeschooling families, including mine, do life together. It is on special occasion that the homeschooling parent goes somewhere without all of their children, that is when your children are young of course. Coordinating childcare for students not testing that day would be a logistical nightmare for many.
    - Would students perform as well on said tests when they are brought to a foreign place with people they don't know administering a test to them? When dealing

with young children, clearly comfortability and familiarity of the atmosphere/environment/people around them would lead to better test results.
- Currently I, the parent and teacher, can choose from different test options to assess my child's progress. SB3193 and HB2376 would remove my ability to select the assessment best suited for each of my children.

Lastly, on an anecdotal note:

My husband went to school in Waianae growing up. In eighth grade he realized, after a classmate stood on their desk and took out his privates showing them to the teacher, that he (my husband) would be better off homeschooling and working. I on the other hand went to public school my whole life and then went straight to the University of Hawai‘i, graduating with 2 degrees. It took me 4 years to find a decent paying job in my field of finance. My husband, boyfriend at the time, was so successful having been homeschooling and working since he was an adolescent that he was able to support me that whole time, paying both of our bills, paying our rent, and providing a car for me, thus not only taking care of me but actually setting *me, "the successful college graduate,"* up for success. He is one of the smartest people I know in that his ability to grasp, retain, and learn anything he wants to is beyond anything I've ever seen. He serves the community through growing food and helping people to grow their own food, he runs his own business, is coaching AYSO soccer for the community, and teaches the young kids at our church. In his younger days he made cement stepping stones for a church in Waianae. Those stones are still in place in a wall bordering their property. He is a highly valuable and contributing member of our society. Homeschooling was likely the best educational decision his parents made for him that really shaped and set him up for success. There was no in-person testing required at that time, and interestingly enough there is currently no other state in the nation that requires in person testing for homeschoolers. Hawai‘i would be the first.

In conclusion, I am in **strong opposition** to HB2376. This bill is not going to be a contributing factor to the success of homeschooled children. I believe it will do the opposite of its intended aim to support the individual child's success. This bill is going to make it more of a headache for the good intentioned homeschool families who are currently abiding by the law. The aim of HB2376 which is to "support student success and ensure access to appropriate educational support when needed" is already fulfilled in the existing law. I find no evidence to support the notion for annual in-person testing.

Mahalo for taking the time to read my testimony.

Alana Sooriyakumar

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[i] https://boe.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/12-Compulsory-Attendance-Exceptions.pdf

[ii] https://nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/ ; https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahhernholm/2024/04/30/rise-of-homeschooling-and-its-transformative-impact-on-education/

[iii] https://boe.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/12-Compulsory-Attendance-Exceptions.pdf

[iv] https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/public-school-rankings-by-state

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 10:12:52 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
RENEE KOMOMUA	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Stongly oppose this bill as it goes against what & why homeschooling is about.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 10:15:04 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ROYALE KOMOMUA	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

STRONGLY OPPOSE

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 10:39:11 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
karina	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a parent I stand firmly against HB2376. HB2376 is unnecessary and coercive. I'm stand for educational freedom and for my parental rights.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 10:54:11 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marina Vorderbruegge	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Representatives: Justin H. Woodson, Chair and Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

Committee on Education

Bill: HB2376

Date of hearing: Tuesday, February 17, 2026

Place and time of hearing: Conference Room 209, State Capitol at 2:00pm

[IN OPPOSITION]

Aloha, my name is Marina Vorderbruegge. I am representing myself as a homeschooling mother to five children. I am writing to testify against HB2376. This bill discriminates against the freedom individual families have to educate their children based on their individual child's learning needs and abilities. This bill will set undue burdens upon parents and homeschool students to meet general standardized tests that may not show an accurate depiction of a child's learning level. Personally, my choice to homeschool is based on the belief that I desire to educate my children in order to accommodate their individual learning skills. Especially my children who show certain learning disabilities such as dyslexia and speech impediments.

It is unfair to mandate a standardized test upon a homeschooled child in order to see if this child meets the State's learning standards. Homeschooled children should not be viewed as receiving a lesser education than public or private students and therefore deemed to be tested in order to "prove" that the child is receiving an adequate education from home. It's important to note that the public and private schools do not mandate that their incoming students take standardized tests in order to attend their prospective grade. Moreover, teachers in public and private schools are not individually reviewed by the State legislature to ensure that the teachers are meeting the requirements for standardized testing in their classrooms.

I ask that you please deny any bill that mandates more standardized tests on homeschooled children. Standardized tests are not an accurate depiction of the education a homeschooled child receives, nor their learning level and abilities.

Mahalo for your consideration of my testimony.

Marina Vorderbruegge

Homeschool Mother

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/14/2026 11:14:34 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brett Kulbis	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Woodson and Committee Members,

My name is Brett Kulbis, I'm a 26yr retired Navy Veteran, who took a solemn oath to defend the Constitution from all enemies foreign and domestic, and that oath didn't expire when I retired. I live in Ewa Beach.

I STRONGLY OPPOSE BILL HB-2376.

HB-2376 from my perspective as a veteran who has served to defend our constitutional freedoms, including the fundamental right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children. A free society trusts families first and uses state power cautiously and only when truly necessary; HB-2376 moves in the opposite direction by increasing state control over how law-abiding parents educate their children at home, without any demonstrated crisis to justify this expanded oversight. By intruding into the core decision-making of fit parents, the bill risks infringing substantive due process protections recognized by the courts and raises serious constitutional concerns that will almost certainly invite a legal challenge.

According to Chapter 12 Compulsory Attendance Exceptions, parents are already required to submit standardized achievement test results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, and in all other years must submit an annual progress report, which may include standardized test results or other forms of assessment demonstrating educational progress. HB-2376 would impose additional testing requirements, including mandatory assessments for kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade students—children who may not be developmentally ready for formal standardized testing—and would force homeschooled students into the state's specific assessments and schedules. Under current law, parents may choose from a variety of standardized achievement tests and may administer them either online or through an approved administrator; HB-2376 would strip parents of the ability to select the assessment best suited to their child and to administer it in a way that respects their educational approach. This combination of added mandates, loss of parental choice, and state-dictated timing and venue transforms homeschooling from a truly independent educational option into a heavily regulated extension of the public-school system, raising serious questions under both parental-rights jurisprudence and Hawaii's own constitutional protections.

Parents currently have the option to test their children at home or in another familiar environment, which allows children—especially younger or more sensitive students—to

demonstrate what they truly know without the stress of an alien setting. HB-2376 would require homeschooled students to be tested in person at a public school, an unfamiliar environment that may negatively affect student performance and undermines the autonomy that leads many families to homeschool in the first place. Forcing families to conform to public-school testing schedules and locations burdens their free exercise of sincerely held beliefs about education and family life, and it compels interaction with a government setting they have deliberately chosen to avoid; taken together, these burdens go well beyond reasonable regulation and could be viewed by a court as unconstitutional conditions on the exercise of a fundamental right. Because the bill targets homeschoolers with uniquely intrusive requirements—requirements that no other state imposes, it is likely to be challenged as an arbitrary and discriminatory regime lacking a compelling justification.

Requiring children to be tested at a public school on designated days and for specified periods of time imposes significant logistical and financial burdens on parents, particularly those with multiple children, special-needs students, or irregular work schedules. Homeschool families are already resourceful and regularly seek educational support through a wide range of services, programs, and groups without the need for coercive mandates, demonstrating that heavy-handed state involvement is unnecessary. By layering new mandates on top of an already functioning accountability framework and singling out homeschool families for in-person public-school testing, HB-2376 invites litigation on grounds of parental rights, due process, equal protection, and potentially religious freedom.

I respectfully urge you to defer indefinitely HB-2376.

Respectfully,

Brett Kulbis

Bill HB3276

Aloha mai kākou,
As a parent of a homeschooled child, I strongly OPPOSE Bill HB2376!! I do not believe in forcing a child to take standardized tests, especially since the curriculum may be very different from the subject matter that the student is being tested on. If I wanted my child to take these tests, I would have put them in a public school. I chose not to! Standardized testing makes children stressed and fearful of failing. These tests result in children giving answers based on short-term memorization. My child has been thriving in a homeschool setting. The progress that my child has made in the last 4 years in math, reading, writing, and many other subjects not even available in public schools, has been amazing! In fact, my child is reading at a much higher level than the grade he's in. Public schools don't teach children "life skills". I know because I currently have another child IN a public school. The pressures of standardized testing causes emotional distress upon my child because he doesn't feel "smart enough".
Also, please do not use my child as a vessel to get funding for public schools! I understand that public schools receive funding based on enrollment. I refuse to be coerced or bullied into believing that standardized testing for my homeschooled child is mandatory.
Please do not pass this bill (HB2376).

Mahalo nui loa,
Tara Hing

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 12:32:47 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karley Sanders	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Representative Justin H. Woodsen, Chairman

House of Representatives Education Committee

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chairman

Senate Education Committee

Hearing February 17, 2026 2PM

Measure: HB2376 and SB 3193

IN OPPOSITION

My name is Karley Sanders. I am the mother of two daughters. For the past 5 years I have been homeschooling both daughters. I am writing **IN OPPOSITION** to **HB 2376 and SB 3193.**

- My daughters are accustomed to an untimed, quiet, unrushed, comfortable setting for quizzes, assessments, and overall testing. Both of these bills would put my daughters at a tremendous disadvantage compared to their peers.
- One state assessment is **NOT** an accurate representation of a child's education or an opportunity to accurately evaluate if a child is abused or not.
- Public school teachers are already overextended; adding unfamiliar students on test days increases stress and may create additional classroom-management challenges.
- Mandated test dates may force homeschooling families to disrupt their instructional schedules, which often do not align with the public school calendar.
- According to information shared with me by reliable sources, public-school parents in Hawai‘i can decline annual standardized testing through a simple written opt-out.

Imposing stricter requirements on homeschool families would create an **uneven and inequitable standard.**

I fully respect and comply with the current homeschool requirements, including submitting a Notice of Intent, providing annual progress reports, and completing standardized testing in the designated grade levels.

In closing I am writing **IN OPPOSITION** to **HB 2376 and SB 3193.**

Karley Sanders

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 3:38:42 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mandy Chang	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Education is of utmost importance to a healthy Nation and homeschooling is one way to ignite, foster and steer our children in the joy of learning. Homeschooling is also one of the best methods of meeting the individual learning styles, needs, and goals of the child. The State should be partnering with homeschoolers on this amazing learning journey and not creating unnecessary barriers or burdens. Nation wide testing scores show that homeschoolers are excelling. Studies show that homeschool graduates are moving on to top Universities to further their education, and then going onto to their career of choice.

- Hawaii already requires an annual assessment, including standardized tests in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10.
- H.B. 2376 goes far beyond what current DOE regulations require and would mark unprecedented government control over homeschooling families.
- The bill eliminates parental choice by banning third-party standardized achievement tests (like the California Achievement Test (CAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford).
- H.B. 2376 would require that all testing be done in person at public schools, imposing burdens on families and creating major logistical problems for school districts.
- Mandating seven years of state testing would undermine homeschooling flexibility, especially for students with special learning needs.

Please oppose HB2376.

Thank you,

Amanda Chang

808-594-3093

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 4:35:40 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jan K Baldado	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I OPPOSE HB2376.

Mahalo.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 7:52:00 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
danielle mueller	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Respectful Opposition to HB2376 on Behalf of Hawai‘i Homeschool Families

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to respectfully, but strongly, oppose HB2376 and to urge you to reconsider its impact on Hawai‘i’s homeschooling families.

Homeschooling families in our state already operate within an established legal framework that provides appropriate oversight while respecting parental responsibility, educational flexibility, and family autonomy. HB2376 introduces additional regulation that is unnecessary, burdensome, and misaligned with the realities of homeschooling in Hawai‘i.

Homeschooling is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Families choose this educational path for many reasons—academic needs, health considerations, cultural values, faith convictions, learning differences, or the ability to provide individualized instruction that best serves their children. These families are deeply invested in their children’s education and outcomes. Increased regulation does not improve educational quality; it diverts time, energy, and resources away from teaching and learning and into compliance.

Of particular concern is that HB2376 appears to presume a lack of accountability where none has been demonstrated. Homeschool families have consistently shown strong academic outcomes, engaged parental involvement, and successful transitions into higher education, careers, and community life. Policies should be based on evidence of need, not on isolated concerns or assumptions that risk penalizing an entire community of responsible families.

Additionally, this bill would disproportionately affect military families, rural families, and families with children who have special learning needs—groups for whom homeschooling is often not a preference but a necessity. Hawai‘i’s unique geography and cost-of-living challenges already place pressure on families; adding further bureaucratic hurdles only compounds those challenges.

I respectfully ask that you consider whether HB2376 truly serves the best interests of Hawai‘i’s children or whether it unintentionally undermines educational freedom, parental rights, and the diversity of successful learning models that exist in our state.

Hawai‘i has long valued family, community, and respect for different paths. Our education policies should reflect that same spirit by supporting—not restricting—families who are actively and responsibly educating their children.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state. I respectfully urge you to oppose HB2376.

Mahalo,

Matthew and Danielle Mueller

943 Kainui Dr.

Kailua Hi 96734

8084453498

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 7:55:17 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Matthew mueller	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Respectful Opposition to HB2376 on Behalf of Hawai‘i Homeschool Families

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to respectfully, but strongly, oppose HB2376 and to urge you to reconsider its impact on Hawai‘i’s homeschooling families.

Homeschooling families in our state already operate within an established legal framework that provides appropriate oversight while respecting parental responsibility, educational flexibility, and family autonomy. HB2376 introduces additional regulation that is unnecessary, burdensome, and misaligned with the realities of homeschooling in Hawai‘i.

Homeschooling is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Families choose this educational path for many reasons—academic needs, health considerations, cultural values, faith convictions, learning differences, or the ability to provide individualized instruction that best serves their children. These families are deeply invested in their children’s education and outcomes. Increased regulation does not improve educational quality; it diverts time, energy, and resources away from teaching and learning and into compliance.

Of particular concern is that HB2376 appears to presume a lack of accountability where none has been demonstrated. Homeschool families have consistently shown strong academic outcomes, engaged parental involvement, and successful transitions into higher education, careers, and community life. Policies should be based on evidence of need, not on isolated concerns or assumptions that risk penalizing an entire community of responsible families.

Additionally, this bill would disproportionately affect military families, rural families, and families with children who have special learning needs—groups for whom homeschooling is often not a preference but a necessity. Hawai‘i’s unique geography and cost-of-living challenges already place pressure on families; adding further bureaucratic hurdles only compounds those challenges.

I respectfully ask that you consider whether HB2376 truly serves the best interests of Hawai‘i’s children or whether it unintentionally undermines educational freedom, parental rights, and the diversity of successful learning models that exist in our state.

Hawai‘i has long valued family, community, and respect for different paths. Our education policies should reflect that same spirit by supporting—not restricting—families who are actively and responsibly educating their children.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state. I respectfully urge you to oppose HB2376.

Mahalo,

Matthew Mueller

943 Kainui Dr.

Kailua Hi 96734

8084451913

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 8:17:59 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kimberly Pecana	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose bill HB2376. Educational freedom for all!

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:05:49 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christmasedna Tuifagu	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2376. Our Goverment should allow us the freedom to teach our children and test them at home. Our government should not impose on our rights as parents to keep our children out of the school system. Each year I use a standardized test and submit properly to the school. I don't need the governments help to teach or test my children.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:48:27 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Crystal Leilani Dudoit Huihui	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a homeschooling parent I oppose HB2376.

These tests are made according to the DOE curriculum and standards which I do not teach at home. I teach at the students pace and according to our every day life, the children's interests and what I feel they will need for their adult life. Therefore what they will be tested on is not what I have taught and they will most likely fail a big portion of these test and skew the numbers they are trying to get. I did not break away from DOE to recreate it at home. I could go on and on but this should be sufficient enough.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 10:17:53 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
TERI SAVAIINAEA	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB2376

Aloha Chair Woodson and Committee members,

I oppose HB2376, which would require home-schooled students to participate in mandatory annual in-person testing at the public school they would otherwise attend.

Home schooling is a legal and legitimate educational choice that already meets parent and family needs without unnecessary state mandates. Forcing families to report to public schools for standardized testing undermines flexibility, imposes added logistical and financial burdens, and does not respect the diverse instructional methods used by home educators. Additionally, this requirement could discourage families from choosing home schooling even when it best serves their child's educational interests.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee oppose HB2376**.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Teri Kia Savaiinaea

Wai'anae resident

Representatives Woodson, La Chica, and Members of the Committee,

The stated purpose of HB2376 is to require the Department of Education (DOE) to "monitor student progress in a manner that respects parental choice to home school while allowing for the early identification of developmental delays, learning differences, and/or other educational needs that may benefit from additional evaluation, resources, or supportive services offered by the department."

However, this bill provides no evidence that home-schooled students with developmental delays are being overlooked or underserved. There has been no prior notice to the public or to the home-school community of any concern raised by the DOE that would justify this proposal.

This is not the first time the bill's authors have introduced legislation that raises constitutional concerns regarding parental rights in the context of addressing child abuse. Yet there was no outreach to home-school leadership or opportunity to discuss any perceived problems before introducing this measure. This lack of communication raises serious questions about both the necessity and intent of the proposed changes.

Under Title 8, Chapter 12 of the DOE Administrative Rules, parents currently have multiple options to demonstrate that their home-schooled children are making academic progress. HB2376 would significantly limit those options by effectively requiring in-person participation in standardized testing conducted on public school schedules and at public school locations. This restriction undermines the flexibility and parental choice intentionally built into Hawai'i's home-school law.

Parents are presumed to act in the best interests of their children. For many families, addressing their child's unique educational needs is precisely why they choose home schooling. Chapter 12 specifically does not recommend assessments for students in grades K, 1, and 2. These assessments are designed as tools for public school teachers; if offered to home-school families, they should remain optional. **Is there evidence that home-schooled students are demonstrating below-standard academic progress?**

For more than a century, Supreme Court case law has affirmed the fundamental right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children. Requiring assessments for students in grades K–2 without sufficient justification is intrusive and infringes upon these protected liberty interests.

The bill also implies**, without evidence**, that home-schooled children are at heightened risk of abuse. If the intent is to bring home-schooled children into contact with mandated reporters under the guise of academic monitoring, such an approach would be misleading. Using educational oversight as a means of physical observation raises serious constitutional concerns and resembles unreasonable search and privacy rights violations under the Fourth Amendment.

A review of child fatalities in Hawai'i indicates that failures within the child welfare system—not home schooling—have been significant contributing factors. For these reasons, **I strongly oppose this bill.**

Marilyn Yamamoto

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 11:15:33 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Moriah Butler	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Justin H. Woodson

House Education Committee

HB2376

Date of Hearing: February 17, 2026

2:00pm

IN OPPOSITION

My name is Moriah Butler and my family lives on Oahu. We are an active duty military family. My husband has served in the military for over two decades and homeschooling has given us much stabilization during the constant fluid military lifestyle.

I am testifying against HB2376

- State testing follows a specific calendar schedule. Most homeschooling families don't follow a typical school schedule. Many families homeschool during the summer and might not complete their curriculum during the same time that the public schools are using state testing.

- 12% of active duty military families homeschool. Active duty military members will change locations every 2-3 years, sometimes during the school year. Homeschooling active duty families don't follow the public school calendar due to moving.
- Homeschool families currently have access to several options for standardized testing at their own expense.
- Homeschool families on Oahu already have an option to go to their local school for standardized testing.
- Requiring children to be tested at a public school places an additional burden on parents, who must transport their children to the school on designated days and for specified periods of time. This requirement can be disruptive to a family's homeschool routine, particularly for families teaching multiple children.
- Screenings tests for kindergarteners isn't necessary for homeschoolers. A child at the age of 5 and 6 years old hasn't developed the abilities to manage stress and take tests. Forcing children into standardized tests before they are developmentally ready can lead to anxiety, frustration, and disengagement from learning.
- Annual physicals and doctor visits already screen young children for health, special needs, vision, hearing, communication skills or potential child abuse signs. Early screening at a public school isn't necessary for homeschooling families.
- Homeschool families are resourceful and regularly seek educational support through a wide range of services, programs, and groups available to homeschooled students.
- No other states require in person testing.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to reject HB2376. Thank you for your time and hearing my testimony.

Moriah Butler

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 11:40:02 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tabitha Tatum-Carmichael	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a pediatric occupational therapist, private practice owner, and mother of 3, I oppose HB2376.

Hawaii already requires an annual assessment, including standardized tests in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10.

H.B. 2376 goes far beyond what current DOE regulations require and would mark unprecedented government control over homeschooling families.

H.B. 2376 would require that all testing be done in person at public schools, imposing burdens on families and creating major logistical problems for school districts.

Mandating seven years of state testing would undermine homeschooling flexibility, especially for students with special learning needs.

I believe that parents are in the best position to make educational decisions for their keiki. Mahalo for standing with us for homeschool freedom!

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 11:46:44 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Applegate	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Applegate, and I am a homeschooling parent in Hawai‘i. I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to HB2376.

While I understand and deeply value the State’s interest in protecting children and ensuring educational accountability, this bill would create unnecessary burdens for families while failing to achieve its intended goals.

Homeschooled students in Hawai‘i are already required to submit annual reports demonstrating educational progress. In addition, standardized testing is currently required at the 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 11th grade levels. HB2376 would expand this to require mandatory, in-person testing at a public school every year from kindergarten through eighth grade. This is excessive oversight that does not meaningfully improve student safety or educational outcomes.

Standardized test scores are a poor measure of student progress and ability. Children develop at different rates, and one exam on one day in one environment does not accurately reflect a child’s learning journey. More importantly, a child’s academic performance—whether high-achieving or struggling—is not a reliable marker of abuse. A high-scoring child can still experience harm, and a child who tests below grade level is not evidence of neglect. Conflating test performance with child welfare is both ineffective and misleading.

Requiring homeschooled children to test in person at an unfamiliar public school introduces additional concerns. Many children will be placed in a room full of strangers, in a setting they do not know, under the supervision of adults they have never met. This environment can be anxiety-inducing and may negatively impact their ability to perform at their best. Testing conditions matter, particularly for young children.

Mandated in-person testing dates would also disrupt the flexibility that defines homeschooling. Many homeschool families do not follow the public school calendar. For families who design instruction around travel, community programs, outdoor learning, or individualized pacing, mandated dates would require unnecessary restructuring of their educational plans.

Additionally, in-person testing places logistical burdens on families. Parents may need to arrange transportation during school hours, coordinate childcare for younger siblings, or take time off

work. For single-parent households or families with limited transportation access, this requirement becomes even more challenging.

HB2376 also places strain on public school educators. Public school teachers are already managing large class sizes and significant responsibilities. Adding students unfamiliar with the classroom environment on test days may increase stress and classroom management challenges. Furthermore, expecting educators to assess children they have never met for signs of abuse is not an effective safeguard. Sadly, abuse often goes undetected even among children who attend school daily.

It is also important to note that no other states require annual in-person standardized testing for homeschooled students in this manner. Hawai‘i would be imposing a level of regulation that exceeds national norms without clear evidence of improved outcomes.

In summary, existing annual reporting requirements already provide sufficient oversight. Expanding testing mandates to require in-person attendance from kindergarten through eighth grade creates undue burdens on families and schools while failing to effectively identify abuse or improve educational accountability.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB2376 and protect the rights of families to educate their children in a manner that best supports their individual needs.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Applegate

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 11:49:51 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shawna Pereira	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose HB2376. Education is not a one size fits all. Learning is not one size fits all. Children learn differently, they show interest in different things, they excel in many different ways. This is why we chose homeschool. We are doing what we believe is best for our own individual children, not trying to keep them in a box. This is exactly what HB2376 will do, a box comparing them to all other children and ranking them within your standards. Standards that are very low, might I add. My children do not need to be kept in a box when they are able to fly.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 12:07:04 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maria Vellalos	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Maria Vellalos, and I am a homeschooling parent in Hawai‘i. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong opposition to bill HR2376.

As a homeschooler, I value the freedom and responsibility that comes with directing my children education. Hawai‘i has long recognized parents as the primary educators of their children, and the current homeschooling framework already provides accountability while preserving parental rights. These bill risk shifting that balance away from families and toward increased government oversight.

Homeschooling is not a one-size-fits-all model. It allows families to tailor education to a child’s individual learning style, pace, interests, and needs. For many of us, homeschooling provides a safer, more effective, and more values-aligned learning environment. Additional regulations, reporting requirements, or oversight measures could create unnecessary burdens that discourage families from exercising their right to direct their children’s education.

I am particularly concerned that HR2376 could:

- Increase administrative requirements without clear evidence of improved educational outcomes.
- Undermine parental authority in educational decision-making.
- Create barriers for families who choose homeschooling for safety, medical, cultural, or individualized learning reasons.
- Divert state resources toward regulating law-abiding families rather than supporting educational access and opportunity.

Homeschool families are diverse and deeply committed to their children’s success. Many homeschool students go on to excel academically, socially, and professionally. Policies that assume additional control is necessary risk penalizing responsible parents who are already meeting their obligations.

Rather than expanding regulation, I urge the Legislature to respect and preserve educational freedom in Hawai‘i.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask you to vote NO on SB3193 and HR2376.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify

Maria Vellalos

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 12:14:36 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Crystale Cayaban	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Crystale Cayaban and I oppose HB2376. I have been homeschooling my children since 2011. I have graduated one daughter and she will be graduating from college this April. I currently have 2 daughters homeschooling.

When I began homeschooling, I enjoyed the opportunities of a variety of curriculum. There is actually so much to choose from that it's overwhelming at first. However, we found our groove in 2016 with a curriculum called Classical Conversations and we've stuck with it ever since. I have my daughters do standardized testing every year beginning in 3rd grade. One of the reasons I do this is so that they are aware of this type of testing and get practice with it. However, we do not do this type of testing throughout the school year. My assessments are individualy based on what I know my daughters' abilities are and where they need to improve, how they have been improving in those areas and my goals for their learning.

I come from a teaching background with a Masters in Education; 10 years teaching in a private school, 4 years teaching part time in a public school, 1 year teaching in a college, and 15 years of homeschooling. I have seen, taken, and given testing in many forms. I have written tests. I have graded them. I have administered them. I do not believe that having my daughters take a standardized test in an unfamiliar setting at a set time of the school year would be beneficial to them, their learning, or their performance on a standardized test. We know that unfamiliarity in simply a setting may negatively affect the students' performance on a test.

We homeschool throughout the school year and enjoy the flexibility of family life and travel, extracurricular activities, and pursuing our daughters' interests like starting a jewelry business. Therefore, our school year is extended through holidays, breaks, and even summer. Consequently HB2376 would interfere with our established homeschool instructional plans.

As for the type of test being adminstered, I currently have the freedom to choose the type of standardized tests that I give to my daughters. Due to the nature of our curriculum being classical, I choose to administer the Classic Learning Test, which is comparable to the widely used SAT. It is accepted by more than 300 colleges and universities.

"The Classic Learning Test was developed as a greatly improved college entrance exam, taking advantage of contemporary technology and testing students on more engaging material." "Colleges and universities across the United States and abroad recognize the value of the CLT, and the excellence of CLT and CLT10 test takers. That’s why hundreds of colleges recruit

students who take the CLT, and even provide scholarships based on test performance." (from cltexam.com website)

In my 15 years of homeschooling, I have learned that none of us homeschool alone. We all plug into a co-op or homeschool community of some sort. We are involved in a variety of homeschool activities all of which allow us parents to share experiences, resources, and support. We are very resourceful homeschool teachers and are able to evaluate, identify, and monitor our students' progress. It is NOT the responsibility of the department of education. Parents are first and foremost responsible, and at the same time, we know we cannot and should not do it alone. It takes a village. We have a village. If the Hawai‘i State Department of Education truly does “strive to inspire learning, innovation, and a collective dedication to Hawai’i’s future,” you should consider collaborating with the homeschool community rather than mandating testing.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 1:03:42 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lucy Molina	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Committee Hearing for HB2376

Hearing Feb. 17, 2026, at 2:00PM

House Conference Room 309

My name is Lucy Molina, and I am resident of Kailua, HI and a homeschool mother to my seven children. We moved to Oahu from Texas in 2018; however I've homeschooled my children since birth and have since graduated my oldest child in 2024. I am in direct opposition to HB2376.

Homeschooling is parent directed, not government directed. I do not believe the government has business measuring my children for any reason whether it's their personal education or how they compare to another child. This Bill would impose additional standardized in-person testing, which is an attempt to compare children in Hawai‘i to children in other states as an attempt to assess their level of education. One state assessment is not an accurate representation of a child's well-being, level of education or love of learning.

As a homeschooler, I reserve the right and freedom to educate my children according to their needs, learning styles and challenges as well as their interests as I see fit. I also reserve the right and freedom to teach subjects at an individual pace and establish a schedule of my choosing according to what fits my children best, which means we may not be studying the same level of instruction that particular year as other students in their grade level, whether homeschooled or publicly schooled. Enforcing this Bill would negatively affect my homeschooled children, requiring them to conform to a public-school schedule for testing, which would interfere with our homeschool plan, schedule, and curriculum. It would also require them to conform to a public-school-chosen test at the discretion of the DOE and not at the homeschool parent's discretion. Quite honestly, it is not the government's responsibility to educate my children, nor is it the DOE's responsibility to ensure my children's educational well-being. I homeschool for the purpose of educating my children differently than a public school would educate, and I do not wish to be forced to adhere to a public-school model. Homeschoolers are diligent and resourceful people who seek the best educational support, services, programs and options for their children.

Homeschool parents are already required to adhere to a list of necessary submitted information yearly including a letter of intent to homeschool, progress reports, grades, samples of work and test scores in certain grades using testing of our choosing. This Bill would disrupt our homeschool routine, cause stress on my children to test in an unfamiliar environment and be tested on material they may or may not be covering in that particular year. And as mentioned above, this would be an additional required test that would not accurately represent my children's level of learning.

In addition, this Bill would require kindergarteners, 1st graders and 2nd graders to test when they may not be developmentally prepared for such standardized tests.

I believe this Bill would not only put unnecessary stress and burden on homeschool parents and their children, but also on the administrative staff and teachers at various school districts. According to the John Hopkins Homeschool Research Lab, reported on the Business Insider online article by Andy Kiersz, there were approximately 4,161 homeschooled students in Hawai‘i during the 2024-2025 school year. (link included) This means there's approximately 4,000 extra students that would require a space to test in a public school and additional monitoring for those students putting extra stress on an already overwhelmed system.

Thank you for your time in reading my letter.

With Aloha,

Lucy Molina

Kailua Resident and Homeschool Educator

817-798-0819

Luzianne19@gmail.com

Link to resource: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xFaTmfL1W-rkgrT_M39aApH2SVTjpnte/edit?gid=1920782788#gid=1920782788

https://www.businessinsider.com/is-homeschooling-on-the-rise-vouchers-public-school-education-2025-9#:~:text=Table_title:%20Follow%20Ayelet%20Sheffey%20Table_content:%20header:%20%7C,%7C%202023%2D2024:%202%2C886%20%7C%202024%2D2025:%203%2C086%20%7C

TO: Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair, and the Committee on Education,

SUBJECT: HB2376

DATE: Tuesday, February 17, 2026

TIME: 2:00 PM

PLACE: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 309
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

POSITION: IN OPPOSITION

Aloha,

My name is Claire Voss, and I am a homeschool parent in Hawaii, affiliated with St. Benedict Hall, a classical collaborative Christian education resource program on the windward side of Oahu. I am testifying against bill HB2376.

The requirement of young homeschool children to take annual standardized testing in a public school setting in which they have never been present is an expectation absent of consideration for early childhood development. Academic testing in unfamiliar spaces would create undue stress for young children, thereby negatively impacting their performance and presenting inaccurate reflections of their academic standing.

As a mother expecting my third child, the logistical burden, especially for 1st and 2nd grade screenings three times a year, is a high cost to for the state to receive imprecise information regarding my children's education. Additionally, I have been the parent of a medically fragile child with severe special needs to include hearing, vision, feeding, and mobility impairment. His condition greatly impacted our family's ability to simply leave our home. This causes the requirements of HB2376 to seem onerous to some of us, particularly when the goal of precise academic assessment would not be met.

No other state requires in-person standardized testing for homeschool families, which reflects the irrationality of HB2376. I hope you will consider the negative impact and cost of this bill which, if passed, will undoubtedly yield inaccurate measures of the academic standing of Hawaii homeschool students. I am in direct opposition to HB2376.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Claire Voss

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 1:31:57 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Austin Westbrook	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Austin Westbrook, and I am a homeschooling parent in Kailua. I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to HB2376.

While accountability and student progress matter deeply to homeschooling families, this proposal would impose significant burdens without demonstrating clear benefits.

First, requiring young children—particularly Kindergarten through 2nd grade students—to participate in repeated in-person screenings in an unfamiliar public school setting raises serious developmental concerns. Many children at these ages are not developmentally ready for formal testing environments. For homeschooled students, who learn in individualized and often flexible settings, being required to test in an unfamiliar building with unfamiliar adults may create stress and anxiety that negatively affects performance and does not accurately reflect their true abilities.

Second, this bill would create substantial logistical burdens for families, especially those homeschooling multiple children. Coordinating transportation to public school campuses multiple times per year, potentially during regular school hours, would disrupt learning schedules, work commitments, and family life. Homeschooling families already take seriously their responsibility to document and assess student progress. This proposal replaces parental choice with a one-size-fits-all mandate that does not account for the diversity of homeschooling approaches.

Third, Hawai'i's current system already allows for standardized assessment at key grade levels. Expanding this to mandatory in-person public school testing for nearly all grade levels adds layers of regulation without clear evidence of improved educational outcomes. Additionally, no other state requires in-person standardized testing in public schools for homeschool students, making this proposal unusually restrictive.

As a parent, I chose to homeschool in order to provide a personalized education tailored to my child's strengths, challenges, and developmental readiness. I fully support reasonable oversight and accountability. However, HB2376 shifts away from partnership and toward unnecessary regulation that risks undermining the flexibility that makes homeschooling successful.

I respectfully ask this committee to reconsider HB2376 and to engage directly with homeschool families to develop policies that support educational excellence while preserving parental responsibility and educational freedom.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Austin Westbrook

Kailua, Oahu, HI

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 1:32:55 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Miki	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill because I don't agree with how the DOE and government handles education. I want the freedom from the state school system, how it should it be.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 2:24:35 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mel hashimoto	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I support the freedom to homeschool and to educate our children within the home. As a parent with a doctorate degree, I deeply value education, as a profession or academic pursuit and also as a lifelong calling. Teaching my children at home has been one of the greatest privileges of my life.

Homeschooling allows our family a wholesome, well-rounded education tailored to each child's individual needs, strengths, and interests. In our home, education is not confined to a rigid schedule or a single method... Its intentional and integrated into daily life. We are able to pursue academic excellence while also cultivating character, critical thinking, creativity, and a love of learning.

With my academic background, I am highly aware of educational standards.
Homeschooling often means raising Expectations. It allows for depth over memorization, and curiosity over compliance. My children benefit from personalized instruction, meaningful discussions, and the flexibility to move at a pace appropriate for them.

I know Homeschool is beneficial because i have seen unexpected fruits: deeper family bonds, increased confidence in my children, independent thinking, and a genuine joy in learning.

There are other benefits like emotional security, moral development, resilience that cannot always be measured by standardized assessments but are foundational to lifelong success.

For these reasons, I stand in opposition to HB2376. Legislation that restricts or burdens the freedom of families to homeschool risks undermining educational liberty and parental rights. Parents are uniquely positioned to understand their children's needs.

.

Educational freedom allows families to choose the path that best serves their children. I respectfully urge that we protect the right of families to educate their children at home without unnecessary interference.

Imposing additional restrictions that dictate how I must homeschool or require me to report to outside authorities undermines parental autonomy and the individualized nature that makes homeschooling effective. Thank you.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 3:13:29 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Trever Duarte	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly OPPOSE HB 2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 3:19:44 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lorrin Duarte	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a homeschooled student, I strongly oppose HB 2376. This bill takes away from my educational opportunities. It hurts my educational experience and my future.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 3:38:23 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sovereign Duarte	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a homeschooled sophomore and am finishing up my associates degree in Hawaiian Studies.

Because of homeschooling, I have been able to have many educational opportunities that children in the classroom do not get. Over many years, I have been able to get to know a lot of the legislators here in the capitol and learn about the way laws are passed, and it has inspired me to become a lawmaker myself.

HB 2376 would take away the experiences I was able to have for other children as it does not allow for children to learn in the way they learn best and thrive and grow in understanding of the life around them. Please do not pass this bill for the children who come after me.

Audit of the Department of Human Services' Child Welfare Services Branch

A Report to the Governor and the Legislature of the State of Hawai'i

Report No. 24-05
April 2024



OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR
STATE OF HAWAI'I

OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR
STATE OF HAWAIʻI

Constitutional Mandate

Pursuant to Article VII, Section 10 of the Hawai'i State Constitution, the Office of the Auditor shall conduct post-audits of the transactions, accounts, programs and performance of all departments, offices and agencies of the State and its political subdivisions.

The Auditor's position was established to help eliminate waste and inefficiency in government, provide the Legislature with a check against the powers of the executive branch, and ensure that public funds are expended according to legislative intent.

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We report our findings and make recommendations to the governor and the Legislature to help them make informed decisions.

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https://auditor.hawaii.gov

PHOTO: ISTOCK.COM

Foreword

Our audit of the Department of Human Services' Child Welfare Services Branch was conducted pursuant to Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 102, Senate Draft 1, House Draft 1 (2022 Regular Session) which requested the Auditor to conduct a performance audit examining the department's policies, procedures, and processes to protect children in their own homes and in out-of-home placements, as well as the recruitment and retention of Child Welfare Services Branch staff.

We express our appreciation for the cooperation and assistance of representatives from the Department of Human Services, including its Director; the Social Services Division Administrator and administrators of the division's Child Welfare Services Branch, Program Development Offices, Support Services Office; various Child Welfare Services Branch employees including licensing administrators and unit supervisors, licensing workers, social workers and human services professionals for Oʻahu, Maui/Molokaʻi/Lānaʻi, Hawaiʻi Island, and Kauaʻi; the Hawaiʻi Child Welfare Continuous Quality Improvement Project Director; and other individuals whom we contacted during the course of our audit.

Leslie H. Kondo
State Auditor

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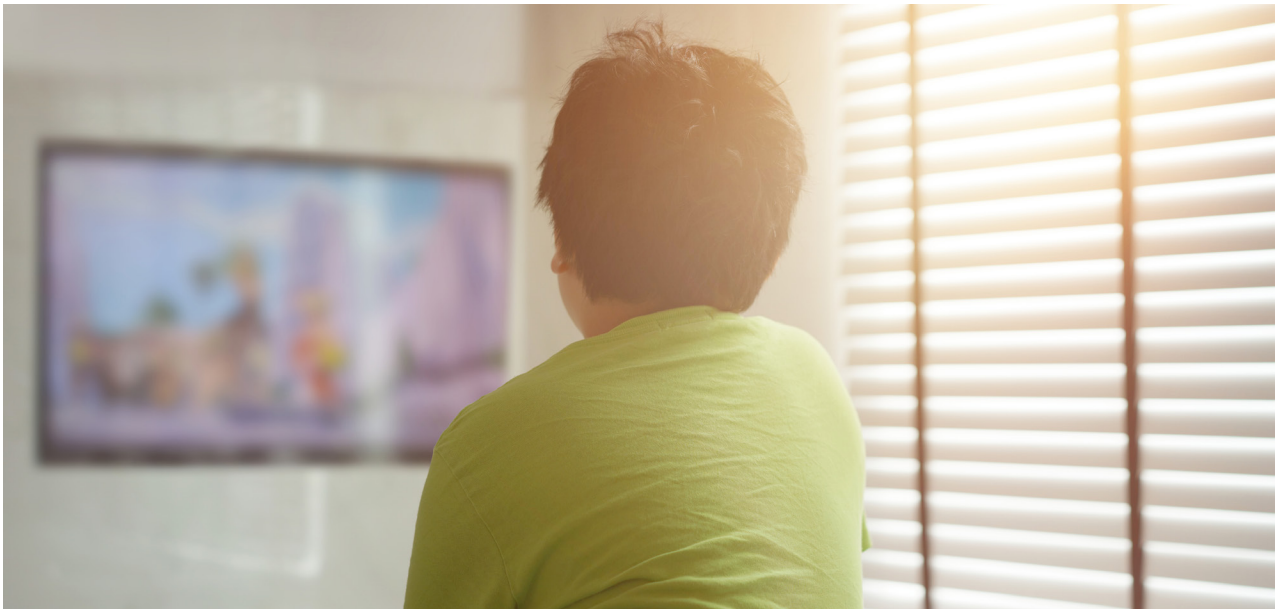


PHOTO: ISTOCK.COM

Audit of the Department of Human Services' Child Welfare Services Branch

The department's process to license child-specific homes did not comply with legal requirements. In addition, the department did not monitor or evaluate the performance of Catholic Charities Hawai'i, the contractor hired to complete documentation necessary for licensing. The question is: Were children at risk?

In FY2022, DHS provided services to 2,322 children who spent some or all of that year in foster care, including 964 children who entered foster care and 1,033 who exited.

Introduction

THE STATE OF HAWAI'I'S Department of Human Services (DHS) provides child welfare services for children who have been abused, neglected, or threatened with maltreatment, offering an array of services including foster care placement when circumstances require children to be removed from their homes. Once DHS assumes placement responsibility, it must ensure resource family homes[1] – private homes caring for foster children on the department's

[1] A resource family home means a home that has met the state licensing requirements "in which minor children are received for temporary substitute supervision, care and maintenance apart from their legal custodians on a twenty-four-hour basis for monetary payment." Hawai'i Revised Statutes and Hawai'i Administrative Rules also refer to resource family homes as "foster family boarding homes," "foster boarding homes," and "foster homes."

"You don't even place [children] in a home that's not licensed [or] licensable."
– CWSB Administrator

behalf – provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment until the children can be reunited with their families or placed permanently with adoptive parents or legal guardians. State law requires foster homes to have certificates of approval to care for children; accordingly, DHS issues licenses to homes that meet and maintain applicable health, safety, housing, and sanitation standards.

When foster care is deemed necessary, state policy gives placement preference to applicants who have existing relationships with the children they intend to foster and are able to meet licensing requirements. Recognizing that child-specific caregivers may not have time to complete the full licensing process until after children are placed in their homes, DHS has discretion to issue provisional certificates of approval to bridge the gap between placement and licensure as long as certain minimum safety standards are met and "it is reasonable to assume that all licensing requirements will be met within sixty days." DHS' Child Welfare Services Branch (CWSB) is responsible for ensuring provisionally certified homes become licensed, as well as removing children from homes that do not meet requirements for licensure within the legal timeframe.

"You don't even place [children] in a home that's not licensed [or] licensable," the CWSB Administrator said.

To qualify for a provisional certificate, a prospective foster family must have an in-person meeting with a CWSB worker in their home; consent to background checks in criminal history, child abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse databases; and begin an application process expected to last no more than 60 days. A license, in contrast, requires more background checks, health clearances, mandatory caregiver training, and a home study that includes a physical assessment of the home and interviews with all household members. If an applicant does not complete all licensing requirements by the time the provisional certificate expires, the law requires that the child be placed in another home that can qualify for licensure. CWSB's procedures manual specifically directs branch social workers to inform prospective caregivers that provisional certificates are only valid for 60 days and "if ALL the licensing requirements are not met, **that child will be removed from the home**." (Emphasis in original.)

In practice, however, we found DHS issued multiple provisional certificates to child-specific homes, often retroactively, without the authority to do so and, most importantly, contrary to the legal licensing requirements. This common practice allowed children to remain indefinitely in homes that had not demonstrated the ability or willingness to meet licensing requirements, such as obtaining fingerprint-based FBI clearances or completing home studies. We

found that DHS has adopted licensing procedures that contradict the department's administrative rules, such as issuing provisional certificates for 90 days – a month longer than allowed in DHS' administrative rules – and permitting an additional 60-day provisional certificate. By allowing provisional certification to last up to five months – three months longer than allowed in the administrative rules – we question whether the department is fulfilling its mandate to ensure that foster children are placed in safe, stable, and nurturing environments.

Aside from exceptions for two rare circumstances, CWSB's written procedures do not contemplate issuing more than one provisional certificate. However, a random sample of approximately 10 percent of active foster homes statewide – a total of 103 homes – included 30 child-specific homes that took an average of 314 days to complete the licensing process. Of the 103 homes in our sample, we identified more than *three dozen instances* where "active" homes had neither a provisional certificate nor a license. We also found DHS issued retroactively dated certificates and licenses to cover periods when homes continued to care for children with expired licenses and expired provisional certificates.

Part of the department's strategy to minimize the time foster children spend in unlicensed homes has been to outsource most of its licensing duties, contracting with organizations to recruit foster families and to work with families to expedite the licensing process. When we began our audit, DHS had existing contracts with Catholic Charities Hawai'i (Catholic Charities) to conduct home studies, a key certification requirement for potential resource families; provide support services and mandatory training for caregivers; and submit completed application packages to CWSB within 90 days. Assessing private contractors' performance is beyond our legal authority. However, we did discover that DHS – which does have that authority and, more significantly, that responsibility – did not monitor its contracts to ensure providers were satisfactorily performing the services they were contracted to perform. At the close of the prior contract, also involving Catholic Charities, DHS did not evaluate the extent to which the provider complied with contract terms and conditions and achieved intended outcomes. More to the point, no one we asked at DHS realized state agencies are *legally required* to establish contract monitoring and evaluation procedures when contracting to provide health and human services to Hawai'i residents.

While it is responsible for licensing foster homes, CWSB has had little involvement in the contracting process or in ensuring performance of the contracted services. Contract-related duties were split between two offices within DHS' Social Services Division – neither of which had

In practice, however, we found DHS issued multiple provisional certificates to a child-specific home, often retroactively, without the authority to do so and, most importantly, contrary to the legal licensing requirements. This common practice allowed children to remain indefinitely in homes that had not demonstrated the ability or willingness to meet licensing requirements, such as obtaining fingerprint-based FBI clearances or completing home studies.

established a legally-required process for monitoring and evaluating contractors' performance, which resulted in contractors being paid despite contract terms and conditions not being met. According to the CWSB Administrator, who had not read the 2019 and 2021 contracts intended to expedite the licensing of foster homes, the branch's feedback on the contracted services was rarely solicited even though its staff who worked directly with providers may have had valuable insight on lessons learned or issues to avoid in future contracts. "Anything that our contractors are unable to meet and perform will ultimately fall on the department because those things need to be done. So now, the workforce absorbs what the contractor may not be able to do," the CWSB Administrator pointed out.

Licensing-related issues have also very likely cost the State federal funds that would otherwise reimburse the State for certain foster care payments; that federal reimbursement is available for fully licensed foster homes, not those operating with provisional certificates.

Hawai'i's Definition of Child Abuse

HAWAI'I LAW defines child abuse or neglect as an act or omission by any person or legal entity related to, residing with, or otherwise responsible for the care of a child that results in physical or psychological harm or "reasonably foreseeable, substantial risk of being harmed" to a child under age 18. Child abuse or neglect can include physical harm resulting in fractures; burns; internal bleeding; poisoning; soft tissue swelling and bruising; psychological abuse manifested as extreme mental distress; medical neglect; inadequate provision of food, clothing, or shelter causing a failure to thrive; provision of harmful drugs to a minor without prescription; sexual abuse; and death.

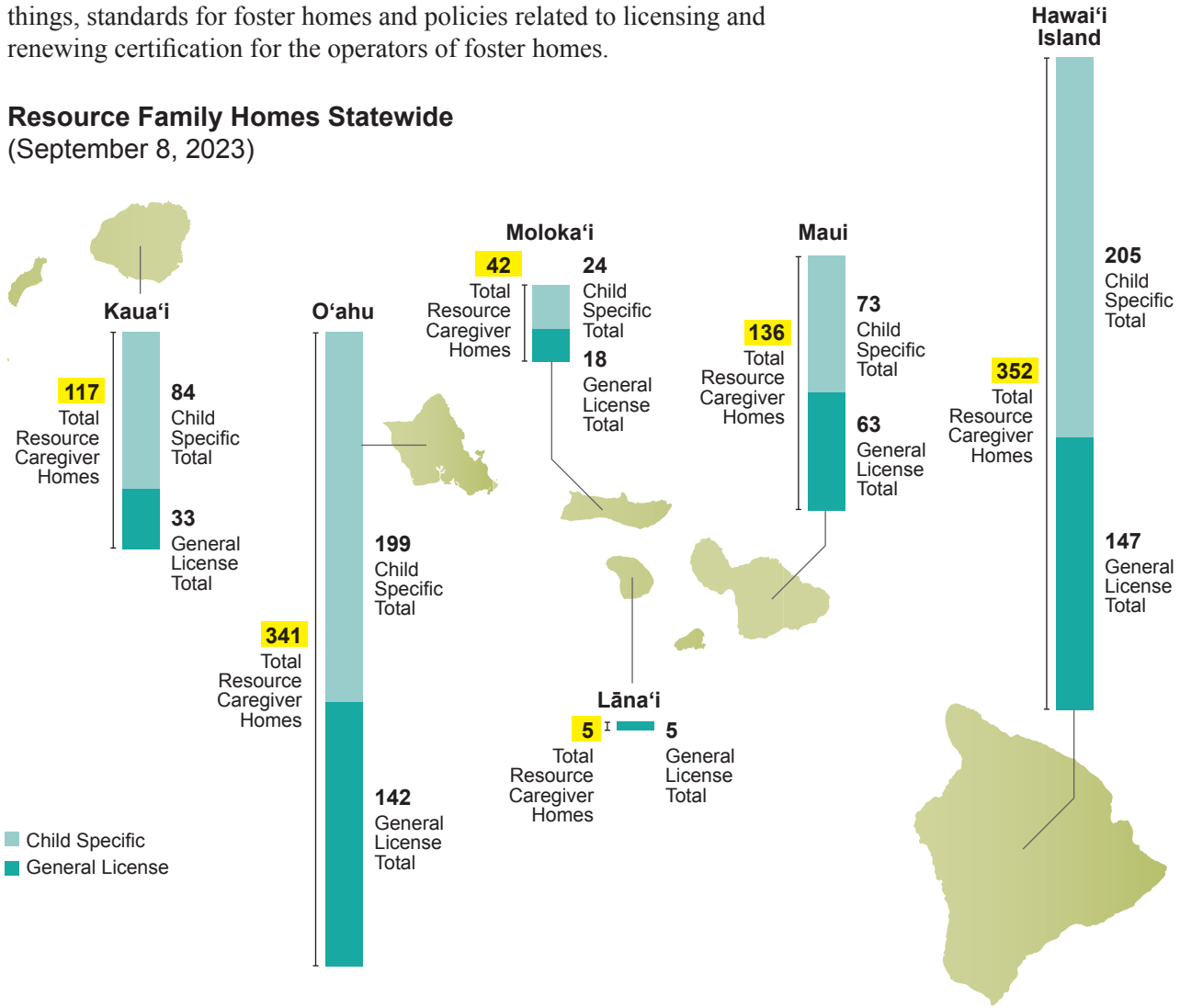
Chapter 1

Background

Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services (DHS) offers public and private assistance programs, as well as social service programs, for Hawai‘i residents who need access to basic necessities, such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. Chapter 346, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes (HRS), lays out duties assigned to DHS, among them a requirement to establish, extend, and strengthen services to children who have been abused or neglected, or are in life circumstances that threaten harm. When necessary, DHS is required to find suitable private home placements for children who have experienced or are threatened with maltreatment. The department's duties also include adopting administrative rules establishing, among other things, standards for foster homes and policies related to licensing and renewing certification for the operators of foster homes.

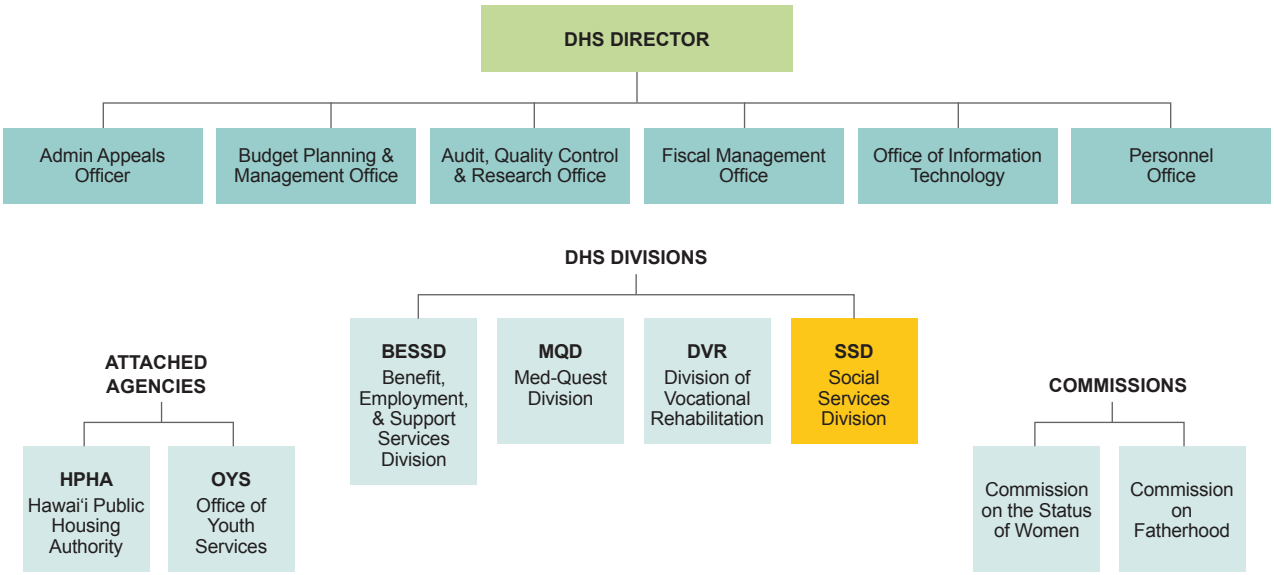
Resource Family Homes Statewide
(September 8, 2023)



Source: Department of Human Services
This graphic includes foster homes with licenses and provisional certificates

The department, led by the Director, consists of four divisions, including the Benefit, Employment, and Support Services Division; the Med-QUEST Division; the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; and the Social Services Division. In addition, two agencies and two commissions are administratively attached to DHS.

Exhibit 1
Department of Human Services' Organizational Chart



Source: Department of Human Services
Organizational chart for federal fiscal years 2020 to 2024 (i.e., October 1 through September 30).

Social Services Division

The Social Services Division is headed by an Administrator and includes two Child Welfare Program Development Offices (jointly referred to throughout this report as the Program Development Office), the Support Services Office, and the Child Welfare Services Branch.



Source: Department of Human Services

Child Welfare Program Development Offices

The two Child Welfare Program Development offices, each with its own administrator, are responsible for policy and program development and analysis; policy clarification; research on child welfare best practices; new initiatives; service development for contracting and procurement; management information system/automation; finance, budget, and payment operations; programmatic implementation of federal and state laws and rules; legislative response, clarification, and action; and the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. The offices are also responsible for ensuring federal funds awarded to the State are expended appropriately (e.g., contracts for procured services and Title IV-E claims) and for the department's compliance with federal and state reporting requirements (e.g., the Child and Family Service Reviews and the Annual Progress and Services Report).

Support Services Office

The Support Services Office is headed by an administrative officer and consists of the Purchase of Services Office and the Management Information and Compliance Unit. The Support Services Office provides direction in developing, implementing, controlling, and monitoring policies and procedures related to fiscal and program support services for the Social Services Division, including, among other things, procuring services and related contracting. The Support Services Office is also responsible for monitoring the division's budget and contract payments, including ensuring vendor invoices are accurate and processing payment of the invoices, as well as for monitoring the department's eligibility, compliance, and claims for reimbursement from federal funding programs.

The Support Services Office is currently administering nearly 100 contracts supporting the Child Welfare Services Branch with an aggregate value of about $48.4 million ($19 million state funds; $29 million federal funds; and $400,000 trust funds).

Child Welfare Services Branch (CWSB)

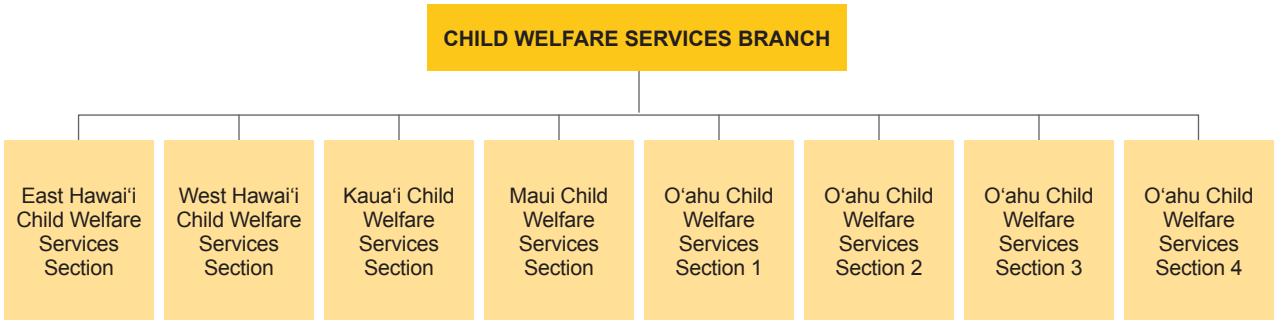
CWSB's mission is "to ensure, in partnership with families and communities, the safety, permanency and well-being of those children and families where child abuse and neglect has occurred or who are at high risk for child abuse and neglect." The branch is responsible for the Child Welfare Services Program, formerly the Child Protective Services Program, one of the Social Services Division's major programs. According to DHS, the Child Welfare Services Program serves children who are exposed to abuse, neglect, or threat of harm through a range of child welfare services to children and their families, such as assessment and crisis intervention, child abuse or neglect investigation, case management, foster care, adoption, independent living, and licensing of foster homes, child placing organizations, and child caring organizations.

The branch is organized by sections on Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi, Kauaʻi, and Maui (which includes Molokaʻi and Lānaʻi) overseen by the CWSB Administrator. As shown on the chart on the next page, those sections include four on Oʻahu; two on Hawaiʻi Island; and one each for Maui and Kauaʻi.

The sections, composed of two to four units each, are responsible for planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating child welfare service activities in their respective region. Each section, led by an administrator, includes:

- Assessment workers who determine the appropriate response to reports of child abuse and neglect and work with local law enforcement to investigate the reports and initiate appropriate intervention;
- Licensing workers who recruit, train, and license resource families; and
- Permanency workers, or case managers, who provide child welfare permanency services to prevent further abuse or neglect of children.

Certain statewide functions are centralized on O‘ahu, such as a unit that specializes in federal fund eligibility and an Intake Unit that operates a 24-hour hotline, staffed by social workers who receive reports about potential child abuse and neglect from all islands, determine the appropriate response using a risk/safety matrix, and disseminate the information to the appropriate section or law enforcement agency for follow-up.



Source: Department of Human Services

Between FY2019 and FY2021, the Intake Unit’s hotline received an average of 20,768 calls a year, with social workers assigning roughly 25 percent of those cases for some level of intervention by CWSB. In FY2022, the hotline received 20,603 calls, 29 percent of which were assigned for intervention. When CWSB intervention is warranted, low-risk cases are assigned to family strengthening services and medium-risk cases are assigned to voluntary case management, which involves regular visits with a case manager and services to address issues that put children at risk of abuse and neglect. According to the

CWSB Administrator, family strengthening services and voluntary case management fall under CWSB's oversight but are managed by contractors who provide community-based interventions designed to support families reported to CWSB for child abuse and/or neglect, with a goal of keeping children safe in their own homes. Services include individual and family counseling; regular home visits; instruction for parenting and practical life skills; role modeling; development of individual program plans; referral to community resources; in-home monitoring, education, and support; and ongoing assessments through monthly in-person contact with the family to ensure appropriate and effective services, and child safety and well-being.

High-risk cases with clear safety concerns are assigned to CWSB investigators for assessment, which may result in a formal police report and/or the child's removal from the home. Reports do not always come in through CWSB's statewide intake line; for instance, children may be removed from their homes by law enforcement before CWSB is notified.

The Intake Unit hotline experienced a slight uptick in calls from FY2018 to FY2022, as well as an increase in the number of calls assigned for intervention during that period – 4,645 in FY2018 to 5,975 in FY2022. Of those 5,975 calls assigned for intervention in FY2022, 3,328 reports (56 percent), some involving more than one child, were assigned to CWSB for investigation. Reports assigned to CWSB require a social worker to contact every child identified in the report within 48 hours (two days) due to concerns for safety.

In FY2022, the Intake Unit received 20,603 calls involving 5,874 children, of which 1,380 children (24 percent) were confirmed as victims of child maltreatment, including abuse, neglect, or threatened harm; however, DHS did not report how many of these children may have entered foster care.

Maintenance payments for foster families

Foster homes that are licensed or issued provisional certificates by DHS to care for children receive monthly foster board reimbursements from the State, a portion of which may be reimbursed by the federal government. As of October 2022, monthly foster board reimbursement rates are $649 for a child 0-5 years old, $742 for a child 6-11 years old, and $776 for a child 12 years and over. Additional reimbursements may also cover basic daily needs and other essentials such as clothing and visitation/services to facilitate reunification. For example, reimbursements for clothing are capped annually at $810 for children ages 0-5, $822 for children ages 6-11, and $1,026 for children 12 and older.

Title IV-E eligibility review

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families conducts periodic reviews of states' child and family service programs through the Children's Bureau.[2] The Children's Bureau is authorized to review states' child and family services programs for compliance with the requirements of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Title IV-E Foster Care Program permits states to claim federal reimbursement for a portion of foster care expenditures for children who are removed from their homes and placed in licensed foster homes, and who are eligible based on income requirements in the former federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. The State of Hawai'i cannot claim Title IV-E reimbursement for foster care payments for children in unlicensed homes, including homes with provisional certificates and expired licenses.

Foster care, by the numbers

IN FY2022, CWSB served 2,322 children in foster care, a roughly 8 percent decline from the previous year; approximately half of those children were in foster homes on O'ahu, according to the Hawai'i Data Booklet accompanying DHS' Annual Progress and Services Report issued on June 30, 2023.

Impetus

This performance audit was performed in response to Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 102, Senate Draft 1, House Draft 1 (2022 Regular Session) that requested the Office of the Auditor to conduct a performance audit of the Department of Human Services, Social Services Division, Child Welfare Services Branch to include:

1. Child Welfare Services Branch's policies, procedures, and processes to protect the safety and well-being of children in their own homes and out-of-home placements, including foster care, guardianship, and adoption; and
2. The recruitment and retention of social workers and other staff at the Child Welfare Services Branch.

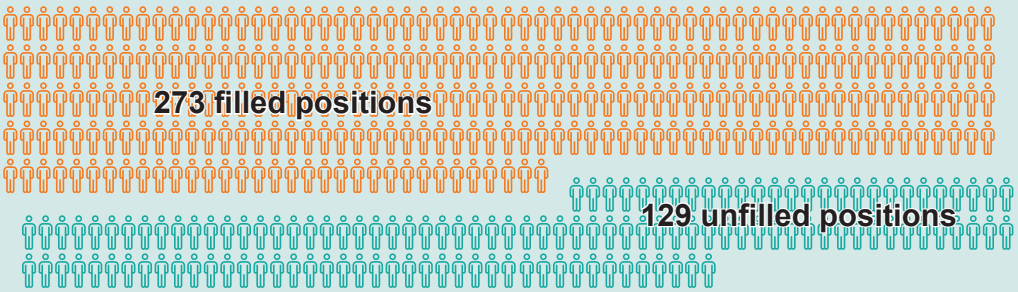
Prior Audits

In 1997, our *Management Audit of the Department of Human Services*, Report No. 97-18, found that the foster board payment program was being administered with little regard for fiscal constraints. Expenditures for services, other than flat monthly board payments, were made largely at the discretion of individual social workers.

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[2] Hawai'i Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) were conducted in 2003, 2009, and 2017. As noted in Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 102, Senate Draft 1, House Draft 1 (2022 Regular Session), CWSB initially failed to pass the three reviews. However, following all three reviews, CWSB submitted Program Improvement Plans (PIP) that were approved by the Children's Bureau and successfully completed all of the actions required to achieve conformity and avoid any penalties. In other words, the issues intended to be addressed by the 2017 CFSR PIP have been deemed successfully completed.

Child Welfare Services Branch Staffing
(as of February 2023)



Source: Office of the Auditor

Filled positions
Unfilled positions

AS OF FEBRUARY 2023, CWSB had 402 funded positions, 129 of which were unfilled. The 32 percent vacancy rate was the highest in five years according to DHS' Annual Progress and Services Report for federal fiscal year 2024. These positions include 177 caseworkers, 40 percent of which were vacant – nearly twice as high as the previous year – and the branch continues to encounter difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. In some sections, caseworker vacancies are so high that supervisors had to take on cases, impinging on their ability to manage and support other caseworkers to move their cases quickly and safely toward permanency and case closure.

The vacancy rate has since climbed higher due to staff turnover and challenges recruiting qualified employees. DHS' FY2023 and FY2024 Variance Report dated December 5, 2023, states that 131.5 of CWSB's 389.5 funded positions (34 percent) were unfilled. According to the CWSB Administrator, exit interviews with departing staff indicate that high workload, a lack of support and guidance, and insufficient pay were the top three reasons for leaving the branch. Assessment workers who investigate abuse allegations are the hardest to retain, they said, noting some assessment workers do not pass the six-month probation period.

CWSB struggles to recruit intake workers because of its non-traditional work hours, which require social workers to receive reports of alleged child abuse and neglect 24 hours a day. During our audit period, CWSB's Oʻahu licensing unit had 12 staff workers and 3 support staff who were responsible for 343 resource caregiver homes. Based on the number of homes, Oʻahu licensing workers would be responsible for approximately 28 licensing files each. In contrast, there was just one licensing worker in each of the branch offices in Maui, West Hawaiʻi, and Kauaʻi. Since May 2021, the Maui office has had one licensing worker who was responsible for 150 resource caregiver homes during our audit period. The West Hawaiʻi office has had one licensing worker for several years; that worker was responsible for 110 licensing files during our audit period. In 2023, the Kauaʻi office's sole licensing worker was responsible for 117 licensing files.

CWSB established a Specialized Workload Assessment Team (SWAT) designed to be adaptive and provide statewide workforce support, including mentoring, training, and casework services, to sections/units as needed due to conditions such as high work volume and/or reduced staffing. The SWAT unit is located on Oʻahu and consists of a supervisor, three caseworkers, and two assistants. SWAT travels where needed and recently assisted offices in West Hawaiʻi and Maui with intakes and closing of inactive cases.

In 1999, our *Audit of the Child Protective Services System*, Report No. 99-5, assessed the adequacy of decision-making processes and communication from case intake through closure. Our report revealed that DHS did not ensure all child abuse and neglect reports were investigated when appropriate. We also found the department's communication between its Child Welfare Services Branch, the county police, and the Family Court was ineffective. As a result, the department had not ensured that decision-makers had access to necessary information, that criminal proceedings began when warranted, or that the Family Court authority was sought when required. In addition, we found that untimely permanency planning unnecessarily increased foster care costs.

Our 1999 audit also assessed the adequacy of the department's contract management and its oversight of federal Title IV-E funds and foster care payments. We reported the department had not adjusted future contract amounts to account for current low service usage, as allowed in its purchase of service contracts, or ensured that services it paid for were received and effective. Although the department had made progress in increasing Title IV-E reimbursements, we found the timeliness in determining eligibility could be improved. We also identified a lack of management controls to prevent unnecessary foster care and general assistance payments.

In 2003, we conducted a *Follow-Up Audit of the Child Protective Services System*, Report No. 03-12, to ascertain the department's efforts to address the findings and recommendations of our 1999 audit. We found that many of the deficiencies remained, and significant problems persisted, including weak contract management, untimely reviews of contractor performance, and continued waste of state funds. Inadequate contract monitoring resulted in numerous overpayments to service providers. In one case, a service provider was overpaid $13,000. We also found that welfare families continued to receive assistance benefits after children were placed in foster custody.

We further found that supervisory oversight and review – a critical department control – was inadequate and resulted in inconsistent enforcement of intake and investigation procedures, poor communication with the Family Court and the Honolulu Police Department, and untimely permanency planning.

In addition, we found that the Child Protective Services System, the State's child abuse and neglect database, remained unreliable, resulting in inaccurate, incomplete, and outdated case information for decision-makers. Moreover, the department did not consistently inform Family Court of pending expirations of voluntary foster custody agreements.

We found six instances where children remained in voluntary placement beyond the 90-day statutory limit. In one of these cases, a child was placed in foster custody for five months before the department petitioned the court for authority. Inconsistent communication was further evidenced through the department's failure to comply with Hawai'i's mandated reporting law, which requires all cases of abuse and neglect to be referred to the appropriate county police departments for criminal investigation.

Our 2003 follow-up report also found that the department failed to plan for permanency by the twelfth month of a child's out-of-home care in almost half of the cases reviewed (23 of 49). Moreover, a family's inability to follow through with service plans was repeatedly disregarded in decision-making, leading to additional, similar plans being offered and resulting in permanency planning delays.

The report additionally found that foster families were paid for foster care services without adequate proof of the child being present in the home. In our sample, we found over $11,000 in questionable payments because of inadequate documentation.

Audit Objectives

1. Determine CWSB's compliance with the following certification requirements for the licensing of resource family homes for children pursuant to Hawai'i Revised Statutes and Hawai'i Administrative Rules, including:

    - Disposition of licensing applications within 120 days;
    - Granting of provisional certificates of approval for no more than 60 days, or, if extended, no more than one additional 60-day extension; and
    - Renewal of unconditional licenses before the expiration date of the existing license;

2. Describe the administration of contracts for services relating to and intended to support CWSB, including the contract monitoring and contract evaluation requirements pursuant to Sections 3-149-401 and 3-149-501, Hawai'i Administrative Rules; and

3. Make recommendations as appropriate.

Audit Scope and Methodology

Our review of DHS' compliance with legal requirements relating to the licensing of child-specific homes and its monitoring of contracts to support its licensing of child-specific homes was conducted from September 2022 through October 2023. When appropriate, we also examined data from prior years and the current calendar year.

We reviewed DHS' applicable statutes and administrative rules – specifically, Chapter 346, HRS, and Title 17, Chapter 1625, Hawai'i Administrative Rules (HAR) – as well as Chapter 103F, HRS, *Purchasing of Health and Human Services*, and the associated administrative rules, Title 3, Chapter 149, HAR, *Contracting*. To address our objective relating to CWSB's compliance with licensing requirements, we also reviewed documents maintained by DHS relating to its licensing of foster homes, including CWSB's policies and procedures related to licensing; relevant DHS internal communication forms (ICFs); Catholic Charities reports; legislative history; and other criteria relating to the department's licensing process for child-specific homes.

To determine the length of time that children were in unlicensed foster homes, meaning in child-specific homes that had only a provisional certificate as well as foster homes whose licenses had expired, we randomly sampled approximately 10 percent of the licensing files from each island that CWSB identified as "active" in its Licensing Resource File database (LRF). We were told the 1,011 active files represented all the resource care homes, including both general license and child-specific homes, in which foster children were placed as of September 8, 2023. However, we found 16 of the 1,011 files identified in LRF were duplicate entries, reducing the number of foster homes to 995.

Of the 103 files that we reviewed, 59 were child-specific homes and 44 were general license homes. We did not have sufficient data to conduct our analysis on 6 of the 59 child-specific homes, and another 4 were closed before being licensed or had been issued a provisional certificate within 60 days of our review; therefore, our analysis is based on 49 child-specific homes, 36 of which were unconditionally licensed. Of the 36 child-specific homes that were unconditionally licensed prior to our file review, we determined that 6 of them were no longer providing care for foster children and, therefore, should have been removed from the list of active resource family homes. For the remaining 30 child-specific homes, we calculated the number of days that each of those homes took to complete DHS' licensing requirements from the date of the home's application. Of the child-specific homes

that did not have unconditional licenses, we determined the length of time each home's application was pending, i.e., the number of days between the date of the application and the date of our file review on September 14, 2023. Because those homes were not licensed as of September 14, 2023, we do not know whether they subsequently completed the licensing requirements or remain unlicensed. However, we did include those homes in calculating the number of child-specific homes in our sample with applications pending longer than 60 days and 90 days.

We also identified a number of general license homes and child-specific homes whose unconditional licenses had expired. We calculated the number of days that those homes were unlicensed while caring for foster children and, for those with an unconditional license as of September 14, 2023, the length of time those homes took to complete the requirements for a new license or to renew their license.

To address our objective relating to DHS' administration, monitoring, and evaluation of licensing support contracts, we reviewed the department's 2019 and 2021 requests for proposals for licensing services; the 2019 and 2021 contract agreements between DHS and licensing providers, which incorporated the provider's proposals; reports prepared by DHS, Partners in Development Foundation, and Catholic Charities, respectively, relating to licensing of foster homes; and program financial information.

We conducted interviews of DHS management and staff, including the Social Services Division Administrator; the Program Development Administrator and Assistant Program Administrators; the Support Services Office Administrator and Purchase of Services Unit Specialists; the Hawai‘i Child Welfare Continuous Quality Improvement Project Director; the CWSB Administrator, CWSB Assistant Administrator, Resource Home Licensing Unit Supervisor, administrators and supervisors for the islands of O‘ahu, Maui/Moloka‘i/Lāna‘i, Hawai‘i Island, and Kaua‘i; and various CWSB licensing workers, social workers, and human services professionals across the state.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our audit findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Summary of Findings

1. CWSB's licensing of foster homes often did not comply with legal requirements, creating risks that foster children were in unsafe or inappropriate homes and causing the State to forgo federal reimbursements.

2. DHS reimbursed contractors' personnel and administrative costs without assessing whether performance goals were met.

Chapter 2

Finding No. 1

CWSB's licensing of foster homes often did not comply with legal requirements, creating risks that foster children were in unsafe or inappropriate homes and causing the State to forgo federal reimbursements.

Both DHS' governing law, Chapter 346, HRS, and its administrative rules, Title 17, Chapter 1625, HAR, are unambiguous in the requirement that foster homes must be licensed by the department in order to care for a child. However, we found DHS struggled to comply with that mandate to place abused and neglected children in licensed foster homes, often allowing children to remain in homes for months – even years – that had not, and sometimes would not, complete the licensing requirements that the department established to ensure the home is safe, stable, and nurturing.

Chapter 346, HRS, creates a broad legal framework for the State's child welfare system, with specific provisions related to foster care services. Among other things, as conditions for licensure, the statute requires foster homes to "[m]eet all standards and requirements established by the department" and all adults residing in foster homes to undergo criminal history record checks as well as child abuse and neglect registry checks. The Legislature delegated policymaking authority to DHS, directing the department to adopt administrative rules to specifically define the conditions and competence required of foster homes to care for and protect minor children. The statute notes that those rules "shall have the force and effect of law."

DHS promulgated administrative rules relating to the licensing of foster homes: Title 17, Chapter 1625, HAR, *Licensing of Resource Family Homes for Children*, has been in effect since December 9, 2010. Those rules include specific policies and requirements for licensure that the department deemed necessary to achieve its goal to provide temporary foster care placement of children "in a safe, stable and nurturing environment."

State policy gives placement preference to "child-specific homes," which may begin caring for foster children before completing licensing requirements.

CWSB recognizes two types of foster homes: homes in which caregivers have no relation to the youth they foster, referred to as general license homes, and homes that become licensed to care for a child where there is an existing relationship, which are called child-

specific homes. DHS policy gives preference to placing a child with a family that has a relationship with the child, which is often a relative but also includes, for instance, parents of a friend, a school teacher, or a neighbor. These child-specific homes satisfy an immediate need to help children maintain some degree of "normalcy" in foster care while the department strives to reunite them with their families.

However, child-specific placements may occur with limited notice, and those prospective foster homes often are unable to complete the department's licensing requirements in advance of the child's placement. In those cases, DHS' administrative rules provide for the issuance of a provisional certificate, which is "a temporary certificate issued at the discretion of the department," to allow the home time to complete the requirements for licensure while caring for a foster child.

Both general license and child-specific homes must meet the same licensing requirements that include criminal history checks, child abuse and neglect registry checks, and fingerprint-based FBI clearances for all adults residing in the home. In addition, foster families must provide written medical reports certifying that no family member suffers from an illness or disability that would impair the family's ability to care for children as well as a tuberculosis clearance for all household members. DHS also is required to conduct a "study" of household members to ensure that they have "the ability and personal qualities to care for foster children." That study involves interviewing every individual in the household, including children, and assessing whether the home meets acceptable State of Hawai'i standards for housing and sanitation. And, on the basis of the study which helps determine whether the foster home met the licensing requirements, the department is empowered to issue the home an Unconditional Certificate of Approval, signifying the home is licensed to care for foster children.

Provisional certificates may only be issued when it is reasonable to assume all licensing requirements will be met within 60 days.

For child-specific placements, the administrative rules state "[a] provisional certificate of approval, *not to exceed sixty days*, unless otherwise approved by the department may be issued to a [foster] home that is unable to meet all the requirements at the time of the study, if it is reasonable to assume that all licensing requirements will be met within sixty days and that there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of a child." (Emphasis added.) "Provisional certificate of approval" is defined as "a temporary certificate issued at the discretion of the department for a period *usually not exceeding sixty days* to any [foster] home which has met the essential safety requirements but which has not fully met all licensing requirements at the time the certificate is issued." (Emphasis added.)

A provisional certificate cannot provide the same health and safety assurances as an unconditional license to operate a foster home. Provisional approval indicates only that the relatives (or other persons) wanting to foster a specific child have been deemed by the department to be willing to care for specific children and that no adults in the household are disqualified based on background checks in criminal history databases, child abuse and neglect registries, and sex offender registries. An unconditional license, on the other hand, certifies that the foster home, whether general or child-specific, meets all standards for health, safety, housing, and sanitation required by DHS in its administrative rules.

The administrative rules limit the provisional certificate to 60 days, and as importantly, the department's ability to issue a provisional certificate is further checked by the additional condition: "*if it is reasonable to assume that all licensing requirements will be met within sixty days and that there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of a child*." (Emphasis added.) Those provisions reflect the department's balancing of the risk to a child and the need to provide foster care for a child. That policy also seems to signal DHS' determination that, in balance, 60 days is a reasonable amount of time for a foster family to complete requirements the department deemed necessary to provide an acceptable level of assurance that the child-specific home is safe. While both sections provide some discretion regarding the length of a provisional certificate, neither the statute nor the administrative rules authorize the department to grant an extension or more than one provisional certificate to the same child-specific applicant. Rather, the absence of such authority seems to reflect the department's unwillingness to further risk a child's well-being by extending the period a child is in a home that the department has yet to determine is safe, stable, and nurturing. Irrespective of the department's rationale, the administrative rules are *legal requirements*.

CWSB procedures manual does not align with Hawai'i Revised Statutes and DHS' administrative rules.

DHS has a *Child Welfare Services Procedures Manual* that contains the department's policies with respect to child welfare services as well as sections specific to the procedures for certain of the branch's activities, including assessment, casework services, licensing, and payments. However, we found many of DHS' licensing procedures did not comport with the legal requirements set forth in the statute and the department's administrative rules; they simply overwrote the policies that the department, itself, developed in its rules to ensure that foster children are in safe, stable, and nurturing environments.

The licensing procedures, which are in Part IV of the manual, describe the steps to license foster homes and provisionally certify child-specific caregivers, with the goal "*to unconditionally approve all homes and to minimize the time a home is provisionally licensed*." (Emphasis added.) That goal correlates to DHS' overarching mandate "to make paramount the safety and health of children who have been harmed or are in life circumstances that threaten harm." The procedures also emphasize that DHS is not able to claim federal reimbursement for either support payments to foster families or administrative costs for eligible children in provisionally certified homes.

Unconditional License vs. Provisional Certificate

GENERAL LICENSE HOMES must complete all licensing requirements before caring for any foster children. Child-specific homes that qualify for a provisional certificate can complete many of those requirements after children are placed in the home. The requirements for a license and a provisional certificate are listed below for comparison.

REQUIREMENTS FOR A 1- OR 2-YEAR UNCONDITIONAL LICENSE	REQUIREMENTS FOR A 60-DAY PROVISIONAL CERTIFICATE
✓ **Background Checks** - Child Abuse and Neglect Registry, Hawai'i Criminal Justice Information System, Hawai'i Sex Offender Registry, and National Sex Offender Registry	✓ **Background Checks** - Child Abuse and Neglect Registry, Hawai'i Criminal Justice Information System, Hawai'i Sex Offender Registry, and National Sex Offender Registry
✓ **Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Clearances** - Fingerprint-based FBI clearances for adult household members	**Not required**
✓ **Home Visit by CWSB**	✓ **Home Visit** - Home visit and an in-person interview to assess the appropriateness of the family
✓ **Health Requirements** - Physical examination within one year, tuberculosis (TB) clearances and other requirements	**Not required**
✓ **Financial Requirements** - The income of the resource family home shall be sufficient to maintain an adequate standard of living for the family before the addition of a foster child	✓ **Financial Requirements** - The income of the resource family home shall be sufficient to maintain an adequate standard of living for the family before the addition of a foster child
✓ **Employment History**	**Not required**
✓ **Marriage Verification** - Marriage/divorce certificate	**Not required**
✓ **Identification Verification** - Verification of identification of all adult household members	✓ **Identification Verification** - Verification of identification of all adult household members
✓ **Home Study** - Interview all household members and other requirements	**Not required**
✓ **Sleeping and Other Arrangements** - Suitable light, ventilation, and provision for proper rest, a safe and comfortable bed of a size and design to ensure safety and comfort with clean, comfortable bedding and linen, and equipment or appliances (e.g., wheelchairs, crutches, oxygen machines, etc.) are available and properly functioning	✓ **Sleeping and Other Arrangements** - Suitable light, ventilation, and provision for proper rest, a safe and comfortable bed of a size and design to ensure safety and comfort with clean, comfortable bedding and linen, and equipment or appliances (e.g., wheelchairs, crutches, oxygen machines, etc.) are available and properly functioning

✓ **Sanitation** - The home shall comply with State of Hawai'i standards on housing and sanitation including a kitchen with working equipment for safe food preparation, bath and shower with hot and cold water, rooms with adequate light, well-lit bedrooms, and fire escape exits	**Not required**
✓ **Fire Escape Plan**	**Not required**
✓ **Current Automobile Insurance** - All Vehicles	**Not required**
✓ **Family Photograph** - All Household Members	**Not required**
✓ **Training** - Year one pre-service Hawai'i Assures Nurturing and Involvement (H.A.N.A.I.) training	**Not required**
✓ **Two References**	**Not required**

Source: Office of the Auditor

According to current procedures for child-specific homes, once the placement worker verifies that required criminal history background checks were completed, the documentation is emailed to the appropriate CWSB licensing unit. That unit will then add the child-specific family into its database, and the assigned CWSB licensing worker emails the provisional certificate to the child-specific home. The licensing worker, ultimately, is responsible for issuing the unconditional license to the child-specific home upon completion of the licensing process. However, if the foster family has not met all the licensing requirements before the provisional certificate expires, the department's procedures explicitly state, "*the child must be removed and the home closed*" except for under certain circumstances. (Emphasis added.)

Specific provisions contained in the manual, which has a revised date of February 22, 2019, have been further amended by DHS through "Internal Communication Forms" (ICFs), which are akin to internal memoranda. Each of those revisions to the department's procedures was originated by the Social Services Division's Program Development Office 2 (Program Development Office), which is separate from CWSB, and approved by different DHS personnel, including the administrator of the Program Development Office and CWSB's Assistant Branch Administrator. Among other things, the department created more lenient timeframes for licensure through ICFs that effectively lengthened the amount of time a child-specific home can be provisionally certified, i.e., unlicensed, while caring for a foster child. For example, approximately six months after revising its procedures manual, DHS further amended those procedures through an ICF dated August 9, 2019 (August 9 ICF), which "temporarily" extended the timeframe for licensing to 90 days. The department has issued subsequent ICFs that have rescinded and

replaced the August 9 ICF, but those ICFs have retained the 90-day period for a child-specific home to complete the licensing requirements.

The department's current procedures include two narrow exceptions that allow it to issue "one additional 60-day Provisional License":

1. Sudden death in the child-specific applicants' family allowing applicants to mourn; or

2. Adult household member is immobilized and not able to leave the home to complete FBI background check.

Those procedures also implicitly confirm the department's policy to remove a child from a home that is not able to meet the requirements to become unconditionally licensed, stating when that happens and the child is placed in another provisionally certified home, the process and timelines restart.

The conflicts between DHS' rules, CWSB's procedures manual, and the series of ICFs have created confusion among CWSB licensing staff about how long child-specific homes may be provisionally certified. Even the Resource Home Licensing Unit Supervisor was unclear about provisional certification timelines after six months on the job and after signing off on a handful of extensions. One CWSB licensing worker told us, "[For] the rules itself I ask my co-workers because there is so much change in the last couple of years as far as how we process things …. You know lately I can't even keep up with them because they keep changing." Another employee brought up discrepancies between provisional certification procedures and DHS' rules, noting that the timing of initial application was 60 days and now it is 90 days, and it is unclear where "administration" got the 90 days from.

In addition to the confusion caused by ICFs, we also question the department's authority for amending *legal requirements* through internal procedures and how that achieves the department's stated goal "to unconditionally approve all homes and to minimize the time a home is provisionally licensed." More specifically, the State's policy to allow child-specific homes to care for children while completing the licensing requirements is clear: the department can issue a provisional certificate, "*not to exceed sixty days*," to a child-specific home that is unable to complete the requirements for licensure, "if it is reasonable to assume that all licensing requirements will be met within sixty days" and there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of a child. We do not believe that the department has the legal authority to ignore those policies or to override them through administrative action.

Neither Chapter 346-17, HRS, nor Chapter 17, Section 1625, HAR, explicitly provide for extensions or issuance of multiple provisional certificates. The ability to approve longer provisional certificates – discretion that the department granted itself in the administrative rules that it promulgated – needs to be balanced against DHS' obligation to ensure there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of a child while the home is unlicensed. The maximum length of a provisional certificate, i.e., "not exceeding 60 days," in the administrative rules presumably reflects the department's determination that such period was reasonable for a foster family to complete the licensing requirements and was the appropriate balance between the importance of providing certain stability for a foster child and the risk to a child that the unlicensed home may not be a safe, stable, and nurturing environment. However, through the procedures intended to guide CWSB licensing workers, the department extended the length of provisional certificates by an additional 30 days and added the ability to issue a second provisional certificate of 60 days without regard to the requirements of the Hawai'i Administrative Procedures Act, Chapter 91, HRS (see sidebar on page 27). In total, the procedures consider child-specific homes operating without completing the licensing requirements for *150 days* (or *five months*), which is *more than double* the number of days than is legally permitted. Moreover, the procedures do not direct either the branch's placement workers or licensing workers to assess whether the child-specific home is reasonably likely to meet the licensing requirements within 60 days, which is a condition to issue the provisional certificate under DHS' administrative rules.

Allowing children to remain in foster homes that cannot – or sometimes knowingly will not – complete the department's licensing requirements within 60 days is inconsistent with the department's higher mandate to protect abused and neglected children. However, we found DHS' actual licensing practices to be even more concerning and contrary to the legal mandates and the department's goal to minimize the time a home is provisionally licensed. Those practices, which are described below, fall well-short of the licensing requirements in the department's administrative rules and even the department's expanded procedures, creating significant risk that a foster child is in an inappropriate environment and reducing the State's federal foster care reimbursements under Title IV-E.

"The expectation is that these children will be in homes that will keep them safe … I think we follow the rules, and we try to do our best with that, and on occasion kids are being hurt in these homes."

– CWSB Administrator

CWSB's actual licensing practices did not comply with the legal requirements or even the department's procedures.

During our audit planning, the CWSB Administrator identified the branch's licensing of foster homes as the activity posing the most risk to children. The CWSB Administrator told us: "The expectation is that these children will be in homes that will keep them safe … I think we follow the rules, and we try to do our best with that, and on occasion kids are being hurt in these homes." However, in practice, we found the department followed neither the legal requirements nor its internal licensing procedures for child-specific homes. The department's actual licensing practices did not align with its goal: "*to unconditionally approve all homes and to minimize the time a home is provisionally licensed*." We found that, once a provisional certificate is issued to a child-specific home, the department generally allowed a child to be in the home seemingly *indefinitely*, without regard to whether the relative (or other persons) fostering the child and others in the home were making any meaningful effort to complete the licensing requirements.

We reviewed approximately 10 percent of CWSB's 995 active resource caregiver homes on O'ahu, Maui, East and West Hawai'i, Moloka'i, and Kaua'i, 59 of which related to child-specific homes. We assessed whether the department's licensing process was consistent and in compliance with legal requirements; we did not assess the process by which each unit licensed child-specific homes because, as explained in the second finding, the department had contracted with Catholic Charities to compile and complete the requirements for the department to license foster homes. However, it appeared that each unit – and each licensing worker – tracked the status of provisional certificates differently, using their own methods.

Based on the 30 child-specific homes that had achieved licensure prior to our file review, we found the licensing process took, on average, 314 days – *over 10 months* – to complete, meaning children stayed for months or longer in homes the department had not verified met State and DHS standards for safety, health, housing, and sanitation. When we looked at all 49 homes we analyzed, we determined that 43 homes cared for children under provisional certificates for longer than 60 days, which is the *legal deadline* for child-specific homes to complete the licensing requirements in the department's administrative rules. With the additional 30 days that DHS added to the length of a provisional certificate through its internal procedures, only three of the 49 child-specific homes completed licensing requirements within that expanded period, i.e., within 90 days. Those same procedures direct that the child will be removed from a foster home that is unable to complete the licensing requirements within that time period, which the department did not do.

Misuse of provisional certificates kept children in homes that had not met DHS' standards for health, safety, housing, and sanitation for months longer than state law allows.

Only 22 percent of the child-specific home licensing applications in our sample were issued a license within 150 days – or, stated differently, *78 percent of the child-specific homes in our sample remained unlicensed after 5 months*. In fact, half of the applications were open for 270 days or more. Even under the department's procedures, the *maximum* number of days for a child-specific home to complete DHS' licensing requirements is 150 days – the first provisional certificate of 90 days and a second provisional certificate of 60 days. While neither the statute nor the administrative rules allow the department to extend or issue a second provisional certificate – according to the law, child-specific homes must complete the licensing requirements within 60 days – the department, through its procedures, granted itself the ability to issue "*one additional* 60-day Provisional License" (emphasis added). But even that is limited to two very specific and narrow circumstances: a death in the applicant's family or an immobile adult household member who cannot leave the house to complete the required FBI background check.

The CWSB Administrator told us, "[We've] got to figure out why the home is not licensable … Children should not be in homes where it is not vetted and safe, and the expectations have not been met." Yet, the department extended provisional certifications for all – 100 percent – of the child-specific homes whose licensing files we reviewed. In those files, we saw instances where multiple extensions and provisional certificates had been issued without any documentation or even a reference about either of the two conditions for which the procedures allow another provisional certificate. The "exceptions" that support one additional provisional certificate seem to be quite uncommon, which suggests that CWSB licensing workers, in practice, were not restrained by those exceptions. Based on our sample, the department commonly issued *multiple* provisional certificates to child-specific homes – all of the homes in our sample needed more than 60 days to meet licensing requirements. Those numbers cause us to question whether licensing staff were made aware of the CWSB Administrator's position – and the legal requirement – that children should be removed when homes do not satisfy the licensing requirements.

The Administrator described that position as clear cut, but explained it was also a "big picture" perspective; supervisors and administrators may offer different instructions based on what is happening in the foster home, such as directing workers to continue encouraging the family to get overdue paperwork completed if maintaining placement stability is deemed in the child's best interest. For example, an O'ahu

Administrative rules must be amended through a formal process that invites public participation

BECAUSE THEY HAVE "THE FORCE AND EFFECT OF LAW," administrative rules are adopted only after a well-defined, rigorous process required under the Hawai'i Administrative Procedures Act, Chapter 91, HRS, that includes posting of the proposed rules and proposed amendments to existing rules as well as holding public hearings. Governor approval is also required for the adoption, amendment, or repeal of any rule. However, in contrast, DHS' process to "amend" rules through its procedures manual – and subsequent ICFs – does not involve any of the requirements and safeguards of the statutory rulemaking process. As we found, DHS changes its procedures, which seemingly attempt to change legal requirements, without any notice to the public, including the affected child-specific homes, whenever it (or the Assistant Program Administrator) decides.

licensing worker stated extensions are acceptable only under extreme circumstances, but explained that CWSB issues additional provisional certificates when foster homes have made continued progress toward licensure but the branch could not complete a home study on time, something that DHS' contractor is responsible for doing. "Of course, we'll extend for that," the licensing worker said. The O'ahu Licensing Unit Supervisor had been told completing the licensing process within 90 days is reasonable, but had come to believe six months is more realistic.

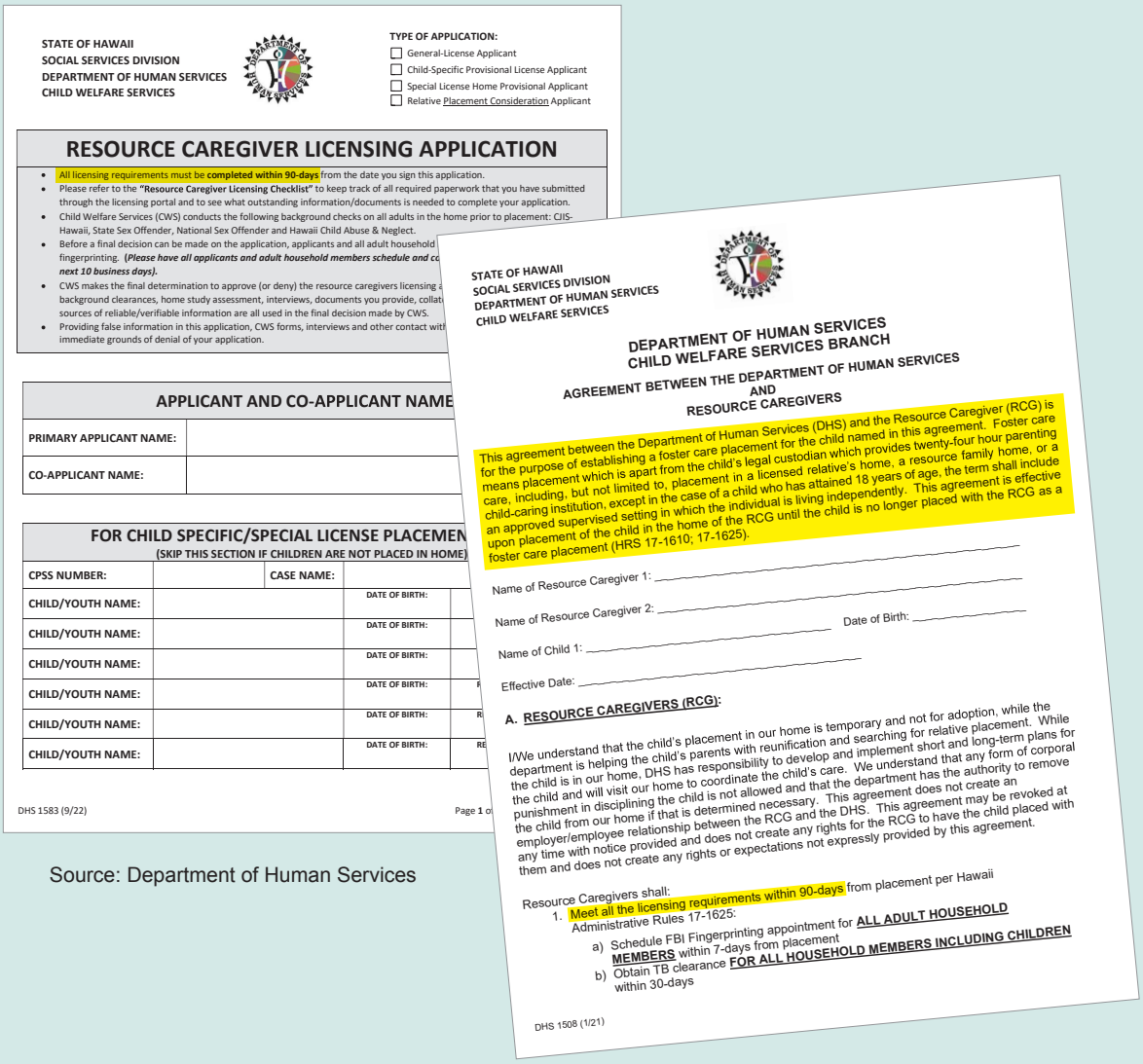
The supervisor and the branch's licensing staff may believe that extending provisional certificates is appropriate in certain circumstances or that the licensing process cannot be completed in 60 days; however, their discretion to extend provisional certificates is constrained by and must be consistent with the statute and administrative rules, which are legal requirements that they do not have the authority to disregard. The statute delegated to DHS the authority to establish licensing standards through administrative rules, which it did. And, as we described above, those administrative rules limit the length of a provisional certificate to no more than 60 days and simply do not provide for an extension or the issuance of more than one provisional certificate to a child-specific home.

CWSB covers lapses in provisional certification by retroactively approving extensions.

Our review of the licensing files revealed many examples – concerning examples – of the department's use of provisional certificates to keep children in child-specific homes, none of which complied with legal requirements or were otherwise allowed. We found foster home applicants were regularly granted multiple, consecutive provisional certificates or extensions that allowed them to continue caring for foster children for months, sometimes more than a year, without meeting DHS' licensing standards. Of the 49 child-specific files we analyzed, we found 18 child-specific homes cared for children under provisional certificates *for more than a year* – during which time applicants lacked background checks, training, and completed home studies. We identified one case in which at least one foster child had been housed in a home with only a provisional certificate for *720 days* through the end date of our random sample, September 14, 2023. We do not know whether the home subsequently completed the licensing requirements or the children have been removed.

We list below three of the more egregious situations that we identified in the child-specific home licensing files that we reviewed:

1. A child-specific home cared for six children over a 606-day period without a provisional certificate or license. While not all six children were in the home for the entire 606 days, we calculated the length of time each child was in the unlicensed home – 1,672 days collectively.



STATE OF HAWAII
SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

TYPE OF APPLICATION:
- ☐ General-License Applicant
- ☐ Child-Specific Provisional License Applicant
- ☐ Special License Home Provisional Applicant
- ☐ Relative Placement Consideration Applicant

RESOURCE CAREGIVER LICENSING APPLICATION

- All licensing requirements must be **completed within 90-days** from the date you sign this application.
- Please refer to the **"Resource Caregiver Licensing Checklist"** to keep track of all required paperwork that you have submitted through the licensing portal and to see what outstanding information/documents is needed to complete your application.
- Child Welfare Services (CWS) conducts the following background checks on all adults in the home prior to placement: CJIS-Hawaii, State Sex Offender, National Sex Offender and Hawaii Child Abuse & Neglect.
- Before a final decision can be made on the application, applicants and all adult household
fingerprinting. ***(Please have all applicants and adult household members schedule and co***
next 10 business days).
- CWS makes the final determination to approve (or deny) the resource caregivers licensing
background clearances, home study assessment, interviews, documents you provide, collat
sources of reliable/verifiable information are all used in the final decision made by CWS.
- Providing false information in this application, CWS forms, interviews and other contact wit
immediate grounds of denial of your application.

APPLICANT AND CO-APPLICANT NAME

PRIMARY APPLICANT NAME:	
CO-APPLICANT NAME:	

FOR CHILD SPECIFIC/SPECIAL LICENSE PLACEMEN
(SKIP THIS SECTION IF CHILDREN ARE NOT PLACED IN HOME)

CPSS NUMBER:		CASE NAME:	
CHILD/YOUTH NAME:		DATE OF BIRTH:	
CHILD/YOUTH NAME:		DATE OF BIRTH:	
CHILD/YOUTH NAME:		DATE OF BIRTH:	
CHILD/YOUTH NAME:		DATE OF BIRTH:	
CHILD/YOUTH NAME:		DATE OF BIRTH:	
CHILD/YOUTH NAME:		DATE OF BIRTH:	

DHS 1583 (9/22)

STATE OF HAWAII
SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES BRANCH

AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
AND
RESOURCE CAREGIVERS

This agreement between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Resource Caregiver (RCG) is for the purpose of establishing a foster care placement for the child named in this agreement. Foster care means placement which is apart from the child's legal custodian which provides twenty-four hour parenting care, including, but not limited to, placement in a licensed relative's home, a resource family home, or a child-caring institution, except in the case of a child who has attained 18 years of age, the term shall include an approved supervised setting in which the individual is living independently. This agreement is effective upon placement of the child in the home of the RCG until the child is no longer placed with the RCG as a foster care placement (HRS 17-1610; 17-1625).

Name of Resource Caregiver 1: _____

Name of Resource Caregiver 2: _____

Name of Child 1: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Effective Date: _____

A. **RESOURCE CAREGIVERS (RCG):**

I/We understand that the child's placement in our home is temporary and not for adoption, while the department is helping the child's parents with reunification and searching for relative placement. While the child is in our home, DHS has responsibility to develop and implement short and long-term plans for the child and will visit our home to coordinate the child's care. We understand that any form of corporal punishment in disciplining the child is not allowed and that the department has the authority to remove the child from our home if that is determined necessary. This agreement does not create an employer/employee relationship between the RCG and the DHS. This agreement may be revoked at any time with notice provided and does not create any rights for the RCG to have the child placed with them and does not create any rights or expectations not expressly provided by this agreement.

Resource Caregivers shall:

1. Meet all the licensing requirements within 90-days from placement per Hawaii Administrative Rules 17-1625:
   a) Schedule FBI Fingerprinting appointment for **ALL ADULT HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS** within 7-days from placement
   b) Obtain TB clearance **FOR ALL HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS INCLUDING CHILDREN** within 30-days

DHS 1508 (1/21)

Source: Department of Human Services

A Requirement in Name Only?

GENERAL LICENSE HOMES must complete all licensing requirements before caring for foster children. However, child-specific placements may occur with limited notice, and those prospective foster home applicants often are unable to complete the licensing requirements prior to the placement in a child-specific home. In those cases, DHS issues a provisional certificate, which allows the applicant time to complete licensure requirements while caring for the child.

The deadline for completing the licensing process is clear: "All licensing requirements must be **completed within 90-days** from the date you sign this application." It is the first line of DHS' Resource Caregiver Licensing Application. In addition, meeting this requirement is first of the many caregiver responsibilities listed in the department's Agreement between the Department of Human Services and Resource Caregivers.

During that time, the home was missing tuberculosis clearances and a home study, as well as FBI fingerprints for one adult in the home. According to the file, both caregivers had "significant" criminal and child welfare histories and the husband's child with another woman had been placed in foster care in 2005 due to the husband and the other woman's substance abuse issues. The file further stated that an Assistant Program Administrator had opted to provide assistance to help the home move toward licensure.

2. CWSB granted a provisional certificate and placed three foster children in a child-specific home on September 3, 2021. According to the case file, the initial home visit did not take place until January 6, 2022, approximately four months after the children were placed. The resource caregiver was subsequently granted four more provisional certificates, including one backdated to cover 157 days that foster children had been living in the unlicensed home with an expired certificate.

   According to the case file, on August 31, 2022, CWSB sent a letter informing the family that its provisional certificate had been extended from August 31 to December 2, 2022, reminding the applicants of pending licensing requirements including personal references, a copy of a marriage certificate, the home study, and the final visit with a social worker. At that point, the children had been in the home just short of one year, and DHS would issue one more provisional certificate before the home was licensed on February 3, 2023, 17 months after the foster children were placed in the home.

3. A child was placed in a child-specific home that applied for a provisional certificate on May 4, 2022. Although the home was still missing several licensing requirements, CWSB placed a second child in the home on January 12, 2023. A letter from CWSB dated May 11, 2023, 372 days after the first child was placed, informed the foster home applicant that the provisional approval to care for both children had been extended to cover three 60-day periods; notably, the first and second "extensions" were approved retroactively, the first went into effect on January 31, 2023, and the second on April 1, 2023. The letter informed the applicant of a third extension through July 29, 2023, and listed the outstanding licensing requirements:

   - FBI and state criminal clearance
   - Medical report
   - Completion of mandatory training
   - Proof of financial stability
   - Current driver's license and no-fault insurance information
   - TB clearances for all household members

REPORT NUMBER: KFLC3 717 — STATE OF HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES — PAGE NUMBER: 3
UNIT: 39 — UNIT OVERDUE ELIGIBILITY REVIEWS USING PROVISIONAL EXPIRATION DATE AS OF 07/31/2023 — RUN DATE: 07/31/2023

FAMILY/FACILITY NAME	FAC TYPE	FACILITY ID	PROV EXPIRATION DATE	MOS O/D	WKR ID
[redacted]	SLH	FOS0197350	07/13/2022	12.8	1877
	SLR	FOS0189160	06/10/2022	13.9	1877
	SLR	FOS0200870	09/28/2022	10.2	1877
	SLH	FOS0208010	02/04/2023	5.9	1877
	SLR	FOS0208270	04/11/2021	28.0	1877
	SLR	FOS0208510	05/05/2021	27.2	1877
	SLH	FOS0117730	11/01/2022	9.1	1877
	SLR	FOS0130950	02/28/2022	17.3	1877
	CFH	FOS0134700	03/20/2022	16.6	1877
	SLR	FOS0217850	07/09/2023	0.7	1877
	SLR	FOS0014200	04/20/2022	15.6	1877
	SLR	FOS0050070	12/29/2022	7.1	1877
	SLR	FOS0215840	01/22/2022	18.5	1877
	SLR	FOS0216410	03/06/2023	4.9	1877
	CFH	FOS0216430	04/01/2023	4.0	1877
	SLR	FOS0216640	03/29/2023	4.1	1877
	SLH	FOS0216650	03/29/2023	4.1	1877
	SLR	FOS0213330	06/18/2022	13.6	1877
	SLR	FOS0213380	06/01/2022	14.2	1877
	SLH	FOS0214780	10/19/2022	9.5	1877
	SLH	FOS0214840	10/25/2022	9.3	1877
	SLR	FOS0214800	10/03/2022	10.0	1877
	SLR	FOS0215060	11/14/2022	8.6	1877
	SLR	FOS0215080	10/29/2022	9.2	1877
			TOTAL MONTHS OVERDUE:	274.4	
			AVERAGE MONTHS OVERDUE:	11.4	
			TOTAL CASES OVERDUE:	24	

Overdue but Under-reported
One CWSB unit's Office of Information Technology report shows that 24 provisionally certified home extensions were overdue for nearly a year on average.

Source: Department of Human Services and the Office of the Auditor

Monthly Reports Show Nearly Year-long Delays in Licensing

"OIT reports" are meant to be used in internal meetings to discuss the status of each provisionally licensed home and steps needed to get it fully licensed. Those meetings were not consistently held.

EACH MONTH, DHS' Office of Information Technology (OIT) generates reports that CWSB licensing workers use to track the expiration date of provisional certificates and the recertification date for foster home licenses. These "OIT reports," which are circulated as paper printouts, compile information about homes that will need license renewals within the next few months, provisionally certified homes that must be licensed within 90 days, homes with lapsed licenses, and homes with expired provisional certificates.

We received sample OIT reports from licensing units across the state, which only capture a snapshot in time, but still offer an illuminating image. For instance, one unit's report of "overdue eligibility reviews using provisional expiration date," shows that on July 31, 2023, licensure for 24 provisionally certified homes was overdue by 11.4 months (or approximately 342 days) on average. A closer look at that report shows that nine child-specific homes had at least one licensing requirement pending more than one year after their provisional certificate expired; two of those homes still had outstanding licensing requirements after two years. An eligibility worker supervisor explained that the purpose of the report is to provide a running list of provisionally certified caregivers and indicate which homes need extensions to their provisional certification and which need a further push to meet requirements. Licensing workers use these reports daily, the worker said.

According to the Resource Home Licensing Unit (RHLU) Supervisor on Oʻahu, the OIT reports are meant to be used in one-on-one meetings between the licensing worker and the supervisor to discuss the licensing status of each home and what steps are needed to get the home fully licensed. However, those meetings were not happening consistently when the Supervisor started the job in April 2023. In September, the Supervisor informed us via email that the unit was "re-establishing ongoing and consistent one-on-one monthly supervision with each of the RHLU Licensing staff to further discuss the OIT reports and actions to follow up with the support of the [resource caregivers] being unconditionally licensed."

Taking no for an answer

During an initial home visit, two household members refused to comply with licensing requirements. CWSB awarded the child-specific home a provisional certificate anyway.

ACCORDING TO a CWSB licensing worker, following the initial home visit on January 10, 2022, two household members were unwilling to fill out the forms necessary for the home to obtain licensure as well as make FBI fingerprint appointments. Specifically, these two household members stated that they did not want to complete fingerprint appointments because they were immigrants from the Philippines. Despite this refusal, a provisional certificate was awarded to the child-specific home.

The home would operate under a provisional certificate for 456 days until all four children were removed from the home. One child was removed on March 18, 2022, and the remaining three children were removed and the home closed on February 21, 2023. The reason for the closing: "household members refused to get fingerprinted."

- Personal references
- Long- and short-term childcare plans
- Fire escape plan
- Parenting practices
- Resource family basics
- Home study and assessment by Catholic Charities
- Home visit by DHS/CWSB after receipt of the file from Catholic Charities

By not complying with legal requirements, DHS increased the risk to children in foster care and lost out on funding for services to support abused and neglected children.

Allowing children to remain in homes that have not completed the minimum requirements the department deems necessary to protect children's safety and welfare inherently increases the risk that those children may be in inappropriate environments and even harmed. As previously discussed, the department has determined that, for child-specific placements, the appropriate balance is to allow a child-specific home no more than 60 days to complete the licensing requirements.

However, the department's actual practice of allowing children to be in unlicensed homes for months, even years, longer than 60 days – a practice that is contrary to the legal requirements as well as DHS' internal procedures – greatly increases the risk to children in those homes. While we cannot determine the extent to which the department's failure to enforce its licensing requirements has resulted in actual harm to foster children, the department knows that the risk – and actual harm to children under its care – is not simply theoretical. The CWSB Administrator identified the branch's licensing of foster homes as the activity posing the most risk to children, saying "I think we follow the rules and try to do our best with that, and on occasion, *kids are being hurt in these [placement] homes*." (Emphasis added.) If children are harmed in an unlicensed home, the State faces "huge" liability, the Administrator noted.

Moreover, the State is entitled to federal reimbursement of child welfare support payments for certain foster children as well as administrative expenses; but eligibility is conditioned on foster homes being licensed. The State cannot seek reimbursement for payments to resource family homes, including child-specific homes, that have only a provisional certificate. While the department was unable to quantify the amount of lost federal reimbursement, the fact that none of the child-specific homes in our sample completed the licensing requirements within 60 days – and most (94 percent) remain unlicensed after 90 days – suggests that the State is forgoing significant federal reimbursement dollars.

Automatic Extensions?

DHS continuously extends licenses and issues provisional certificates to homes with lapsed licenses that cannot meet requirements at the time of renewal.

TO MAINTAIN ACTIVE LICENSURE, foster homes must repeat many requirements annually or upon renewal, including certain background checks and clearances that are only considered "current" for one year. While administrative rules require resource family homes to "immediately report" changes or circumstances that may impact their certificate of approval or their ability to care for children, the renewal process requires the agency to make affirmative checks on a regular basis. As with initial applications, DHS rules allow CWSB to issue a provisional certificate to foster homes that do not meet all licensing requirements at the point of renewal "if it is reasonable to assume that all licensing requirements will be met within sixty days and that there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of a child."

CWSB maintains a Licensing Resource Files database that contains licensing/certification information necessary to claim federal foster care funds and generate reports used by CWSB to develop policy and planning decisions. The data we sampled included 50 general license and child-specific foster homes with renewed licenses; of those, 37 homes took more than 60 days to complete the renewal process.

In one of those cases, a license was retroactively renewed 230 days after it expired. The renewed license also lapsed, this time for 237 days, and another child was placed in the home and a new adult moved in while the home was unlicensed. DHS renewed the home's license before doing any background checks or FBI fingerprinting for the new adult household member and backdated the license, an extension, and a provisional certificate to cover the lapses in licensure. The home cared for three children at different times while the home was unlicensed.

In another case, a home that initially required two extensions to its provisional certificate before obtaining a license later needed three extensions totaling 271 days before meeting requirements for renewal. The process for that home's third license was extended by approximately 11 months: CWSB granted the home a three-month extension to its unconditional license, followed by a six-month provisional certificate to care for two children. Both extensions were referred to in a letter from CWSB reminding the caregivers they had 45 days to complete six hours of required training before their provisional certificate expired, and warning them, "Your home will automatically close [when the provisional certificate expires] if the pending licensing requirement is not received by that day." Nevertheless, the resource caregiver requested and was granted an extension to meet the six-hour training requirement; the training was completed two months later, and an unconditional license was approved soon after.

"Largely Noncompliant"

Missing numerous licensing requirements, a resource caregiver ignored contractor's weekly and monthly phone calls, text messages, and emails for nearly a year. Nevertheless, CWSB awarded the caregiver seven extensions to her provisional certificate, allowing the home to operate without a license for nearly 17 months.

On November 2, 2021, a child-specific resource caregiver home was granted a 90-day provisional certificate to care for four children. CWSB would approve seven extensions to the provisional certificate despite the resource caregiver's failure to complete the FBI fingerprinting and concerns about drug use and unsafe living conditions reported by Catholic Charities.

On April 5, 2022, CWSB simultaneously approved two extensions to the provisional certificate, the first retroactively dated to be effective from February 1, 2022, and the second extending the certificate through May 31, 2022. At the time the extensions were granted, the caregiver had not completed the required FBI and state criminal background clearances, submitted personal references, obtained TB clearances, medical and clinical reports, or had a home study conducted by Catholic Charities. Moreover, by this point, four mandatory background clearances conducted prior to placement were no longer current; according to DHS procedures, child abuse and neglect registry clearances, Hawai'i Criminal Justice Information System clearances, and state and national sex abuse registry clearances are only valid for one year.

On May 24, 2022, while conducting a visit of the home, a CWSB licensing worker noted the presence of a man outside of the house who was gathering his belongings and preparing to leave. The caregiver explained that the man was her brother, who is impaired due to injuries sustained in prior years. For years, the brother had come to the home to sit outside and wait for their father, who had passed away. While the caregiver confirmed that the brother talks to himself, she said that he had not exhibited aggressive behavior toward the children who had become accustomed to his presence.

On June 14, 2022, CWSB approved another extension of the provisional certificate, retroactive to June 1, 2022 and effective through July 30, 2022. The extension was granted despite CWSB's repeated efforts to contact the resource caregiver about providing required documents, including FBI and state criminal history clearances for an adult son living at the home. As chronicled by a CWSB licensing worker on October 10, 2022, the licensing worker requested assistance from a CWSB social worker, relaying challenges in getting the caregiver to complete licensing requirements or even respond.

The social worker contacted the caregiver on **February 8, 2023,** and reminded her of the pending requirements. The next day, outstanding documentation notwithstanding, CWSB simultaneously approved four more provisional certificates, for a total of 193 days, retroactive to July 31, 2022 and effective through February 9, 2023. Along with the email informing the caregiver of the extensions, the CWSB licensing worker attached instructions for FBI fingerprinting to the email because the caregiver's adult son had yet to comply with this requirement. The worker also included a warning: "I can't stress enough that it's important that these requirements are completed soon as your home can't remain on a provisional license."

Nine days after the final extension was approved, the home was closed, and three minor children were removed due to sex abuse allegations. One child was already aged out at 18 and lived elsewhere.

On February 22, 2023, Catholic Charities prepared a Child Specific Resource Home Closing Summary noting the resource caregiver had been largely noncompliant during the licensing process. In addition to the caregiver's failure to complete more

The "Cover Letter"

In one correspondence, CWSB retroactively awarded three extensions to a provisional certificate even though the caregiver repeatedly failed to provide required documentation.

Prior to this February 9, 2023, correspondence, CWSB awarded extensions for three provisional certificates, a six-month period covering February 2, 2022 to July 30, 2022. The three extensions were retroactively awarded despite repeated efforts by the CWSB licensing worker to contact the resource caregiver about providing required documents, which included FBI and state clearances for an adult son living at the home, medical and clinical reports, and TB clearances.

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STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Social Services Division
Child Welfare Services Branch
Oahu Child Welfare Services Section 3
Resource Home Licensing Unit
420 Waiakamilo Road, Suite 300B
Honolulu, Hawaii 96817

February 9, 2023

On February 21, 2023, 12 days after the final extension was approved, the home was closed, and three minor children were removed due to sex abuse allegations.

[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

We wish to inform you that the provisional approval of your resource home has been extended. The approval is for the care of [redacted] for the period of July 31, 2022 to September 28, 2022. The provisional approval of your resource home has also been extended for the care of [redacted] for the periods of September 29, 2022 to November 27, 2022; November 28, 2022 to January 26, 2023; and January 27, 2023 to March 27, 2023.

CWSB retroactively extends the caregiver's provisional certificate three more times for a total of almost eight months, from July 31, 2022 to March 27, 2023, even though the caregiver has yet to provide the required documentation.

An unconditional certificate will be sent to you when the following requirements are met:

X FBI clearances for [redacted]
X Medical report for [redacted]
X TB clearances for [redacted]
X Clinical report for [redacted]
X One personal reference
X Home study by CCH

The missing items are identical to the ones listed in CWSB's June 14, 2022 letter, which awarded the resource caregiver with a 60-day extension to her provisional certificate.

A home visit will be scheduled when your file is received back from CCH. The outstanding requirements are due as soon as possible. *For children to remain in placement, the requirements for approval must be met.* If there are any questions regarding the above information, please contact me at [redacted]
We wish to express our appreciation for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
[redacted]
Licensing Social Worker

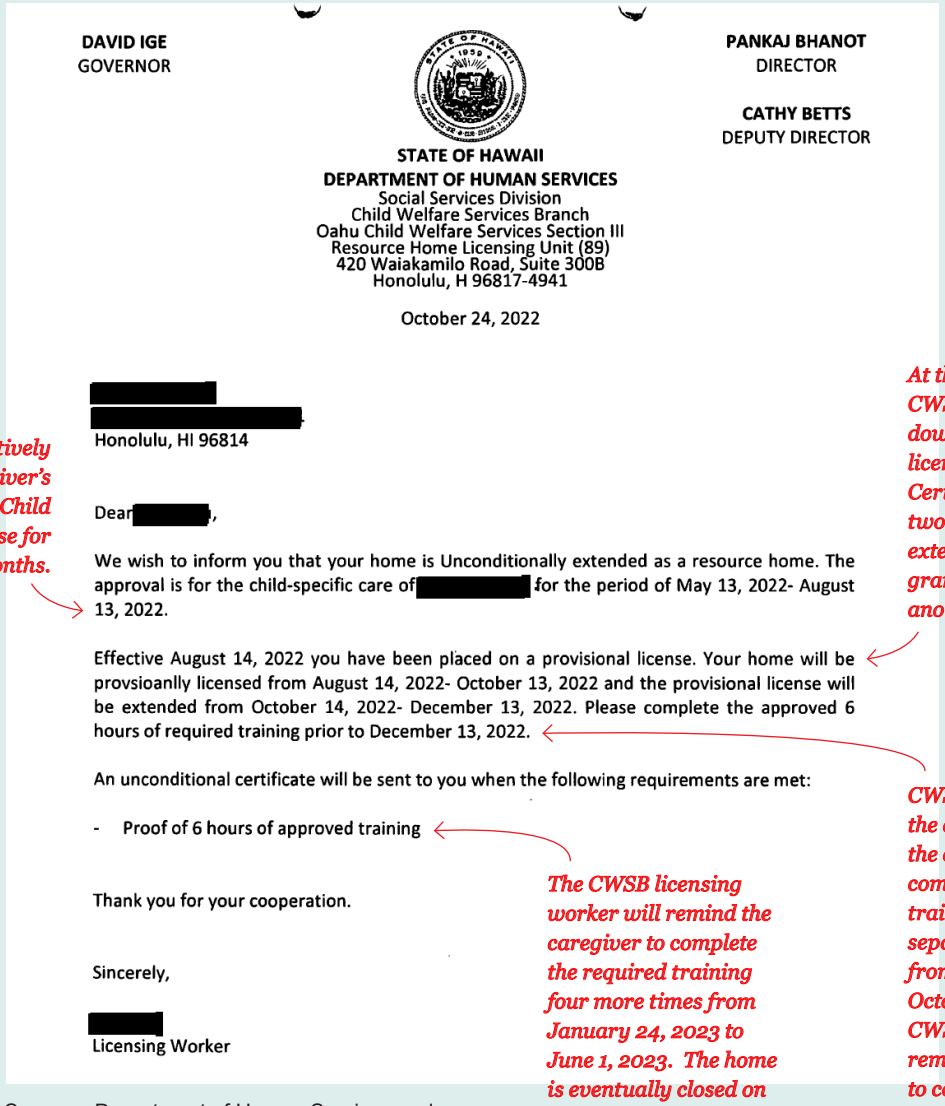
Cc: [redacted]

Sources: Department of Human Services and the Office of the Auditor

than a half-dozen licensing requirements, the summary cited previous concerns about a deranged uncle smoking a metal pipe and a child potentially sleeping in an unventilated attic. According to Catholic Charities, the resource caregiver had not responded to the agency's weekly and monthly phone calls, text messages, and emails for nearly a year while continuing to care for multiple foster children.

Another "Cover Letter"

In one correspondence, CWSB retroactively and simultaneously extended and downgraded an unconditional license even though the caregiver failed to complete required training.



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Oahu Child Welfare Services Section III
Resource Home Licensing Unit (89)
420 Waiakamilo Road, Suite 300B
Honolulu, H 96817-4941

October 24, 2022

[redacted]
Honolulu, HI 96814

Dear [redacted],

We wish to inform you that your home is Unconditionally extended as a resource home. The approval is for the child-specific care of [redacted] for the period of May 13, 2022- August 13, 2022.

Effective August 14, 2022 you have been placed on a provisional license. Your home will be provsioanlly licensed from August 14, 2022- October 13, 2022 and the provisional license will be extended from October 14, 2022- December 13, 2022. Please complete the approved 6 hours of required training prior to December 13, 2022.

An unconditional certificate will be sent to you when the following requirements are met:

- Proof of 6 hours of approved training

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Licensing Worker

CWSB retroactively extends the caregiver's Unconditional Child Specific License for three months.

At the same time, CWSB retroactively downgrades the license to a Provisional Certificate, good for two months, and then extends the newly granted certificate for another two months.

CWSB has granted the extension despite the caregiver not completing required training. On five separate occasions, from April 22, 2022 to October 24, 2022, the CWSB licensing worker reminded the caregiver to complete six hours of required training.

The CWSB licensing worker will remind the caregiver to complete the required training four more times from January 24, 2023 to June 1, 2023. The home is eventually closed on September 29, 2023.

Sources: Department of Human Services and the Office of the Auditor

Powerless

Only after a child-specific home loses power – twice – did CWSB suspend the resource caregiver's provisional certificate and remove the child.

ON AUGUST 20, 2019, a resource caregiver applied for an Unconditional Child Specific License for the care of a non-relative youth with special needs. The resource caregiver, who had worked with the child since elementary school, was one of the 24-hour caregivers for the child, along with rotating nurses and the child's grandfather. Both grandfather and grandson lived in a small one-bedroom apartment.

The caregiver was awarded a 90-day provisional certificate the same day the application was submitted. CWSB would award the resource caregiver eight extensions to that provisional certificate between November 11, 2019 and May 13, 2021.

In a letter dated October 24, 2022, CWSB concurrently and retroactively (a) extended the license, effective May 13, 2022 to August 13, 2022; (b) downgraded the license to a provisional certificate, effective August 14, 2022 to October 13, 2022; and (c) awarded another extension effective October 14, 2022 to December 13, 2022. In addition, CWSB requested that the resource caregiver complete six hours of mandatory training by December 13, 2022. Between April 22, 2022 and September 14, 2023, the day we reviewed the file, CWSB would make eight separate requests that the resource caregiver complete the required training, to no avail.

But overdue training requirements were only part of the reason the home could not be licensed. On October 24, 2022, the resource caregiver had informed the CWSB licensing worker that the grandfather was having difficulty paying his electric bills. On September 1, 2023, the child's social worker informed the licensing worker that the home had no electricity. The licensing worker suggested the child be removed from the home as living conditions were no longer sustainable. However, no action had been taken when we asked to review the home's file on September 14, 2023.

Notes added to the home's file record communications between CWSB and the resource caregiver on September 14, 2023, the day of our review, stating the home was still without electricity and according to the caregiver, they were "running an extension cord from the neighbor's home again." The file further noted that the home had no power for an undetermined amount of time in May 2023 and for more than two weeks in September 2023, a particular concern since the child was medically fragile. A letter bearing the same date as the home visit informed the caregiver that no further provisional certificates would be issued, citing noncompliance with DHS administrative rules that require foster homes to meet acceptable state standards on housing and sanitation and to ensure that required equipment and appliances are available and functioning. The letter further noted that the training requirements had been overdue for roughly 16 months.

On September 29, 2023, the home was closed, and the child was placed in another home the following day.

Finding No. 2

DHS reimbursed contractors' personnel and administrative costs without assessing whether performance goals were met.

DHS has entered into nearly 100 contracts with private organizations, spending more than $48 million to support CWSB's efforts to strengthen families and protect children who have been abused, neglected, and/or threatened with maltreatment. These include contracts to recruit foster families as well as to expedite the licensing of foster homes, which is the activity that the CWSB Administrator identified as posing the most risk to children, as well as to the State. The Administrator told us: "If a child gets hurt in a home that's not licensed it's devastating and the liability around that is huge. So, any home that comes at least to the attention of the Supervisor, the Administrator, or myself it's clear the expectation is you remove the child. You don't even place children in a home that is not licensed [or] licensable."

In an effort to expedite the licensing process, DHS has contracted with Catholic Charities, and has since 2006. The current contract, which pays $2 million annually, requires Catholic Charities to perform home studies and to compile the other documentation necessary for CWSB to complete foster family licensing within 90 days of placement.[3] However, paying Catholic Charities to do that work has not resulted in an expedited licensing process. As described in Finding 1, of the 49 randomly selected child-specific home files that we were able to analyze, no home was licensed within the legal deadline of 60 days and only three within the current contractual requirement of 90 days. In our sample, for the homes that had licenses, it took an average of 314 days for DHS to issue the license from the date of the application.

And yet, we are unaware of any consequence to Catholic Charities when it failed to meet the annual goal of licensing 100 percent of child-specific homes within 90 days – a goal set by the department and adopted by Catholic Charities which represented it to be "reasonable and achievable." One of the reasons for this lack of accountability is that DHS has yet to establish a contract monitoring infrastructure – clear lines of responsibility to monitor contractor performance, documented policies and procedures, a monitoring plan, and criteria – a legal requirement staff were unaware of prior to our audit. As a result, staff in the Program Development Office and the Support Services Office, which are separate offices under the Social Services Division, were

[3] Prior to the current contract, Catholic Charities was required to complete the assessments required for CWSB to license a child-specific home within 60 days of placement. As reported above, the department purported to expand the duration of a provisional certificate from 60 days, as set forth in its administrative rules, to 90 days through an Internal Communication Form issued on August 9, 2019.

confused over not only which office should be fulfilling that legal requirement but what that job would entail.

More significantly, DHS was seemingly unconcerned about monitoring and evaluating contractor performance despite numerous provisions in its contracts that require DHS to consider whether Catholic Charities had "satisfactorily performed" the contracted services, including, for example, when processing payment. Per the contracts' Compensation and Payment Schedule, DHS agreed to pay Catholic Charities "[f]or services satisfactorily performed." With performance seemingly irrelevant, DHS' contract "monitoring" had been conflated with its reimbursement of Catholic Charities' expenses. In other words, DHS paid Catholic Charities for the people it employed to do the contracted work regardless of how or even if that work was getting done.

That means, despite contracting for licensing support services, DHS not only left foster children in homes it could not verify met health, safety, and housing standards, risking their safety, it also left federal money on the table that could have reimbursed the State for a portion of its foster care-related expenditures and administrative costs. It also means that DHS continued to pay Catholic Charities $2 million year-after-year without holding Catholic Charities accountable for performing those services that are intended, among other things, to expedite the licensing of foster homes.

DHS contracted with private organizations to "expedite" the licensure of child-specific homes.

We reviewed DHS' two most recent contracts to support CWSB's licensing of child-specific homes: the first with Partners in Development Foundation, in collaboration with Catholic Charities and Family Programs Hawai'i, effective from June 26, 2019 to June 30, 2021 (the 2019 Contract),[4] and the second with Catholic Charities, which has been in effect since July 1, 2021 (the 2021 Contract).[5] As outlined in the respective requests for proposals (RFPs) that resulted in the award of these contracts, the goal of the services to be provided under both contracts is, among other things, to "expedite child-specific trainings and licensure . . . as well as to maximize federal Social Security Act Title IV-E funding."[6] The RFPs described Title IV-E funding as

[4] Catholic Charities was responsible for completing the required foster home certification requirements and reports for DHS to assess applications for licenses of child-specific homes. (See sidebar on page 40.)

[5] For purposes of our audit, the primary difference between the scope of services in the 2019 Contract relating to the licensing of child-specific homes and the 2021 Contract is the outcome performance measurement: under the 2019 Contract, homes were to be unconditionally licensed within 60 days; the 2021 Contract allows a 90-day license window.

[6] The RFPs and the providers' proposals are incorporated into the respective contracts.

The Contracts

The 2019 Contract

In February 2019, DHS issued a request for proposals for *Resource Family Recruitment, Training, Home Study, and Support* for licensing services. In June 2019, the department contracted with Partners in Development Foundation to recruit, train, and license foster homes, both general license and child-specific. The contracted services were to be provided by a collaboration called Hui Hoʻomalu, comprised of Partners in Development Foundation, Catholic Charities, and Family Programs Hawaiʻi. Partners in Development Foundation would provide recruitment, training, assessment, and required document collection for general license applicants, while Catholic Charities would provide those same services for child-specific applicants.

The annual total funding for the 2019 Contract was not to exceed $4.05 million, with nearly $2.1 million of that amount relating to the licensing of child-specific homes, Catholic Charities' part of the contract.

The 2021 Contracts

In February 2021, DHS issued a request for proposals for *Resource Caregiver Recruitment, Licensing & Support Services*, the substantively identical services provided under the 2019 Contract. In August 2021, the department retroactively awarded three separate contracts for the solicited services: one to Partners in Development Foundation for recruitment of foster families, a second to Catholic Charities for licensing of both general license and child-specific homes, and a third to Catholic Charities for support services.

The Catholic Charities contracts are for a two-year period starting on July 1, 2021, with annual maximum contract amounts of $2 million for licensing services and $800,000 for support services. Both include two options, each to extend for two years.

"an essential component of the DHS/CWS budget" that is available to the State only for those homes with unconditional licenses. The RFPs also included certain General and Special Conditions that require Catholic Charities, as the contracted provider, to comply with Hawaiʻi law, including, specifically, Title 17, Section 1625, HAR, which are DHS' administrative rules relating to licensing of foster homes, as well as DHS' policies and procedures.

Both contracts have required Catholic Charities, each fiscal year, to complete assessments of at least 325 child-specific homes statewide,[7] which include face-to-face interviews with each household member, and to provide reports to CWSB on all child-specific home applications as well as other documentation required for CWSB to unconditionally license the homes. The 2021 Contract expressly notes that "[c]ompleted assessments within 90 days of placement for child-specific licensure shall provide the necessary support to the applicant resource families, foster children, and birth families as well as maximize federal IV-E funding."

Although the pricing structure in both the 2019 and 2021 Contracts was characterized as "cost reimbursement," where the State pays the Provider up to a maximum annual contract amount for budgeted costs actually expended in the delivery of the contracted services, performance of the contracted services is required for reimbursement of those costs. Specifically, in accordance with the Contracts' Compensation and Payment Schedule, Catholic Charities is paid the allowable costs that it actually and appropriately incurred in the performance of the Contracts for:

a. Maintaining the capacity to fully deliver services in compliance with the terms and conditions of the Contracts, and throughout the terms of the Contracts; and
b. Satisfactorily performing the services under the Contracts.

Both the RFPs and the 2019 and 2021 Contracts describe how Catholic Charities' performance of the contracted

[7] The number of unconditionally licensed child-specific homes that Catholic Charities is required to "minimally provide" under both contracts total 325.

Performance Matters

Although the pricing structure in both the 2019 and 2021 Contracts was characterized as cost reimbursement, performance of the contracted services is required for reimbursement of those costs.

STATE OF HAWAII

COMPENSATION AND PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Cost Reimbursement Pricing

This Original Contract provides funding for FY 2022 and FY 2023 for the delivery of one (2) years of Licensing Services from July 01, 2021 through June 30, 2023.

The Provider's final budget, including all amendments and revisions which have been accepted by the State, shall be incorporated into this Contract as part of this Attachment 3. All terms and conditions of this Compensation and Payment Schedule are valid and enforceable.

1. Payment Conditions and Sum

Subject to the continuing availability of State and Federal funds, the State agrees to pay the Provider:

a. For the maintenance of the capacity to fully deliver services in compliance with the terms and conditions, and throughout the term, of this Contract.

b. For the services satisfactorily performed under this Contract.

c. For the expenditures actually and appropriately incurred in the performance of this Contract, according to a budget for costs approved by the State, by the submittal of invoices supported by the required documentation specified by the State.

Cost reimbursement still requires performance of the contracted services.

The total sum, unless otherwise agreed, shall not exceed:

TWELVE MILLION DOLLARS AND 00/100 DOLLARS ($12,000,000.00)

This sum shall be allocated as follows for the specified fiscal years:

	FY 2022		FY 2023		FY 2024	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
State Funds	$2,000,000.00	100.00	$2,000,000.00	100.00	$2,000,000.00	100.00
Total Federal Funds	$0.00	0.00	$0.00	0.00	$0.00	0.00
Annual Maximum Contract Amount	$2,000,000.00	100.00	$2,000,000.00	100.00	$2,000,000.00	100.00

Source: Department of Human Services

services will be monitored and evaluated. For example, the RFPs state that the resulting contracts "shall be monitored by DHS" in accordance with Chapter 103F, HRS, and will include "review of program and fiscal reports and periodic assessment of service delivery and program effectiveness" as well as an annual review of Catholic Charities' "compliance with contractual requirements." The Contracts contain performance measurements, called "Output and performance and outcome measurements," which are the criteria by which Catholic Charities' performance of the Contracts are to be monitored and evaluated, and specifically require Catholic Charities to "maintain the capacity to deliver services throughout the contract term as specified in the Performance Measurement Forms A, B, and C, Section 2" of the RFPs. Those Performance Measurement Forms reflect DHS and

Promises Made

In the 2021 Contract, Catholic Charities claimed that it would meet the department's projected goals. However, of the 49 randomly selected child-specific home files that we analyzed, only 3 were licensed within 90 days.

LICENSING FORM C: OUTCOMES	Annual Goal for Contract Year	
	DHS' PROJECTED GOALS	APLICANT'S PROJECTED GOALS
GENERAL LICENSE		
1. % of new GL resource families who are unconditionally licensed within 90 days	100%	100%
2. % of resource families who are still active with the department 15 months following licensure or approval	75%	75%
CHILD SPECIFIC LICENSE		
1. % of new CS resource families who are unconditionally licensed within 90 days	100%	100%
2. % of CS resource families who are still active with the department 15 months following licensure or approval	75%	75%

Source: Department of Human Services, Contract No. DHS-22-POS-0008 (sic)

Catholic Charities' annual performance and outcome goals: to license 325 child-specific homes and to unconditionally license 100 percent of the child-specific homes within 90 days of CWSB's receipt of the foster home application.[8]

In its proposal relating to the RFP for the 2021 Contract, Catholic Charities expressed its ability to achieve those performance and outcome goals. In describing its licensing process for child-specific homes, Catholic Charities stated, "[h]ome studies and supporting licensing documents will be submitted [to CWSB] within 60 to 75 days of referral." Catholic Charities also emphasized that awarding it both the licensing contract and a contract for support services that DHS was procuring separately "will facilitate the requirement for meeting the 90-day deadline for licensing [child-specific homes]." DHS awarded both contracts to Catholic Charities.

DHS is required by law to monitor and evaluate Catholic Charities' performance under the contracts.

The department procured the licensing support services under Chapter 103F, HRS, which applies to all contracts made by state agencies to provide health or human services to Hawai'i's residents. Contracts awarded under Chapter 103F, HRS, including those awarded

[8] In the 2019 Contract, DHS and Catholic Charities' goal was to unconditionally license 100 percent of child-specific homes within 60 days.

to expedite the licensing process, are generally exempt from Chapter 103D, HRS, *Hawai'i Public Procurement Code*, but are subject to the requirements of Title 3, Chapter 149, HAR, *Licensing*. Those administrative rules are intended "to provide uniform practices and procedures for drafting, monitoring, and evaluating contracts awarded under [C]hapter 103F, HRS."

With respect to monitoring contractor performance, Section 3-149-401, HAR, *requires* DHS to "formulate and implement a monitoring plan" that includes:

1. A manual or other set of guidelines that includes the objectives, procedures, and requirements of the monitoring process;

2. Procedures to document reported problems or recommendations between the provider and the department; and

3. A clear procedure for follow-up on recommendations, problems, and items requiring corrective action, including deadlines for both reporting and responding to such items.

In addition, Section 3-149-501, HAR, requires DHS to evaluate every contract awarded through a competitive purchase of services method within 120 days after the expiration or termination of the contract. According to the rules, DHS must establish criteria and procedures to evaluate the contracts, which, at a minimum, include a final written evaluation assessing the extent to which performance outcomes were met as well as discussion of problems or adjustments to those outcomes, as applicable.

DHS did not monitor its contracts with Catholic Charities for performance. Instead, it focused on reimbursing the contractor's personnel and administrative costs.

We found DHS neither formulated nor implemented a contract monitoring plan as it is legally required to do; it did not have "[a] manual or other set of guidelines that include the objectives, procedures, and requirements" to monitor contractor performance or procedures to document reported problems or recommendations required by Section 3-149-401, HAR, the administrative rules relating to health and human services contracts. In fact, the Support Services Office Administrator was not even aware of the requirement that DHS develop a monitoring plan until we discussed the applicable administrative rules during the audit. The Support Services Office includes the Purchase of Services Unit (the Purchasing Unit) that is identified in the RFPs as "responsible for overseeing the contracts resulting from this RFP including systems operations, fiscal agent operations, and *monitoring and assessing the Provider's performance*." (Emphasis added.)

Irrespective of the legal requirement, we discovered that DHS had not established procedures to monitor or assess contractor compliance with contract terms. Instead, the contract "monitoring" DHS did do was limited to reviewing the number of Catholic Charities personnel assigned to the contract for the purpose of reimbursing Catholic Charities for those personnel-related costs each month. DHS did nothing to assess Catholic Charities' performance of the contracted licensing support services or to hold Catholic Charities accountable for performing those services. The actual performance of the services was seemingly ignored and effectively deleted from the contracts.

Although identified in the RFPs as the unit responsible for overseeing the Catholic Charities' contract as well as for "monitoring and assessing" Catholic Charities' performance, the Purchase of Services Specialist told us that the Purchasing Unit does not monitor contractor performance. The Specialist said it was not the Purchasing Unit's responsibility to ensure Catholic Charities satisfactorily performed the services for which it was contracted to perform before approving payment of the monthly invoices. The Support Services Office Administrator agreed that the Purchasing Unit's role is mainly procurement, not managing performance of the contract requirements. According to both, contrary to what was stated in the RFPs, the Program Development Office is responsible for ensuring satisfactory performance of the contract. The Program Development Office is also under the Social Services Division but separate from the Support Services Office.

The Purchase of Services Specialist said that the Purchasing Unit primarily reviewed and approved Catholic Charities' monthly invoices, comparing the monthly payroll expenditure report against the approved personnel budget to ensure that Catholic Charities maintained the appropriate number of staff. In addition, the Purchase of Services Specialist reviewed the quarterly activity reports submitted by Catholic Charities to understand what services were rendered based on the contract's goals and informed the Program Development Office of concerns that may have arisen from their review of the reports. The Purchase of Services Specialist did not track or otherwise monitor Catholic Charities' performance of contract goals. The Specialist emphasized that the Program Development Office is responsible for determining whether the contractor met the contract's goals.

The Program Development Administrator, however, initially told us that the Purchasing Unit monitors Catholic Charities' performance of the contract, then clarified that the responsibility was shared by both the Program Development Office and the Purchasing Unit. While monitoring contract performance may be the responsibility of the Program Development Office or the Purchasing Unit or both, we found neither monitored Catholic Charities' performance of the services under the contracts.

Although the Contracts' terms require satisfactory performance before payment is made, DHS has yet to withhold or even reduce payment to Catholic Charities based on lack of performance.

While the payment structure of both Contracts is intended to reimburse Catholic Charities for its actual expenses, payment of those expenses is also premised on satisfactory performance of the services under the Contract. The Contracts, by their terms, require DHS – whether that be the Purchase of Services Specialist or someone else – to ensure that Catholic Charities satisfactorily performed the contracted services *before* processing any invoice for payment. According to the Contracts, if Catholic Charities' performance is less-than-satisfactory, Catholic Charities is not entitled to reimbursement (or to full reimbursement) of the expenses it incurred performing sub-par services.

The Contracts include other criteria by which Catholic Charities' performance of the services is supposed to be monitored and evaluated, including annual performance and outcome goals, which offer another means to assess whether Catholic Charities is "satisfactorily performing" the services. Among other things, DHS and Catholic Charities each agreed to the goal of unconditionally licensing 100 percent of child-specific homes within 90 days (and the goal in the 2019 Contract was within 60 days) from the date of the application. To achieve that goal, Catholic Charities must complete the services for which it is contracted to perform: home studies and compiling the documents required for CWSB to license child-specific homes.

Catholic Charities neither performed the services in accordance with the contract requirements nor achieved the contracts' performance and outcome goals. And, of greater concern, Catholic Charities' underperformance of the services for which DHS paid $2 million each year was readily apparent to DHS. Because the department places children in the homes and licenses the homes, DHS was well-aware that it was licensing very few child-specific homes within 90 days. The internal OIT reports used by CWSB staff to track licensing status of child-specific homes showed, among other things, the expiration date of a provisional certificate and the number of months that a provisional certificate had been expired. (See page 31) The 49 child-specific home files we analyzed generally confirmed the information available to CWSB staff in the OIT reports: slightly more than 6 percent of the child-specific homes were licensed within 90 days and, on average, it took 314 days to complete the licensing process. While the applications relating to those child-specific homes may not all be from the same fiscal year, we believe that the results are representative of Catholic Charities' performance: the services Catholic Charities performed resulted in far less than 100 percent of child-specific homes being licensed within 90 days.

Defining by Doing

THE MONITORING of contracts defines what actions the agency will take in order to ensure that the contractors are delivering the results required in the contract standards.

– Casey Family Programs, a foundation focused on reducing the use of foster care in the United States

We also reviewed Catholic Charities' quarterly activity reports for each of the quarters during FY2022 and found that Catholic Charities missed its annual goals, benchmarks, and outcomes meant to expedite the licensing process for child-specific homes. Those reports show that Catholic Charities completed home studies for about 62 percent of the child-specific homes that it is contractually responsible to license annually. Specifically, in FY2022, Catholic Charities reported completing the licensing for 201 child-specific homes; the 2021 Contract required licensure of 325 child-specific homes. Those reports, however, do not reflect the amount of time that lapsed between the initial filing of the application and licensure of the homes.

We understand that DHS did not pay Catholic Charities the full amount of the Contracts when they had less than the number of staff performing services than it was contractually required to maintain. However, it is our understanding that DHS has not withheld or even reduced payment to Catholic Charities based on performance.

Reported but Unnoticed?

Catholic Charities' FY2022 quarterly activity report clearly shows that the contractor's work fell far below the stated annual goal. It is unclear if anyone took note of this deficiency.

Annual Goal: 325 Resource Families
Qtr. Total/YTD: Actual number of activities performed (unduplicated).

SERVICE ACTIVITIES	Annual Goal	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Total of Completed Child-Specific Home Studies Submitted to DHS	-					
O'ahu	175	33	21	19	16	89
West Hawai'i	40	6	6	6	6	24
East Hawai'i	40	9	8	14	19	50
Kaua'i	20	6	2	2	3	13
Maui	35	11	2	3	6	22
Moloka'i	10	2	0	1	0	3
Lāna'i	5	0	0	0	0	0
STATEWIDE TOTAL	325	67	39	45	50	201

Source: Department of Human Services

With contracting duties split between two offices, monitoring contractor performance has fallen through the cracks.

Social Services Division staff knew Catholic Charities fell short of performance goals in the 2021 Contract meant to expedite the process so all foster homes can be licensed within 90 days of a child's placement. Yet, the 2021 Contract was extended to June 30, 2025, raising questions about how the division monitored and evaluated its contractor's performance. The simple answer is that they didn't, at least not in any formal manner.

The lack of oversight can be partly attributed to DHS' decision to segregate contracting duties between different sections under its Social Services Division – one section develops the scope of services, and another procures the services. While one section pays the monthly invoices, neither that section nor the other section ensures that contractors actually performed the work for which they are contracted to do. CWSB, whose work the contracts are intended to support, is not one of the sections involved in contracting, managing the contract, or even evaluating contractor performance. In fact, for the three contracts relating to licensing, the CWSB Administrator admitted to not reading the contracts and did not know the specific work for which the contractor has been contracted to do.

We interviewed the Social Services Division Administrator, whose division includes the Program Development Office and the Purchasing Unit as well as CWSB, to gain an understanding of how the division's contracts are monitored, including the contracts' goals and performance measures. The Social Services Division Administrator told us the responsibility lies with both the Program Development Office and the Purchasing Unit. According to the Social Services Division Administrator, the Purchasing Unit is responsible for ensuring the terms of the contract are being satisfied, while the Program Development Office is responsible for addressing any contract-related issues with the provider. This generally aligns with how the Program Development Administrator described the separation of duties.

The Support Services Office Administrator had a different take, stating that the Program Development Office – not the Purchasing Unit – is responsible for monitoring contractors' performance. The Support Services Office Administrator described the Purchasing Unit's role as primarily financial in nature, with staff reconciling the contractor's monthly expenditure report, which includes personnel costs and line items, with the invoice the contractor submits to DHS for payment. The Support Services Office Adminstator said the Purchasing Unit does not have the staff to monitor the contractor's performance, but even if it did, it would not take on that responsibility. "How can I monitor when

The Proof is in the Performance

OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES, states have increasingly turned to performance-based contracts to deliver human services, a trend facilitated by policy guidance issued by the federal government in the late 1990s and early 2000s, accompanied by best practices concerning performance-based contracting for other services. According to a paper prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are several definitions of "performance-based contracting," but most refer to contracts that include clearly identified objectives and measures to examine performance, consistent processes for data collection, reporting and assessing results, and incentives (and potential consequences) based on performance.

Lost in Administration

According to the Social Services Division Administrator, responsibility for monitoring performance of the division's contracts, including the contracts' goals and performance measures, lies with both the Program Development Office and the Purchasing Unit. Neither does.

I don't even know where those goals came from, and I don't set the policies tied to the contract? [The Program Development Office] sets the policies; they [are] the one that is responsible."

We note that the division of responsibilities seems relatively clear on paper. DHS' RFPs in 2019 and 2021 identified the Purchasing Unit as the Contracting Office "responsible for overseeing the contracts resulting from this RFP including systems operations, fiscal agent operations, and monitoring and assessing the Provider's performance." The 2019 RFP also stated, "The Applicant is charged with presumptive knowledge of all requirements of the cited authorities," referring to Chapter 103F, HRS, and an unspecified HAR. But the Purchasing Unit staff we interviewed did not seem to understand the legal requirements themselves. Notably, neither the Support Services Office Administrator nor the Purchase of Services Specialist named as the contact person in the RFP for the 2021 Contract were aware of the administrative rules that require the unit to develop a plan to monitor contractors' performance and perform post-contract evaluations that include analyses of whether defined performance outcomes were met.

By failing to hold Catholic Charities accountable for its contractual performance, DHS is not receiving the intended benefits of the contracts.

DHS contracted with Catholic Charities to expedite the licensing of child-specific homes, requiring, among other things, that Catholic Charities provide 325 licensed child-specific homes each fiscal year and establishing a performance outcome goal to license 100 percent of child-specific homes within 90 days. Catholic Charities has not fulfilled those requirements or come anywhere near to those performance goals. DHS has not formulated a monitoring plan and did not ensure Catholic Charities met performance outcomes; however, DHS was aware that it was not licensing child-specific homes within 90 days and that the support services Catholic Charities was paid to perform have not expedited the licensing of child-specific homes. Notwithstanding that payment to Catholic Charities was for services "satisfactorily performed," DHS reimbursed Catholic Charities without regard to performance. By effectively removing performance from the Contracts' payment conditions, DHS' payments to Catholic Charities – $2 million each year – constitute waste, which, according to the Comptroller General of the United States, includes when funds are used carelessly or to no purpose.

In addition to constituting waste of the state funds, DHS' failure to hold Catholic Charities accountable for its performance of the Contracts likely resulted in additional costs to the State. Both RFPs described Title IV-E funding as "an essential component of the DHS/CWS budget"

that is available to the State only for those homes with unconditional licenses. Title IV-E funding was also emphasized in CWSB's licensing procedures: DHS is not able to claim federal reimbursement for either support payments to foster families or administrative costs for eligible children in provisionally certified homes. While the department was not able to quantify the amount of lost federal reimbursement, the fact that no child-specific homes in our random sample completed the licensing requirements within 60 days – and most (78 percent) remained unlicensed after 150 days – suggests that the State has been forgoing significant federal reimbursement dollars.

A perceived scarcity of available providers is DHS' rationale for not holding contractors accountable for achieving contract goals.

Instead of holding Catholic Charities accountable for its sub-par performance, DHS "rewarded" Catholic Charities by extending the contracts for another two years, from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2025. Both contracts contain nearly identical "Performance Terms," describing the term of the contracts, the number of possible extensions, and the term of each extension. The performance terms also include "Conditions for an extension," two of which are "Full service delivery in compliance with the terms and conditions of this Contract" and "Satisfactory performance." According to that unambiguous language, DHS is required to consider those conditions when it extends the contract.

However, the Social Services Division Administrator said that the division's practice is to automatically grant contract extensions unless there is a compelling reason to terminate – such as unresolved issues with underperformance and complaints. The Administrator, as previously noted, had not been informed of any concerns related to Catholic Charities' performance. But the Assistant Branch Administrator told us, "I know meeting the 90 days hasn't happened after contracting," when asked whether the contracts with Catholic Charities have been effective.

We asked the Social Service Division Administrator how DHS holds contractors accountable for achieving contract goals. The Administrator alluded to a different rationale for extending the terms of contracts, pointing out that few contractors can offer the types of services required for how much DHS can afford to pay for those services. Upon the termination of a contract, the Administrator worries no new qualified applicants will offer their services. While we acknowledge the Administrator's concern about attracting new qualified providers, contractors paid with state dollars need to be held accountable for delivering the services they are contractually obligated to perform.

Even more concerning, DHS allowed foster children to remain in unlicensed child-specific homes well beyond the period allowed by law, CWSB's policies, or any reasonable standard simply because the home study and/or certain documentation required to complete the licensing process had not been completed – services for which DHS pays Catholic Charities $2 million annually to perform. In addition to putting children at risk, accepting Catholic Charities' non-performance increases the financial risk to the State. While we cannot quantify that risk, as the CWSB Administrator told us, "If a child gets hurt in a home that's not licensed it's devastating and the liability around that is huge." The CWSB Administrator added, "You don't even place [a child] in a home that's not licensed [or] licensable."

Conclusion

DHS, through its Child Welfare Services Branch, has a critical mission: to provide child welfare services for children who have been abused, neglected, or threatened with maltreatment, which includes placing children in foster homes until those children can be reunited with their families or placed with permanent adoptive parents or legal guardians. The importance of that responsibility – protecting Hawai'i's keiki – simply cannot be overstated. Neither can the difficulties that the branch experiences in performing its work.

The Legislature, through Chapter 346, HRS, and the department, itself, through its administrative rules, have established state policies with respect to child welfare services. Those policies create the *legal* framework under which DHS and CWSB are required to provide child welfare services; neither has the discretion nor the authority to ignore those legal requirements or to change them through internal administrative action.

Both Chapter 346, HRS, and DHS' administrative rules require foster homes to be licensed by the department in order to care for a child. That requirement provides reasonable assurance that the foster home meets minimal health and safety standards, including confirming that adult household members do not have criminal histories that would disqualify the home from caring for a child. DHS has recognized the need for provisional certificates, which are akin to temporary licenses, so children can be placed in child-specific homes while those caregivers complete the licensing requirements. However, the law is clear: those provisional certificates are "not to exceed 60 days" and may be issued to a child-specific home only "if it is reasonable to assume that all licensing requirements will be met within 60 days and there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of the child." If applicants do not complete these requirements by the time their provisional certificates

expire, the child must be placed in another home that can qualify for licensure. We found that DHS' process to license child-specific homes did not comply with those legal requirements. DHS often allowed children to remain in child-specific homes for months – even years – that had not, and sometimes would not, complete the licensing requirements.

DHS has contracted with Catholic Charities, which it pays $2 million a year to perform home studies and to compile the other documentation necessary for CWSB to complete foster family applications within 90 days of placement. The performance goals in the contracts are clear: 325 child-specific homes licensed every fiscal year and 100 percent licensed within 90 days; however, contracting with Catholic Charities has not resulted in an expedited licensing process, which is one of the purposes of the contracts. Of the randomly selected child-specific home files that we reviewed, none of the homes were licensed within the legal deadline of 60 days and only 3 within the current contractual requirement of 90 days; on average, for the 30 child-specific homes that had licenses, DHS took 314 days to issues those licenses, with some taking significantly longer.

We found DHS did not monitor or evaluate Catholic Charities' performance. DHS had not implemented a contract monitoring plan, including procedures to monitor performance, that is required by law, and in fact, administrators of the DHS offices with responsibilities relating to the Catholic Charities contracts were unaware of the legal requirement. What is more concerning is that Catholic Charities' performance was apparently not a concern to the department. While we did not audit Catholic Charities' performance, DHS knew that Catholic Charities' performance of the contracts to support CWSB's licensing of foster homes was, at best, poor. Nonetheless, DHS reimbursed Catholic Charities for its personnel and administrative costs even though the payment under the contracts is "for the services satisfactorily performed." Instead of assessing performance, the division took a "do-your-best" approach to contract administration, helping ensure that contract goals were not achieved.

The end result is that contractor invoices were paid, and contracts were renewed, regardless of how or whether the work was being done. The State did not receive federal reimbursement of certain foster home support payments for children in foster homes that only had provisional certificates. Worst of all, children were put at risk.

Recommendations

The Department of Human Services should,

Regarding licensing of child-specific homes:

1. Ensure that the Department of Human Services' policies and procedures relating to licensing of resource family homes are consistent with Chapter 346, HRS, and Title 17, Chapter 1625, HAR. Document the processes employed by the department and/or the branch to implement this recommendation to inform management, including supervisors, administrators, and others charged with governance. Management is responsible to ensure that the department and its divisions comply with and operate in compliance with legal requirements.

2. Develop and document policies and procedures, including specific criteria, that Child Welfare Services Branch workers will use to determine whether "it is reasonable to assume that all licensing requirements will be met within 60 days and there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of a child" before issuing a provisional certificate to a child-specific home. The policies and procedures should require Child Welfare Services Branch workers to document their determination based on the criteria developed by the department. Documentation will allow supervisors, among others, to effectively oversee and manage Child Welfare Services Branch workers who are responsible for placing children in child-specific homes under provisional certificates.

3. Amend the applicable portions of the *Child Welfare Services Procedures Manual*, specifically, "Part IV – Licensing," and any relevant Internal Communication Forms to require child-specific homes to be unconditionally licensed by the 60th day from a child's placement in the home.

4. Amend the applicable portions of the *Child Welfare Services Procedures Manual*, specifically, "Part IV – Licensing," and any relevant Internal Communication Forms that allow the Department of Human Services and/or the Child Welfare Services Branch to issue provisional certificates for greater than 60 days. Provisional certificates should be for no more than 60 days. See Sections 17-1625-2, 17-1625-10, 17-1625-11, HAR.

5. Amend the applicable portions of the *Child Welfare Services Procedures Manual*, specifically "Part IV – Licensing," and any relevant Internal Communication Forms that allow the Department of Human Services and/or the Child Welfare Services Branch to issue more than one provisional certificate to allow a child-specific home more than 60 days to complete the licensing requirements. Neither Chapter 346, HRS, nor Title 17, Chapter 1625, HAR, authorize the Department of Human Services to issue more than one provisional certificate to allow a child-specific home to complete the licensing requirements.

6. Amend the applicable portions of the *Child Welfare Services Procedures Manual*, specifically "Part IV – Licensing," and any relevant Internal Communication Forms to make clear that the Department of Human Services and/or the Child Welfare Services Branch will not extend a provisional certificate for the purpose of allowing a child-specific home more than 60 days to complete the licensing requirements. Neither Chapter 346, HRS, nor Title 17, Chapter 1625, HAR, authorize the Department of Human Services and/or the Child Welfare Services Branch to grant extensions to a provisional certificate.

7. Develop and document policies and procedures to track the licensing status of child-specific homes, including the date by which a child-specific home must complete the requirements for licensure, i.e., 60 days from a child's placement in the home, as well as the expiration dates of licenses and provisional certificates. The policies and procedures should ensure that the processes by which licensing workers track the licensing status of child-specific homes are uniform and consistent as well as protect children from being in child-specific homes whose provisional certificates have expired. Documented policies and procedures will allow supervisors to effectively oversee and manage licensing staff.

8. Develop and document policies and procedures for supervising personnel and licensing workers to track the licensing status of general license homes, including the expiration date of licenses and, for those general license homes granted provisional certificates to complete the re-licensing (i.e., the renewal) process, the expiration dates of the provisional certificates. The policies and procedures should ensure that the processes by which licensing workers track the licensing status of general license homes are uniform and consistent as well as protect children from being in homes whose licenses have expired. Among other things, documented policies and procedures will allow supervisors to effectively oversee and manage licensing staff.

9. Identify the requirements for licensure that child-specific homes most often do not complete within 60 days; develop and document policies and procedures specific to those licensing requirements. The policies and procedures should support child-specific homes' completion of the requirements for licensure and minimize the risks that those homes are caring for children without the ability (or intent) to complete the requirements.

10. Develop and document policies and procedures to remove and relocate children in the event a child-specific home does not complete licensure requirements by the 60th day from a child's placement in the home.

11. Develop and document policies and procedures to remove and relocate children in the event a general license home does not complete licensure requirements by the 60th day from the date of the provisional certificate issued for the purpose of allowing the home to complete the requirements to renew its license.

Regarding Contract Monitoring and Evaluation:

12. Formulate and implement a contract monitoring plan as required by Section 3-149-401, HAR. The plan should identify the specific office or unit that is responsible for each of the activities described in the monitoring plan and include the procedures that each office or unit is to follow in performing their respective responsibilities.

13. Establish and implement contract evaluation criteria and procedures as required by Section 3-149-501, HAR. Procedures should identify the specific office or unit responsible for completing a written evaluation within 120 days after the expiration or termination of the contract.

14. For cost reimbursement contracts, develop and implement policies and procedures to determine whether the contractor has satisfactorily performed the services under the contract as part of the department's invoice payment processes, including criteria against which contractor performance is to be assessed or measured. For the licensing support contract that we reviewed, that criteria should include the contract's requirements and service goals as well as actual licensing data, such as the OIT reports and contractor reports and feedback from Child Welfare Services Branch licensing staff about the contractor's performance in licensing child-specific homes. Those policies and procedures should require the Purchasing Unit to determine whether contractor performance was satisfactory based on the criteria before processing

contractor payment requests. The policies and procedures should include guidance as to whether and/or how the Purchasing Unit should consider the contractor's performance in processing the payment request, specifically when the Purchasing Unit deems the contractor's performance to not meet contractual requirements or expectations. The Purchasing Unit should be required to document its review of the contractor's performance during the period for which payment is requested and its determination to process, reduce, or withhold payment. The documentation will allow management to ensure that the department is accountable for its use of state resources, including in paying contracted child welfare services providers.

15. Develop policies and procedures to hold contractors accountable for performing the services and achieving the performance goals in accordance with the contract terms. Those policies and procedures should define the office or offices that are responsible for holding contractors accountable and require feedback from the Child Welfare Services Branch about the contractor's performance of the services.

16. Develop and implement an oversight structure, identifying supervisors, administrators, or other management personnel who are responsible for ensuring that contractor performance is monitored and contractors are held accountable should they not perform the services (or meet performance requirements, measures, and goals) under the contract.

Regarding Management:

17. Demonstrate a commitment to following the legal requirements. Among other things, management should document and communicate that commitment to Child Welfare Services Branch, specifically regarding its placement and licensing of workers, affirming that child-specific homes must complete the licensing requirements within 60 days of placement. As we found, despite the risk to the children, the department allows child-specific homes to care for children without completing the licensing requirements that are intended to ensure the homes are safe and nurturing environments.

Office of the Auditor's Comments on the Department of Human Services' Response to the Audit

ON MARCH 25, 2024, we provided a draft of our audit report to the Department of Human Services (DHS) and, on April 12, 2024, met via videoconference with the department's Director, a Deputy Director, the Social Services Division Administrator, the Child Welfare Services Branch (CWSB) Administrator, the Acting Program Development Administrator, and the Complaints Liaison and Legislative Coordinator to discuss our audit findings. The department subsequently provided written comments to the draft report, which consists of a four-page cover letter containing comments signed by the Director and an attachment with six pages of additional comments. The cover letter and attachment, which we refer to herein collectively as the department's comments, are included in their entirety as Attachment 1 to this response.

On the last page of its comments, the department says that it "agrees with the fifteen (15) recommendations" in the report, which suggests that DHS concurs with our findings. The recommendations are intended to address the audit findings, i.e., they are the actions that we recommend the department implement to comply with the legal requirements relating to licensing child-specific homes and to ensure that Catholic Charities Hawai'i (Catholic Charities), or any other contractor, satisfactorily performs the licensing support services under its contract with DHS. The department's comments, however, do not reflect "agreement" with the findings. Instead, the department's comments attempt to justify its disregard of the State's policy and the legal requirements relating to the licensing of child-specific homes; that policy and those requirements are intended to ensure foster children are in safe, stable, and nurturing environments. DHS also seems to downplay the significance of its noncompliance with those legal requirements by maintaining there is no evidence to suggest that foster children were at greater risk of harm because of its noncompliance.

We are compelled to respond to the department's comments, specifically those that attempt to justify its noncompliance with legal requirements and to minimize the significance of the findings. While we recognize the challenges DHS faces in performing its work, the importance of the department's responsibility – protecting Hawai'i's keiki – simply cannot be overstated. Yet, many of the department's comments seem to reflect different priorities. We do not agree that the department has the legal

authority to amend policies relating to child welfare services set forth in Chapter 346, Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS), and its own administrative rules to prioritize things ahead of the safety of the children under its care.

DHS' paramount responsibility is the safety of children in its care

In her cover letter, the Director defends allowing foster children to remain in unlicensed homes for months – and sometimes years – saying that the department "hold[s] firm to supporting a child's placement unless there are health and safety risks." The Director advocates what seems to be the department's policy to allow children to remain in unlicensed homes by representing that well-supported research shows multiple placements have long-term negative impacts on children in foster care. That policy, and presumably the cited research, are premised on the home being a safe environment for the child. However, DHS does not know whether a foster home placement poses safety and health risks to a child *until a foster home completes the licensing requirements*. That is the purpose of the requirement that foster homes must be licensed to care for children – so the department can determine whether a home and its occupants pose a risk to a child's safety and health. The Director's comment suggests that the department prioritizes "placement stability" over the child's safety, which is irrefutably misplaced and clearly inconsistent with state law.

DHS' enabling statute, Chapter 346, HRS, is unambiguous in directing the department to prioritize the safety and health of foster children. Specifically, the law directs DHS to "[e]stablish, extend, and strengthen services for the protection and care of abused or neglected children and children in danger of becoming delinquent *to make paramount the safety and health of children who have been harmed or are in life circumstances that threaten harm.*"[1] In fact, "child welfare services" is defined to mean "[a]ll services necessary *for the protection and care* of abused or neglected children and children in danger of becoming delinquent."[2] As importantly, DHS' own administrative rules *require* foster homes – including child-specific homes – to be licensed to care for children. We are unaware of any authority that supports the department prioritizing placement stability over the legal requirement that a foster home be licensed, or overwriting the department's administrative rules about the use of provisional certificates. We also note that the State is not entitled to receive federal reimbursement of certain foster care payments to homes that have not completed the licensing requirements, meaning that prioritizing placement stability over requiring child-specific homes to complete the licensing requirements before the initial provisional certificate expires likely has caused the State to forgo significant amounts of federal funds.

[1] Section 346-14(2), HRS (emphasis added).

[2] Section 346-1, HRS (emphasis added).

The risk of harm to children is not theoretical

Perhaps as concerning, the department asserts that the audit does not support any suggestion that allowing children to remain in unlicensed homes, i.e., child-specific homes with provisional certificates, for months – and sometimes for years – puts children at risk. The department, however, is grossly misinformed. The report includes multiple bases supporting the conclusion that DHS' actions – more accurately, inactions – resulted in foster children being at risk, starting with the CWSB Administrator's candid comments during our audit planning work. The CWSB Administrator identified the branch's licensing of foster homes as the activity posing the most risk to children, telling us: "If a child gets hurt in a home that's not licensed, it's devastating and the liability around that is huge. . . You don't even place children in a home that is not licensed [or] licensable." The CWSB Administrator's statement clearly reflects the concern that there is heightened risk to children who are in homes that have not completed, or cannot complete, the department's licensing requirements. And, in our sample of child-specific homes, **none** completed the licensing requirements within 60 days after placement of the child.

Second, as stated in the department's administrative rules relating to licensing, DHS' goal is to provide temporary foster care placement in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment. Those rules require that homes be licensed to care for a foster child. The clear purpose of that requirement is to provide reasonable assurance that the home is a safe, stable, and nurturing environment. Accordingly, when a home does not complete the licensing requirements, children who DHS has placed in that home are at risk – the department simply does not know if the home is a safe environment. The department seems to have determined that, in balance, the risk to a child placed in a child-specific home is acceptable for the period of the provisional certificate, i.e., 60 days; that policy also implicitly reflects that allowing children to remain in homes that have not completed the licensing requirements beyond 60 days creates an unacceptable risk to the safety of a child, which is consistent with the department's procedures that direct CWSB licensing staff to remove the child if the home is not unconditionally licensed within that period. The child-specific homes in our sample took, on average, 314 days to complete the licensing requirements, well beyond the 60 days that the department appears to have determined is, in balance, an acceptable amount of risk.

Third, the risk of harm is not simply theoretical. We reported cases where children were *actually harmed* in child-specific homes that had not completed the licensing requirements. The department approved multiple consecutive provisional certificates to allow those homes to continue caring for the children. For example, we reported that three

children were removed from a child-specific home in February 2023 due to sex abuse allegations. DHS approved a provisional certificate for the home to care for the children over a year earlier, in November 2021, and subsequently issued multiple provisional certificates, many of which were retroactively approved. (See sidebar "Largely Noncompliant," page 34.)

In addition, we reported about a special-needs child who had been under foster care since August 2019 in a child-specific home that had been retroactively issued multiple consecutive provisional certificates. In October 2022, CWSB licensing staff were informed that the owner of the home was having difficulty paying his electric bills. When the child was removed from the home on September 29, 2023, which was prompted by our inquiry about the home a few weeks prior, it was the second time that the home did not have electricity. (See sidebar "Powerless," page 37.)

Misleading "context"

The department's comments also include a number of confusing and misleading statements. For instance, the department alleges that the conclusions are "without context," stating that the Family Court is responsible for placement decisions and repeating the department's apparent policy to prioritize placement stability. We assessed the department's compliance with the legal requirements relating to its licensure of child-specific homes. The Family Court's involvement does not change or excuse DHS' noncompliance with those requirements.

Similarly, DHS contends that we did not review applicable federal laws or policies, stating that "federal laws take precedence over state laws." While that may be true, we are unaware of any U.S. Code provision or other federal law that allows foster homes to be unlicensed when caring for children, and the department does not cite or otherwise direct us to any such federal provisions. Instead, DHS represents only that updated federal rules "eased some of the *placement* requirements." (Emphasis added.) Those updated rules, however, do not supersede Hawai'i law requiring foster homes to be licensed to care for children or the administrative rules relating to provisional certificates. Additionally, the State is not eligible to receive federal Title IV-E reimbursements for foster care payments to unlicensed homes, including child-specific homes with provisional certificates, suggesting to us that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services does not support the placement of children in foster homes that have not fully completed the department's licensing requirements.

The department argues that the administrative rules allow it to extend provisional certificates beyond 60 days. Specifically, the administrative rule states "[a] provisional certificate of approval, not to exceed sixty days, unless otherwise approved by the department may be issued to a resource family home that is unable to meet all the requirements at

the time of the study, if it is reasonable to assume that all licensing requirements will be met within sixty days and that there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of a child." DHS apparently believes the language allows it to issue an unlimited number of consecutive provisional certificates to the same child-specific home. That interpretation is unsupported by the rule's plain language. Moreover, the department's suggestion that the delays in completing the licensing requirements are "reasonably acceptable" is belied by the evidence. As we report, the department's licensing files are replete with correspondence to child-specific caregivers about the outstanding information needed to complete the licensing requirements; the files reflect that the department did nothing when the child-specific caregiver ignored those requests to provide the missing information – except issue another provisional certificate.

Irrespective of DHS' disagreement with the interpretation of the rule, we are troubled by the department's effort to discount the number of consecutive provisional certificates that were issued to the majority of child-specific homes as well as the 314 days, on average, that the homes in our sample took to complete the licensing requirements. In some instances, we found that children were in unlicensed child-specific homes for well over a year.

Catholic Charities' performance wasn't overlooked, it didn't – and still doesn't – matter

Lastly, we would be remiss if we did not address the department's comments about Catholic Charities' performance of the contracted licensing support services. DHS attempts to explain Catholic Charities' failure to complete the licensing of child-specific homes within 90 days by citing the COVID-19 pandemic. However, DHS is well-aware that the licensing delays predated the pandemic; those same delays continue today, as evidenced by the cases described in the report and the reproduced page of the Office of Information Technology report on page 31 of the report.

We also are concerned that the department's comments about the challenges that Catholic Charities may have encountered to perform the work for which it was paid to do – i.e., to expedite the licensing of foster homes, including child-specific homes – seems to again ignore the department's most important responsibility: to protect children who have been harmed or are in circumstances that threaten harm. Neither the pandemic nor other circumstances changed that responsibility. In fact, the paramount importance of DHS' child welfare duties is highlighted by the Governor's Proclamation ordering all persons in the State to stay at home in response to COVID-19: "child protection and child welfare personnel" were exempted from the order.

The department should hold Catholic Charities accountable for its performance of the contracted services instead of trying to justify its poor performance. It is simply a waste of public funds to pay $2 million year-after-year to Catholic Charities without any regard to the performance of the contracted services.

More importantly, DHS' comments attempting to excuse Catholic Charities' performance highlight the department's misunderstanding of the audit finding and, very likely, the recommendations to address the finding. We did not audit Catholic Charities' performance of the licensing support services under the contracts with DHS. We audited the department's monitoring of the Catholic Charities' licensing support contracts.

DHS says that it "was aware that the projected performance goals would likely not be met." We assume that DHS was aware of the extreme lengths of time that children were in child-specific homes that had not completed the licensing requirements. (See, e.g., the Office of Information Technology report on page 31.) However, being aware is not the same as monitoring, i.e., ensuring that Catholic Charities performs the contracted work; being aware is not the same as "formulating and implementing a monitoring plan" that includes guidelines for the monitoring process, as the law requires.

A serious misunderstanding of the audit

As apparent from this response, the majority of the department's comments are unrelated to the audit that we performed and the associated audit findings. The comments reflect a serious misunderstanding of the audit and the department's obligation to comply with legal requirements, specifically those relating to the licensing and the use of provisional certificates as well as to the monitoring and evaluation of contractor performance. Most concerning, the comments seem to reflect that the department prioritizes things over what is DHS' paramount responsibility: the safety of the children under its care.

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KA LUNA HOʻOKELE

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April 15, 2024

Mr. Leslie Kondo
State Auditor
Office of the Auditor
465 S. King Street, Room 500
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813-2917

RE: Draft Audit of the Department of Human Services Child Welfare Services Branch, Report No. 24-05 / April 2024

Dear Mr. Kondo,

The Department of Human Services administration and staff value the opportunity to review the draft audit's findings and recommendations and to work with the Auditor's office to improve our internal controls and systems. As noted in our exit interview, the Social Services Division and Child Welfare Service Branch greatly appreciated the candor and kindness of your staff.

The Department affirms its responsibility to ensure the health and safety of children who require the State's intervention and child welfare services. The complexity of working with children and families to restore a safe and nurturing home or to find a different permanent home is daunting. The field continues to evolve to meet the needs of families who lack parenting information and skills, have themselves experienced childhood adversities, lack economic resources or social or familial connections to assist or provide nurturing support, or are impacted by domestic violence or substance abuse.

While acknowledging the importance of the audit's findings and recommendations, the Department and those involved in child placement decisions hold firmly to supporting a child's placement unless there are health and safety risks. The focus of the audit regards licensing of resource family homes; in the field of child welfare, the issue of placement stability is well-researched and founded on principles of child development that a child needs consistency,

stability, and attachment to a nurturing adult to thrive. There is also well-supported research that multiple placements have long-term negative impacts on children in foster care and increase the child's risk of developing aggression, delinquency, and depression. The federal Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 changed the child welfare practice and financing model to shift the field from intervention to preventing and reducing out-of-home placements.

With the draft audit's recommendations, the Department will examine and work with the Department of the Attorney General to review the administrative rules and draft rules or propose legislation, if necessary, so that the State's statute and rules, policies and practices, better reflect the considerations of the child's health and safety, including the number of placements a child has experienced, whether there is an alternative placement and the efforts or issues to assist an appropriate resource caregiver to meet the licensing requirements.

A strong protective services system requires the agency to engage with family members who often take on the responsibility of being a child's resource caregiver and collaborate with the Judiciary, the legal community, who serve as parents' counsel or Guardian Ad Litem, health care professionals, teachers, community members, and our contracted providers. We routinely work with contracted providers to address and resolve compliance concerns to ensure our duties and obligations are carried out. We will also seek providers' input as we address the draft audit's recommendations.

However, as mentioned during the exit interview, a sense of balance needs to be added to the draft audit, which would more accurately capture the realities and conditions of the division and branch that was already experiencing staff shortages prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. A comment was noted in the draft audit referring to the amount of change that was taking place and that it was challenging for staff to keep up. From the Department's perspective, the pace of change, especially during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, required a complete and constant redesign to keep children and resource families safe while mitigating the risks to staff health and safety. Notably, in the draft audit, there is no reference to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Division staff and operations. We cannot express our appreciation enough for the resource caregivers, staff of the Social Services Division, and contracted providers for their dedication during "blue skies" and the pandemic, as the face-to-face nature of the work increased their stress, risk of exposure, and illness.

The draft audit presents a brief discussion of the high vacancy rates in the branch in 2023, which continue above 30% in 2024. Yet, the report needs to comment further on the impact of high vacancy and turnover, including retirements of significant leadership, which contribute to skills and knowledge loss that may likely lead to weakened internal controls. The struggle to maintain sufficient staffing cannot be understated. We actively recruit and fill positions, and have strongly advocated to have positions and funding restored in past sessions, including this session, as the Department faces proposed cuts of 91 positions.

We agree with the Department of Human Resource Development statement in its 2024 Act 57 (SLH 2019) report to the Legislature,

> "State employees are changing positions or leaving state service faster than departments can fill vacancies, which has caused the State's vacancy rate to increase. In addition, the Executive Branch faces an aging statewide workforce that is approximately 39% eligible to retire within the next five years."

Across the nation, human services and child welfare programs are experiencing high vacancies as private sector industries pay much higher wages for similarly skilled work. Contracted providers have also experienced high turnover and need help filling positions. Here in Hawaii, the provider community is strongly promoting government contracts to meet the true costs of services for child care, homeless services, and child protective services. Thus, we are additionally motivated to address recommendations that will lead to improved efficiencies to maximize federal reimbursement and increase revenue to the State to fund higher wages aimed at supporting the public and private human services workforce and strengthening the child welfare system.

Notably, in the effort to support the branch, the Department's Human Resources office and the Social Services Division innovated to address the high vacancy rates in the Division even before 2020 by developing and piloting the Wiki Wiki Hire process with the Department of Human Resources Development, which shortened the hiring process for Child Welfare Staff. Last year, we advocated for stipends for Child Welfare staff and an increase in funds for contract providers. We are also examining position descriptions to modernize the public workforce and add needed skills.

We have also been working with our federal oversight agency, the Administration on Children and Families, to gain authorization for our proposed IT modernization project for the Child Welfare Services. We are requesting appropriations from the Legislature for the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System. We envision that an improved and well-designed IT infrastructure will significantly assist the Social Services Division staff to have the tools to do their work and lead to more efficiencies in their case management and contract oversight.

The branch also gained the approval of the State's Family First Prevention Services Act plan—the first in federal Region IX—which shifts the agency's work to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and changes the federal reimbursement process. We will incorporate the Auditor's recommendations and insight regarding our process to increase federal reimbursements.

The Department also worked with the Department of the Attorney General, the Judiciary, law enforcement, community providers, and advocates and proposed three measures this session that clarify several state laws and establish new processes for impacted families involved in child welfare services. We are also in discussion with federal agencies and Congressional members to improve access to resources for youth who have aged out of foster care and to increase oversight of families who receive federal adoption assistance.

As we continue to engage in multiple efforts to ensure the health and safety of Hawaii's children and families, the Department will continue to address the problems identified in this draft audit with the Office of the Auditor and our partners. The detailed response is attached along with an updated Department organizational chart, as the one referenced in your draft report needed to be updated.

If you or your staff have any further questions, please contact Daisy Hartsfield, Social Services Division Administrator, at dhartsfield@dhs.hawaii.gov.

Sincerely,

Cathy Betts
Director

Attachment 1

Department of Human Services' Response to the Draft "Audit of the Department of Human Services Child Welfare Services Branch"

The Department of Human Services ("DHS") appreciates the opportunity to respond to the State Auditor's draft Audit of the Department of Human Services' Child Welfare Services Branch ("CWSB" or "branch"). The Department agrees with the draft audit's recommendations to amend existing rules, manuals, policies, and procedures to improve overall documentation and contract monitoring efforts and increase access to federal funds reimbursement.

The conclusion that children were put at risk was not supported by the data presented in the audit.

The Department of Human Services disagrees with the conclusion that the 'children were put at risk.' We want to emphasize that for each child in foster custody, a comprehensive network of professionals, including the case-assigned social worker, the child's guardian ad litem, the Family Court, and other mandated reporters, conduct ongoing risk assessments. Upon review of the cases investigated as part of the audit, we found no evidence that the involved children 'were put at risk' due to the licensing issues identified. While we acknowledge the need for policy and procedure changes, we firmly dispute the stark conclusion drawn by the audit.

The Department agrees that the applicable statutes, rules, procedures, and practices must be reviewed and amended to improve statutory compliance and facilitate contract oversight. The Department will work to ensure that those changes prioritize the health and safety of children in care and placement stability.

The conclusions were without context.

Placement decisions are made as part of a more extensive system of court monitoring for children in foster care. We contend it is necessary to highlight that the agency works within a more extensive child welfare system and does not act alone when making placement decisions. For children in foster custody, the ultimate decision on placement is the province of the Family Court. In making that decision, the Family Court receives input from the Department, parents, parents' counsel, and the child's guardian ad litem. At any time, the

parties, e.g., parents and their legal counsel, the child's court-appointed guardian ad litem, and the court can raise concerns about the appropriateness of the resource caregivers and any other concerns about the child's health or safety. These same parties can advocate to the Family Court that a child not be moved from a placement if the parties believe, despite licensing concerns, that the placement is in the best interest of the child.

In considering appropriate placements for children in foster custody, the Department always prioritizes the child's safety. The Department also considers factors like the child's needs, the proximity of the placement to the child's school, childcare, or health care provider, the willingness of the proposed placement to facilitate reunification with the parents, and other factors that affect the child's best interests. If there has been no identified risk to a child's safety, removal of that child from the resource caregiver's home can cause additional trauma to the child, and that potential trauma must also be considered in considering removal.[1]

Inflammatory graphics and terms that should be removed.

In contrast to the financial audits from the Auditor's office that the Department is responding to, the tone of this draft audit mischaracterizes quotes without context as "sound bites." It uses visual cues that appear to intend to inflame the reader versus neutrally focusing on actionable improvement.

Examples include the addition of graphics (including color-blocked, side-text information) where citations to the information and purpose of the graphic are omitted, which may lead a reader to make conclusions that are not evidence-based or fact-based. The stock photo of a child looking out of a window on the first page of the audit report needs to be more relevant to the focus on contract compliance addressed in the draft audit. Instead, the photo infers the child is alone or forgotten. The Department requests reconsideration of the use of the photo.

The use of the red circles on pages 22, 23, and 42—without explanation—places unnecessary emphasis that negatively influences the reader's interpretation and conclusion that something is amiss.

[1] See, In re AS, 132 Hawai'i at 378, (2014)(holding DHS's placement decisions remain subject to the family court's "independent best interests review"), and In re ASK, 152 Hawai'i 123, at 275, (2022).

The conclusion that resource caregiver homes could be provisionally licensed "indefinitely" was not supported by the cases investigated in the audit.

The sentence, "We found that, once a provisional certificate is issued to a child-specific home, the department generally allowed a child to be in the home seemingly indefinitely, " on page 26, is a misrepresentation. We acknowledge that the provisionally licensed homes were licensed longer than contemplated by the rules, but they were not provisionally licensed indefinitely. The provisionally licensed homes were all eventually licensed. The provisional licenses were also time-limited based on case factors like the return of the child to their family or the child being adopted. Notably, the average length of stay in an out-of-home placement in SFY 2023 was 17 months.

The box on page 29 is misleading, and the appropriateness and fairness of using "A Requirement in Name Only?" is questionable. An individual who has been asked to become provisionally licensed so that they can care for a specific child is not similarly situated as an individual who is interested in becoming a resource caregiver for any child in foster care. Hence, there are different procedures for individuals who begin with a provisional license.

The review period conducted for the audit report was from September 2022 through October 2023, with a sampling of 103 files, of which 44 were general licensed resource homes and 59 were child-specific resource homes. The analysis, however, is based on 49 of the child-specific resource homes.

The Department requests which sampling approach was used in the draft audit; the Department is at a disadvantage in adequately responding to the validity of the information drawn from the sample size and its applicability to the population of licensed resource caregivers (provisional or unconditional).

Federal policies and guidance also inform child welfare policies and procedures.

The draft audit did not review applicable federal laws or policies, which would have been necessary to understand the federal requirements that must be adhered to by CWSB if the State is to accept federal funding, which is used for child welfare services. Review of federal laws, especially ones where federal funding is provided to a state government, is beneficial when analyzing a state's compliance with legal requirements because, typically, federal laws take

precedence over state laws. Additionally, the September 28, 2023, amendments to 45 CFR 1355.20 and 1356.21(m) updated federal rules regarding placement with relatives or kin, which eased some of the placement requirements. These 2023 federal amendments are not yet reflected in our administrative rules.

Notably, no one in the Department's executive leadership, including the Director or Deputy Directors, was interviewed as part of the audit despite statements during the audit exit interview regarding the executive leadership roles and functions. The lack of participation of the Department's executive leadership resulted in a void of information as part of this audit.

The draft audit should mention that the Department instituted the use of a web portal[2] launched in July 2021 to improve the timeliness of the licensing process. This is significant because the portal became the mechanism to process applicants and illustrates the intent and commitment to address delays in licensing.

Unfortunately, the launch of the portal was not without additional technical issues that needed to be addressed and resolved. Other reasons for the delay in obtaining an unconditional license were challenges in finding interpreters for applicants, waitlists for training, and availability to do fingerprints due to limited access to authorized fingerprinting sites and fingerprinting machines. As mentioned in the draft audit, capacity issues continue to impact all levels of child welfare significantly. An example of this is how the absence of one employee who was on leave during the timeframe of the audit and thus unavailable impacted the audit because this person likely would have had much personal knowledge to provide specific details regarding the contract at issue. We do acknowledge the audit process highlights the need to strengthen our day-to-day documentation process. Fortunately, concerns about licensing were discussed during supervision, which is how concerns about the use of the licensing portal were addressed and eventually resolved.

The continued environment of being understaffed impacts our operational capacity and the ability to have the time and resources to supervise better, document, and timely record information. Another example of this lack of capacity problem is when a management position is vacant, requiring line staff to either cover or get temporarily assigned, which results in

[2] The only reference to the licensing portal is in the graphic on page 29 of the draft audit.

decreased supervision, heavier workloads, and truncated onboarding processes that do not allow new workers sufficient time to receive adequate training to familiarize themselves with the rules and statutes related to procurement.

The agency acknowledges the untimeliness of completing non-conditional licensing by every provisionally licensed child-specific resource caregiver but disagrees with the use of the term "often ignored" as it implies an intent to disregard the law or administrative rules.

As discussed above, the Department also disagrees that safety risks were created by the inability to have a provisionally licensed resource caregiver become unconditional licensed caregivers within sixty (60) days of being provisionally licensed. Also, Section 17-1625-10(b)(2) of the Hawaii Administrative Rules states that "A provisional certificate of approval, not to exceed, **unless** otherwise approved by the department . . . if it is reasonable to **assume that** all licensing requirements will be met within sixty days...". (Bold emphasis added.)

The Department will work with the Department of the Attorney General to examine whether the rule or authorizing statute should be amended to better inform decision-making and correct implementation of the law. The Department's interpretation of the rule is that reasonably acceptable delays are valid reasons to extend a provisional certificate beyond 60 days of approval as long as there are no risks to the health, safety, or well-being of a child. Further, the rule, as interpreted by the Department, does not limit the number of extensions that can be approved by the Department pending completion of an unconditional license, and there were no evidentiary facts to support that a child in a provisionally licensed home pending non-conditional licensing was abused or neglected.

The Department acknowledges the finding that there is no assessment per se of whether the contracted provider met performance goals. However, the Department was in contact with the provider and was aware that the *projected* performance goals would likely not be met. This, however, was attributed to delays beyond the contract provider's control, such as the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions, delays associated with the web portal transfer of information, and fingerprinting delays. COVID-19 played a considerable part in the licensing and home studies completed timely; families were reticent to allow anyone in their homes. The change in business practices in the other sectors to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 infection

also delayed the completion of background clearances and medical exams. Additionally, the outcome goals of the contract are based on projections, as the number of applicants and other unanticipated issues is unknown at the time of contract execution.

Generally, the Department agrees with the recommendations and commits to incorporating them in a continuing effort to amend policies and procedures.

The Department agrees with the fifteen (15) recommendations of the draft audit and notes that several recommendations will require the cooperation of external partners to implement. Even before this audit was conducted, the policies and procedures relating to licensing, which includes the Hawai`i Administrative Rules and Child Welfare Services Procedure Manual, were already being reviewed for updating in consultation with the Department of the Attorney General.

While it will take time to implement all of the recommendations due to many competing interests related to daily operations and crises that arise during case management, the Department is committed to improving the child welfare system.

In fact, the department had already identified the same areas for improvement and had begun addressing them before the audit.

Further, the Department worked and advocated to add executive leadership to restore the second Deputy Director position in the Director's Office. The loss of this position in the mid-1990s reduced the leadership by a third and further reduced top-level availability to assist the Division with oversight and quality improvement efforts. With the position restored in 2023, the 2nd Deputy position was filled in August 2023, six days before the Maui Wildfires.

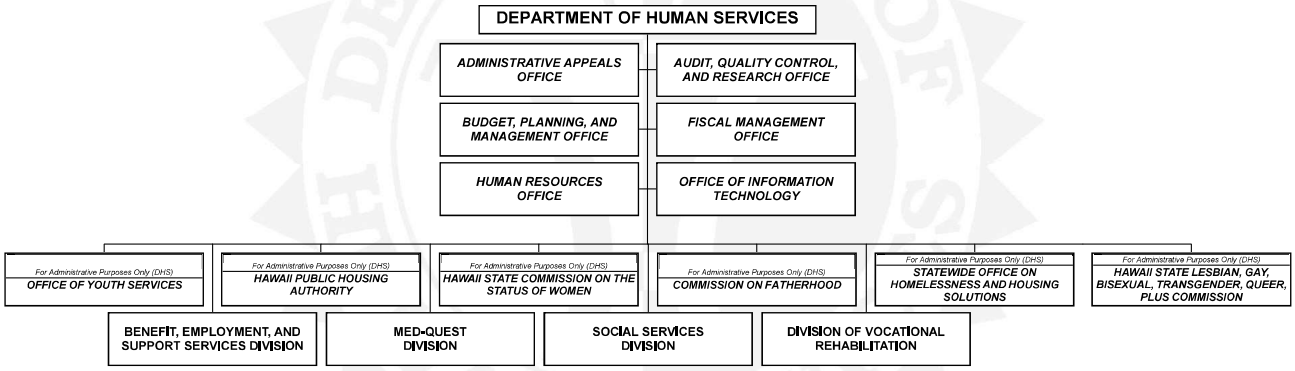
Relevant to CWS, the August 2023 Maui Wildfires immediately reprioritized the Director's office and divisions' efforts to support the State's emergency management response. As recovery efforts are now plateauing, the Department is tasked with additional responsibilities to the residents of Maui to ensure an equitable recovery.

However, as much as the Department may not like some of the sentiment and tone in the draft audit, the recommendations provide an additional framework for the Department to move forward with realigning or reshaping internal controls and improving our practices.

Attachment 2

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

ORGANIZATION CHART
JUNE 30, 2023



HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 4:17:54 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sue	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please vote no on this bill.

Homeschoolers in Hawaii are already required to submit letters of intent and comply with testing requirements as well as end of year summary reports .

They are reported to already be testing at or above state and national averages as well as already pay taxes that go to public schools they choose to opt out of .

It is also consistently reported that child abuse cases are not higher than public school children and many reports indicate this is significantly lower so why this added regulation is being put forward is unclear and unhelpful .

Homeschoolers use different curriculims and are in different learning settings than public school students so asking them to test that way is also unhelpful and even unfair . How well would public school students test if asked to do this in reverse?

Could the state include the already submitted scores with theirs and use it for whatever they may feel it needs?
Could each of you please consult with the homeschool community on their thoughts and experiences with this rather than take it in your own hands as those who may never have been a homeschooled student or parent ?

Would you be able to look more closely at the plethora of stats and info regarding the above mentioned points that are easily accessible if searched before moving forward with this?

Hawaii has enjoyed and been deeply blessed by fair and lenient regulations so far with increasingly positive results . Why not keep it this way ?

Please , please please respectfully vote to protect the freedoms you were elected to safeguard not monitor or control. Please allow homeschool families to continue to test the way they have since the beginning .Please allow parents to be the ones who decide what and where and how their children learn not the government .

Sincerely from a parent of three grown children who attended public , private , charter and homeschool all based on their individual temperaments and learning styles as well as finances and circumstances at the time .

Thank you for your time and again Please vote no.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 4:20:10 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kailani Arai	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in strong opposition to H.B. 2376 due to the serious concerns it raises for homeschooling families across Hawaii.

Hawaii already has an established system of accountability for homeschool students. Current regulations under the Hawaii Department of Education require annual assessments, including standardized testing at grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. These requirements already ensure that homeschooled students demonstrate academic progress while still preserving the flexibility that makes homeschooling effective.

H.B. 2376 goes far beyond these existing rules and would represent an unprecedented expansion of government control over homeschooling families. Rather than improving educational outcomes, the bill imposes rigid mandates that undermine parental rights and educational choice.

One of the most concerning provisions is the elimination of parental choice in assessment methods. The bill would ban widely used third-party standardized achievement tests such as the California Achievement Test (CAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford Achievement Test. These assessments have long provided reliable, flexible, and cost-effective ways for families to meet state requirements.

Additionally, H.B. 2376 would require that all testing be conducted in person at public schools. This creates significant logistical burdens for families, especially those on neighbor islands, those with limited transportation, and those with multiple children. It would also place unnecessary strain on school districts tasked with administering these additional testing responsibilities.

Finally, mandating seven years of state-controlled testing would severely undermine the flexibility that is central to successful homeschooling. This rigidity would be particularly harmful to students with special learning needs, who often benefit from customized pacing, alternative assessments, and individualized educational approaches.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose H.B. 2376 and to preserve the balanced system that currently supports both accountability and educational freedom for homeschooling families in Hawaii.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Mahalo,

Kailani Arai

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 4:53:08 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kerri Yeakey	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a homeschool parent and oppose HB2376 because it restricts parental rights. No mandatory testing should be required in person for families that choose to homeschool. Mahalo for respite my ohanas freedom of choice for homeschooling.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 5:05:11 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Callie Wood	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We already meet all requirements regarding testing in the state, and submit yearly required CAT testing scores to the appropriate schools. But in regards to homeschooling students, the public schools are teaching and practicing for their specific tests, while homeschooling families use their time to delve in the broader subjects as they see fit, not for a specific school testing. That's the freedom of homeschooling, to be on par with their same-grade level students but have the freedom to learn different things. We don't need more testing to prove that they are learning. We already have adequate state end-of- year requirements to prove progress and adequacy. Mahalo!

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 5:24:44 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Ameen Jr.	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I OPPOSE this bill restricting educational and parental freedoms and liberties.

There are already very good annual accountability requirements by DOE for homeschoolers as well as required standardized tests.

Education is not the right of government, **but the right of parents**. Many choose to delegate to the state of hawaii public or charter schools.

This bill will 1) restrict freedom of curriculum and

2) restrict teaching standards/methods and remove choice from parents

3) impose unfair requirement for parents to have their kids tested often locally at the public school in their district.

4) this would require overburdensome time and childcare to do this frequent testing

5) this bans parent choice of standardized testing like CAT or Iowa or stanford testing which are great standardized tests.

6) This would be very burdensome and discrimating to families with special needs children.

Please do not let this bill pass. Thank you David Ameen Jt.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 6:35:04 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Serafin	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Woodson and the House Committee on Education,

My family and I strongly oppose HB 2376.

I implore you to protect our family.

Mahalo,

Michelle, loving mother to amazing twin girls flourishing in homeschool

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 8:17:37 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
sally Eveland	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill goes far beyond what current DOE regulations require and would mark unprecedented government control over homeschooling families.

The bill eliminates parental choice by banning third-party standardized achievement tests.

Mandating seven years of state testing would undermine homeschooling flexibility, especially for students with special learning needs.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 8:42:10 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Schoen	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson and the House Committee on Education,

I strongly oppose HB 2376.

I have home schooled my children for 8 years now. Four of those years have been in the state of Hawaii. We choose to homeschool for many reasons but one of those reasons is that I can carefully individualize my curriculum choices based on my specific children's learning styles. This has allowed me to meet their educational needs in a way that allows them to flourish. Under current DOE guidelines we standardize test on required years but can choose the tests that most meet our families needs. Under this new bill we would be required to test on the public school schedule and also with tests that are geared to measure learning with public school curriculum options in mind. This would not properly evaluate my children's abilities or progress as we do not use the same curriculum but meet the same overall learning objectives. My goal as a homeschool parent is not to teach my children to be good standardized test takers but to be people that love to learn and can show their knowledge through other means such as teaching a skill to a younger sibling. They also demonstrate proficiency by using math and language skills in their every day life and interacting with people of all ages and backgrounds. In our sciences we write out lab reports and perform experiments and test within our specific curriculums. This type of learning cannot be measured on a standardized test. Requiring homeschool families to appear in the public school for testing is also a logistical nightmare for both the school districts and the families.

Another objection is the violation of parents' rights. We are highly involved in our children's lives and learning and do not need a school evaluation to show this. Requiring evaluations to this level is suggesting that we do not care for our children appropriately and therefore need more direct oversight. This is not the right of the government to decide.

Parents do not choose homeschooling because it will be an easy way out. It is rigorous and time consuming and we do it because we love our children and deem that this is the best way for our

family to live and be educated. We do not in any way hinder parents that choose public, or private, or religious schools. School choice is paramount and is the right of the parents to decide.

Again, I strongly oppose HB 2376!

Mahalo for your time,

Hannah Schoen

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 8:56:46 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
alicia morrier	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! I am in opposition to HB 2376. This bill is a major detriment to our families of Hawaii who choose a much higher and better quality education for their Keiki than what our public schools currently offer.

The state funding that would be lost due to people pulling their children out of Hawaii's failing public school systems is mostly what is being prioritized by our currently elected Govenor vs. him listening to the fact that many families choose a better education for their children by keeping them homeschooled and providing better educational opportunities than what is offered in Hawaii's public schools.

mahalo

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:22:19 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Pressey	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha. As a parent homeschooling my children in Hawaii since 2012, **I oppose HB2376**, not only because it would be redundant, but because it would eliminate freedom of choice for homeschoolers in a way no other state does.

Per Hawaii Administrative Rules, Chapter 12, Section 8-12-18, **annual progress reporting is already required** for homeschooled students. Additionally, **all educational and related services are already available** to homeschooled students who need and want them, per Section 8-12-14.

Currently, homeschooled students in grades 3, 5, 8 and 10 have the option to participate in the statewide testing program at the local public school, or parents may arrange comparable private testing or work with the school principal on other acceptable means of evaluation. For grades in which test scores are not required, parents may still submit scores from a standardized test, or submit an evaluation written by a certified teacher or the parent. Section 8-12-18 provides a framework for the principal of the local public school reviewing test scores/progress reports to help parents address inadequate progress.

In addition to these redundancies, **HB2376 would eliminate families' freedom to choose** from the options for evaluating student progress. Mandatory participation in in-person state testing for homeschooled students is not a one-size-fits-all approach any more than public school is, and nowhere in the nation is this restriction placed on homeschoolers (hslda.org).

Thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to express my opposition to HB2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:25:42 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kanoeuluwehianuhea Case	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2367 as it imposes DOE Standards on families who choose Homeschool. This bill defeats the purpose of homeschooling.

Mahalo,

Kanoeuluwehianuhea Case

Moku O Keawe

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:49:18 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Danielle	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill because homeschooling is a deeply personal decision my family has made to support how our child learns best. We chose homeschooling to provide a more flexible, individualized education that supports our child's pace, strengths, and emotional well-being. Mandatory, in-person public school testing would add stress, create scheduling challenges, and interrupt learning methods that are already working well for our family. Like most homeschooling parents, we are fully invested in our child's success and growth, and we take that responsibility seriously. Therr are better ways to support accountability and student progress without adding regulations that limit parental choice and the ability to provide a personalized education.

Dear Representatives,

My name is Melissa Scott, and I am a homeschooling mom of thirteen years. I respectfully ask that you oppose HB 2376.

I realize as a state we are very concerned with childhood neglect and abuse, and the need for accountability. With that said, HB 2376 would place difficulties on my children and myself as a home educator that I believe are wholly unintended, but nonetheless harmful to my children's educational future. There are three areas in which this bill would cause harm.

First, I would lose the ability to choose what standardized tests my students would take. As a veteran homeschooler, each year I am required by law to turn in standardized test scores to my local schools to provide objective evidence of my children's educational growth. And to this, I happily comply. Depending on the year and the student, I choose tests accordingly. The summer I had multiple boys making baseball all-star teams, I chose the shorter California Achievement Test. Last year was a quieter year, so I was able to go back to the more thorough Stanford Achievement Test. I used paper tests when my kids were little and online tests when they are middle elementary and up. Sometimes the tests are proctored by me, but often it's by another or the online test attendant. I would lose the ability to choose with HB 2376, and would instead be burdened with the task of coordinating travel and pickups from multiple schools with multiple students on conflicting schedules. If the goal is to have more homeschoolers comply with our current homeschool law, this does not seem to be the way forward.

Second, I plan our test-taking week intentionally to create as much of a stress-free environment for my children as possible. Every year, I remind them these tests are in no way a reflection of their value, but merely one of the formalities that life requires. My daughter, in particular, underwent much anxiety when test-taking and a familiar environment was key to keeping her emotions stable when taking the oft lengthy tests. Part of my responsibility as a parent is to foster a positive and encouraging environment for my students while learning. With HB 2376, I would have to send my kids to an unfamiliar place, a busy classroom, and a stranger to try to perform well. This does not sound like a successful environment for the unknown homeschool student.

Third, our homeschool year does not align with the traditional DOE school year. Part of the draw of homeschooling is the flexibility it allows. My family typically travels in the fall and late summer, therefore we do not start our regular schoolwork until mid-September and we typically finish our school year in late June, but sometimes July. By forcing homeschool

families to comply with the DOE school year, it will mean our children's studies are not lining up with the DOE schedule or their curriculum and students would therefore not score as well on the tests as they normally would. By law, homeschoolers are given the choice and opportunity to customize our curriculum to each student. HB 2376 would take this opportunity away from our students.

As you can see, I appreciate the intent of accountability, but this law would mean trouble and hardship for homeschool families and their students, not to mention the additional burden on the DOE schools to make room in classrooms for temporary students. Meanwhile, the current law has worked well for over twenty years. I encourage other homeschool families to be good citizens and comply with the law and would be willing to offer any ideas in the future to that end.

Mahalo for your time and commitment to the betterment of our keiki,

Melisssa Scott

Homeschool Mom, Kane'ohe

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 10:03:40 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
pahnelopi mckenzie	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB 2376
This bill offers restrictions over families who choose alternative forms of education and should don't be inflicted with this kind of oversight. We all know that the majority of kids are not having high success rates in the DOE not in testing, communication, socialization, or acceleration of intellect. The measurements of a child's brilliance is not measured in this testing narrative and is not superior and should don't be forced on homeschooled children. Parents should have the choice to enroll their children in the program that works for them and they can stand by. Testing is the focus of the DOE day in and out. Homeschooling is to honor the child in life skills that include choice, physical and mental excellence, and accomplishing challenges and test that are relative to life. With all of the suffering that are youth are faced with in the current school system the choice to force alternative education to the narrow path of the restrictive testing and restrictive acceptable programs is unnecessary. Please uplift the teachers, admin, and support staff in the DOE. Please update the text books that they would offer truth and knowledge that is spread farther that the suprematist nature of the current education. Let children be children and support learning to be independent. Education should don't be focused on passing a test to prove you are learning.
Thank you for your time and please vote No on HB 2376
Pahnelopi McKenzie

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 10:06:34 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joanna Miller	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Joanna Miller and I oppose the bill HB2376. As a mom of three in Hawaii, I see many concerns with this bill in regards to the educational future of my children.

First of all, the bill states that these mandated tests are for the purpose of evaluating whether or not additional resources or support is needed for the child. Who would be best at determining this than the parents of a child who has nurtured and raised them from their first breath? Parents spend the most time with their children and know their needs better than any state representative can assess through a series of questions. As a parent I know my child's weaknesses and strengths, where they need additional practice vs. where they excel best. By requiring mandatory testing for the purpose of "early identification of…educational needs" they are saying that parents are insufficient in providing proper education and don't know what their child needs to excel.

Additionally, there are already testing requirements in place that sufficiently assess a child's progress through their schooling. Homeschooling allows parents to teach their children at the pace that fits their child's developmental needs. By requiring additional testing at certain times, this restricts parent's freedom to determine what pace is best suited for their child. As a mom, I want my child to be an upstanding and well educated adult and I should have the freedom to choose how to do this for my own children without the government mandating what method they think is best to measure that success.

This bill is not serving the best interest of the homeschoolers of Hawaii but rather imposing unnecessary mandates to restrict a parent's judgement of their child's educational needs. Mandating standardized and in person testing will dramatically limit the freedoms of homeschoolers across the state and will not allow parents to choose what is best needed for their child's education. I oppose bill HB2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 10:07:13 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
jenny gumbert	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jenny, and I am a parent and the primary educator of my children through homeschooling. I am writing to respectfully express my strong opposition to the proposed legislation (Bill HB2376) that would impose stricter testing regulations on homeschool families.

Hawai‘i already has a thoughtful and effective system of oversight. Homeschool families are required to file notice of intent, maintain records, and participate in academic assessments in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. These measures ensure students are being educated while still allowing families the flexibility that makes homeschooling effective. I believe this bill does not strengthen oversight; it moves toward unnecessary control over family decisions, family scheduling, and educational methods.

The government has an important role in protecting children and upholding the law, but it does not have the constitutional authority to standardize how families run their schools at home. Families who choose homeschooling are intentionally stepping outside the public system. In doing so, we are not placing the state *in loco parentis* over our children’s education; we are taking that responsibility ourselves.

Like many families, we follow a hybrid model. Our children learn through a combination of home instruction, tutors, outside teachers, and independent testing. We are deeply involved in our community, and our children participate in classes, activities, and enrichment beyond our home. Homeschooling today is not isolated or unaccountable; it is connected, evaluated, and engaged.

Many families also rely on flexible scheduling to travel off-island for family, educational opportunities, or cultural experiences. Mandating rigid testing windows would unnecessarily interfere with this freedom without improving educational outcomes.

We are grateful that Hawai‘i has historically supported homeschooling in a way that balances accountability with parental rights. **I respectfully urge you not to change that balance.** This bill goes beyond what is needed and risks overstepping into what should remain a family matter.

Mahalo for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenny

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/15/2026 11:24:41 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristi Murai	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We oppose HB2376 because it places an unnecessary burden upon homeschooling families which goes beyond far beyond what current DOE regulations require. The bill is restrictive and does not allow for parents to choose the tests they prefer.

For younger elementary students in particular, it seems unfair and burdensome to mandate testing in an unfamiliar location with students they do not know and with teachers they do not know. This unfavorable environment will cause unnecessary anxiety and perhaps even underperformance on standardized tests that they are unfamiliar with. This will not only be a burden for the homeschooling families, but it will also be a burden for school districts to accommodate these students.

As homeschooling parents of 4 children, we used different tests at different stages of their lives. When our children were very young, we submitted written progress reports, and from about the 3rd grade and up, we used standardized tests we felt were appropriate for our students and their development. In high school we used the PSAT and SAT tests to measure progress. All of our students did fine on these tests. Even though we don't have any students who will be impacted by this bill, we feel strongly about voicing our concerns and opposition to this restrictive and unnecessary bill. As homeschooling parents for the last 19 years, we can see how this would have negatively impacted our homeschool and family when our children were young. It would have taken away precious time, focus, and freedoms. So we humbly ask and wholeheartedly insist that you do not pass this bill.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:16:32 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Siumukuka Galea'i	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TO: Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Committee on Education **RE:** Testimony in **OPPOSITION** to **HB 2376 HEARING DATE:** Tuesday, February 17, 2026 **TIME:** 2:00 PM **PLACE:** State Capitol & Videoconference

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is **Siumukuka Galea'i**, and I am a resident of **Waipahu**. I am testifying in **OPPOSITION** to **HB 2376**.

My family moved to Hawaii from American Samoa. Before our move, my 7-year-old daughter was enrolled in a traditional school setting. During that time, I witnessed firsthand how the pressure of homework and standardized measures limited her ability to enjoy learning.

When we arrived in Hawaii, we made the conscious decision to homeschool her to restore that joy. We are now in our second year of homeschooling, and the change has been remarkable. By following her lead and removing the pressure of "standardization," I have seen her love for learning return. She is now thriving in areas that are not measured by standard school education.

I oppose HB 2376 because:

1. **It reintroduces the exact pressure we left:** Mandating that my 7-year-old enter a public school she does not attend, to sit with strangers for a standardized test, brings back the anxiety and rigidity we worked so hard to remove.
2. **It is not an accurate measure:** A standardized test cannot accurately measure the progress of a child-led, personalized education.
3. **Current oversight is sufficient:** The current requirement to submit annual progress reports is already enough to ensure she is learning.

Please respect our right to choose an educational environment where my daughter can thrive.

Please vote NO on this measure.

Sincerely,

Siumukuka Galea'i Waipahu, HI

February 16, 2026

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

SB3193 and HB2376 propose expanded oversight and compliance requirements for homeschooling families in Hawai‘i. Although the stated intent is to strengthen accountability and educational quality, these measures would increase reporting or testing obligations beyond the existing statutory framework, which already requires documentation and standardized assessments to demonstrate academic progress.

We respectfully oppose SB3193 and HB2376. As a homeschooling family with one child, we operate within the current statutory framework and comply with existing requirements for documentation and assessment. The present system already includes mechanisms to demonstrate academic progress.

The flexibility provided under current law allows families to meet those requirements while tailoring instruction to individual needs and circumstances. For our child, that flexibility makes a meaningful difference. It allows us to adjust pacing and explore subjects in greater depth when she is ready, rather than being confined to a fixed, grade-based sequence. Many homeschooling families across Hawai‘i similarly rely on that flexibility to maintain strong academic expectations within an accountable structure.

If the Legislature’s concern is equitable access to resources and opportunities, we suggest a different approach. Rather than expanding mandatory testing requirements, public schools could allow homeschooled students, as many other states do, to participate in extracurricular programs, athletics, academic clubs, advanced coursework, and other enrichment opportunities at their assigned public schools.

For students who need additional support, increasing voluntary access to public school resources such as special education services, counseling, tutoring, and enrichment programs would be a more targeted and constructive solution. Expanding access addresses opportunity gaps without imposing additional regulatory burdens on families already in compliance with existing law.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote no on SB3193 and HB2376 and instead consider policies that expand opportunity while preserving parental autonomy and educational flexibility.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Katherine Aumer and ‘Ohana

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:10:04 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chelsea Cruz	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to HB2376.

As a homeschooling parent in Hawai‘i, I am deeply concerned that this bill represents a significant government overreach into the rights of families to direct their children’s education. Homeschooling is a lawful and well-established educational choice, and families who take on this responsibility already comply with existing requirements such as submitting notices of intent, maintaining educational records, and demonstrating student progress.

HB2376 would impose a new mandate requiring homeschooled students to participate in annual, in-person testing at the public school they would otherwise attend. This requirement is intrusive and undermines the very flexibility that makes homeschooling effective. Many families choose homeschooling specifically because their children thrive in alternative learning environments, have unique educational needs, experience anxiety in traditional school settings, or require customized teaching approaches. Forcing children into a public school environment for testing disregards these realities.

Furthermore, public data shows that Hawai‘i’s public school testing outcomes are mixed. While elementary scores have improved, middle school performance in core subjects such as math and reading remains below national averages. This demonstrates that standardized, one-size-fits-all testing is not a guaranteed measure of educational success and should not be imposed on families who have chosen a different, legally recognized path.

Homeschooling families are not seeking to avoid accountability; rather, they seek the freedom to educate their children in ways that are appropriate, effective, and aligned with their individual needs. HB2376 shifts from reasonable oversight into unnecessary control and sends a message that parents cannot be trusted to responsibly educate their own children.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose HB2376 and protect the rights of families to make educational decisions that best serve their children.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

DATE: Sunday, February 15, 2026

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Rep. Terez Amato
Rep. Luke A. Evslin
Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett
Rep. Jeanne Kapela
Rep. Darius K. Kila
Rep. Ikaika Olds
Rep. Christopher L. Muraoka
Rep. Kanani Souza

RE: HB 2376

Position: Oppose

Dear Chairs Woodson and La Chica and Committee Members:

My name is Maluhia Miller. I am a Hilo resident and have been home educating my 8 children for 18 years now. I strongly oppose HB2376 and am asking that you oppose it as well. Current homeschool laws require standardized testing in grade 3, 5, 8, and 10 along with annual end of year reports, standardized testing scores, or written evaluation by a Hawaii certified teacher on each of the other grade levels in order to demonstrate our children's educational progress.These existing requirements already offer the department of education the ability to monitor student progress. This bill would impose additional testing requirements, including mandatory assessments for Kindergarten, first, and second grade students who may not be developmentally ready for formal standardized testing. Much like our educational styles, focuses, and curriculum, we parents have the ability to choose the assessment best suited for our children. HB2376 strips us parents of that ability while also forcing our children into an unfamiliar setting that may negatively affect their performance. As far as I'm aware, not one of the 50 states of our country currently requires in person testing for homeschooled students. I view this as an absolute overreach of power and necessity. As the legislature acknowledged, "Homeschooling is a valid and beneficial educational option that offers flexibility, individualized instruction, and strong family engagement." Our education looks different from the public school schedule and calendar. These additional testing requirements would demand that we conform to the public school testing schedule that could interfere with our established instructional plans.

To summarize, current homeschooling laws are sufficient to satisfy the goal stated in HB2376. Additional requirements aren't necessary.

I do notice that the bill leaves a lot of gray areas where interpretations could differ greatly and lots of information has been left out.

For example… What are scoring goals? What happens if goals aren't met? Are there consequences set in place for missing testing? What will the DOE do with the testing scores? Does the state or DOE financially benefit when our children participate in their testing?

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide testimony,

Sincerely,

Maluhia Miller

DATE: February 16, 2026

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

RE: HB 2376
Position: Strongly Oppose

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

My name is Darren Maeda and my wife and I homeschool our six children. My children have benefitted so much from the customized education that homeschooling provides. It would not be in their best interest for them to have to do in person testing or to have additional testing done every year, because we tailor our school to our children's needs and not according to the public school system. We can see how they are doing academically every day that we are working with them and find testing unnecessary, as we address the needs as they arise. This would just be an extra burden and would negatively affect the customized education plan that we have for them.

Please vote NO on HB 2376.

Sincerely,
Darren Maeda
18-4170 Hinuhinu Street
Mountain View, HI 96771
(808) 747-1165

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 6:39:28 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Neil	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill. My child was failed by the public school system in Hawaii. My child's educational needs were never met. My child should be at a 7th grade level. Due to the schools failing my child, my child is only capable of doing basic addition and subtraction and reading at a 3rd grade level. I am now paying for private lessons to get my child caught up to grade level. There is no way I am trusting the state with my child's education again. Why would I want to subject my child to testing by an education system that failed them drastically? Where is the logic in that?

My child was also bullied nonstop. I moved my child to three different schools because of this. My child was bullied at all three schools and none of the schools did anything to stop it. The third school even tried to blame my child for being bullied and called Child Protective Services on me for pulling my child from their school and homeschooling them since they could not protect my child at their school. Make that make sense! Charges against me were dropped because Child Protective Services agreed that I did nothing wrong and it was in my child's best interest to be pulled from that school.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:18:32 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Terri Yoshinaga	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose this bill!

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:19:52 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karri Teshima	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

There are many reasons to oppose this bill ! First and foremost government has no right to overreach into what a parent wants to do with their children. Personally if I had children of school-age, I would NEVER put them in public school!Hawaii school age children are not learning due to lack of teachers abilities to teach,public schools now think that it is all right to read transgender books with illicit sexual language to children in elementary schools and yes, this does happen in the state of Hawaii. They want to bring transgender men dressed up like whores to read books to these children (state supported and funded,disgusting,that the schools want,They want to allow nurses to give medication's including shots vaccines,to children w o notifying the parents.School nurses ,they are not doctors.! Josh Green has no right abusing his discretion the way he does, and has in the past passing bills behind peoples backs against people's best interest. Using a EUA a lot When there is no emergency. Government overreach, egregious overreach.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:33:55 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zoey	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to SB 3193 and HB 2376.

Homeschool families in Hawai‘i already comply with existing reporting and testing requirements. These measures provide sufficient oversight. Requiring children to participate in mandatory, in-person testing at public schools creates unnecessary burdens on families and schools without clear benefit.

Academic performance is not a reliable indicator of child safety. This proposal will not effectively prevent abuse, but it will increase stress for students, disrupt individualized learning, and create transportation and childcare challenges for parents.

Homeschooling works in Hawai‘i because it allows families to meet the unique needs of their children. These bills undermine that flexibility and penalize responsible families who are already following the law.

No other state requires annual in-person testing for homeschool students. Hawai‘i should not adopt policies that place unnecessary barriers on home education.

I respectfully urge you to oppose SB 3193 and HB 2376.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:12:30 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
samantha pang	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Members of the House,

The proposed House Bill 2376 significantly impacts freedom and parental choice of homeschoolers in Hawai'i. Mandating statewide testing for homeschoolers would not only create a substantial administrative burden, it undermines the very essence of personalized education that draws families to this path. I have special needs learners that are not accommodated by a 504 or IEP as they are not enrolled in DOE and there is no need. Therefore they would be required to show up in person, to an anxiety inducing, sensory overload situation, inside a school building they are not familiar with and zero testing accommodations in place. Then they'll be asked to take a standardized test they are not accustomed to. It's not only unfair it's a threat to my child's safety and security. The freedom to tailor learning experiences is crucial, especially for children with unique learning styles or specific talents that require a flexible approach.

Our current laws rightly recognize the importance of allowing parents to guide their child's education in a way that aligns with their individual needs and aptitudes. This bill's intention to impose generic statewide standards risks stifling the creativity and individualized attention that make homeschooling such a valuable option for many. It's about preserving the ability for parents to truly customize their child's educational journey, fostering a love of learning that standardized testing often diminishes. Our current laws allow flexibility in our school year start and ends dates, which is an important reason many families choose to homeschool. With mandated in person testing on the DOE's timeline, we lose all freedom of choice in our school year dates.

We believe in nurturing the strengths of every child and allowing parents the autonomy to do so effectively. I urge you to consider the profound impact this bill could have on families and to reject measures that would diminish the freedom and effectiveness of homeschooling in our state.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:18:37 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Okihiro	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a homeschooling family this bill violates every right of educational freedom for my children. The reason for educating our children is to be able to teach The Word of God in our home which is the foundational basis and principle of all morals that our society and community is lacking. The structure of our home education allows us to teach our children morals and values. It's more than just education it's creating their character to be teachable, loveable and kind individuals in every stage of their lives and to interact with all different generations. It also gives us parents to be in charge of every childs needs as to how they learn and tailor to their needs not to be conformed into one way of learning. In our home we show our children truth about education that it may be different from the secular government school's ideology. That is why we are creating critical thinkers in our home and to ask questions in love and to have positive debates about truth; that our society is lacking is truth and transparency.
so with all that has been said I strongly oppose HB2376!

I believe all constituents should have the right to educate their children on their own and each parent should have a right to assess their children's learning ability and find the source of how to teach their own child and what needs need to be met by their home education. it is not the government's responsibility to impose public school standardized testing against well rounded educated homeschoolers.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:31:42 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Veronica Milford faavi	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

First, I want to say mahalo nui loa: thank you for upholding your kuleana to the children of your constituency. We recognize that this bill may stem from a desire to further protect school-age children from abuse and neglect. Notably, the heinous abuse leading to the deaths of Geanna Bradley and Isabella Kalua in our state is something we hope to never see repeated. We support effective legislation to safeguard the most vulnerable among us.

That said, as the legal maxim goes, “Hard cases make bad law.” Or, as stated by Richard Wexler from the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform, “When horror story cases become the basis for public policy, we get horrible policies.”

The myself and our Curious Keiki Co-op members made up of 124 families believe H.B. 2376 and its companion bill are just that: bad law. Of note, no other states mandate in-person testing for homeschooled students. Requiringthis yearly in-person testing will

• fail to mitigate the harm of child abuse,

• introduce significant harm to the homeschooling population,and

• further stress an already overstrained public school system.

Failure to mitigate child abuse

1. Research from the 1980s to present has found nostatistically significant difference in abuse between homeschooled and non-homeschooled populations.Homeschooling itself is not known to be a risk factor for systematic abuse. Thus, using homeschooling alone as a criterion for additional oversight is unwarranted.

2. Most abuse ending in death occurs before children are school age. This is true nationwide, and the State of Hawaii DHS’s Statistical Report on Child Abuse and Neglect in Hawaii for years 2016 through 2023 confirm this to be true in Hawaii as well.

3. Abuse goes undetected in children who are in school on a daily basis—by teachers who know their names, their habits, their needs, their personalities. The abovementioned statistical reports indicate that on average, only 10.26% of all reports of abuse from mandatory reporters came from education professionals, and only 19% of those reports were confirmed. In contrast,

social services, medical professionals, and legal and law enforcement personnel were each responsible, individually, for a higher percentage of all abuse cases and had a higher percentage of their reports confirmed. Thus, expecting teachers to effectively recognize abuse in strangers within a few hours at most, while they are also responsible for proctoring a test, is absurd.

4. Even when abuse is reported, the system is still failing these children.

a. In the case of Geanna Bradley, officials ignored red flags when Geanna was withdrawn, such as the fact that her third grade teacher and school counselor both recommended she stay in school.

b. Isabella Kalua was withdrawn from school under suspicious circumstances in the months preceding her death. A teacher reported in February 2020 that Isabella was exhibiting concerning behavior, like shutting down when asked about her home environment.

Causing harm to homeschooling families

1. Requiring children to test in an unfamiliar environment, in a room full of strangers, may impact their ability to perform at their best and could be anxiety inducing. A 2020 comprehensive review by Emma Howard, "Review of theLiterature Concerning Anxiety for Educational Assessments," found that "high levels of test anxiety are associated with reduced performance," but even if"students [are] not negatively impacted in terms of grade outcomes, the experience of high levels of test anxiety can still have detrimental effects of mental health and well-being." As parents, we consider it our responsibility to teach our children that they can do hard things. But it's also our responsibility to safeguard their mental health from unnecessary harm, especially during the critical impressionable early years.

2. Related to this, it's no secret that the usefulness of standardized testing as a marker of student progress is a matter of hot debate. Jack Schneider, a historian and policy analyst who co-founded the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA), writes, "The current data used to measure student success… closely correlates to race, income, and family educational attainment. It really only tells us about advantage and disadvantage outside school, not what schools are actually doing." So requiring homeschoolers to take these tests is a double blow: kids have to go through this anxiety, for what? For a number on a page that's not even a reliable indicator of their abilities or predictor of future success.

3. Requiring children to perform at a standardized grade level negates the freedom parents have to tailor their child's learning pace and content of education to that child's needs and goals.

4. Requiring children to test on mandated dates could require homeschooling parents to shift their instructional calendar; not all homeschool parents follow the public schoolcalendar.

5. Requiring children to appear in person is a burden on parents who must also care for other children in their household, and who may not have transportation during school hours.

6. Parents are already required to submit an annual progress report for each child at the end of their school year, which is more than sufficient to show academic progress—or, in terms of abuse, a lack of educational neglect.

Add stress to an overwhelmed system

1. According to the Pew Research Center's report titled "What's It Like To Be a Teacher in America Today?" from April 2024, teachers are already under immense pressure.

▪ 77% say their job is frequently stressful.

▪ 68% say it's overwhelming.

▪ 70% say their school is understaffed.

▪ 84% say there's not enough time during their regular work hours to do tasks like grading, lesson planning, paperwork and answering work emails.

• Among those who feel this way, 81% say simply having too much work is a major reason.

▪ 82% say that the overall state of public K-12 education has gotten worse in the last five years.

2. According to a 2025 report by Hawai‘i Scholars for Education and Social Justice, Hawaii schools are chronically underfunded and facing teacher shortages. This bill increases the workload of teachers and staff without creating additional funding for the schools. Homeschoolers' scores are not counted in schools' overall performance and our students will not be enrolled, so no more federal or state dollars will be allocated to schools to account for the influx of up to four thousand students who would now need to test in person.

Conclusion

Again, we respect legislators' desire to protect and care for the children of Hawaii. But attempting to do so through a bill that will cause stress to all parties involved, while failing to solve for purported harms, is not the best path forward. We urge you to spend your effort—and our tax dollars—where the need is greatest. Give public schools the support they need with increased salaries and reduced class sizes, and work on giving at-risk families the social support they need to minimize risk factors for abuse.

Thank you for your consideration of our opposition to this bill.

Mahalo,
Veronica.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:39:18 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joey Kohatsu	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and Distinguished Members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Joey Kohatsu and I was born and raised in Pukalani, Maui and currently reside in Makiki, Oʻahu.

I am submitting this written testimony in **STRONG OPPOSITION TO H.B. 2376.**

I attended Pukalani Elementary School, Samuel Enoka Kalama Intermediate School, and graduated from Maui High School. I am also a proud graduate of the University of Hawaiʻi system starting with an undergraduate degree at UH-Manoa, followed by a one year post-baccalaureate program (ʻImi Hoʻōla), UH JABSOM, UH Internal Medicine Residency, UH Internal Medicine Chief Medical Resident, and UH Geriatric Medicine Fellowship. I am a primary care physician in solo independent practice on Oʻahu.

Although I am grateful for my State funded education, as a father of a 7-year daughter who has been homeschooled from preschool, I am a strong supporter of home schooling as a valid and beneficial option that offers flexibility and individualized instruction. Most importantly it has helped to foster morals and values that will help our daughter face the challenges of this world.

Hawaiʻi already requires an annual assessment including standardized testing in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. H.B. 2376 goes above and beyond the current Department of Education regulations and would mark unprecedented control over homeschooling families. This seems to be contradictory to the statement that the legislature finds home schooling as a valid and beneficial educational option.

H.B. 2376 eliminates home school parental choice to select other third-party standardized achievement tests (like the California Achievement Test (CAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford Achievement test). Mandating additional testing would also undermine homeschool flexibility, which is especially vital for students with special learning needs.

A final practical point would be regarding the logistical problems for school districts and families created by the in-person testing requirements. Introducing over five thousand students for annual testing seems to be a logistical nightmare for our already challenged public school system.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in **STRONG OPPOSITION TO H.B. 2376.**

Respectfully submitted,

Joey Kohatsu

Makiki, O‘ahu

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:16:18 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Soleil Hawthorne	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose HB2376. To begin with, here's no evidence suggesting that state testing surpasses the quality of homeschooled children's testing. Requiring homeschool students to attend any in person task at public schools (or anywhere for that matter) puts a extra burden on homeschooling families and interrupts their weekly schedule. Mandating any requirements for this is an interference with personal freedom as well as an interference with a parents qualified right to chose where they want to take their child for educational purposes.
In my experience, as a homeschooling mom who also has children who attend public school- testing at home is far more efficient and better tailored to the specific child and their individual needs. Homeschool parents already know what level their children are at academically, and are more qualified to sufficiently provide the child's testing at home with better results. Parents are better able to use their kids specific test results to motivate academic growth as well. State testing results are too vague and parents don't even know what specific questions their children struggle with during these tests.

In addition, the overly excessive screen time required for performing these tests is not in any child's favor. There are massive amounts of scientific evidence showing that excess screen time is harmful to developing brains and has a negative effect on children's behavior as well. Every parent has the right to chose to opt out of this for the sake of their child's well-being. Homeschooling your children is a work of love, personal sacrifice of time, and dedication for their children that parents provide.
Parents should NOT be expected to handover their right to the state to chose what is best for their own child's education, nor should the state try to impose additional requirements, especially for parents already providing such a service to their families.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:16:43 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
J McCabe	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 2376

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Janelle McCabe, and I am a resident of Kakaako. I am testifying in strong opposition to HB 2376, which would mandate in-person testing at public schools for homeschooled children beginning in the 2027-2028 school year.

1. This Bill Creates an Unjust Double Standard

Current Hawaii homeschool law prohibits homeschooling families from participating in public school sports, extracurricular activities and therapy. HB 2376 would force homeschoolers to participate in public school testing while still denying them access to these other public resources. If the state wishes to require homeschoolers to use public school facilities for testing, it should also grant them access to other programs their tax dollars support.

2. The Bill Offers No Demonstrated Benefit to Homeschooled Children

The bill's text fails to explain how this mandate would improve outcomes for homeschooled students. Research consistently shows that homeschoolers already excel academically, scoring 15-25 percentile points higher on standardized tests than their public school peers and enjoying higher college acceptance rates.

Meanwhile, decades of increased testing in public schools has not improved educational outcomes. Since the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act mandated extensive testing, results have remained stagnant or declined. By 2024, only 35% of 12th graders were proficient in reading and 22% in math—the lowest levels in 20 years.

Given these realities, it's unclear why homeschoolers—who are demonstrably succeeding—should be subjected to a testing regime that has failed to improve public school performance.

Current Hawaii homeschool law already requires regular testing, providing adequate accountability and state monitoring of student progress.

3. The Mandate Is Logistically Impractical

Implementation would create significant burdens for both families and the Department of Education:

Do Hawaii's public schools have the capacity and resources to proctor tests for thousands of additional students?

For families, coordinating drop-offs at multiple school campuses while arranging childcare for younger children would be exceptionally difficult.

Conclusion

Current Hawaii homeschool law strikes an appropriate balance between respecting families' constitutional right to direct their children's education and ensuring reasonable accountability. This bill attempts to fix what is not broken while our state faces many genuine educational challenges that deserve legislative attention.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 2376 and stand for the interests of homeschooling families.

Janelle McCabe

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:16:57 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Reschan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a mother who has a Bachelor's degree, I disagree with this measure. Standardized testing can be a poor indicator of learning. The National Education Association recognizes the failures of standardized testing. The pressure of a timed test is not a suitable assessment for many students and will reflect poorly on their actual academic knowledge.

Forcing homeschooled children into this situation in an unfamiliar environment would place an unfair burden on them.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:18:24 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julie Alejado	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Why I Oppose HB2376

As a homeschool graduate from 1988, I stand firmly against HB2376. Hawaii's current homeschooling laws already provide appropriate levels of oversight and accountability. They strike a fair balance by ensuring educational quality without infringing on the rights of parents to guide their own children's education.

HB2376 threatens that balance. It adds unnecessary regulations and compliance requirements that would burden families rather than benefit students. I believe this bill represents an overreach into parental authority and undermines the freedom that has allowed homeschoolers to thrive in Hawaii for decades.

Before adding more rules, we should ask: What specific problems is HB2376 trying to solve? Has there been evidence that homeschoolers are failing to meet existing standards? Without clear data showing widespread noncompliance, more regulation seems unjustified.

Many families turn to homeschooling because they believe — and experience shows — that individualized education at home best meets their children's needs. Requiring in-person standardized testing at public schools would disrupt that environment and could cause stress or anxiety for students who have never attended public school.

I personally know how uncomfortable such a setting can be. When I was a teen attending a driver's education class after public school hours, I witnessed a loud argument between a teacher and student. The incident shook me deeply, and I never went back. I can only imagine how vulnerable children who have always learned at home might feel in a similar atmosphere.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you **not to pass HB2376**. Please continue to support Hawaii's parents and their freedom to educate their children in the way that best serves their well-being and growth.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:29:12 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Briana Pierce	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a homeschool parent for the last 10 years, I comply with the DOE requirements of registration, annual progress reports and standardized testing. HB 2376 goes beyond current DOE requirements and imposes government control over homeschool families. The standardized testing that I use is currently approved would no longer be an option if this bill is passed. HB 2376 takes away parent rights to choose their test. It is also an inconvenience for children to be taken to test at the public schools. The testing proposed in HB 2376 is almost twice as much as the current requirements. For these reasons, I strongly oppose HB 2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:43:47 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Courtney Kerr	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committees,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB2376, which seeks to mandate that homeschooled students participate in annual in-person testing at their local public schools. As a mother of two children who I educate through a Waldorf-inspired homeschool curriculum, I am deeply concerned that this bill is fundamentally flawed, developmentally inappropriate, and potentially harmful to the very students it claims to support.

Inaccuracy of One-Size-Fits-All Assessment

Standardized testing is a poor yardstick for the individualized education that homeschooling provides. In our Waldorf-based approach, we prioritize a holistic, developmental sequence that emphasizes arts, movement, and deep narrative learning rather than rote memorization for exams. Many homeschoolers utilize non-linear or mastery-based curricula that do not align with the specific sequence of state-mandated tests.

Teaching to the Test: This bill would force families to abandon rich, deep-dive learning in favor of a narrow testing window.

Misleading Data: A single score on a specific day does not reflect a student's critical thinking, creativity, or the developmental milestones we track in a Waldorf environment.

Harm to Vulnerable and Neurodivergent Students

Many families choose homeschooling specifically because their children have test anxiety, ADHD, autism, or other sensory processing needs that make a traditional classroom environment overwhelming.

Psychological Distress: Forcing a child who thrives in a calm, home environment into a crowded, unfamiliar public school for high-stakes testing can trigger extreme anxiety and shutdowns, resulting in scores that reflect stress rather than knowledge.

Physical Response: Studies show that standardized testing weeks correlate with significant spikes in cortisol (the stress hormone), which can impair cognitive function and long-term mental health.

Logistical and Social Disruptions

Requiring in-person testing at a school the student would otherwise be required to attend creates an unnecessary burden.

Unfamiliar Environment: Testing is most accurate when a student feels safe. Dropping a child into a school they do not attend, surrounded by strangers and unfamiliar proctors, is a recipe for failure.

The Private Testing Alternative: Current Hawaii law already allows for various forms of progress reporting (including nationally normed tests or evaluations by licensed teachers). This bill removes that flexibility, ignoring the diverse ways students learn and prove competency.

Conclusion

HB2376 is an overreach that undermines parental rights and ignores the psychological well-being of Hawai‘i’s children. It prioritizes bureaucratic data over genuine student welfare and the educational diversity that homeschooling provides to families like mine.

I urge you to HOLD this bill and maintain the existing, balanced reporting requirements that allow for flexibility and respect the unique needs of the homeschooling community.

Mahalo,

Courtney Kerr

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:46:45 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Linda Miyata	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully oppose to HB 2376.

Homeschoolers should have the freedom to learn and be tested on what they believe is important to live as a contributing member to our country. Not what the government thinks.

Please honor Homeschoolers' freedom to choose.

Mahalo,

Linda

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:06:49 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley Pondo	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully oppose Hawaii HB2376, which mandates additional testing requirements for homeschool students. While accountability in education is important, this bill places unnecessary burdens on homeschooling families who are already meeting educational standards under existing law.

Homeschooling in Hawaii has long provided families with the flexibility to tailor education to their children's individual needs, learning styles, and pace. Requiring additional standardized testing risks undermining that flexibility and imposing a one-size-fits-all metric that does not accurately reflect the diverse methods and outcomes of home education.

Furthermore, there is no clear evidence that current oversight is insufficient or that homeschool students are underperforming. In many cases, homeschoolers meet or exceed national averages without excessive regulation. Adding new mandates would create administrative strain for both families and the state without demonstrated benefit.

Rather than increasing regulation, policymakers should support parental choice and educational diversity. I urge legislators to reject HB2376 and continue respecting the rights of families to direct their children's education responsibly and effectively.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:09:24 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason	Lions Den	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

10 years ago, my mom decided to homeschool me, I was 5 years old, im 15 now, and I now have the capacity to understand how blessed I was to be able to have the freedoms I did in a homeschooling group, where the people who picked the curriculum I completed genuinely cared about my education. They would make it fun, ELA class was filled with popsicle-stick point systems, science class made us pay rent with "den dollars" which came from attendance and assignments, and home school extra curriculars included martial arts, allowing us to be active and improve our physical health. Now I dont speak agaisnt public school teachers, students or even principles, however, today with this bill being passed, I speak against the members of the house or state senate who introduced this bill, those who sided with it, and those who work to take the freedom of education we have as homeschoolers away. Is it liberty if every year the public school system, which we were freed from, tests my adequacy as though it were judge, juror, and executioner? All logic and sound reasoning would say it is not freedom, if we are still on the public schools leash. We need not be controlled by this bill, not in 1993, not in the future, and certainly not today.

I, Jason Nouchi advise against this bill being passed.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:46:13 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Courtney Stuursma	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Members of the House,

We ask you to oppose House Bill 2376. This proposed bill significantly impacts freedom and parental choice of homeschoolers in Hawai'i. It undermines the very essence of personalized education that we have the ability to rightly choose for our own families. Its mandate of specified, in-person, statewide, yearly testing for homeschoolers would create a substantial administrative burden that is unfeasible for the public school system to support.

It also produced extreme and undue hardship for one of your largest constituents: the military family.

You are public servants who love and diligently serve the people of Hawai'i. As military families, we too, spend our lives serving. And to maintain consistency while achieving excellence in education, a vast majority of us choose to home educate our children as we serve our country around the world.

We sacrifice much and diligently provide tailored, individualized education that is best suited for each of our children. We comply with the homeschool laws already in place, providing both yearly grades, progress reports, and testing requirements from nationally recognized sources that best reflect our individual educational paths, such as the California Achievement Test, Iowa Basic Skills, Stanford, CLT, etc.

HB 2376 is exclusionary and would place undue hardship on families by forcing us to change our curriculum while stationed here in order to accomodate your state-specified testing requirements not seen in any of the other 49 states across the country. This negates our freedom of choice and forces us to change curriculum paths for our duration on station, negating the consistency of our children's education.

As one of the DOD's focus is the support the Military Family, and as HB2376 would be the only state in the union requiring specified testing that would pose extreme and undue hardship to the military family, we ask you to resolutely Oppose HB2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:14:43 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Luke Reed	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to respectfully submit testimony in opposition to HB2376.

As a homeschooling family, we are concerned that requiring homeschool students to participate in standardized testing at public school sites according to public school schedules undermines the flexibility and autonomy foundational to homeschooling.

Homeschooling in Hawai‘i has historically maintained accountability through parent-directed education and reporting requirements while preserving the independence necessary for families to tailor learning to their children’s needs. Mandating participation in state testing at public school sites creates both philosophical and practical conflicts with this model.

Specifically, this requirement would:

- Infringe upon the rights of homeschool families to direct the pace and structure of their children’s education.

- Disrupt individualized learning schedules that do not align with public school calendars.

- Create unnecessary logistical burdens for public schools tasked with coordinating testing for non-enrolled students.

Homeschool families have intentionally chosen an alternative educational path. Requiring participation in public school testing environments fails to respect that choice and risks imposing a one-size-fits-all structure on a diverse educational community.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose HB2376. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Luke Reed

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:16:20 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vivian Lopez	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I submit this testimony in strong opposition to Bill 2376 relating to homeschooling.

Hawaii law already provides a clear regulatory framework for home education through the Hawaii State Department of Education. Families are required to submit a notice of intent and provide annual progress reports demonstrating educational growth. This structure balances accountability with parental rights. Bill 2376 would disrupt that balance by imposing additional oversight that is duplicative, unnecessary, and potentially unconstitutional.

From a policy standpoint, this bill raises several serious concerns:

1. Government Overreach and Parental Rights

The U.S. Supreme Court has long recognized that parents have a fundamental right to direct the upbringing and education of their children. Expanding regulatory control without clear evidence of systemic failure infringes upon that right. Public policy should protect constitutional liberties, not erode them through excessive administrative requirements.

2. Lack of Demonstrated Need

There is no credible data showing widespread abuse of Hawaii's current homeschooling framework. Effective policy reform requires documented problems and data-driven solutions. Absent evidence of systemic deficiencies, increasing regulation appears reactionary rather than evidence-based.

3. Administrative and Fiscal Burden

Additional reporting, monitoring, or approval requirements would increase administrative costs for the state. At a time when Hawaii faces significant educational challenges within the public system, resources should be directed toward improving literacy, math proficiency, and teacher retention—not toward regulating families who are successfully educating their children at no cost to taxpayers.

4. Disproportionate Impact on Military and Rural Families

Hawaii has one of the highest concentrations of military families in the country. Many rely on homeschooling due to frequent relocations, deployment schedules, or special education needs. Increased regulatory hurdles would disproportionately burden these families. Likewise, families in rural and neighbor island communities depend on homeschooling due to limited school access.

5. Educational Outcomes

National research consistently shows that homeschooled students perform at or above national averages academically and demonstrate strong civic and social engagement outcomes. Public policy should support models that demonstrate success, not penalize them.

Good governance requires proportionality. Regulation should address clear risks with narrowly tailored solutions. Bill 2376 expands state authority without clear justification and risks undermining a functioning, accountable system already in place.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose Bill 2376 and preserve educational freedom and parental rights in Hawaii.

Mahalo for your consideration.

TO: Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair, and the Committee on Education,

SUBJECT: HB2376

DATE: Tuesday, February 17, 2026

TIME: 2:00 PM

PLACE: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 309
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

POSITION: IN OPPOSITION

Aloha,

My name is Jon Voss. I am a homeschool parent on Oahu, and an active duty military service member in the Army. I am testifying against bill HB2376.

Homeschooling offers my children an element of consistency and predictability often denied them due to my profession. By adhering to well-established standards and expectations, my children can be reasonably certain to meet or exceed the developmental milestones of their peers. There appears no reason to believe HB2376 would contribute to this, while there are several reasons it may be counterproductive.

The data is inconsistent and conflicting as to whether or not standardized testing, especially for grades 3 and under, provides any meaningful measure. What is clear is that standardized testing often leads to "teaching to the test" instead of developing the mastery of concepts necessary for later academic excellence. It also requires a testing environment that does not reflect the dynamics of age-appropriate learning. Data indicates this is particularly true for young boys, which is exacerbated by testing in an unfamiliar environment as BH2376 would effectively mandate. The testing also creates a financial and logistical burden that paradoxically takes time and resources away from instruction.

These burdens would be acceptable if the testing addressed a known deficiency in homeschool education. But such a deficiency does not exist, nor would such testing be likely to resolve one if it did. Homeschooled children regularly outperform their peers in long-term academic and wholistic outcomes. This is likely why no other states levy requirements similar to HB2376. Hawaii should remain the same. I encourage you to vote in opposition to HB2376.

Sincerely,
Jon Voss

DATE: February 16, 2026

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

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

RE: HB 2376

Position: IN OPPOSITION

Dear Chairs Woodson and Todd, Vice Chairs La Chica and Takenouchi, and Committee Members:

I strongly oppose HB 2376. While I understand the intention behind the bill, I believe that the current law in Hawaii already provides a sufficient means to assess and evaluate students, and thus further restrictions are unnecessary.

Section 1 of the bill states, "*The legislature recognizes that the department of education must be able to monitor student progress in a manner that respects parental choice.*" The current law in Hawaii already requires parents of homeschooled students to submit annual assessments (with standardized testing mandated in certain grade levels). Thus, there is already a sufficient process in place to fulfill the department of education's obligation stated above.

The purpose of the bill, as stated in Section 2, "*to require annual in-person participation in certain tests by home schooled students*," is therefore not only unnecessary, but will place an added burden on schools and families. Far from "*support[ing] student success and ensur[ing] access to appropriate educational support when needed*," as claimed in Section 2 of the bill, it will only add to the workload of teachers and administrators. They are already tasked with monitoring the progress of the many students they see on a regular basis. Seeing a homeschooled student on a few test days of the year will not provide them with meaningful information to adequately support and assess students, in contrast to parents, who teach and interact with their homeschooled students daily. Forcing homeschooled students to be tested in an unfamiliar environment can also lead to lower results, not indicative of a student's actual progress.

In closing, I have homeschooled my children in Hawaii for over ten years. I have diligently submitted my annual assessments to the appropriate schools, and I have always had positive interactions with school officials. I believe that the current law already fulfills the state's responsibility to monitor my children's academic progress. Any further obligations put upon schools and families will increase cost and workload without significant benefit.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Tresham
tresham@gmail.com
House District 2

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:30:17 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brynna Smith	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose this bill, having homeschooled my children for 17 years as it works best for our family with my husband's 23 year first responder career shifts and allows us to individualize education for the few of my children with some learning disabilities. We work hard to not teach to the test and build their confidence and skills and an appropriate pace. Public schools in Hawaii do not rate high and therefore should not set a standard for homeschoolers, we do not want to be part of the system and do not want more testing or to have to do it according to public school schedules/locations. Testing at home via our own test choices and timing, or opting to meet other requirements, is essential for many children to succeed and taking that away will heavily impact homeschool families. We do not want to be required to test in person so that the schools can generate more funding. That is backwards and quite frankly, deceitful. It's not intended to help the homeschoolers. Please vote no and allow homeschool families to do what works best for their own children, that will make this an even greater state in which we get to raise our keiki. Thank you for your time.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:33:54 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Genai Patterson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I write in strong opposition of HB2376 that would expand mandatory testing requirements and significantly restrict parental choice for families who homeschool in Hawai‘i.

Homeschool freedom in our state has been won through years of effort by parents who believed deeply in their right and responsibility to direct the education of their children. This bill represents an insulting step backward.

Requiring homeschooled students to take the state assessment in-person at public schools in grades 3–8 and 11 imposes unnecessary state control over families who have already chosen an alternative educational path. Families who homeschool do so for many reasons: academic customization, health concerns, safety, religious convictions, special learning needs, or simply because individualized instruction better serves their child. Forcing these students into a public school testing environment undermines the very flexibility and autonomy that make homeschooling effective.

Additionally, mandating Kindergarten Entry Assessments and universal screening for grades 1 and 2 extends state oversight into early childhood education in a way that is neither neutral nor minimal. Early education within the homeschool setting is often intentionally individualized and developmentally flexible. Standardized benchmarks administered through the state risk pressuring families to conform to institutional pacing rather than respecting each child’s unique readiness and growth.

Homeschool parents are not seeking to avoid accountability. Under current Hawai‘i regulations, families already demonstrate educational progress. Expanding mandatory in-person testing does not increase educational quality—it increases compliance burdens and strips away parental authority.

Education is not one-size-fits-all. Centralized mandates may serve institutional systems, but they do not necessarily serve individual children. Families, not the state, are best positioned to determine the appropriate educational methods, pacing, and assessments for their children.

This bill eliminates parental choice about location and format. Parents could lose the option of selecting alternative evaluations or private testing that currently count toward annual reports.

It places homeschool students into the public-school assessment system without clarifying how results are applied.

This bill DOES NOT clarify how this data will be measured and utilized. It risks misusing homeschool assessment data as part of public school accountability measures. This is quite significant in a state that consistently ranks in the bottom nationally.

Hawai‘i has long recognized the fundamental role of parents in directing their children’s education. This bill shifts that balance away from families and toward increased state control.

I respectfully urge you to vote NO on this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:43:03 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashlei Gochenouer	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Ashlei Gochenouer and I am testifying against HB2376.

I was an educator with the state for several years for both Elementary and special education and was able to see firsthand how state testing is not an accurate account of the students' growth and knowledge. It also altered the way the school day was structured, including what was focused on with the curriculum. So students were being trained and simply memorizing facts for the test, but no true learning and deep understanding of information was retained. I chose to homeschool my children for several reasons, one of them being that I believe education goes beyond what state testing shows. My children learn the spectrum of disciplines using a multitude of curriculum and experiences, and since it is a part of their life, the knowledge becomes deeply understood. No state test can truly show that kind of knowledge and does not fairly measure the growth of my children. Therefore, if the purpose of the state test is to see growth based on the specific measurement of the test, and knowing each family creates and chooses curriculum and experiences specific to their child and family's needs, then forcing them to take the state test to determine their effectiveness is not only not fair, it's also not accurate. I oppose this bill which is requiring homeschool families to do state testing, as it is not accurate nor an effective measurement of our education. Do not do our children a diservice they way the DOE does their students.

Ashlei Gochenouer

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:45:27 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Marie Rohr	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Opposition to HB 2376

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Anne-Marie Rohr. I am a licensed psychologist in Hawai‘i and a homeschooling parent. I am writing in opposition to HB 2376 as currently drafted.

I support thoughtful oversight of homeschooling families. Children deserve safety and accountability. However, mandating annual in-person standardized testing at public schools is not the right mechanism to achieve that goal.

Many families choose homeschooling specifically because their children struggle in traditional school environments, including formal testing settings. For children with anxiety, sensory sensitivities, neurodivergence, or nontraditional developmental pacing, in-person standardized testing can be destabilizing and may not accurately reflect learning. As a psychologist, I can attest that performance in high-stress testing environments often measures stress tolerance more than mastery.

Hawaii already requires annual assessment and allows flexibility in how families demonstrate progress. Removing that flexibility and requiring in-person testing risks increasing anxiety for vulnerable learners without meaningfully improving child safety or academic outcomes.

If the goal is accountability, policies should preserve multiple pathways for demonstrating progress. If the goal is child welfare visibility, academic testing is not designed to serve that function.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider this approach and maintain assessment options that support diverse learners.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:48:20 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alyssa Hudson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Alyssa Hudson and I am a homeschooling parent residing in Makakilo. While my children are also currently a part of Myron B. Thompson Academy, I share the concerns of full-time homeschool families, and I am testifying against HB2376 for the reasons listed below.

1. **This bill restricts the autonomy parents have over their children's education. Homeschoolers are already required to submit standardized achievement test results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. In all other years, they must submit an annual progress report, which may include standardized test results or other forms of assessment demonstrating the child's educational progress. Additional mandatory assessments for kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade students, as proposed by HB2376, are unnecessary, and inappropriate for their age.**
2. **We all know that children have their own unique learning styles. Homeschoolers choose to homeschool in order to teach their children within the frameworks that work best for them. HB2376 would remove parents' ability to select the assessments best suited to their children.**
3. **HB2376 would require homeschooled students to be tested in person at a public school, an unfamiliar setting that may negatively affect student performance. I am a mom to a first grade student. I know my child's personality, and I know the unnecessary stress she would experience by having to enter a very large, unfamiliar setting to take a test. This is one of my strongest reasons for opposition. We hear so much about taking care of our mental health; why then consider a bill that would cause extremely unnecessary stress for the homeschooled children of Hawaii?**
4. **Lastly, HB2376 would require homeschooled students to conform to public school testing schedules, which could interfere with established homeschool instructional plans. We have co-ops, specialty classes, and field learning opportunities that we schedule throughout the year to enhance our children's education. It's very disruptive to have to pull them out to take additional tests.**

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my testimony in opposition of HB2376.

Mahalo,

Alyssa Hudson

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:58:58 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sandra S N Dobesh	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a retired public school Special Ed teacher and had homeschooled our two children with my husband from preschool through the 12 grade. Our children we discovered had difficulty in spelling and were dyslexic but we persevered by teaching to their abilities without the added time, effort and costs to go to a publc school to have them tested. They did pass the SAT to enter community college, a 4 year college and graduate school at a university in Germany to pursue their interests in digital computing and glass science research. They have been successful in NYC and in LA, California. So it is pono to save the homeschool teachers' and public school teachers' time and effort and the Hawai‘i's education dollars to not pursue more from the homeschooling families. Aloha.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:00:17 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dylan Hawkins Siarot	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose Bill HB2376 as it imposes on the rights of our sovereignty. Each citizen of this planet is entitled, through birthright, to be able to live their life how they choose. This includes the right to choose their educaional path. The curriculums here in Hawaii are designed for children less intellectually advanced than my daughter. She is extremely intelligent and these curriculums offered in public schools here simply don't measure up to the education she is recieving from our homeschool curriculum. This is not a decison for governmental leaders to make as you yourselves are not educated on the full picture here. You do not witness nor experience daily the massive improvements and milestones conquered by my daughter or any homeschool student. There is no one size fits all when it comes to learning, yet that is the approach taken within the educational system in this country. And it does not work for our journey nor many others. The curriculum option is the parents right to choose. Mahalo.

I don't want to take a test in a

place that I don't know with strangers

I want to show my learning in ways

that fit how I learn.

Alice



HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:04:53 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ivana Burbage	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly oppose HB2376. Homeschooling has long been a successful and effective educational option in Hawai‘i, providing individualized instruction, flexibility, and strong family involvement. For decades, homeschooled students have demonstrated academic success without evidence of widespread underperformance.

The Department of Education already has oversight in place. Parents are required to submit annual progress reports through standardized testing, certified teacher evaluations, or written parent evaluations. These existing regulations have worked well since they were established and continue to ensure accountability while respecting parental choice.

HB2376 adds unnecessary requirements to a system that is already functioning effectively. I respectfully urge you to oppose this measure.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Ivana Burbage

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:11:31 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
megan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Homeschool families are documented, accountable, and lawful. HB2376 is unnecessary and coercive.

Children are not funding units. No funding formula should determine the limits of parental authority.

Public school parents may refuse testing without risking enrollment. Homeschool families, however, would risk losing their lawful exemption from compulsory attendance if they decline participation.

Under federal ESSA, Schools Must meet testing participation rates but parents are not legally required to force their children to take tests. There is no penalty to families who lawfully refuse. The accountability falls on the institution, not the Child.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:24:42 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2376. It is unnecessary and excessive. The current schedule required in Hawaii for standardized testing for homeschoolers is more than sufficient.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:16:06 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Monica Swanson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As parents who have graduated three sons from homeschooling, 2 of which got college scholarships, and have graduated college with degrees in engineering and data analytics (and got jobs directly out of college) we strongly oppose billHB2376. We live in the country on the north shore and if this bill were passed it would require families like ours to bring children to local public schools for testing, whichis both inconvenient, and unecessary. We did an excellent job offering our children standardized tests at home and bringing them to a public school for that would offer zero benefits. Homeschool families we know are resonsible and intentional in their homeschooling and the state should not cross the line into trying to control what we do as homeschoolers.

Entrance assessments for Kindergarten students also make no sense, especially in light of how poorly Hawaii public schools rank in our nation. One of many examples is the 2025 report from Wallet Hub shows that Hawaii public school ranked 42nd out of 51 states in the bottom tier for educational outcomes.

Our sons ranked in the top percentile of students in the nation and that is because of the home education they received.

Homeschooled kids are proving far and wide to excel both acadmically and in their community involvement and the public schools should focus on what they can do to improve the education of the students who go there. We appreciate that the public school system is concerned about the welfare of students and want to offer the best education possible to those families who must outsource the education of their children to the government, but for those of us who work hard to provide our children with the best education possible, we ask that you respect us and allow us to do our job without interference.

Thank you so much for your time and I hope you will reconsider trying to put this bill into action.

Signed,
Monica Swanson and Dr. David Swanson

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:22:24 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angelica Seto	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Senate Bill 3193 proposes mandating statewide testing for all homeschooled students at public schools, a measure that fundamentally undermines the personalized educational approach valued by families in Kahului and across Hawaii. This legislation directly conflicts with the current state law's recognition that a child's curriculum should adapt to their 'interests, needs, and abilities.' Data indicates that a significant portion of homeschooling families opt for this educational path precisely for the flexibility it offers, especially for children with diverse learning styles or special needs, allowing for tailored instruction not always achievable in standardized environments.

Imposing uniform, high-stakes testing on all homeschooled students, irrespective of their individual learning profiles, will inevitably stifle the very adaptability that makes homeschooling beneficial. Research demonstrates that a one-size-fits-all testing model can negatively impact student engagement and may not accurately reflect the full spectrum of knowledge and skills acquired through individualized curricula. This policy risks creating unnecessary burdens and potentially disadvantaging students whose educational journeys are best served by divergence from conventional schooling methods.

We must uphold the principle of educational choice that allows parents to design learning experiences that best suit their children. The current framework, which permits flexibility and individual adaptation, is a strength of our educational landscape. I urge you to oppose SB 3193 and protect the right of families to provide an education that is truly responsive to the unique potential of each child.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:33:56 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley Davison	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a dedicated and faithful homeschooling mom of 5, I oppose the HB2376 bill. This would add unnecessary pressure and stress to not only myself, but to my children who would be directly impacted by this bill. I pray that you would honor and support the freedom I have as a home educator to continue to allow my children to test in the safety, comfort, and familiar environment of their home. My children have excelled on each of their tests- scoring well above the national average! You are the voice of the public- and the public whom this bill will impact are passionately opposing all aspects of this bill! Mahalo.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:35:02 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samuel Prows	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

My name is Samuel Prows. I was raised as a homeschooled student, and I am writing in strong opposition to HB2376.

Homeschooling was not a deficiency in my education; it was the foundation of it. Because my 6 siblings and I were homeschooled, I was able to travel to over 50 countries around the world. My education was not confined to four walls or limited to a standardized curriculum. I experienced cultures firsthand. I learned history by walking through it. I learned geography by standing in it. I developed adaptability, independence, and critical thinking through real world exposure, not by standardized tests that force children into rigid boxes.

Every one of my siblings was also homeschooled. Today, they are successful adults; doctors, interior designers, entrepreneurs, creatives, and professionals across diverse fields. Our outcomes speak for themselves.

Homeschooling allowed our family to tailor education to each child's strengths, learning pace, and interests. It fostered self direction, confidence, and responsibility. Most importantly, it cultivated curiosity rather than compliance.

On the otherhand, standardized testing measures conformity, not curiosity, not creativity, not entrepreneurial skills, not leadership, or cultural intelligence.

Homeschool families already take on the full responsibility of educating their children. Many utilize nationally recognized curriculum, private assessments, dual enrollment, trade training, and college level coursework.

Requiring homeschool students to conform to state testing undermines the very flexibility that makes homeschooling effective. It imposes a "one size fits all" structure on families who have intentionally chosen an alternative path.

I respectfully urge you to preserve educational liberty in Hawaii and reject any measure that would impose unnecessary standardized testing requirements on homeschool students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Samuel Prows

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:32:30 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Housman	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Hannah Housman. I am a homeschooling mom and registered voter in Wailuku, HI. We have homeschooled our kids from kindergarten through eleventh grade.

- I strongly oppose HB2376 because it removes the parent/teacher's choice when it comes to procuring a test best suited to their student's needs.
- No other state requires in person testing for homeschool students. This bill would require homeschooled students to navigate an unfamiliar classroom setting on test days while public school students are at ease in their own classroom with their own teacher. This puts homeschooled students at a disadvantage and could likely hinder their overall performance.
- I further object to this bill's disregard for homeschool scheduling. The required DOE test days and hours conflict with homeschool schedules and cause us to forfeit useful class time.
- Homeschool students often score well above their peers. This proof of higher educational benefit is lost when homeschool student's scores are lumped by force with public school testing scores. Homeschool families work very hard to give their students the best education possible. Allow them to continue to prove this with separate testing.

This bill dismisses homeschool freedoms and adds unnecessary constraint and obligations to homeschool families. Please vote no to HB2376.

Thank you for your consideration.

Hannah Housman

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:34:45 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Keown	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Committe on Education

HB2376

Tuesday Februay 17, 2026 2:00 P.M. HST

State Capitol Building

In Opposition Of HB2376

I am Elizabeth Keown, A homeschooling parent in Maui County to a First Grade student. I am testiying against HB2376. While I am certainly not against assessments, It would be detrimental to young students to have to enter an environment that they are unfamiliar with and expect them to perform on a level that truly matches their capability. While I oppose the bill, I do agree that homeschoolers should be assessed. It is important to ensure learning is actually happening at home. Chosing to take on the education of a child outside of the public school is a commitment that should not be taken lightly, and several students have been failed by their parents under the umbrella of 'homeschooling'. Take a different approach toward assesment of homeschooled students. Yes, The school board should be ensuring the keiki are being educated. No, they should not be required to enter an unfamiliar environment and be expected to test to their capability at the ages of five, six, or even seven. I am grateful you are showing your support and care for the homeschooled keiki across the state of Hawaii.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Keown

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:46:22 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Viktoriya Shishikin	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill because we as parents deserve the right to choose how our children are being tested and what they are exposed to. This will make our girls exposed to public school setting with all sorts of behavior that they are not used to and I do not want them exposed to. Some of my kids learn differently and testing is not a one test fits all. I believe this is taking away our rights as parents and forcing "homeschool" to be controlled like a public school system is. the state does not pay for our curriculum and testing. That is all on us, in the same measure, we should oversee our children's testing.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:52:16 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tsu Osato	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee on Education,

Our nation's values are built on individual liberty and the right of parents to guide their children's upbringing, a principle that resonates deeply here in Hawaii, a place forged by diverse peoples coming together.

Mandating statewide testing for all homeschoolers, irrespective of their individual circumstances, ignores the very essence of why families choose this path. Many, like myself, embrace homeschooling to provide a tailored education, particularly for children who may have specific learning styles or needs not always met within a traditional classroom setting. Hawaii law currently acknowledges this flexibility, stating curriculum should consider the child's interests, needs, and abilities.

Imposing uniform, statewide expectations would undermine this vital parental responsibility and civic duty, essentially forcing a one-size-fits-all approach onto a diverse student population.

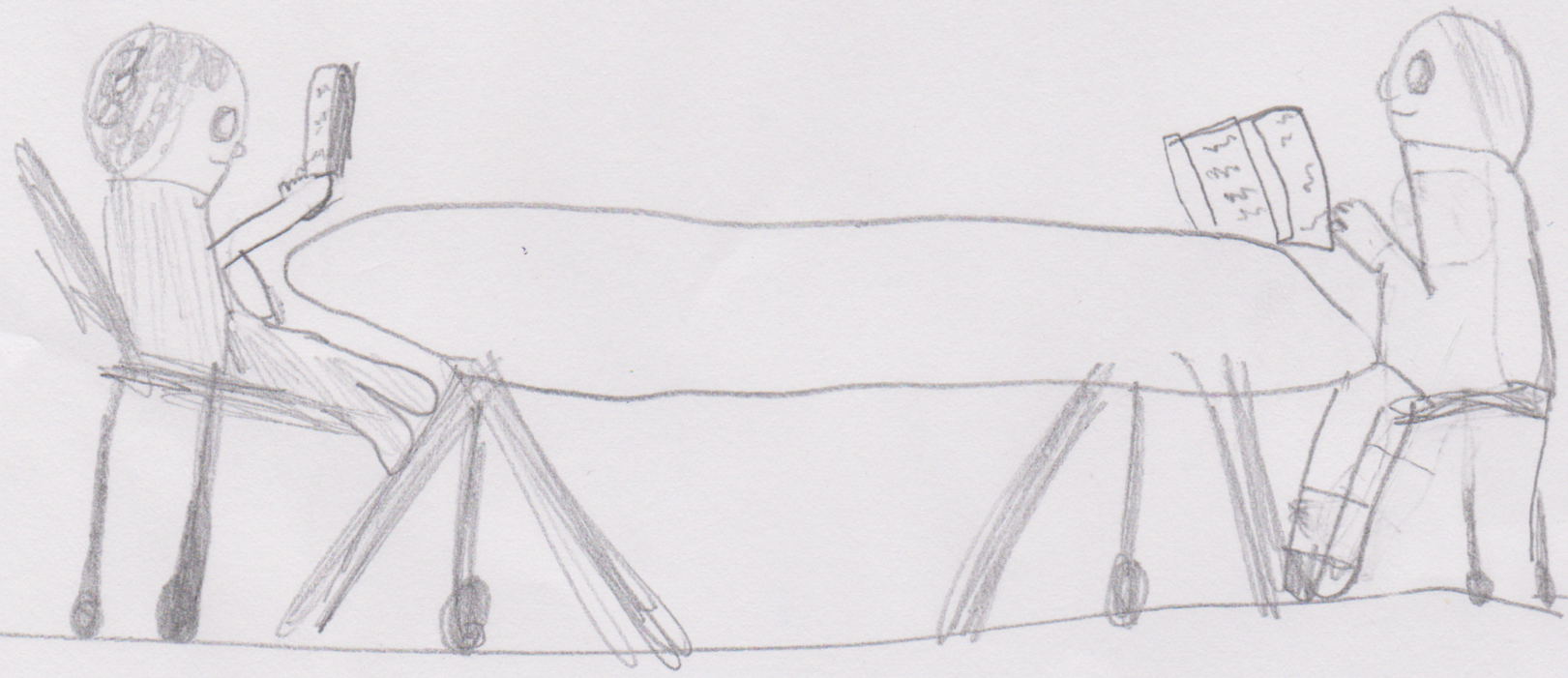
Upholding the freedom to homeschool without undue governmental intrusion allows families to nurture critical thinking and a genuine love for learning. It prepares students to be engaged citizens. We must ensure our laws reflect a commitment to these principles, safeguarding the educational autonomy that is so crucial for our children's future and the strength of our democracy.

Future generations depend on us to uphold these fundamental freedoms, ensuring that the educational landscape remains vibrant and adaptable, much like the spirit of aloha that defines our islands.

Yours sincerely,
Tsu Osato
520 Lunalilo Home Rd
Honolulu, HI 96825
tsuneil@gmail.com

I learn best when I am at my house.
please don't makes rules that make
learning harder for me

Amelia



HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:47:15 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katherine C. Morales	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I respectfully submit testimony **in strong opposition to HB 2376**.
My name is Katherine Morales and I am a homeschooler and registered voter in the district. Please understand that if passed this legislation would be a very burdensome restriction of the freedoms Hawaii homeschoolers currently possess.

Hawaii has long recognized homeschooling as a lawful, effective, and accountable educational option. Under current law, families already provide annual documentation of educational progress through multiple assessment pathways. This system has functioned for decades without evidence of widespread failure, neglect, or harm to children educated at home.

HB 2376 would place Hawaii among **the most restrictive homeschool states in the nation**, despite **no evidence of systemic homeschool failure** that would justify such a dramatic shift in policy. Most states that require homeschool assessment preserve parental choice and do not mandate participation in public school testing systems. HB 2376 goes significantly further.

This bill does not merely regulate homeschooling—it **restricts the legality of homeschooling on mandatory participation in the public school testing system**. By requiring homeschool students to physically attend public schools for state-selected assessments, HB 2376 blurs the constitutional line explicitly protected by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, which affirmed that children are not "mere creatures of the State" and that parents retain primary authority over their education.

The removal of parental choice in assessment, combined with compulsory in-person testing at public schools, represents a substantial intrusion into family autonomy and educational independence. This shift from parent-directed accountability to state-controlled validation is not narrowly tailored, especially when less restrictive mechanisms already exist and are functioning effectively.

As a result, HB 2376creates **significant constitutional vulnerability**. Parental rights are recognized as fundamental rights under longstanding Supreme Court

precedent, and legislation that burdens those rights must meet heightened scrutiny. HB 2376 fails to demonstrate a compelling state interest that cannot already be addressed through existing law.

Finally, it is important for the Legislature to understand that Hawaii has a **strong, organized, and engaged coalition of homeschooling families**. Should HB 2376 pass in its current form, the Legislature should reasonably expect a **legal challenge** based on parental rights, privacy protections, and constitutional overreach. This bill risks costly litigation and division where none is necessary.

Homeschool families are not seeking to avoid accountability. They are asking the State to preserve a balanced framework that respects parental authority, educational diversity, and constitutional boundaries.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **reject HB 2376**.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Katherine C. Morales

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:51:23 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tammy McMurry	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Tammy McMurry. I am a Hawai‘i resident, registered nurse, small business owner, and homeschooling mother of four children. I respectfully submit testimony in strong opposition to HB2376.

Our family has homeschooled for years, and we take our responsibility very seriously. Under current Hawai‘i law, we already provide annual documentation of our children’s educational progress. The existing framework allows accountability while preserving flexibility, and it has functioned effectively for decades.

HB2376 would require homeschool students to participate in mandatory, in-person testing at their assigned public school beginning in the 2027–2028 school year. While accountability is important, this bill imposes a broad mandate on families who are already fulfilling their educational responsibilities.

For neighbor island families like ours, in-person public school testing creates logistical burdens, travel challenges, and work disruptions especially for households with multiple children. This requirement does not address a demonstrated gap in the current law.

Additionally, the bill removes parental choice in assessment. One of the strengths of homeschooling is the ability to tailor education to a child’s learning style, developmental readiness, and emotional needs. A one-size-fits-all public school testing requirement undermines that flexibility.

Hawai‘i has often looked to California in shaping healthcare and education policy. Yet even California does not require homeschool families to report to public schools for mandatory state testing. Families there maintain records and accountability without in-person public school oversight. HB2376 would make Hawai‘i more restrictive than California without clear evidence that such expansion of regulation is necessary.

We understand concerns about rare situations in which a child may fall through the cracks under the label of homeschooling. Those concerns should be addressed through targeted enforcement of existing child welfare and education laws, not by imposing new blanket mandates on all families.

Homeschooling is a legitimate and proven educational choice. My family invests substantial time and resources into our children's education, as do many others across our state. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to OPPOSE HB2376.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,
Tammy McMurry
Parent and Hawai‘i Homeschool Family (4 children)
Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i
Registered voter

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:53:01 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Barillaro	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Jennifer Barillaro, mom of 2 and I ***strongly oppose*** H.B. 2376 and its companion bill.

First, mahalo nui loa for honoring your kuleana to the children of your constituency. I understan this bill was likely introduced out of a sincere desire to prevent tragedies like those involving Geanna Bradley and Isabella Kalua. I fully support effective efforts to protect vulnerable children.

However, as the saying goes, hard cases make bad law. When heartbreaking cases drive policy, the result can be legislation that causes unintended harm without solving the underlying issues.

I believe H.B. 2376 and its companion bill fall into that category.

This bill will not prevent abuse.
Research over several decades shows no statistically significant difference in abuse rates between homeschooled and non-homeschooled children. Most abuse-related fatalities occur before school age. Even within public schools, abuse frequently goes undetected despite daily contact with teachers. State data from Hawaii DHS (2016–2023) shows that education professionals account for a relatively small portion of abuse reports, and an even smaller portion of confirmed cases. Expecting teachers to identify abuse during brief annual testing sessions is unrealistic. In the tragic cases cited, warning signs were missed even within the traditional school system.

This bill will harm homeschooling families.
Requiring children to test in person in unfamiliar environments can cause significant anxiety and negatively impact performance and well-being. Standardized testing itself is widely debated as a meaningful measure of student learning, often reflecting socioeconomic factors more than educational quality. Homeschooling allows parents to individualize pace, content, and calendar; mandated in-person testing undermines that flexibility. It also places logistical burdens on families and duplicates existing oversight, as homeschool parents already submit annual progress reports demonstrating academic progress.

This bill will strain an already overburdened system.
According to Pew Research Center (April 2024), most teachers report high stress, understaffing, and insufficient time to complete existing responsibilities. Hawaii schools are also facing chronic underfunding and teacher shortages. This bill would increase workload without providing additional funding, even though homeschooled students are not enrolled and would not generate additional state or federal dollars.

We respect the Legislature's commitment to protecting Hawaii's children. But this bill adds stress to families and schools while failing to address the root causes of abuse. We urge you to focus resources where they are most needed: strengthening public schools, increasing teacher support, and providing meaningful services to at-risk families.

Thank you for considering our opposition.

Best,

Jennifer Barillaro

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:53:08 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elyce Hardwick	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose to this measure. -Elyce Hardwick

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:54:24 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brittany Kelly	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Thank you for taking time to read the comments I have on this bill. I am currently a parent who homeschools my children, but this is only in the past couple of years. Prior to this, I was a teacher in the public school system for eleven years, seven of which were in Hawaii. I have an undergrad in education and am almost finished with a Masters in Educational Leadership. There are many reasons why I choose to homeschool my children, but the most important is for me to be able to have a say in what they are learning and how they are learning. This would also cover how they are assessed in their learning. Forcing our children to report for in person testing not only takes away a right that we have as a homeschool family, but it also goes against good testing practices in general. One of the first things they teach you when learning to teach is you have to start with the assessment first. You have to know what is going to be on the test to make sure that everything has been covered. Though public school teachers do not know exactly what questions will be on the test, they do know the style of the questions and cater the material and style of their teaching to help the students be successful on that test. This would mean that homeschool families would be limited with the materials and styles they teach to make sure their child will be successful on this particular test, which is not the only measurement that is used nationally. This once again would take away their right of what and how they teach. As a teacher in the classroom, we always made sure that the children feel as comfortable as possible when they are taking the state tests. This right would be taken away from our children as they would be in an unfamiliar environment most likely with unfamiliar people. This would also very likely cause the scores to not properly reflect the true knowledge of the student and put that student at a disadvantage. Requiring in person testing would also force homeschool families to have to abide by the schedule that is given to them, preventing them from doing what they know is best for the timing of what they are teaching. Lastly, forcing homeschool families to have to participate in further assessments for younger grades is also taking away our rights of removing our children from the testing culture of the schools. More testing does not require better results. More testing raises stress and anxieties in our children. As a homeschool parent I ask that you vote no to this bill as it will prevent our right to protect our children from these anxieties and stresses.

Thank you for your consideration to vote no to protect my right as a homeschooling parent.

Brittany Kelly

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 11:56:29 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Austen Betts	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Do not make in person yearly testing mandatory for homeschooled invdividuals.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:46:08 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelley Steele	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill and believe it is in the best interest of our keiki. I would be happy for my tax payer dollars to support the expansions for libraries, charter and community schools, inclusion of homeschoolers in extracurriculars, special needs accomadations, and do think homeschool students should required to take the tests that all other students take as a data collection point. I believe it is minimally impactful because there are no consequences or rewards regardless if they score low or high. Information and data about completely unregulated schooling is important to advocate for minors who are not give a choice in their learning environment and this is the least we can do to provide some insight to how their learning compares to other students in state programs with strict accountability and oversight. Thank you for your consderation.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:07:51 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kateri Roybal-Lothamer	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill widely misunderstands homeschoolers. Studies show that up to 80% of homeschooled kids are neurodivergent. Performing unfamiliar, high pressure tests would be mentally, physically, and emotionally detrimental to the majority of homeschooled children. Gaining access to IEP's is a privilege, and many who do have means and time to get services will still tell you they had to homeschool because their child's IEP was not met adequately by the school. This doesn't even consider that boys are diagnosed with neurodivergent disabilities, like autism at a rate of 4 to 1 over girls but this becomes equal rates at adulthood. Meaning most girls are suffering misdiagnosis. This bill would cause even more trauma to these already underserved children. Please do not require our kids to endure more suffering than they are already predisposed to encounter. Please do not penalize parents further when we are doing everything in our power to make the sacrifices to homeschool our kids because we know it is best for them.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:14:42 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenna Henry	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:12:59 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Skylar Peters	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Homeschoolers should not be mandated to take public school or state tests, which only at its root is about funding for public schools. Homeschoolers in Hawaii don't even receive basic benefits of other states, like being able to participate in their zoned schools sports teams. It's also the reason many pull their kids out to homeschool because of the corrupt and ineffective protocols the DOE use to "educate" children. The public schools in Hawaii rank close to the lowest, they shouldn't have any mandates for homeschooling families, who are often ahead of their peer counterpart. Thank you.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:13:09 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ayumi Beaty	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Chair/Members/Senetors

I am writting as a homeschooling parents and physcialy (Timothy Beaty, MD) to strongly oppoose Senate Bill 3193 and House Bill 2376.

SB 3193 / HB 2376 goes far beyond these current requirements and represents unprecedented government overreach into homeschooling families. Key concerns include:

• Elimination of parental choice in testing: The bills would ban flexible, third-party standardized achievement tests that many families rely on, forcing all testing to use the state's specific assessments.

• Mandatory in-person testing at public schools: Requiring all homeschool students to test on-site imposes significant logistical and financial burdens, especially for families on neighbor islands, those with multiple children, working parents, or those in rural areas. It also disrupts homeschool schedules and creates unnecessary strain on already overburdened public school districts.

• Annual testing for seven or more years: Expanding from the current four key grades to near-annual testing (including early grades) undermines the core flexibility of homeschooling. This would pressure families to "teach to the test" rather than provide a holistic, individualized education tailored to each child's unique learning style, pace, and needs—particularly for students with special learning needs, gifted abilities, or alternative educational approaches.

Our own children are thriving under our current homeschool plan. They are engaged, progressing well, and developing as whole persons—not just test-takers. Mandating this level of state control would force us to realign our curriculum and schedule around public school testing timelines, eroding the very benefits that make homeschooling effective for our family. Most importantly this bill will keep parnets from educating and assisting children in the most successful way possible. These bills will limit children's highest potential, keep parent from unlocking children's unlealized gifts, providing the safest environment for them to learn and flourish, and providing our children the best childhood with the ones they love the most which is the right of every child.

Homeschooling is a valid, beneficial option that promotes individualized instruction and family values. Hawaii's existing framework already ensures accountability without infringing on parental rights. I respectfully urge the committee to reject SB 3193 and HB 2376 to preserve homeschool freedom and prevent unnecessary government intrusion into family education decisions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available to answer any questions and encourage the committee to hear from other homeschool families affected by this proposal.

Sincerely

Ayumi Beaty

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:12:02 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beth King	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha to the House of Representative Committee on Education,

My name is Beth King and I am a homeschooler and registered voter in Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i Island.

I am in opposition to HB 2376 because of the added burden these testing requirements would place on homeschool families, the misperception that this bill would somehow better help identify learning issues rather than the current practice, and because homeschool parents are already deeply invested in their students’ education success.

The first reason I urge you to oppose HB 2376 is because of the significant burden this would place on Homeschool families, who would have to arrange schedules, interrupt their current schoolwork, drive to different schools for multiple students, and interrupt the teaching time of their other children in order to bring each student to a public school for testing.

I have four children, three in elementary school and one in middle school, currently. I am their primary teacher and to be required to take them individually on different days for testing located in at least two different schools would be a huge interference in our school schedules and their individual learning. This bill has not taken into account the transportation needs, interference in the testing student's and their sibling's learning, or the burden this would place on homeschool students and families who are not daily attending the public schools.

The second reason I urge you to oppose HB 2376 is that it misperceives in thinking this bill would help homeschoolers, when in fact, it would harm. It appears this bill's intention is to be able to closely monitor homeschool students’ test results and identify any developmental delays or learning differences in order to offer help. However, this new burdensome bill ignores the fact that homeschool families are already required to submit testing scores in grades 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 10th along with annual reports. This provides ample assessments in order to identify any learning issues. The current status also allows homeschool families to take assessments at home, in an environment the students are comfortable and familiar with, rather than requiring they arrive in person to unfamiliar and possibly intimidating public school settings. I have personally chosen to do yearly online testing with my children and find that they consistently perform higher than their peer grade levels.

The third reason I urge you to oppose HB 2376, is that this bill does not take into consideration that homeschool families are deeply invested in the educational success of their children. We desire for our children to flourish and are intimately acquainted with how our children learn and any developmental differences they have. This is a distinction from many public school families who only find out from teachers and reports about how their children are performing academically. As a homeschool teacher, I am constantly tailoring learning to my students individual needs. If there was a significant learning issue, homeschool parents are on the front line to assist their children and actively seek help at their own cost from the local community and from the abundant online resources available. We as homeschool teachers are daily investing our time and resources into our children and desire our students to excel throughout their homeschool years.

No other state has an in-person testing requirement for homeschoolers. Does Hawaii desire to lead in becoming the most restrictive state on educational choice freedoms?

Mahalo for your time to read and take into account the testimony of this homeschool parent about the reasons why this bill would in fact harm and not benefit homeschool students. Please oppose HB 2376 if you desire homeschooling to continue as beneficial educational option in our state.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/13/2026 8:10:51 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 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

Including CHILD WELFARE CHECK to prevent child abuse, like Isabella Kalua, still her body was not recovered!

2376 HB RELATING TO EDUCATION.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:15:37 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emily Rogers	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong opposition to the proposed bill that would require homeschooled students to participate in mandatory, in-person state testing at public schools for grades 3–8 and 11, as well as the Kindergarten Entry Assessment and universal screening for grades 1 and 2.

Our family has been homeschooling in Hawai‘i for 23 years. During that time, three of our children have graduated from our homeschool and gone on to succeed in college — including one who is on the autism spectrum. We currently have children who are homeschooled as well as children enrolled in public school, so we are deeply invested in the success of *both* systems.

This bill would not improve educational outcomes. Instead, it would create unnecessary burdens for families and for already strained public schools.

Homeschoolers are already succeeding

Research consistently shows that homeschool students perform well academically and in higher education:

- Studies summarized by the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) show homeschool students typically score 15–25 percentile points above public school students on standardized academic tests.
- Homeschool graduates have been found to have college GPAs equal to or higher than their traditionally schooled peers and higher college retention rates.
- Research published in the *Journal of College Admission* found that homeschoolers graduate from college at higher rates and are actively engaged in campus life and leadership.

Our own family reflects these outcomes. We are living proof that the current Hawai‘i homeschool law works.

The current law already provides accountability

We are fully willing to comply with the existing law, which allows homeschool families to:

- obtain standardized testing on our own schedule
- choose the most appropriate assessment for our children

- submit results to our district

This system provides accountability without disrupting instruction, therapies, extracurricular activities, and community commitments.

Mandatory in-person testing would waste public resources

Requiring homeschoolers to test on public school campuses would:

- pull staff time away from public school students
- require scheduling, space, and administrative coordination
- create logistical challenges for families across rural areas like Hāmākua

This is not an efficient use of limited educational resources.

It would significantly harm homeschool families

We are a large, active homeschool family with:

- academic classes
- dual enrollment and enrichment
- sports and community activities
- individualized learning plans

For us — and for many others — being required to appear at a public school for testing would:

- disrupt carefully planned learning schedules
- create transportation and childcare challenges
- take time away from meaningful instruction

Most importantly, it would erode the educational freedom that has allowed our children to thrive for over two decades.

Public school performance in Hawai‘i shows the need for educational choice

Many families choose homeschooling because the public system is struggling:

- According to the Nation’s Report Card (NAEP), Hawai‘i ranks below the national average in both 4th and 8th grade reading and math.
- State data show that a majority of Hawai‘i public school students are not proficient in math, and large percentages are not proficient in English Language Arts.

These challenges are especially pronounced in rural communities. Schools in areas such as Laupāhoehoe face the same statewide issues of limited resources, small enrollment, and ongoing proficiency gaps. Homeschooling provides an essential, successful alternative for many families.

Please protect homeschool freedom

Homeschool freedom in Hawai‘i is something that has been carefully built over many years. It has allowed families like ours to:

- raise college-ready graduates
- successfully educate children with special needs
- remain active contributors to our communities

We are not asking to avoid accountability — we are asking to keep the current system that is already working.

Please oppose this bill and preserve the flexibility in Hawai‘i law that allows homeschool families to choose testing options and submit results on their own time.

Thank you for your service to our keiki and for considering the voices of long-time homeschool families like ours.

Sincerely, Emily Rogers

808 557 5750

emily808@ymail.com

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:21:07 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anna Shishikin	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully submit testimony in strong opposition to SB 3193.
My name is Anna Shishikin and I am a homeschooler and registered voter in the district. Please understand that if passed this legislation would be a restriction of the freedoms Hawai‘i homeschool families currently have.

Hawai‘i has long recognized homeschooling as a lawful, effective, and accountable educational option. There is no evidence of consistent or ongoing neglect or passivity towards academics of homeschooled children.

SB 3193 would place Hawai‘i among the most restrictive homeschool states in the nation, despite no evidence of systemic homeschool failure that would justify such a dramatic shift in policy. Most states that require homeschool assessment preserve parental choice and do not mandate participation in public school testing systems. SB 3193 goes significantly further.

This bill does not merely regulate homeschooling—it restricts the legality of homeschooling on mandatory participation in the public school testing system. By requiring homeschool students to physically attend public schools for state-selected assessments, SB 3193 blurs the constitutional line explicitly protected by the U.S. Supreme Court in Pierce v. Society of Sisters, which affirmed that children are not “mere creatures of the State” and that parents retain primary authority over their education. Furthermore, it takes away parental choice by assigning schools where the tests would have to be taken.

The removal of parental choice in assessment, combined with compulsory in-person testing at public schools is intrusive to family autonomy and independence. Parental rights are recognized as fundamental rights under longstanding Supreme Court precedent.

Finally, it is important for the Legislature to understand that Hawai‘i has a strong, organized, and engaged coalition of homeschooling families which can lead to litigation if the bill was passed.

Homeschool families are not seeking to avoid accountability. They are asking the State to preserve parental rights and freedom to homeschool their children.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to reject SB 3193.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Anna Shishikin

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:23:37 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maia Munoz Luz	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I write as a concerned, working homeschooling parent who values the flexibility and alternative choices that homeschooling allows for my family and an education tailored to each of my children's specific needs.

Education is not one size fits all and the beauty of homeschooling is that as parents we are able to cater to the specific needs of each student.

Standardized testing is already required for specific grades. There is no need for more and more testing. They are unnecessary and this bill would give more governmental control over homeschooling families, limiting their abilities to best serve their children.

This bill eliminates choices that homeschooling parents make for their own children by requiring physical presence at the public schools, which can be burdensome to families with multiple children and those who live in rural areas. Not only will this put a burden on homeschooling families, but it's doubtful that the public schools even have the space to facilitate so many children.

It would eliminate the parents' ability of choosing alternative testing. Currently, parents are able to not only choose which tests they utilize, but when, where and how the children take the test.

If it's not broken don't fix it. No other state has a bill like this one, which is overreach.

February 16, 2026

Committee on Education

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

In Opposition to HB 2376

Dear Rep. Woodson and Rep. La Chica,

My name is Marissa Sutton and I am a homeschool parent, testifying in opposition to HB 2376. This bill did not identify a problem to be solved, and the current system already provides sufficient support for homeschool families. We are currently required to submit standardized achievement test results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. In all other years, parents must submit an annual progress report, which may include standardized test results or other forms of assessment demonstrating the child's educational progress. We can choose the reporting method and standardized test that best aligns with our educational plan and calendar.

This bill would create an unnecessary logistical and administrative burden for both homeschool families and the DOE, with no clear benefit. For these reasons, I oppose HB 2376.

Sincerely,

Marissa Sutton

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:26:40 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
E. Walker	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- Parents are already required to submit standardized achievement test results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. In all other years, parents must submit an annual progress report, which may include standardized test results or other forms of assessment demonstrating the child's educational progress. **SB3193 and HB2376 would impose additional testing requirements**, **including mandatory assessments for kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade students. Children at these ages may not be developmentally ready for formal standardized testing.**
- Under current law, parents may choose from a variety of standardized achievement tests and may administer them either online or through an administrator approved by the test publisher. **SB3193 and HB2376 would remove parents' ability to select the assessment best suited to their child.**
- Parents currently have the option to test their children at home or in another familiar environment. **SB3193 and HB2376 would require homeschooled students to be tested in person at a public school**, **an unfamiliar setting that may negatively affect student performance.**
- Parents also establish their own homeschool calendar year. **SB3193 and HB2376 would require homeschooled students to conform to public school testing schedules**, **which could interfere with established homeschool instructional plans.**

Requiring children to be tested at a public school places an additional burden on parents, who must transport their children to the school on designated days and for specified periods of time. This requirement can be disruptive to a family's homeschool routine, particularly for families teaching multiple children.

Homeschool families are resourceful and regularly seek educational support through a wide range of services, programs, and groups available to homeschooled students.

No other states require in person testing.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:26:21 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Celso	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I feel all homeschooler's in Hawaii have the right to oppose in class testing.

I am here to support homeschoolers freedom to choose if they would like to test their children in a class room setting.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:28:11 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hope Ucker	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose this bill that would place unnecessary burden and standards upon our home. We homeschool our children and are grateful for the freedom to do this. They are ages 5,3 and 1. I do not feel mandatory assessments, entry level screenings and more standardized testing would measure the development of our children accurately. One of the main reasons for this is that we have a comfortable and safe atmosphere at home and requiring that the students be placed in a completely new environment for a test will almost certainly provide an inaccurate evaluation. Most likely not in our favor since we choose to school at home. The shock alone of being in a new place and being surrounded by so many people would distract and may negatively effect their outcomes for the test.

Additionally, violence in schools - mainland shootings and prejudice make me feel vehemently opposed and rather distressed about the idea of requiring my children to go into the school environment. While I'm sure measures and training are taken, I don't have much if any faith in the qualifications or character of teachers and staff found in public schools in 2026 based on much of the information, statistics and research available.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:33:57 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mercedes Akaka	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I highly oppose HB2376. I do not support this bill and the requirements it is trying to put on homeschooling families. Hawaii is among the few states with already stringent homeschooling requirements for families with having to notify schools about our intent to homeschool (at which many schools across the state don't seem to fully know the state's policies when it comes to homeschooling and try to require parents to enroll their children into their schools and then disenroll them or try to enforce parents provide the curriculum they will be using), submitting progress reports each year (at which some parents choose to already test their students with standardized testing to submit as the report), and are forced to test during certain grades across their academic years. Many states across the US do not have any of these requirements nor do they try to force their way into families' homeschool lives. Hawaii also has the least amount of financial support for families who choose to homeschool and do not allow children to participate in DOE sports while many other states provide stipends to parents and allow homeschool children to participate in DOE sports. As a homeschooling parent, we do not complain about those things. We find ways to make it work for us.

As a homeschooling parent, I do not need anyone monitoring our family and our children's academic progress. Children all learn at different paces and in different ways. Homeschooling parents have already identified far more than any teachers what delays and learning disabilities our children may/will or already have. Standardized testing does not reflect children's learning progress. Not all kids do well under timed tests, using computers, in group settings, or with tests in general. There are far more ways to test a child's academic progress than with a test. Some homeschooling parents already choose to test their children on a yearly basis and in the comfort of the child's home. With that, most homeschooling parents I have spoken to choose to use tests at higher standards and that test them nationally among their peers. Please do not interrupt families and what we have spent years researching and implementing in our children's homeschooling journeys to impose yearly in-person testing at local schools so that schools can monitor "student progress." Let homeschooling parents monitor their children's progress. Teachers are overburned as it is. I hear from admin in the DOE that they dislike when families choose to homeschool because it puts more paperwork burdens on the school. It's disheartening to hear. Now you add this to the admin or teacher's plate, and they will for sure even dislike homeschooling families even more.

I also believe kindergarten entry assessment should not be imposed. Not all children attend preschool so what will these assessments give detail about? What will the results do for a DOE school? It's just another requirement and thing added to a homeschooling family's plate.

Also, imposing screenings for first and second grade three times a year is ludicrous. What will these screenings do? What will it reflect? It does not make sense. I understand some children fall through the cracks, but those children do not reflect the majority of homeschooling families that are doing an amazing job with our children's academic journey. My 8th grader is taking college courses via ASU online learning this year. I don't need testing scores to tell me if she is doing amazing or not.

That being said, I highly oppose HB2376 and hope and pray you will not pass this bill and keep homeschooling requirements as minimum as possible so homeschooling families can continue to thrive in their choice to homeschool their children.

Mahalo, Mercedes Akaka

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:39:28 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paula	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a homeschooling parent raising multilingual children, I know firsthand that learning cannot be reduced to a test score. My kids are growing up trilingual, exploring languages, cultures, and ideas in ways that a rigid standardized test could never capture. Forcing annual, in-person testing completely undermines the purpose of homeschooling—it transforms individualized, curiosity-driven learning into a checklist of compliance.

Homeschooling is about tailoring education to each child's strengths, pace, and interests. It fosters creativity, critical thinking, independence, and confidence—all qualities tests ignore. It allows children to develop holistically, integrating emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and life skills alongside academic knowledge. Annual testing punishes this diversity, adds unnecessary stress, and teaches kids that learning is about holding up to outside standards, not understanding

Policies like this don't support education—they constrain it. They take control away from parents who are choosing what's best for their children and replace it with a one-size-fits-all measure that fails to see the whole child. Our children deserve to learn in ways that inspire them, challenge them, and respect their individuality—not to be boxed in by arbitrary testing.

Lawmakers, I urge you to consider the real impact: this bill doesn't protect education—it destroys the very freedom that allows homeschooling to succeed.

— Paula Schiebschick

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:43:36 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joshua Beaty	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee members

Hello, my name is Joshua Beaty. I am 12 years old and homeschooled my majority of my life. I do not believe that this bill will be beneficial but harmful because parents has the right to teach their children in the way that suits them. This is a commande given in the Bible that parents should train their children. America is a one county under God. Therefore the goverment should honor that.

Homeschool has been working for me becuase I can learn at my own pace. I know my siblilings better than most kids who attends schools. This allows me to become best friends with them for our lives and share our lives in most intimate ways. I do not want bill to pass because my mom would havet to change the way she teaches and how she organizes her plans to meet the standard that is fornced upon us. This will be problematic because I am homeschooled so that my parents can teach in the most optimal and personalized way possible that no other teachers can provide. This is the heart of homeschool.

I am thriving in mathmatics and language arts. I enjoy science especialy anatomy. My parents can supplement my learning using their medical degree. This woul dnot be possible in the traditional school setting. This expends my interests and provides a wide range of knowledge and cultivates my curioousity. I see that I can learn far better at my own home.

At home, using my time I can cater my learning according to my interests to deepen my understanding. I also can learn subjects that schools do not offer anymore such as Latin. Learning Latin has been allowing me to see bases for many English vocablaries and sentense structures. This serves me to become a better and more competent communicator through writtings. I must adress that writting and reading level of students who attennd schools are below their standard placed upon them. So why would we surrender this right.

Dear committee members, please understand that this is our right. Right to be educated at home and pursue our goals in the very best way possible. Please do not take this right from me and children across Hawaii.

Sincerely

Joshua Beaty

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:44:54 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mina Humphries	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Legislators of Hawaii,

I am writing a personal testimony in opposition to the new purposed homeschool bill as a homeschooling mother. I have a bachelors degree in economics and business management and have enjoyed using my prior taught skills via education and in my corporate career to aid the development of my children educating at home.

I'd like to share one of the many examples where independent homeschooling has only benefited my children in ways I don't believe would happen if this purposed bill were to pass.

My boys are severely dyslexic. I had them diagnosed by a pediatric psychologist. She was the main doctor that helped the department of education develop programs for special needs children.

I asked her opinion on what age she thought my boys with proper remediation would be reading. She told me they would never read or write. I also asked if they would benefit more of going to public school to get better resources than I could offer at home. She told me they would not benefit at all anymore than what they were doing at home.

This furthered my research into the national homeschool online community and I happened to find "The Nectar Group".

I can say my boys are reading and writing(ages 12 and 14) and rapidly progressing in filling any gaps of delayed academic learning due to their dyslexia. I have had the flexibility to put them through the brain training therapy that despite what I was told by the doctor, disagreed with, and knew my boys could learn to read.

Had they been required to do in school assessments especially at such young ages; how would that have affected their confidence or my drive to find solutions for their needs. If I was not so driven to succeed as a homeschool mother I could've easily fallen victim to what the doctor told me and allowed my boys to never be educated in the way I knew they were capable despite their

disability.

I know I am not an expert but I am a mother on a mission to raise children that are wildly successful in whatever ways they decide to go in their lives. The work ethic and cooperation that the daily life of homeschool offer are invaluable.

While homeschooling families socialize often in various ways from coops, churches, friends, neighbors, beach days and so on. One thing is certain most homeschooled children are not used to being dropped off at unknown locations and away from their primary caregivers like public educated children are. My biggest concern that these extra tests would require is anxiety(especially if having to be dropped off) in the children and specifically around education which is the last thing that would produce adults who overcome the many obstacles that life throws at you in the workplace, higher education, and such.

I do so hope that you trust the parents and caregivers who homeschool to know what is best for the children they care for and educate.Trust that we all have the same desire which is to see children who grow up to make the world a better more functioning place instead of the opposite. Our paths that we take to get to that destination may look different from the DOE but it doesn't mean that it is wrong or needs extra monitoring.

Mahalo for your time and understanding. I have faith you will make the best decision for our keiki.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:48:46 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paula DePeralta	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to exress my strong opposition to HB2376. While the intent to monitor student progress is understandable, this bill oversteps my right as a parent to direct my children's education.

It infringes on our educational freedom. My husband and I chose to home school our children for the past 16 plus years as our right and responsibility to guide them in their individual strengths and giftings. We are responsible for preparing them for life. This bill displaces that priority, as a test score will NOT determine or reflect how prepared they will be for life beyond graduation.

This bill will also, inherently, cause unnessary burden for home schoolers at large. To force our children into public school environments to take a test would cause undue stress which may lead to possible negative test scores. Not only that, but it would also cause incredible logistical hurdles, especially for those of us with multiple children of varying ages. I would not want to leave any of my children in an unfamiliar environment to take a test that we can easily administer from home or with other home schoolers.

Lastly, there is no data suggesting that Hawai‘i's current home schooling requirements are failing, so why is this bill even being considered? Mandating these assessments is only a so called "solution" in search for a problem that does NOT exist. I believe wholeheartedly, that, through written and in-person testimonies, you will find home schooled students mature, well spoken, and more prepared for life than any assessment test given via public school system will reveal.

I urge the committe to hold HB2376 and respect the autonomy of Hawai‘i's home schooling community. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Paula DePeralta

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:50:26 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charmaine Garcia	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I highly oppose this bill. I have homeschooled 5 children (4 of whom have graduated already, 2 of those have graduated from college as well, the other 2 are currently enrolled at UH Manoa) These 5 children have been homeschooled here in Hawaii their whole life. I have sent in standardized testing for them every year. We work the testing into their work day. To have thier school day interrupted with going to another school that we are not familiar with is detrimental to their learning in time, effort, cost and stress. One woiuld not take a public school child out of their daily familiar environment and transport them to another place to take a test among people or an environment they are unfamiliar with. It is not failr to the child or the teacher. I there for highlly oppose HB2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:00:15 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sheena Tanimoto	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, and the rest of the Tanimoto Ohana, strongly oppose this bill.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:07:58 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bree McCook	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a Hawaii resident, and I strongly oppose HB2376. First, removing an exception for homeschool students to test at home is very unfair both for the students and the schools. Requiring a young student to go to an unfamiliar location that they may have never been before alone with teachers they do not know, strangers, could be very scary for them. Then they would be required to perform on a test in that environment, it is simply not fair to homeschool students.

Additionally, many families choose to homeschool in order to have a more flexible schedule. Holding homeschool families to more rigorous testing requirements that force them to physically be at a location at specific times, is unfair. Many families have choosen this path because of travel schedules or choose to homeschool on a year round schedule instead of a traditional schedule. This bill would strip away that option for families.

Finally, the logistics for the public schools to accommodate additional students during testing times would be another stress and requirement for administrations and teachers who are already stretched too thin. Homeschool students already have teachers (parents, grandparents, or tutors) and comfortable, familiar environments to take tests. They do not need to unnecessarily take resources from an overburdened public school system.
Trying to implement HB2376 would be tramautizing to homeschool systems and place an unnecessary burden on both homeschool families and our public schools.

Thank you for reading and considering my testimony.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:11:12 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leticia Quinsay	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill. As a newly homeschooling parent, going on 5 years, I see the benefits of homeschooling for my children. When COVID hit and my children had to stay at home and do online schooling, I saw first hand, how behind they were. I never had a desire to homeschool until I saw how much my children were struggling in their education. My son had an IEP as well and he was further behind in grade level than what I was led to believe. They just pushed him through in hopes that he'll just catch up eventually. That was no longer an acceptable answer for me. So my husband and I decided that I was going to homeschool our kids. In homeschooling I'm able to focus my attention on each of my kids, tailor their learning to how they effectively learn and grasp concepts, and I get to spend quality time with my kids. We also teach life skills as well to prepare them to be active contributors to society when they become adults. Today, my children are thriving in their education and they enjoy learning! We've closed the gaps in their education and we couldn't be more happy. I just don't know why we didn't do this sooner.

Another reason why I enjoy homeschooling is that I know they're safe. I don't have to wonder if there's going to be a tragedy.

All that to say, I don't see how forcing our children to "show face" at a school for state testing is benefiting anyone. We already are required to send in testing for certain grade levels as well as send in annual progress reports.

We also have annual dentist and doctor checkups and are active in our church. We attend church 3x a week for services and a couple other times for practices in ministry. We also attend community events.
I still don't understand why this bill was even introduced without factual information to back up WHY you would want to enforce this bill on homeschooling families. Hawai'i literacy is one of the lowest in the nation. So again, why should homeschooling families be required to take state standardized testing when our kids all learn differently?!?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:04:57 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heide San Nicolas	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

I respectfully request that you oppose HB2376 for the following reasons:

- Parents are already required to submit standardized achievement test results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. In all other years, parents must submit an annual progress report, which may include standardized test results or other forms of assessment demonstrating the child's educational progress. **SB3193 and HB2376 would impose additional testing requirements**, **including mandatory assessments for kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade students. Children at these ages may not be developmentally ready for formal standardized testing.**
- Under current law, parents may choose from a variety of standardized achievement tests and may administer them either online or through an administrator approved by the test publisher. **SB3193 and HB2376 would remove parents' ability to select the assessment best suited to their child.**
- Parents currently have the option to test their children at home or in another familiar environment. **SB3193 and HB2376 would require homeschooled students to be tested in person at a public school**, **an unfamiliar setting that may negatively affect student performance.**
- Parents also establish their own homeschool calendar year. **SB3193 and HB2376 would require homeschooled students to conform to public school testing schedules**, **which could interfere with established homeschool instructional plans.**

Requiring children to be tested at a public school places an additional burden on parents, who must transport their children to the school on designated days and for specified periods of time. This requirement can be disruptive to a family's homeschool routine, particularly for families teaching multiple children.

Homeschool families are resourceful and regularly seek educational support through a wide range of services, programs, and groups available to homeschooled students.

No other states require in-person testing.

Mahalo,

Heide San Nicolas

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:07:51 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nina Buchanan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I have been conducting research on homeschooling in Hawaii for several years. Hawaii's current regulations are sufficient if the HIDOE provided the oversight already in the regulation.

FYI The Homeschool Hub reports that: 1) About 14 states require some form of test/assessment or portfolio in some grades that must also be reviewed or otherwise submitted; 2) No other state requires the state test because the test should reflect the taught curriculum. If the state test does not do that for homeschoolers, then the fear is that they won't do well, not because they don't know things, but because they don't know THOSE particular things; and 3) Most states allow families to take a test of their choice out of a group of approved tests. One way to incentivize taking the state test is to offer it to families for free, and then they have to pay for their own test if they choose another kind.

The bill you are considering requires student to come to the school in person to take the test. No other state or local education agency in the nation places this burden on parents.

Here is a video my fellow researcher, Angela R. Watson, did this summer that addresses the stereotypes that some house members may have about homeschooling.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jPRXvz_sR6E4xWddpBV59c4qh8J8K-5_/view

Dr. Nina Buchanan Professor Emerita UH

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:01:47 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cynthia Hossain	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully oppose HB2376.

This bill would require standardized testing in public schools, an unfamiliar and stressful environment for many homeschool students. For some children, homeschooling was chosen specifically to remove them from situations involving bullying, anxiety, or other school related stress. Requiring them to return to that setting for testing will negatively affect both their emotional wellbeing and academic performance.

Parents should retain the ability to choose appropriate assessments that best reflect their child's learning. HB2376 adds unnecessary regulation without proven benefit and limits educational freedom.

I urge you to oppose this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:00:23 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Diana Calia	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Hawai‘i State Legislature — Committees on Education and Judiciary / Finance
Re: SB3193 and **HB2376** — **OPPOSE**
Hearing: Tuesday, February 17 2026
Submitted by: Diana Calia, Honolulu, Hawai‘i — homeschool parent

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

My name is **Diana Calia** I am a **homeschool parent** in **Honolulu, HI**, a **registered voter** in **my district** submitting testimony in **strong opposition** to **SB3193** and **HB2376**.

These concurrent bills would **expand mandatory standardized testing** for homeschool students and **require in-person testing at public schools** for grades **3–8 and 11**, while also imposing **new assessments for kindergarten, first grade, and second grade** (including a kindergarten entry assessment and universal screening for grades 1–2).

1) Hawai‘i already requires homeschool accountability — these bills are unnecessary overreach

Under current Hawai‘i homeschool rules, parents already submit **annual progress reports**, and standardized achievement test results are already required in designated grades (commonly **3, 5, 8, and 10**). This system already provides measurable accountability while allowing families to choose an appropriate method and setting.
SB3193/HB2376 add mandates without demonstrating a problem that existing law fails to address.

2) Mandatory in-person testing at public schools harms students and distorts results

Requiring homeschool children to test **in an unfamiliar public school environment** can **negatively affect performance**, especially for students who experience anxiety, sensory sensitivities, learning differences, or who simply learn best in familiar settings. If the state’s goal is “accurate measurement,” forcing a setting that predictably degrades performance does the opposite. It produces **worse data** and **more false negatives**, not better accountability.

3) These bills eliminate parental choice of assessment and violate the logic of homeschooling

Homeschooling is, by design, individualized. Parents choose curricula, pacing, and instructional methods tailored to the child. Current law permits parents to select from **nationally normed standardized tests** and choose administration options that match the child's developmental readiness and learning needs.
SB3193/HB2376 remove that choice, forcing a one-size-fits-all compliance regime that mirrors public school operations—without any showing that homeschool families are failing to educate their children.

4) K–2 screening mandates are developmentally inappropriate and create predictable collateral damage

Kindergarten through second grade is a period of wide developmental variation. Mandating universal screening/assessments at these ages risks:

- Mislabeling normal developmental variation as deficiency
- Pressuring families into premature formal testing
- Increasing stress on children and families
- Incentivizing box-checking over real learning
  If the legislature wants to support early literacy and numeracy, it should invest in **voluntary supports**, not compulsory compliance aimed at families who have already chosen an alternative education model.

5) The logistics are a real burden — especially for families with multiple children

In-person testing at public schools imposes **transportation, scheduling, and childcare burdens**, especially for families teaching multiple children, families with working parents, rural families, and families without reliable transportation.
Homeschool calendars often differ from public school schedules due to travel, enrichment programs, year-round models, military schedules, and individualized pacing. These bills force homeschool families to conform to public school testing windows, disrupting established instruction.

6) These bills shift costs and administrative load onto public schools and the state

Requiring in-person testing for homeschoolers increases administrative burden on schools: coordinating test days, staffing, supervision, accommodations, and reporting. If the state intends to expand testing mandates, the fiscal and staffing impact should be clearly justified—especially when existing compliance mechanisms already exist.

7) This is a policy outlier with no demonstrated benefit

Homeschool families are already resourceful and engaged with co-ops, enrichment, and community programs. Expanding compulsory testing and requiring in-person administration is a disproportionate response and does not align with the policy approach in most states. The legislature should not adopt an outlier mandate without strong evidence of necessity and effectiveness.

Requested action

For these reasons, I respectfully request the committee **HOLD SB3193 and HB2376** (or vote **NO**). If the legislature believes changes are needed, any amendments should preserve:

- **Parent choice** of nationally normed assessments
- **Flexible testing location and timing**
- A clear justification tied to a demonstrated problem and measured outcomes
- Protection against burdens that penalize families for choosing homeschooling

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully,
Diana Calia
Honolulu, Hawai‘i
808-384-9929

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:13:03 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marissa Treskon	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello Committee Leaders,

I'm writing in strong opposition to HB2376 for the following reasons:

--there is already a sufficient testing requirement in place for homeschoolers in various grades, and in off years there are requirements to record proper progress.

--current public school students have the option to opt out of testing (we've done this with our public school child) therefore placing an unfair bias against homeschoolers

--an unfamiliar setting for testing might cause stress and disadvantage against homeschoolers versus public school students

I urge committee members to vote against creating an unfair disadvantage toward homeschool students across Hawaii, standards not even imposed by other states. As a parent of both public school and homeschool children, I humbly ask you to vote no on HB2376.

Thank you.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:14:06 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
EMILY MATSCO	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TO THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

Regarding the Hearing on February 17th, 2026 at the State Capitol for HB2376.

I am testifying in opposition to HB2376. As both a tutor and homeschooling parent, I oppose this bill as it is redundant regarding accountability already in place, the bill's prescriptions are not appropriate means of gauging learning, expands Hawaii's already failing educational systems and it is ultimately harmful to homeschool students' wellbeing.

This bill claims to enact in-person testing and evaluation standards that would benefit homeschooling children and their families. However, current Hawaii law already requires annual reports, standardized testing in specific grades, and for the parent to keep a record of planned curriculum. This bill does not provide evidence showing that current requirements are not adequate.

The bill's proposed legislation to require early assessments and in person-standardized testing is harmful to homeschool student development. As a parent and tutor, I have taught over 30 children to read and write over the past 3 years. Children come to language and mathmatical development at various times. Homeschool curriculum that is thoughtful and intentional in developing the child is more important than a set of arbitrary assessments the Hawaii Department of Education (DOE) deems the standard. Currently, Hawaii public schools are listed as 42nd in the nation as of 2025 reports. They are currently failing at developing their own students; this bill expands the DOE's failure even further, by disrupting the scucess of families who are choosing to educate differently. The bill does not adequately specify what these "resources" are that it could provided, nor the possible requirements and consequences for accepting or declining such resources, if a homeschooled student assesses below DOE standards.

It is a known fact that the early learning years of a child are highly variable, and diverse learning methods and child specific learning benchmarks provide a child appropriate growth. A

student who does not learn to read until they are at the age of 8 but has been exposed to a wide variety of rich read-alouds and hands-on experiences is not behind the student who learns to read at age 6. Homeschool students may do poorly in the proposed initial assessments at the K, 1st, and 2nd grade levels if their curriculum does not teach to Hawaii DOE standards and timing. This does not mean a child is not appropriately developing but is developing according to different curriculum. A child who is then deemed failing, or needing intervention according to Hawaii DOE could then be pushed into failing DOE systems that would likely be traumatic and detrimental to their well-being.

Current required standardized testing in 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 10th grade have been deemed appropriate as there should normally be benchmarks students are meeting at these levels. However, requiring homeschool students to take standard, in-person exams with Hawaii DOE students may not meet homeschool learning objectives and hinders full potential of these students. Parents who choose to homeschool their students have a pedagogy that likely differs from that of the DOE, often due to the failure of the DOE system itself. They are not merely doing school at home but are providing a curriculum with a set of objectives that may differ in timeliness and content with that of the DOE. To force homeschool students to take the same state assessments as DOE students does not allow for the freedom to school differently and will not result in higher learning, especially in Hawaii. As it is, standardized testing is highly debated on the national scene as an effective measure of learning. Schools at the forefront of education are moving to alternative forms of assessing students.

HB2376 should be strongly opposed by all those who support education. Those who desire to see a society that recognizes the benefit of diverse schooling options to optimize learning potential, should understand that intelligence is developed and measured in a multitude of ways. The current legal requirements are more than adequate to ensure accountability of homeschooling families while the legislation proposed would be a disastrous set-back to learning, harmful to families and schools alike, and undermine the diversity of education Hawaii claims to promote.

Respectfully,

EMILY MATSCO

Kailua, HI

Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair

House Committee on Education

Tuesday, February 17, 2026

2:00 PM, House conference room 309 Via Videoconference

IN OPPOSITION to HB 2376

As homeschool parents who graduated our four children, we are testifying against HB2376.

The homeschool rule Hawaii Rev. Stat. § 302A-1132(a)(5) in effect already requires homeschool parents to submit their children's standardized test scores in 3, 5, 8, and 10 grades to their local public schools annually. In all other years, parents must submit an annual progress report that may include standardized test results, as well. These requirements monitor the homeschool children's academic progress from year to year.

Requiring parents to have their children tested at the public schools puts an undue burden on these parents, a number of them who have children in multiple grade levels, as well as infants and preschoolers.

The basic premise of homeschooling, for parents to be responsible to teach their own children, is being overridden by this bill which requires testing at the public school.

Parents are the biggest stakeholders in their children's education. Please oppose this bill because oversight of homeschooler's education is already being done through the existing homeschool rule.

Mahalo for your time and kind consideration.

Michael and Amy Chinaka

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:13:32 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kuulei Kupihea	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong opposition for this bill. Home school is "HOME" school not DOE school.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:16:25 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Meri Barcons	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to strongly oppose bill hb2376, which would require homeschooled children to attend school in order to take standardized tests. This proposal is unnecessary, intrusive, and undermines the rights of parents to direct the education of their children.

Homeschooling families in Hawaii are committed to providing high-quality education tailored to each child's needs. For many families, homeschooling is essential not only for academic growth, but also for preserving multilingual abilities and cultural connections. My own daughter, for example, speaks three languages, and the learning rhythm we maintain at home allows her to develop fluency, maintain her heritage language, and remain deeply connected to her cultural roots. Forcing children into a traditional school environment for standardized testing would disrupt this balance, potentially hindering language development and weakening the vital link to their cultural heritage.

Homeschooling families already engage in various forms of assessment, record-keeping, and accountability. This bill's requirement to send children into schools solely for testing is disruptive, unnecessary, and counterproductive. It imposes logistical, emotional, and financial burdens while disregarding the unique needs of multilingual and culturally rich households.

I urge the legislature to respect the autonomy of homeschooling families and oppose any measure that would force unnecessary testing in traditional school settings. Children and families deserve the freedom to learn, grow, and maintain their cultural and linguistic heritage in the environment that works best for them.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:16:07 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tony Barwick	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Opposition to SB3193 and HB2376

Committee Members,

My name is Tony Barwick, and I am a resident of Kula, Maui. I am a homeschooling parent (or strongly support homeschooling families in our community), and I submit this testimony in strong opposition to SB3193 and HB2376.

Hawai‘i’s current homeschooling law already strikes an appropriate balance between accountability and parental freedom. Parents are required to submit standardized achievement test results for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. In all other years, parents submit an annual progress report that may include standardized test scores or other evidence of educational progress. This framework has worked well for decades, ensuring oversight without unnecessary intrusion into families’ educational choices.

SB3193 and HB2376 would impose significant new burdens on homeschooling families that are neither necessary nor beneficial:

1. Mandatory testing for kindergarten, first, and second grade
These bills would require formal standardized assessments for very young children who are often not developmentally ready for such testing. Many kindergarten, first-, and second-grade homeschool students are just beginning to read, write, and engage with formal academics at their own pace. Subjecting them to mandatory standardized tests risks creating anxiety and a negative association with learning at the very ages when children should be developing a love for education.

2. Removal of parental choice in assessments
Under current law, parents may select from a variety of standardized achievement tests and administer them in ways best suited to their child (online or through an approved test administrator). These bills would eliminate that flexibility, forcing families to use only state-designated assessments that may not align with a child’s learning style, curriculum, or needs.

3. Mandatory in-person testing at public schools
Homeschool parents currently have the option to test their children at home or in a familiar environment. Requiring testing to occur in person at a public school—an unfamiliar and

potentially intimidating setting—could negatively impact student performance and add unnecessary stress for both children and parents.

4. Disruption of homeschool schedules
Homeschooling families establish their own instructional calendars tailored to their children's needs and family circumstances. Forcing homeschooled students to conform to the public school testing schedule would interfere with established educational plans, travel, or other legitimate scheduling choices.

These changes represent an unnecessary expansion of state control over private educational decisions. The existing requirements already provide sufficient accountability while preserving the flexibility that makes homeschooling effective and successful for thousands of Hawai‘i families. Adding more testing—especially for our youngest learners—will not improve educational outcomes; it will only create barriers, stress, and resentment.

I respectfully urge the committee to reject SB3193 and HB2376 and to preserve the reasonable balance that has served Hawai‘i's homeschooling community well.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tony Barwick

Kula, Maui, Hawai‘i

Tonyalanbarwick@gmail.com

808 344 0851

February 16, 2026

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:13:59 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michele Fusato	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Testimony in Opposition to HB2376

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in respectful opposition to HB2376.

I am a former public school teacher of eight years and a homeschooling mother of three children, ages 7, 4, and 2. I have been homeschooling for four years. I value education deeply and understand both the structure of public schools and the responsibility assumed by homeschooling parents.

When families submit a notice of intent to homeschool, we assume full responsibility for our children's education. We do not receive curriculum, materials, funding, or instructional assistance from the Department of Education. With that responsibility comes the freedom to determine the scope, sequence, pacing, and assessment methods that best serve our children.

HB2376 would require homeschooled children to participate annually, in person, at their assigned public school in the kindergarten entry assessment, first and second grade universal screenings, and statewide standardized testing in later grades. While framed as supportive, this requirement represents a significant shift in the relationship between homeschooling families and the state.

First, standardized testing at fixed grade levels does not account for the individualized pacing that defines home education. The material assessed may not align with a family's chosen curriculum or instructional philosophy. Homeschooling allows children to progress according to readiness, not according to a state testing calendar.

Second, universal screenings in first and second grade and the kindergarten entry assessment are designed for students enrolled in public school settings. Many homeschooling families intentionally delay formal academics or follow alternative educational models. Imposing public school readiness benchmarks effectively standardizes early childhood expectations in a way that conflicts with parental educational discretion.

Third, children who have never been in a public school setting may experience anxiety or discomfort when required to report in person to a public campus for testing. Performance under those circumstances may not reflect actual academic ability or growth.

Fourth, parents currently retain the freedom to choose both curriculum and assessment tools. That flexibility allows for meaningful evaluation tailored to each child. HB2376 removes that freedom and replaces it with a mandatory, state-selected assessment administered on public school grounds.

Additionally, requiring annual in-person participation at the assigned public school creates logistical and administrative burdens for families who operate independently from the public system. Homeschooling families receive no funding or institutional support. Imposing new mandates without providing services shifts the balance from oversight to regulation.

As a former public school teacher, I understand the value of assessment tools within that system. However, homeschooling operates on a fundamentally different model — one built on parental accountability, flexibility, and individualized instruction. A single standardized test on a single day does not capture the depth, mastery, and personalized progress that homeschooling often fosters.

HB2376 sets a significant precedent by expanding state oversight into an educational model that has long operated successfully under parental responsibility. While accountability is important, it must be balanced with respect for parental authority and educational diversity. Policies that gradually standardize homeschooling risk eroding the very flexibility and independence that make it effective. I respectfully urge the Legislature to preserve educational freedom in Hawaii and oppose HB2376.

Sincerely,

Michele Fusato

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:18:30 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
chastity Rubbelke	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

My name is Chastity Rubbelke and I am a homeschooling parent here in Hawai‘i. I am writing today not just as a parent, but as someone who has dedicated my daily life to personally guiding my child’s education. I respectfully ask you to oppose HB 2376.

Homeschooling is deeply personal for our family. I wake up every day intentionally planning lessons, researching materials, tracking progress, and adjusting instruction to meet my child’s unique needs. I see firsthand where my child excels and where extra support is needed. Education in our home is not passive it is hands on, engaged, and constant. It is conversations at the dinner table, science experiments in the kitchen, reading together on the couch, and applying math while budgeting at the grocery store.

One of the greatest blessings of homeschooling is flexibility. Because of that flexibility, my child participates in extracurricular activities and sports offered during homeschool hours by local businesses and community organizations. These daytime programs whether athletic training, martial arts, art, music, or STEM enrichment exist because homeschooling families are active and present in our communities. My child builds friendships, learns teamwork, develops discipline, and gains confidence through these opportunities.

We also use the flexibility of homeschooling to travel within our island, to neighbor islands, and occasionally beyond Hawai‘i specifically for learning. We visit historical landmarks, cultural sites, farms, museums, and natural environments to experience lessons in real life. My child learns Hawaiian history by standing where it happened. Science is learned through hiking, tide pooling, and observing ecosystems firsthand. These experiences cannot be measured by a single standardized test score, yet they are some of the most meaningful lessons my child receives.

I also want to speak from the heart regarding concerns that sometimes surround homeschooling. As a parent who is present with my child daily, I can say that homeschool families are deeply involved in their children’s lives. There have not been reports of widespread abuse within Hawai‘i’s homeschooling community that would justify additional academic mandates. Sadly, abuse can happen in any setting including traditional schools and annual testing does not prevent it. Requiring standardized tests for homeschoolers does not protect children; it simply adds another layer of regulation to families who are already committed and accountable.

Standardized testing once a year does not reflect the depth of individualized, mastery-based learning happening in our home. It risks shifting our focus from genuine understanding and curiosity to teaching toward a test. That is not why we chose this path.

The current system already requires notice of intent and annual progress reports. We are not asking for zero accountability we are asking for reasonable accountability that respects parental rights and educational freedom.

Rather than increasing regulation on families who are successfully educating their children, I respectfully encourage the Legislature to focus its energy and resources on strengthening Hawai‘i’s public schools addressing teacher shortages, classroom resources, student support services, and academic outcomes. Families choose homeschooling for many reasons, and additional mandates on homeschoolers will not solve the broader challenges facing the public education system.

We have chosen homeschooling thoughtfully and take that responsibility seriously. HB 2376 places unnecessary burdens on parents who are already fully invested in raising educated, capable, and compassionate children.

I respectfully urge you to vote NO on HB 2376 and instead prioritize meaningful improvements that benefit all of Hawai‘i’s students.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Chastity Rubbelke
Ewa Beach, Hawai’i
808-541-7185

DATE: February 16, 2026

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

RE: HB 2376
Position: Strongly Oppose

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

My name is Keolapono Maeda. I'm a homeschool student in my senior year.

House Bill 2376 is a direct threat to the heart of homeschooling in Hawaii. This bill's mandate for statewide testing at public schools would cripple the very flexibility that makes homeschooling so vital for a child's education. The ability to tailor education to each child's unique needs and learning style is paramount, especially for students with special needs or those who thrive outside traditional classroom structures. My own experience in a homeschool education has shown me firsthand how crucial this customization is as I perform better working at my own pace. Imposing a rigid, one-size-fits-all testing standard undermines the core purpose of homeschooling and ignores the proven success of individualized learning. We need to preserve the existing laws that respect each child's interests, needs and abilities. Legislators must understand that stifling educational freedom through unnecessary testing requirements will have profound, negative impact on families across Hawaii. This matter requires urgent attention.

Please vote NO on HB 2376.

Sincerely,
Keolapono Maeda
18-4170 Hinuhinu Street
Mountain View, HI 96771
(808) 747-1165

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:19:04 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katie Brunk	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good afternoon. I am a homeschooling mom of two for the last 5 years. I have abided by the state laws and properly administered and submitted the required state testing for 3rd grade last year for my daughter. I am a registered voting mother in Wailuku, HI. Requiring homeschooled children to go to an unfamiliar school, with unfamiliar testing, with unfamiliar people is not a fair way to accurately view a child's academic knowledge. Doing so also does not factor in each child's learning disabilities. This puts homeschooled children at a large disavantage to those who are used to the "system". Please vote NO on HB2376. Thank you for reading this and considering the individualistic needs of each child in Hawaii.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:19:33 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thomas Olson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB 2376. As a homeschooling father, I see this bill imposing significant restrictions on my family's ability to exercise the freedoms we are given in choosing how to best educate my four children. Forcing my children to go to their local school to take tests totally defeats the purpose of choosing not to follow a cookie cutter approach to education. I urge our state legislature to consider the impacts of this bill should it pass. Mahalo.

DATE: February 16, 2026

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

RE: HB 2376
Position: Strongly Oppose

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

My name is Keilah Maeda and I am a sixteen year old homeschool student. I strongly oppose HB 2376 because it absolutely deviates from the whole point of homeschooling, where we don't have to follow other schools' programs but have our own way of teaching and education. From what I can see this bill is violating homeschool rights by making it so that we have to follow the public schools way of teaching their kids when, literally, the point of being homeschooled is so that we don't have to. I also definitely don't see the reason in participating in the statewide public school test, when Hawai'i's public schools' overall academic performance show that we are forty-second in all of the fifty states, according to this article, which means that the public schools are not meeting very good standards and there would be no point in having us homeschoolers test under this system. I fail to see the reason and logic in this bill and so I stand against it, hoping that it will not go through and that the state will come to respect homeschooling rights.

Please vote NO on HB 2376.

Sincerely,
Keilah Maeda
18-4170 Hinuhinu Street
Mountain View, HI 96771
(808) 747-1165

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

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

Rep. Terez Amato	Rep. Darius K. Kila
Rep. Luke A. Evslin	Rep. Ikaika Olds
Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett	Rep. Christopher L. Muraoka
Rep. Jeanne Kapela	Rep. Kanani Souza

NOTICE OF HEARING

DATE:	Tuesday, February 17, 2026
TIME:	2:00 p.m.
PLACE:	VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE Conference Room 309 State Capitol 415 South Beretania Street

HB2376

IN OPPOSITION

Dear Committee on Education,

My name is Kristen Hewitt. I am a proud home educator of our daughter. I'm writing to inform you that our family, as well as over 100 members of our homeschool co-op **TESTIFY AGAINST** H.B. 2376.

Firstly, we want to say mahalo nui loa: thank you for upholding your kuleana to the children of your constituency. We recognize that this bill may stem from a desire to further protect school-age children from abuse and neglect, and we support effective legislation to safeguard the most vulnerable among us. However, no other states mandate in-person testing for homeschooled students, and we believe that this bill is

not an effective way of measuring student progress, nor a safeguard against abuse and neglect.

Failure to mitigate child abuse and neglect

Using homeschooling alone as a criterion for additional oversight is unwarranted. Research from the 1980s to present has found no statistically significant difference in abuse between homeschooled and non-homeschooled populations. Homeschooling itself is not known to be a risk factor for systematic abuse.

Again, we wholeheartedly support the effort to protect our keiki. We do not believe this bill is an effective means of doing that.

The toll on homeschooling families

1. Standardized testing is antithetical to many homeschooling philosophies, because it forces individualized, mastery-based, or interest-led education into a rigid, standardized, and "one-size-fits-all" framework. These tests create unnecessary stress, promote superficial learning over deep understanding, and undermine the freedom and independence that are characteristics and hallmarks of home education.
    - Requiring children to perform at a standardized grade level negates the freedom parents have to tailor their child's content of education and learning pace to that child's individual needs and goals.
    - Requiring children to test in an unfamiliar environment, in a room full of strangers, could be anxiety-inducting and may impact their ability to perform to the best of their ability. A 2020 comprehensive review by Emma Howard, "Review of the Literature Concerning Anxiety for Educational Assessments," found that "high levels of test anxiety are associated with reduced performance," but even if "students [are] not negatively impacted in terms of grade outcomes, the experience of high levels of test anxiety can still have detrimental effects of mental health and well-being." As parents, we consider it our responsibility to teach our children that they can do hard things and to teach them the tools for navigating difficult circumstances. It's also our responsibility to safeguard their mental health from unnecessary harm, especially during the critical impressionable early years.
    - The adequacy of standardized testing as a marker of student progress is a matter of hot debate. Jack Schneider, a historian and policy analyst who co-

founded the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA) writes, “The current data used to measure student success… closely correlates to race, income, and family educational attainment. It really only tells us about advantage and disadvantage outside school, not what schools are actually doing.” These tests are not a reliable indicator of their abilities or predictor or future success.

2. Requiring children to test on mandated dates could require homeschooling parents to shift their instructional calendar. Not all homeschool parents follow the public school calendar.
3. Requiring children to appear in person is a burden on parents who must also care for other children in their household, and/or who may not have transportation during school hours.
4. Home-educators are already required to submit an annual progress report for each child at the end of their school year, which is more than sufficient to show academic progress—or, in terms of abuse, educational neglect.

Adding stress to an overwhelmed system

1. According to the Pew Research Center’s report titled “What’s It Like To Be a Teacher in America Today?” from April 2024, teachers are already under immense pressure.
    - 77% say their job is frequently stressful.
    - 68% say it’s overwhelming.
    - 70% say their school is understaffed.
    - 84% say there’s not enough time during their regular work hours to do tasks like grading, lesson planning, paperwork and answering work emails.
        - Among those who feel this way, 81% say simply having too much work is a major reason.
    - 82% say that the overall state of public K-12 education has gotten worse in the last five years.
2. According to a 2025 report by Hawai‘i Scholars for Education and Social Justice, Hawaii schools are chronically underfunded and facing teacher shortages. This bill increases the workload of teachers and staff without creating additional funding for the schools. Homeschoolers’ scores are not counted in schools’

overall performance and our homeschooled students will not be enrolled, so no more federal or state dollars will be allocated to schools to account for the influx of up to four thousand students who would now need to test in person.

Conclusion

While we respect legislators' desire to protect and care for the children of Hawaii, we believe that attempting to do so through a bill that will cause stress to all parties involved, while failing to solve for purported harms, is not the best path forward. We urge you to spend your effort—and our tax dollars—where the need is greatest: give public schools the support they need with increased salaries and reduced class sizes, and work on giving at-risk families the social support they need to minimize risk factors for abuse and neglect.

Thank you for your consideration of our opposition to this bill.

Mahalo,

Kristen Hewitt

Home Educator

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:27:03 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonathan Fant	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The bill would place an undue burden on the public school system to hold tests for all homeschool students in their districts and it would place an undue burden on homeschooling families who are already submiut progress reports to their local public school.

This is an uneccesary measure and needs to be opposed.

Mahalo!

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:29:00 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Matthew Blake	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good afternoon, my name is Matthew Blake and I am a husband and father of four boys, all whom we have started and/or plan to start homeschooling. I am writing on behalf of our family and thousands of others across Hawai‘i to express strong opposition to SB3192 and HB2376.

This proposal would amend Hawai‘i’s compulsory attendance statute by conditioning homeschool compliance on mandatory, in-person participation in state-administered assessments aligned with public-school standards. While framed as a modest accountability measure, the proposal represents a significant expansion of state oversight into a sector of education that has historically functioned with autonomy, flexibility, and demonstrated effectiveness.

At the outset, it is important to ask whether the Legislature has provided empirical justification for this policy shift that seeks to impose new regulatory authority over families. Where is the evidence of systemic academic neglect or widespread educational deficiency among Hawai‘i’s 5,000 homeschooled students that justifies expanded state oversight? Absent documented harm, policy interventions of this magnitude risk being solutions in search of a problem. This bill directs taxpayer resources and legislative attention toward regulating a small, high-performing segment of students rather than addressing the well-documented challenges within Hawai‘i’s broader public school system, which consistently ranks near the bottom nationally and experiences significant enrollment decline.

The stated purpose of the bill is to “ensure the educational well-being of all school-age children” and to “monitor student progress.” But monitoring through a single state assessment program—designed around public school pacing and standards—does not equate to educational well-being. Homeschool education is, by design, individualized. It frequently employs nationally recognized, evidence-based curricula – such as Classical Conversations and other structured academic programs – that deliberately sequence learning to align with the student’s developmental stages, through language acquisition, logical reasoning, and persuasive expression of truth. Many already administer standardized testing assessments voluntarily, chosen according to their child’s developmental readiness and learning path without mandatory compulsion from the State.

The imposition of public-school-aligned assessments on homeschool students does not merely measure learning as the legislature suggests; it implicitly standardizes it. Homeschooling operates on a fundamentally different instructional model—one characterized by adaptability, depth of study, interdisciplinary integration, and responsiveness to a child’s developmental readiness. It allows families to tailor instruction around real-life learning, travel, service, trade

skills, entrepreneurship and outdoor education alongside traditional academic disciplines. It replaces institutional conformity with intentional formation. It fosters responsibility, independence, and critical thinking without overreliance on bureaucratic oversight. Homeschooling serves as the perfect remedy for the justification of this bill's required testing, which aims to provide "additional resources or supportive services offered by the department...to facilitate student success and access to educational support when necessary."

This bill raises serious concerns. If a homeschooled student's performance does not align with state-imposed benchmarks, what happens next? Will families lose homeschool compliance status? Be compelled into remedial programs? Be subjected to escalating oversight? The legislation is silent on these critical questions, leaving families uncertain about how state-collected data may be used and raises legitimate concerns about privacy and regulatory overreach.

Proponents of the bill may frame this as a modest accountability measure in pursuit of "high-quality learning for all" and "*equitable* outcomes *for all* learners" as articulated in Goal 1.1 of the Hawai‘i State Board of Education. Nevertheless, "for all" constitutes a linguistic stratagem frequently employed in scholarly discourse to transition from individual merit to collectivist and equity-focused (equality of *outcome*, not opportunity) agendas masquerading under the state's goal of "culturally responsive education." This is one of many reasons parents are opting out of a failing public education system that emphasizes social-emotional learning, mass conformity, state-sanctioned ambiguity regarding gender and morality, and employs Marxist educator Paulo Freire's Critical Consciousness model to effect societal transformation. The state's substitution of the term "learner" for "student" serves as compelling evidence of a Freirean framework, indicating a transformational, subjective learning experience as opposed to a quest for objective truth.

It is also crucial to evaluate fiscal ramifications of this bill. Mandating annual in-person assessments for homeschool students will necessitate administrative coordination, personnel allocation, and facility utilization. The Legislature has not provided a cost-benefit analysis indicating that these expenditures will result in quantifiable enhancements in student performance. Does the state stand to benefit financially from these mandated test requirements at the expense of homeschooling families and taxpayers who already incur the highest expenses in the nation? Effective governance demands faithful stewardship of taxpayer resources, particularly considering potential expansions in regulatory authority.

The modern state says, "give us your children, and we'll give you progress." But history proves that when government controls education, wisdom dies. Education is not foremost, as the Legislature believes, a government program; it's a parental calling. The home was meant to be the first school, the table the first classroom, and parents the first teachers. As homeschool parents and students raised in the public education system, we see it as our duty and moral obligation to provide a scholarly platform that instructs our children in the pursuit of knowledge. Contrary to what some in this legislature might believe, homeschooling is not isolation from society but a deliberate investment in discipling thoughtful, morally grounded, and truth-oriented citizens.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to reject SB3192 and HB2376. Any reforms affecting homeschooling should be grounded in demonstrable need, carefully limited in scope, and respectful of the constitutional and moral role of consenting parents in directing their children’s education.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:37:26 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mathie Reed	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to HB 2376. I appreciate your concern for our children and their education. However, under Chapter 12 Compulsory Attendance Exceptions, homeschooling parents are already required to submit standardized test results for students in 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 10th grades. In the remaining grades, parents must provide an annual progress report, which may include standardized test results or another form of assessment that demonstrates educational progress.

HB 2376 would impose additional requirements and eliminate parents' ability to choose the assessment method that best fits their child's individual needs. The bill would also require homeschooled students to follow the public school testing schedule, disrupting homeschool plans and placing an added burden on families. Parents would be required to transport their children to designated schools on the schools' testing timelines, regardless of their own schedules.

Additionally, no other state requires in-person testing for homeschooled students.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 2376.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mathie Reed

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:38:42 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charles Ward	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It's wrong to tell parents how their children should be educated. Standard tests are unconstitutional and demoralizing. Stay out of our children's schools

Aloha,

My name is Stephanie Chou. I was homeschooled from 1994 through 2008, and today I'm a proud home educator of two children. I'm writing on behalf of **124 families** on Oahu who are members of the Curious Keiki Homeschool Co-op. Our families **STRONGLY OPPOSE** H.B. 2376.

First, we want to say mahalo nui loa: thank you for upholding your kuleana to the children of your constituency. We recognize that this bill may stem from a desire to further protect school-age children from abuse and neglect. Notably, the heinous abuse leading to the deaths of Geanna Bradley and Isabella Kalua in our state is something we hope to never see repeated. We support effective legislation to safeguard the most vulnerable among us.

That said, as the legal maxim goes, "Hard cases make bad law." Or, as stated by Richard Wexler from the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform, "When horror story cases become the basis for public policy, we get horrible policies."

The Curious Keiki Co-op members believe H.B. 2376 and its companion bill are just that: bad law. Of note, no other states mandate in-person testing for homeschooled students. Requiring this yearly in-person testing will

- fail to mitigate the harm of child abuse,
- introduce significant harm to the homeschooling population, and
- further stress an already overstrained public school system.

Failure to mitigate child abuse

1. Research from the 1980s to present has found no statistically significant difference in abuse between homeschooled and non-homeschooled populations. Homeschooling itself is not known to be a risk factor for systematic abuse. Thus, using homeschooling alone as a criterion for additional oversight is unwarranted.
2. Most abuse ending in death occurs before children are school age. This is true nationwide, and the State of Hawaii DHS's Statistical Report on Child Abuse and Neglect in Hawaii for years 2016 through 2023 confirm this to be true in Hawaii as well.
3. Abuse goes undetected in children who are in school on a daily basis—by teachers who know their names, their habits, their needs, their personalities. The abovementioned statistical reports indicate that on average, only 10.26% of *all* reports of abuse from mandatory reporters came from education professionals, and only 19% of those reports were confirmed. In contrast, social services, medical professionals, and legal and law enforcement personnel were each responsible,

individually, for a higher percentage of all abuse cases *and* had a higher percentage of their reports confirmed. Thus, expecting teachers to effectively recognize abuse in strangers within a few hours at most, while they are also responsible for proctoring a test, is absurd.

4. Even when abuse is reported, the system is still failing these children.
    a. In the case of Geanna Bradley, officials ignored red flags when Geanna was withdrawn, such as the fact that her third grade teacher and school counselor both recommended she stay in school.
    b. Isabella Kalua was withdrawn from school under suspicious circumstances in the months preceding her death. A teacher reported in February 2020 that Isabella was exhibiting concerning behavior, like shutting down when asked about her home environment.

Causing harm to homeschooling families

1. Requiring children to test in an unfamiliar environment, in a room full of strangers, may impact their ability to perform at their best and could be anxiety inducing. A 2020 comprehensive review by Emma Howard, "Review of the Literature Concerning Anxiety for Educational Assessments," found that "high levels of test anxiety are associated with reduced performance," but even if "students [are] not negatively impacted in terms of grade outcomes, the experience of high levels of test anxiety can still have detrimental effects of mental health and well-being." As parents, we consider it our responsibility to teach our children that they can do hard things. But it's also our responsibility to safeguard their mental health from unnecessary harm, especially during the critical impressionable early years.

2. Related to this, it's no secret that the usefulness of standardized testing as a marker of student progress is a matter of hot debate. Jack Schneider, a historian and policy analyst who co-founded the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA), writes, "The current data used to measure student success… closely correlates to race, income, and family educational attainment. It really only tells us about advantage and disadvantage outside school, not what schools are actually doing." So requiring homeschoolers to take these tests is a double blow: kids have to go through this anxiety, for what? For a number on a page that's not even a reliable indicator of their abilities or predictor of future success.

3. Requiring children to perform at a standardized grade level negates the freedom parents have to tailor their child's learning pace and content of education to that child's needs and goals.

4. Requiring children to test on mandated dates could require homeschooling parents to shift their instructional calendar; not all homeschool parents follow the public school calendar.
5. Requiring children to appear in person is a burden on parents who must also care for other children in their household, and who may not have transportation during school hours.
6. Parents are already required to submit an annual progress report for each child at the end of their school year, which is more than sufficient to show academic progress—or, in terms of abuse, a lack of educational neglect.

Add stress to an overwhelmed system

1. According to the Pew Research Center's report titled "What's It Like To Be a Teacher in America Today?" from April 2024, teachers are already under immense pressure.
    - 77% say their job is frequently stressful.
    - 68% say it's overwhelming.
    - 70% say their school is understaffed.
    - 84% say there's not enough time during their regular work hours to do tasks like grading, lesson planning, paperwork and answering work emails.
        - Among those who feel this way, 81% say simply having too much work is a major reason.
    - 82% say that the overall state of public K-12 education has gotten worse in the last five years.
2. According to a 2025 report by Hawai'i Scholars for Education and Social Justice, Hawaii schools are chronically underfunded and facing teacher shortages. This bill increases the workload of teachers and staff without creating additional funding for the schools. Homeschoolers' scores are not counted in schools' overall performance and our students will not be enrolled, so no more federal or state dollars will be allocated to schools to account for the influx of up to four thousand students who would now need to test in person.

Conclusion

Again, we respect legislators' desire to protect and care for the children of Hawaii. But attempting to do so through a bill that will cause stress to all parties involved, while failing to solve for purported harms, is not the best path forward. We urge you to spend your

effort—and our tax dollars—where the need is greatest. Give public schools the support they need with increased salaries and reduced class sizes, and work on giving at-risk families the social support they need to minimize risk factors for abuse.

Thank you for your consideration of our opposition to this bill.

Mahalo,

Stephanie Chou

Curious Keiki Homeschool Co-op

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:41:59 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JODI A REYES	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jodi reyes, and I am a proud grandparent from Ewa Beach, Hawaii. I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to HB2376 and its yearly testing requirement.

My daughter homeschools her keiki and co-runs two homeschool co-ops in our community. I have watched firsthand the dedication and commitment that homeschool families bring to their children's education. My grandchildren regularly participate in educational field trips, community-based learning, and collaborative projects through their co-ops. Their learning is hands-on, engaging, and deeply connected to our Hawai‘i community.

In addition to their academic work, my grandchildren are heavily involved in sports. They train consistently, practice discipline, teamwork, leadership, and perseverance. These experiences are just as formative as anything learned from a textbook. Homeschooling gives them the flexibility to pursue excellence both academically and athletically, without sacrificing either.

There is no evidence of widespread abuse or neglect within Hawai‘i's homeschool community. They track progress carefully and tailor education to each child's needs. A mandatory yearly standardized test does not reflect the rich, well-rounded education these children are receiving.

As a grandparent, I see children who are confident, capable, socially engaged, and thriving — not just academically, but physically and emotionally as well. A yearly testing requirement would add unnecessary stress and shift the focus away from meaningful learning and balanced development.

Our keiki are more than a score. They are athletes, artists, leaders, and thinkers. I respectfully ask you to trust families and reconsider the yearly testing mandate in HB2376.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jodi Reyes
Ewa Beach, Hawaii
808-330-3387

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB2376,

As a parent and constituent, I firmly believe that homeschooling decisions should remain at the discretion of parents. Families know their children best and are in the best position to determine how they should be educated. This includes the freedom to choose curriculum, teaching methods, and educational approaches that align with our values and beliefs.

For many families, including mine, education based on biblical principles is deeply important. The ability to incorporate faith and scripture into our children's daily learning is not only a personal conviction but also a foundational aspect of how we raise and guide them. Government policies that limit parental authority in homeschooling risk undermining both parental rights and religious freedom.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB2376 and support policies that protect parental choice and the freedom of families to direct their children's education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kathy Allen

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:45:12 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Penelope Beaty	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear committee members,

My name is Penelope Beaty. I am a homeschooled student in Hawaii in the 5th grade. I request that you do not pass this bill. I believe that parents should be able to homeschool their children how they choose.

I am able to learn at my own pace, and learn additional subjects such as Latin. If this bill goes into law, my homeschooling would have to change, affecting the quality of my education. I already take standardized tests and perform well, there is no need for additional restrictions on testing.

Sincerely,

Penelope Beaty

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:46:50 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia Olson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good afternoon. I am a homeschool parent submitting this testimony in opposition to HB2376.

It is my understanding that this bill came about in order to help protect vulnerable children who have been taken out of the public school system. The idea is that by mandating that all homeschooled children participate in yearly testing physically at their local public school, the DOE can have eyes, at least once a year, on all children. If this is an accurate representation of the intent of the bill, I can see the good intent behind it, but respectfully, I very much oppose the approach taken in this bill.

Testing is stressful for students. Everyone wants to do their best. Under this bill, homeschooled students would be at a major disadvantage over their public school peers when these tests are administered. While their public school peers are familiar with the school facilities, schedule, teachers and staff proctoring these tests, homeschooled children would essentially be taking these tests in a location unfamiliar to them proctored by strangers. Currently, homeschooled students are required to submit standardized test scores for certain grades. As a homeschool parent, I am able to choose an approved standardized test and proctor it to my child at home, which in my opinion is a much fairer approach than the approach this bill takes. I am concerned about the negative consequences homeschool children will potentially face if they score poorly on these tests due in part with the added stress of having to take them in unfamiliar places with strangers.

Like I mentioned, the law currently mandates that homeschool students submit standardized test results only for certain grade years. The bill put forward increases the number of tests plus other assessments and screenings for children as young as Kindergarten age through grade 8 plus grade 11. One of the benefits of homeschooling is the ability to meet children where they are developmentally. Imposing testing, assessments and screenings on all students in these grades universally hurts students who may not be ready for them. Currently, yearly reports mandated to the DOE include the option of reports written by parents as an acceptable way to show child

progress. For children who are not ready for vigorous testing, I see the current system much more fair than the approach the proposed bill takes.

I can empathize with the desire to do all we can to protect vulnerable children and I am appreciative of what you all do to try to meet that need. I cannot support HB2376 as it is currently written, however, and submit this testimony in opposition.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:47:37 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emma Evergreen	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawai‘i’s current homeschool framework is working. Families already submit annual progress reports through multiple assessment pathways, and national research consistently shows homeschooled students perform as well as or better than their public school peers (Ray, 2017; NHERI). This bill appears to presume a deficiency where none has been demonstrated. Requiring in-person state testing under the justification of “monitoring” reframes committed parents as subjects of oversight rather than partners in education. Homeschool parents are with their children daily and are fully capable of identifying academic or developmental concerns and pursuing services when appropriate. Mandating additional state supervision does not communicate support; it communicates distrust. Policies that treat responsible families as problems to be managed will not build cooperation; they will fracture it.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:47:57 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shayna Dell	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: House Committee on Education

From: Shayna Dell

Location: Maui, Hawaii

Date: February 16, 2026

Subject: TESTIMONY IN STRONG OPPOSITION TO HB2376

Statement of Opposition

I am writing to express my firm opposition to HB2376, which seeks to mandate standardized testing for homeschooled students based on the public school curriculum. As a resident of Maui and a homeschooling mother of five, I believe this bill is an overreach that provides no benefit to our children, our families, or the state's educational standing.

Preserving the Quality of Education

My husband, Corey, and I are not raising our children to be compliant followers; we are raising critical thinkers, problem solvers, and world changers. In my years of homeschooling, I have consistently seen that my children are more advanced than their peers in the public system.

• Tailored Learning: We utilize high-quality curricula like The Good and the Beautiful and Abeka, supplemented by "The Constitution Kit" and "Junior Patriots Kit." These allow for a depth of understanding that a standardized syllabus cannot match.

• Life Skills vs. Rote Memorization: Our days are filled with mathematics, language arts, literature, cursive, and music. We also include financial literacy and biblical teachings, which mold character—elements that are sorely missing from the public school system.

• Efficiency: We cover essential academics in a fraction of the time it takes a public school, allowing our children more time for family adventures and real-world learning.

Logistical and Systemic Failures

It is baffling to suggest that a system currently struggling with some of the lowest test scores in the nation should be the benchmark for those who have successfully opted out.

1. Student-to-Teacher Ratios: The Department of Education (DOE) is already stretched thin. Forcing hundreds of homeschooled children onto campuses for testing is logistically impossible and would disrupt existing student events and schedules.

2. Irrelevant Metrics: My intelligence—and that of my children—should not be measured by how fast I can recite a multiplication table or by geometry and trigonometry formulas I have never used in my adult life. We want our children to learn how to solve problems, not just how to repeat answers to pass a test.

3. Lack of Precedent: This type of restrictive mandate has not been successfully implemented anywhere in the U.S. for a reason—it doesn't help the students; it only increases bureaucracy.

Conclusion

We want the values and morals that we agree on as parents to be the foundation of our children's education. The way public school students carry themselves is not the standard I want for my children; we are preparing them to be productive members of the Maui community through a personalized education.

I strongly urge this committee to vote NO on HB2376 and respect the right of parents to direct the education of their children without unnecessary and wasteful interference.

Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Shayna Dell Maui Resident & Homeschool Parent

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:59:58 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
chris pascual	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Opposition to HB2376 — Relating to Education

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

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong opposition to HB2376.

While the stated intent of the bill may be to ensure educational accountability, HB2376 imposes new mandatory in-person standardized testing requirements on home-schooled students without providing any meaningful supports, resources, or accommodations to the families who would be affected.

Home-school families in Hawai‘i already assume full responsibility for curriculum development, instructional materials, scheduling, and educational oversight. Unlike public schools, they do not receive per-pupil funding, transportation services, testing infrastructure, or administrative support from the state. Yet HB2376 would require these families to transport their children to assigned public schools for annual assessments, potentially creating logistical challenges, missed work hours, childcare complications for siblings, and travel burdens — particularly for families living in rural areas or on Neighbor Islands.

Most concerning, the bill creates new compliance obligations without offering:

- Financial assistance for travel or testing-related costs
- Access to preparatory materials aligned with state assessments
- Academic support services tied to test results
- Clear alternative assessment options for diverse learning models
- Dedicated DOE liaisons or resources to help families navigate compliance

In effect, HB2376 adds regulation without partnership. If the Legislature believes additional oversight is necessary, it should also provide tangible supports that recognize homeschool families as contributors to Hawai‘i’s broader educational community — not simply subjects of regulation.

Additionally, standardized testing may not accurately reflect the individualized, mastery-based, or project-centered approaches commonly used in home education. Without flexibility or

accommodation, the bill risks penalizing educational diversity rather than strengthening student outcomes.

Accountability and support should go hand in hand. HB2376 advances the former while completely neglecting the latter.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote NO on HB2376.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Chris Pascual
Kona

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:47:59 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Danice Smith	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the House of Representatives Education Committee:

Aloha! I am a second generation homeschooler in the State of Hawaii. I myself was homeschooled from Kindergarten through 12th grade and went on to earn a Bachelor's Degree four years later, graduating with honors. I have homeschooled my own children from Kindergarten through 8th grade. One is now a high school graduate, my second is a 9th grader at Kalani High School, and my youngest is still homeschooling.

I am testifying in opposition to HB2376. This bill would create a serious disruption to my homeschool instructional plans, and would create an unnecessary burden and interuption to our already rigorous and well-thought-out learning trajectory. There are several ways this interferes with my homeschool plans, but I will list two:

(1) Homeschoolers establish our own school calendar year, one that fits our family's situation best. This bill would require me to adjust our calendar to match up with public school's testing schedules. This will have a negative affect on my student's learning as it will require me to remove important aspects of education that I have chosen to include in his schooling in order to fit into this testing schedule.

(2) Going in-person to an unfamiliar school with unfamiliar people is not only a disruption to our daily homeschool routine, it is not an environment where I think my child will be able to do his best.

From my homeschool days until now, homeschoolers have been required to submit progress reports or standardized test scores to their district schools every year. These assessments sufficiently demonstrate the student's progress without interfering in the learning process that the family has chosen for their homeschool.

Mahalo,

Danice Smith

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:48:28 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Madison Ne.son	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing to respectfully oppose HB2376.

Homeschooling has been a meaningful and successful option for families here in Hawai‘i for many years. It allows parents to be deeply involved in their children’s education while providing individualized instruction that meets each child’s unique needs. Homeschooled students consistently demonstrate strong academic outcomes, and there has not been evidence of widespread failure within the current system.

The Department of Education already requires oversight. Families submit annual progress reports through standardized testing, certified teacher evaluations, or written parent evaluations. These measures have been in place for decades and have proven to be effective in maintaining accountability while still respecting parental rights and educational freedom.

HB2376 would add additional requirements to a system that is already working well. I truly believe the current structure strikes a thoughtful balance between accountability and family autonomy, and I respectfully urge you to oppose this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Madison Nelson

TO: House Committee on Education

RE: Testimony in **STRONG OPPOSITION** to **HB2376**

HEARING DATE: February 17 2026

HEARING TIME: 2:00pm

CONFERENCE ROOM: **Room 309** VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee:

My name is Makoa Kaupe, and I am a resident of Maui County. I believe I have a valuable view of this bill due to my experience in being **homeschooled from kindergarten to high school graduation**.

- **HB2376 solves no issue**. The majority of studies regarding standardized tests reveal that homeschoolers score, on average, higher than public school students (Ray, 2013). The education of homeschooled students is not lacking. HB2376's addition of in-person mandatory testing will not solve any of our state's educational shortcomings.
- **HB2376 will be an expensive redundancy**. The state of Hawaii already requires annual progress reports and certain standardized tests. HB2376 will introduce additional expenses for the state's education system, without any valuable return. HB2376 will be a cost without reward.
- **HB2376 disregards student needs**. Homeschooling accounts for specific needs, including scheduling conflicts, volatile housing, and the need for a quiet and personal learning environment. HB2376 disregards these needs entirely, requiring homschoolers to make the trip to a public school to take a test in an unfamiliar classroom.

I respectfully request that the Committee **hold this bill**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Makoa Kaupe

first_son@icloud.com

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:49:15 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kenneth Plank	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kenneth Plank. I graduated as a homeschooler, and today I'm a homeschool parent with one child in 1st grade and another about to start kindergarten. I'm also a criminal investigator with the County and a Radar, Airfield & Weather Systems technician with the Hawaii Air National Guard. I mention this because I'm living proof that homeschoolers can grow into capable, successful adults without heavy government oversight. I am submitting this testimony in **strong opposition** to HB 2376.

This bill is clear government overreach. Hawaii already has a system that works: we file our notice of intent, keep records, and show progress. The state already has the authority to look into situations that raise legitimate concerns. There's no need to impose new, across-the-board requirements that interfere with a family's freedom to choose how their children learn. This bill isn't about child welfare or improving education—it's about tightening control over families who choose something other than a one-size-fits-all model.

HB 2376 would force homeschool families to bring their kids to public schools every year for standardized testing, in person, with no option to decline. If we say no, we risk losing our right to homeschool and could be pushed into the public system or dragged into a long court process. That's coercive, plain and simple. Public school parents can refuse testing without fear of their kids being kicked out, yet homeschoolers would face a "comply or else" threat. It's punishment for choosing a different educational path.

If the state were offering real support—like the homeschool subsidies many other states provide—or if Hawaii's public school system consistently outperformed national standards, maybe there'd be something to talk about. But that's not the case. Instead, this bill adds more control, more intrusion, and more pressure on families who are simply trying to do what's best for their kids.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Mahalo.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:49:42 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Genevieve Matsumura	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Honorable Representatives,

Mahalo for your service to our community and for your leadership on education issues. I'm writing as a concerned resident and parent regarding House Bill 2376, which would require home-schooled students to participate in specific statewide assessments in person at public schools starting with the 2027–28 school year.

I appreciate the Legislature's intention to support homeschool families and help ensure all students receive the educational support they need. At the same time, I would like to better understand the purpose and context for these bills.

1. What specific problem are these bills intended to solve?
The bills require annual in-person participation for kindergarten entry assessment, universal screening in grades 1–2, and the statewide Smarter Balanced English language arts and math tests in grades 3–8 and 11. What evidence or data prompted the Legislature to propose this change in homeschool reporting?

2. Are these bills related to statewide enrollment trends?
Recent reporting shows that public school enrollment in Hawai'i has declined significantly in recent years, by more than 6 % statewide over five years, and even higher at many individual campuses, with more than 20 % drops at dozens of schools. These declines have led to discussions around redistricting and potential school closures as the Department of Education considers how to address underutilized campuses and shifting population patterns.

If the intention is to stem public school enrollment loss or better retain students, could you clarify how requiring homeschoolers to take public school assessments fits into that strategy?

3. Will the results of these tests have consequences for families?
As currently written, the bills require participation but *do not* include any minimum score requirement or mandate that children return to public school based on results alone. I would appreciate clarification on how test data will be used by the Department of Education, especially regarding: monitoring student progress, referrals for additional educational resources or interventions and whether low performance could influence homeschool compliance status.

4. Could alternative solutions achieve similar goals?
There may be other ways to support homeschool families and identify learning needs such as: expanded guidance on portfolio assessments, third-party evaluator options, or voluntary access to state tests without mandatory in-person participation. I would welcome clarification on whether these options were considered during bill drafting.

I share these questions out of a sincere interest in ensuring both student support and family choice are respected, and in better understanding the legislative intent behind these proposals.

Mahalo for taking the time to address my concerns. I look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Genevieve Matsumura

Wahiawa, Oahu

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:57:55 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heidi Vance	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the legislation team determining the vote of HB2376:

I am writing to share my concern for HB2376 for our homeschool families in Hawaii. I am writing to oppose the bill as it does not provide any adequate evidence for benefiting our students or national test scores in Hawaii. As a homeschool mother of 4, I have tested my children according to the standard provided and each year they have proven to far exceed both state and national averages. I know this is true for many homeschooled families on island bringing our state average higher than it would be otherwise. Putting these homeschooled children in an environment with a large group of students they do not know as well as a setting that is completely unfamiliar to them (including proctors and rules that are new to them) would not provide an adequate environment for them to test and be expected to thrive. Even the most excellent students would face challenges with the many distractions that would be new to them in a classroom environment.

I believe the goal of homeschooling is not to mimic a school classroom at home but rather to teach your child in a way that helps them become confident and healthy individuals as a whole - both in academic and non-academic settings.

Putting them in a testing environment that does not lend itself to success for them could severely impact their confidence as a young person. If there are specific families that you have concerns about, I understand there may be a need to followup with them to make sure those kids are succeeding academically. It is not however appropriate to punish the many thriving homeschooled children for those few. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:50:48 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jen Vinzons	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the honorable Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Jen Vinzons and I am a lifelong Oahu resident currently residing in Vice Chair La Chica's district. I am also a proud homeschool graduate, earned my Master's in Library and Information Science, and current work as a librarian. I strongly oppose HB 2376, which requires homeschooled students to take annual assessments or testing at their local public schools.

Homeschool parents are already required to submit an annual assessment every year and additionally standardized achievement test results when students are in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10.

Passing HB 2376 would leave homeschooling students with no other option but to submit to state tests in-person. Notably, no other state in the country currently require this.
In addition, current Hawaii DOE laws governing homeschooling allow homeschooling families to establish their own academic school schedule, but HB 2376's requirements would force homeschool families to bend to the Hawaii DOE testing schedule.

The Hawaii State Legislature should instead focus on the Board of Education and the public school system that is failing its students according to its own data such as the "State of Hawai‘i Public Schools Statewide Strive HI Snapshot (2024-25)" report which shows that in the 2024-2025 school year, the percentage of Hawaii public school students "demonstrating proficiency" in language arts was 53%, in math was 41%, and science was 43%.

Mahalo to the committee for the opportunity to share my concerns and I strongly urge the deferral of HB 2376.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:56:05 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Yajm One	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson and the House Committee on Education,

I strongly oppose HB 2376.

Mahalo

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:52:32 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tracy Miyashiro	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to encourage opposing HB2376. I have home educated and tested both of my children for 15 years - both tested well above norms and both are now college graduates. As a home school parent, I was also certified to administer standardized testing as required by the state throughout those fifteen years and tested many other home schooled students. As concerned parents, we tested annually, not just for the years that the DOE required.

As a home schooling parent and certified tester, I had an occasion where I needed to obtain copies of my children's records for employment purposes. Much to my shock, the school had LOST their records that I had submitted. Thankfully, I had kept complete records, original results and documentation of certified mail recording that they had been received. I replenished their files with additional copies.

It is my experience that home schooling families have been much more diligent and accountable with assessments and that therefore legislating and expanding mandates is unnecessarily burdensome. Surely our resources could be better focused elsewhere.

Rep. Justin H. Woodson
Rep. Chris Todd
Bill: HB2376
Hearing: February 17, 2026 @ 2:00pm

IN OPPOSITION

My name is Sammie Olson, I am a homeschooling parent of 3 and a registered voter in Hilo, Hawaii. We have been homeschooling since 2014, both independently and through the umbrella of a charter school. We are members of HSLDA, CHOH and our local homeschooling group, HICHE. I am testifying in opposition against HB2376.

This bill would create new restrictions on homeschooling by imposing state standards on our independent homeschool. We currently test at the end of our school year, using our choice of tests, and submit the results to the school district. This bill would require that the test we use and the timing of testing be dictated by a school system that we are not a part of. This means our scope and sequence for what we learn and when we learn it would not necessarily match up with the school's scope and sequence. I believe this could unfairly influence our test scores or force us to line up our curriculums to match the public schools', limiting our homeschool choices.

One of the reasons we homeschool is to provide an individualized education for each of our children. They learn at their pace in the way that we feel suits them best according to their specific strengths and interests. Their individual growth and learning are monitored by myself and my husband on a daily basis. I do not feel that school-based testing would accurately measure their academic status or learning. We have had experience with the SBA and I would not choose this test if continued to allow to choose testing. We currently use the CAT standardized test which allows for a non-timed version as well as the option of doing work on paper vs computer. I appreciate these accommodations that would not be an option if my child was required to test on the computer, in an unfamiliar environment. This bill would take away my freedom in making that choice.

Considering that only 53% (ELA) and 44% (Math) of Hawaii students grades 3-8 reached proficiency in the 2025 SBA results, I am also concerned about what would happen if my child did not reach proficiency. Would school intervention be imposed? Who would make those decisions? We would become the only state in the nation to require on site school testing for homeschoolers.

I have worked for CWS in the past and absolutely share concern for children in bad situations slipping through the cracks. This bill would not prevent these situations from happening, it would instead unfairly target law-abiding, community-minded homeschooling families in your communities. We would be asked to comply with a testing system that doesn't seem to be successful even within the existing school system. Please consider our passion for doing our very best for our kids as the reason why we took on homeschooling in the first place and respect our rights and abilities to do so. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Sammie Olson

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 2376

TO: House Committee on Education
FROM: Jackie Kim
DATE: 16 Feb 26
LOCATION: Honolulu, Hawai‘i

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

My name is Jackie Kim, and I am a homeschooling parent in Honolulu. I chose to homeschool because I take seriously my responsibility to guide my child’s education each day.

I respect the State’s role in ensuring children receive a quality education. Homeschooling shares that goal. Families choose this path because it allows us to tailor learning to our children — their pace, strengths, and areas where they need extra help.

HB 2376 concerns me because it changes how homeschooling functions in a significant way.

Homeschooling is built on daily involvement and flexibility. Parents determine how their children are taught and how progress is measured. This bill would require homeschool students to participate in annual, in-person testing at assigned public schools beginning as early as kindergarten. When continued homeschooling depends on participating in public school testing, that state-selected test becomes the primary measure of progress.

The bill speaks about early identification of learning needs, which I support. But its main effect is to add a testing requirement. It does not clearly expand services or outline how families would receive additional help. It adds a mandate without clearly expanding support.

I understand that concerns behind this bill may relate to children who are struggling or unseen. Every child deserves safety and a meaningful education. But annual standardized testing is not a safeguard against abuse or neglect. It is a measurement tool, not a protection system. A child can pass a test and still be unsafe, and a low score does not automatically signal harm.

As a homeschooling parent, I see my child learning every day. If something is not clicking, I adjust immediately. Standardized tests can offer information, but they cannot replace consistent, hands-on involvement. National data show that homeschooled students generally perform competitively with their public school peers, suggesting this model can work well without mandatory annual state testing.

Homeschooling is not about avoiding accountability. It is about accepting full responsibility for our children’s education. I respectfully ask the Committee to hold HB 2376 and preserve the current framework that respects both the State’s interest in education and the role of families in directing their children’s learning.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and for your service to our keiki.

Respectfully,
//signed JK//
Jackie Kim
Honolulu, Hawai‘i

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:52:37 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy Rice	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Opposition to [HB2376]

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in strong opposition to this bill requiring homeschooled children to forfeit educational choice and submit to mandatory testing within the public school system.

This legislation undermines one of the most fundamental rights protected in our nation: the right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children. The United States Supreme Court affirmed in Pierce v. Society of Sisters that "the child is not the mere creature of the state." Parents hold the primary authority and responsibility in determining the appropriate educational path for their children. Any law that weakens this right raises serious constitutional concerns.

Homeschooling families choose this path for many valid reasons—academic customization, safety, moral and religious convictions, individualized learning styles, and the ability to nurture creativity and independent thinking. Forcing homeschooled students into the public testing system subjects them to standards, environments, and frameworks that may not reflect their educational model or values.

Furthermore, this bill expands the reach and control of the Department of Education into private family life. By requiring registration and testing within the public system, the state increases its administrative authority while also potentially increasing funding tied to enrollment and testing metrics. This creates a concerning incentive structure that prioritizes institutional growth over parental autonomy.

Public education serves many families well. However, it is not the only valid educational path. Educational pluralism strengthens our society. A free nation should protect diversity in education—not restrict it.

Parents are not asking for state oversight to be eliminated entirely. They are asking for their constitutional right to choose and direct their children's education to be respected. Homeschooling families already accept responsibility for academic outcomes and civic development. Additional compulsory integration into the public system is unnecessary and excessive.

This bill sets a dangerous precedent by shifting educational authority away from families and toward centralized institutions. Once parental rights are weakened in one area, it becomes easier to erode them in others.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote NO on this bill and protect the constitutional rights of families to educate their children according to their conscience, values, and educational philosophy.

Respectfully

Nancy Rice

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:53:05 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caree	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear chairmembers of the House Committee,

My name is Caree Edens. I am a homeschool mom of four children in Hilo. We homeschool to provide an alternative classical approach to learning that highlights critical thinking and creativity. Because of our differing worldview on childhood education, I oppose Bill HB2376.

It limits our rights and freedoms to homeschool each unique child and test them how we see fit using available online programs. It is stressful for a child to enter a large unfamiliar building without their parent, and take a standardized test that highlights performance and competition skills over critical thinking and creativity. Homeschool parents already work very hard to provide an enriching education for each of their children. Instead of seeing the value in this unique approach and supporting parents more, it seems the State wants to make it harder on them. The current legislation already asks for accountability to the local school that the majority of homeschool parents are complying with.

If the State is worried about abused or neglected children falling through the cracks, more attention and legislation could be offered to support the agencies that already assist this vulnerable population.

Thank you for your time.

Caree Edens

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:53:33 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jaclynne Follis	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Members of the Committee on Education,

I am a homeschooling parent in Hawaii and I strongly oppose the proposed House Bill 2376. This bill significantly changes the current system that already ensures accountability and educational progress for homeschool families. Additionally, it significantly impacts freedom and parental choice of homeschoolers in Hawaii. Mandating statewide testing for homeschoolers would not only create a substantial administrative burden, it undermines the very essence of personalized education that draws families to this path.

My children learn at home in a calm, familiar setting with individual pacing. Requiring them to take high stakes tests in a public-school environment - with unfamiliar teachers, procedures, location, and expectations - would not reflect their true academic ability. The unfamiliar setting could negatively affect their performance, not because the lack of learning, but because of the stress and disruption of an environment they are not accustomed to.

Hawaii's current homeschool law already requires families to submit annual progress reports, including standardized test scores for certain grades. This system works and provides the state with the information it needs. The flexibility to choose the assessment method is essential because homeschoolers use diverse educational approaches - classical, Charlotte Mason, Montessori, mastery-based, or individual learning. A single testing method cannot accurately measure progress across these varied models.

The burden the proposed bill introduces does not improve educational quality; it simply makes homeschooling harder for families who are already meeting the state's requirements without any evidence that the current system is failing.

I respectfully ask the committee to oppose or amend HB2376 to preserve parental choice in assessment methods.

Respectfully,

Jaclynne Follis

District 40

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:54:10 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessie Hopper	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We homeschool on a year round schedule, so the end-of-year testing in public schools does not match up with the end of our grade. If they had to go to the school to test, the testing would be too soon in our school year and it wouldn't be an accurate measure. Once their grades are complete, my children take standardized tests every year, not just in some grades, that we submit to the principal of our local public school.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:00:15 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rocio Bueno	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2376. I believe the assessments already in place, for homeschoolers, are sufficient. Please oppose HB 2376. Thank you for your time.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:00:20 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kerrilynn Kaupe	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Kerrilynn Kaupe. I am a homeschooling mom and a registered voter in Kahului, HI. I have homeschooled our 2 boys from kindergarten. I've graduated my oldest in 2024 and my youngest is currently working on 9th grade. We are currently on our fourth year of homeschooling in Hawai'i. The rest of our homeschooling years were accomplished in California.

I homeschool my boys for many reasons but the most important reason is to be able to have a say in what they are learning and how they are learning. This includes how they are assessed. Forcing our children to report for in person testing takes away our homeschooling right to choose what and how they learn. Our children would be forced to be in an unfamiliar environment with unfamiliar people. As oppose to those students who have been in that same classroom with that same teacher all year long. This would possibly cause more anxiety and stress and lead to scores that will not properly reflect the true knowledge of the homeschooled student putting that student at a disadvantage.

I strongly oppose HB2376 because it removes the parent/teacher's choice when it comes to procuring a test best suited to their student's needs.

No other state requires in person testing for homeschool students. Forcing our children to participate in further assessments for younger grades is also taking away our rights of removing our children from the testing culture of schools. Not all children are the same. More testing does not require better results.

As a homeschool parent i ask that you please vote no to HB2376 and protect our children and our rights. Thank you.

Kerrilynn Kaupe

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:00:34 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kris	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Some of the reasons I oppose this bill are as follows (and are taken from hslda.or but I agree with them):

- Hawaii already requires an annual assessment, including standardized tests in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10.
- H.B. 2376 goes far beyond what current DOE regulations require and would mark unprecedented government control over homeschooling families, hindering parents ability to individually tailor schooling needs.
- The bill eliminates parental choice by banning third-party standardized achievement tests (like the California Achievement Test (CAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford).
- H.B. 2376 would require that all testing be done in person at public schools, imposing burdens on families and creating major logistical problems for school districts.
- Mandating seven years of state testing would undermine homeschooling flexibility, especially for students with special learning needs.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:01:04 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
D. Miyahira	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I stand in opposition of HB2376 for the following reasons:

- This will cause logistical challenge for families, particularly those with multiple children of varying ages. Parents having to bring their children to an in-person test disrupts not only the child's homeschool schedule but also that of their siblings. In addition to that, schools will have an added burden of having to accommodate and track student progress for those who are not part of their school when they are already managing an overwhelming amount of their own students.
- Homeschooled students are already required to submit scores from standardized achievement tests. If the goal of in-person testing is to monitor student progress, there is no better person to do that than the child's own parents. Homeschool parents are hands-on when it comes to their children's education. They are fully aware of their child's strengths and weaknesses, and they can give their child the necessary attention and guidance to help them succeed. Homeschool parents are also resourceful and seek out educational support through programs, groups, and other resources. They go above and beyond for their children.
- No other state requires in-person testing for homeschooled students.
- Homeschooling is intentionally different from the public school system. Homeschoolers and even certain private schools can attest to the fact that standardized tests do not measure learning. It usually measures regurgitated facts and information that often gets forgotten. This is why many have moved away from traditional learning in classroom settings. The goal of the homeschooler is to create a love of learning and be able to apply what they have learned in everyday life.

I oppose this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

D. Miyahira

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:02:07 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Moniz	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose. We chose to homeschool so I can give my ADHD child the support that he needs. These new requirements will take away more of our freedoms to homeschool in a way that is supportive to my child. Let parents decide when and how to test and have control over their child's education.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:02:24 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenny Nakagawa	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Rep. Woodson, Rep. Chica, and Committee Members,

My name is Jenny Nakagawa, I'm a resident of Oahu, and I am testifying in opposision to HB 2376.

This bill requires homeschool students to test in public schools and homeschool students already have the option to do this. In lieu of standardized testing in schools, homeschoolers are currently required to submit the results of standardized tests on state mandated years where all students must test.

Families who homeschool do so for different reasons -- it may be due to illness, parent work demands, family travel plans, religion, familiy philosophy or morals to name a few -- but they all do so expecting some flexibility. Testing -- when to test and how to test is a part of homeschooling. Many homeschoolers are enrolled in academically robust programs and additional testing may put a burden on parent teachers and students. Furthermore, many homeschoolers do not follow the traditional school year, so whatever state test may not be at the norms for where a student may be in their academic year.

Of my three children, I have only traditionally homeschooled one of them -- meaning that my husband and I picked the curriculum, taught him, and assessed him. He graduated in 2024. When he was in elementary school, my husband and I chose to have him tested at our district school because it was offered and because it was free. We administered standardized tests on our own - the Stanford 10, Terra Nova, and the Iowa Assessments, but we wanted him to to have the experience of standardized testing at a public school because we thought it would be good for him. We did this for 2 or 3 years before he attended middle school where we opted for a hybrid charter school -- he planned to play sports in high school and we believed the public hybrid charter would provide a smooth transition from homeschool to high school. He was grateful for the experience of testing at the local elementary school because he learned about inequalities in the classroom that he would not experience elsewhere. One year, he was able to take the class with an advanced class and they had a nice AC classroom with a lot of space and the students had no behavior problems. The teacher was at the back doing their own work during the test. The following year, he was crammed into a loud classroom where he could barely fit between the rows of desks and the desk was too small for him. Kids were throwing paper balls at each other and the teacher took a bit to get everyone to pay attention. She sat at the front of the room where she watched and corrected the students' behavior if needed. There was also no AC.

Another year he tested in the cafeteria and there were so many distractions, he could not concentrate. He also doesn't recall a teacher being in the room. Looking back on it, my son has said he was amused at the expereience, but he also mentioned that he thought it was mean of me to make him do that.

We appreciated the option to test at our neighborhood public school. Testing gets expensive and it was nice to know that if we ever couldn't afford it and if it fit into our schedule, we could always check with the school councelors on testing dates and times. However after being around homeschoolers for a number of years, I know that many homeschoolers would not thrive in public school testing conditions. Homeschoolers learn well because they are comfortable in their enviornment. It seems almost cruel to thrust children who have limited classroom exposure into a strange situation and expect them to succeed. My younger daughter is a learner like this. She is currently enrolled in a public charter, but at a charter with small classes. She would not thrive in the local school down the street.

In closing, please vote no on HB 2376. Let homeschoolers test when and how if fits in their schedule, academic calendar, and in learning conditions in which they are familiar and thrive in.

Mahalo for your time,

Jenny Nakagawa

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:02:25 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William Newton	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill, I feel that it puts an unneeded burden on the parents who are already shouldering the responsibilities of their children's education by homeschooling them.

I am a parent of a child who is currently being homeschooled and another who is attending a private school after being homeschooled for a few years. The child who is currently homeschooled is doing well and will be tested this year (3rd Grade), the older is excelling in their school which the teachers have attributed to their homeschooling.

Homeschool parents work with their children on a daily basis with curriculum for their appropriate grades and have a pretty good idea on what subjects their children are struggling with. Perhaps the less expensive and demanding route would be the state providing programs to help identify and help remedy if a parent feels their homeschooled child might have a learning disability.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:11:38 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicholas Zehr	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong opposition to SB2376. Hawai‘i’s homeschooling families have demonstrated for decades that they are capable, committed, and effective in educating their children. The Legislature correctly recognizes home education as a valid and beneficial option. SB2376, however, replaces that recognition with a mandatory, annual, in-person testing regime that undermines parental autonomy and expands state control without clear evidence of need.

First, there is no showing that homeschooled students in Hawai‘i are broadly failing or underserved in a way that justifies this mandate. Statewide testing programs such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment were designed for standardized, classroom-based public education, not individualized, family-directed learning environments. Imposing those assessments as a condition of lawful homeschooling conflates two fundamentally different educational models.

Second, mandatory in-person testing at assigned public schools imposes logistical burdens, privacy concerns, and unnecessary state intrusion into family life. Many families choose homeschooling precisely because it allows them to tailor curriculum, pacing, and assessment methods to their child’s unique needs. For Hawaiian immersion families or those using alternative pedagogies, standardized testing may not meaningfully reflect progress or mastery.

Third, SB2376 alters the balance of trust between families and the Department of Education. Hawai‘i already requires notification of intent to homeschool and allows the department to intervene in cases of neglect or educational harm. Targeted intervention based on credible concerns is reasonable. Universal annual testing of all homeschooled children, regardless of performance or complaint, treats every family as presumptively deficient.

Finally, educational pluralism strengthens our state. Families who assume full responsibility for educating their children relieve pressure on the public system, save taxpayer dollars, and contribute to diverse pathways of success. Policy should protect this diversity, not narrow it.

If the Legislature's goal is to ensure children with learning differences receive support, there are less intrusive alternatives, such as voluntary assessments, resource partnerships, or clearer access to DOE services, without conditioning homeschooling on compulsory standardized testing.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to defer SB2376. Thank you for your consideration.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:32:09 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karla Jackson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony Opposing H.B. 2376

TO:

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

Rep. Terez Amato

Rep. Darius K. Kila

Rep. Luke A. Evslin

Rep. Ikaika Olds

Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett

Rep. Christopher L. Muraoka

Rep. Jeanne Kapela

Rep. Kanani Souza

FROM:

Karla Jackson, Homeschooling Parent, Ewa Beach

RE: Strong Opposition to H.B. 2376

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Karla Jackson, and I am a homeschooling parent in Ewa Beach. I am writing in strong opposition to H.B. 2376.

As a parent, I take my responsibility to educate my children seriously. We chose homeschooling because it allows our keiki to learn in a safe, familiar environment where they can grow academically, emotionally, and spiritually. This bill threatens that freedom.

I respectfully disagree with this bill as my children do not need to be scrutinized by the state in an unfamiliar setting. Forcing them into a public school environment for testing would create unnecessary stress and anxiety, especially for children who have never been in that setting. We already assess our children at home, as allowed under current law, and it has worked well for years.

Hawaii already requires an annual assessment, including standardized tests in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. H.B. 2376 goes far beyond what current DOE regulations require and would mark unprecedented government control over homeschooling families.

This bill also eliminates parental choice by banning widely used third-party standardized achievement tests such as the California Achievement Test (CAT), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford. These tests are nationally recognized, reliable, and accessible. Removing them serves no educational purpose, it only restricts families.

Additionally, requiring all testing to be done in person at public schools creates major logistical burdens for both families and school districts. Many homeschool families have multiple children, work schedules, transportation limitations, or keiki with special learning needs. Public schools are already stretched thin; adding homeschoolers to their testing load is unrealistic and unnecessary.

Mandating seven years of state testing would undermine the flexibility that makes homeschooling effective. Children with learning differences, anxiety, or unique educational paths would be especially harmed by rigid, one-size-fits-all requirements.

Homeschooling in Hawaii has always been a partnership built on trust between families and the state. H.B. 2376 breaks that trust. It replaces parental responsibility with government control and treats homeschoolers as a problem to be managed rather than families who are already meeting the law's requirements.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose H.B. 2376 and protect the rights, liberty, and educational freedom of Hawaii's homeschooling families.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Karla Jackson

Ewa Beach, HI

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:43:56 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aldarah Kumura	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill is an unnecessary standard which conflicts with existing requirements. Homeschool parents already submit standardized tests and/or annual progress reports to the appropriate school districts each year for our students. Adding an additional measure does not enhance the level of testing, it only provokes further segregation in standards. If a standardized test with an in-home/online proctor is not adequate, what would make a public school exam more beneficial? This suggests that proctored homeschool standardized exams and in-person standardized exams are only then equal or standardized if in a communal setting. If the State of Hawaii is communicating that education is pivotal to independence of character and growth, requiring additional testing further explains that one set standard is insufficient, therefore another standard is mandated for accuracy of goals. Are children to ascertain that though you complete, work through, and accomplish your year, it is still not enough? Consider the message you are sending and the additional hardships you are accumulating for your public school officiants.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:47:03 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shaquile Day	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Shaquile Day, homeschooler and registered voter in the Kapolei district. I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill-2376 the 2026 bill that increases the testing frequncy for homeschool students.

High stakes testing would not support our children's educational success, it would rather increase stress and anxiousness in our children.

It poses a logistical burden on us families that homeschool multiple children at various grade levels. We would need to arrange transportation, childcare for siblings, take time off work, adding both financial and scheduling strain.

We currate programs that are tailored and adaptable towards our children's individual strengths and interests. So that we can use that interest and set them up for success in areas that may need more attention.

The bill would limit that autonomy of deciding what is best for our children, and narrow our scope of teaching due to shifting our children's focus to testing, rather than fostering deeper learning and connection, one of the many reasons we choose to homeschool.

In 2016, 44% of Hawaii residents believed that schools placed too much emphasis on standardized testing. 84% of principals and 91% of teachers across the state believe the HIDOE should consider changes to the state testing program. (U.S. D.O.E, 2020)

Please consider voting no to this bill. As it would impact my ohana and so many others who take advantage of the freedoms we have in America and Hawai'i to give our children an education we believe in.

Reference

United States Department of Education. (2020). APPLICATION FOR GRANTS UNDER THE Application for New Grants Under the Competitive Grants for State Assessment Program. https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2020/10/Hawaii-State-Department-of-Education_Redacted.pdf

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:48:22 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chelle Galarza	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY OPPOSING HB2376
House Committee on Education
Hawaii State Legislature — Hearing on Tuesday, February 17, 2026

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

My name is **Chelle Galarza** and I am *parent/Hawaii resident*residing in **Haiku, Hawai‘i.** I am submitting this testimony in **strong opposition to HB2376**, which would require home-schooled students to participate in annual in-person testing at public schools.

While the intent to support all keiki and ensure academic progress is understandable, the bill raises serious concerns that outweigh any potential benefits.

1. Threat to Parental Rights and Educational Choice

Hawaii law has long recognized home schooling as a valid and legitimate educational choice. Mandating annual in-person testing imposes state control on families who choose alternative educational paths. This requirement undermines parental authority and places unnecessary government intrusion into the home education model.

Homeschooling often succeeds because families tailor learning to their children’s needs without rigid assessment schedules. Forcing standardized testing at public schools disregards families’ autonomy and creates an inequitable burden compared to private or parochial education.

2. Logistical and Equity Burdens

Requiring home-schooled students to travel to schools for mandated testing would impose *significant logistical challenges*, including transportation barriers, scheduling conflicts, and extra costs for families—especially on neighbor islands and for families without reliable transportation.

This bill would create an unequal playing field between traditional public, private, and homeschool students, with homeschool families carrying the burden of compliance rather than being supported in ways that respect their diverse circumstances.

3. Limited Evidence That the Policy Will Improve Outcomes

There is *no evidence* that periodic standardized tests—in isolation—necessarily lead to better educational outcomes or early identification of learning needs, particularly in the homeschool setting where instruction is already individualized. Requiring tests without adequate context, support services, or funding does little to help students thrive and may even discourage families from continuing home education.

4. Strain on Public School Resources

Public schools are already under strain in terms of staffing, space, and resources. Adding a quota of homeschoolers for mandatory testing without additional funding or logistical support will divert limited resources away from current students and educators who already shoulder heavy workloads.

Conclusion

I respectfully urge the Committee **to vote *no* on HB2376**.
If the Legislature wants to support comprehensive educational success for all children, that goal can be better achieved through *voluntary, supportive, and resource-based approaches*—not one-size-fits-all mandates that burden families and schools alike.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Chelle Galarza
Haiku, Hawai'i

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

In OPPOSITION to HB2376/SB3193

The Libertarian Party of Hawaii submits this testimony in **uncompromising opposition** to SB3193/HB2376. These bills exemplify coercive government overreach that we categorically reject.

These measures would mandate that homeschooled students participate annually in certain in-person assessments at the public school they are choosing not to attend. This includes the kindergarten entry assessment, universal screenings at the start of first and second grade, and the statewide Smarter Balanced Assessments in English language arts and mathematics for grades 3–8 and 11. Homeschool families would be forced to submit their children to government-administered standardized testing in a public school setting, where they will most certainly poorly attempt to line up homeschool progress with public school schedules and standards. Noncompliance could have the potential to fall under truancy or educational neglect, depending on how this is implemented.

We are outraged at the arrogant presumption that state bureaucrats have the right to dictate, monitor, and enforce how free parents raise and educate their keiki. This is not about supporting student success or about properly directed accountability; it is a direct assault on parental sovereignty. Parents, not politicians, not the Department of Education, hold the natural and constitutional authority to direct their children's care, upbringing, education, and moral development without coercive state interference.

We support the absolute separation of school and state and we advocate freedom of choice in education. Education must be governed by voluntary decisions of parents. It should not be dictated by involuntary taxation, bureaucratic mandates, or forced government monitoring. We demand the full acknowledgement of parental authority, free from state surveillance or one-size-fits-all impositions that ignore a family's unique needs, values, culture, faith, or learning styles.

These bills initiate force against peaceful families by compelling in-person compliance with state tests, requiring alignment with public school timelines and curricula, and treating homeschooling parents as suspects who must prove the validity of exercising inherent freedoms to officials. They assume the state is a superior guardian that is wiser than loving parents who nurture, guide, and protect their children daily. They assume that they are more capable of a higher level of care than those in their close family and community circles. That assumption is insulting, dangerous, and antithetical to liberty. It normalizes government as the ultimate overseer of family life, eroding natural rights and opening the door to further intrusions.

We urge both committees to reject SB3193 and HB2376 in their entirety. Do not advance legislation that treats responsible parents as subjects requiring state approval and monitoring. Protect individual and parental rights from coercive overreach. Genuine child welfare and educational success thrive in freedom. The Libertarian Party of Hawaii stands firmly in defense of these principles and opposes any measure that substitutes state coercion for parental liberty. **Kill these measures**.

In firm support of parental rights,

Abbra Green | LPHI Secretary | LibertarianHawaii.com | (808)824-LPHI

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:59:34 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JW Kane	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice-Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is JW Kane. I am a Hawai‘i parent of five children, four of whom are currently homeschooled. I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to HB2376.

This bill proposes mandatory annual in-person standardized testing at public schools for homeschooled students. However, the measure does not demonstrate a documented educational deficiency within Hawai‘i’s homeschool population sufficient to justify expanding state mandates.

1. Hawai‘i already regulates homeschooling and requires testing

Hawai‘i homeschool law currently requires annual oversight. Parents must submit yearly progress reports and standardized test results in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, or an approved equivalent evaluation.
(Hawai‘i DOE; Haw. Admin. Rules Chapter 12)

Sources:
https://hawaiipublicschools.org/enrolling-in-school/homeschool/
https://boe.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/12-Compulsory-Attendance-Exceptions.pdf

Therefore, homeschool students are already monitored academically. HB2376 does not address a lack of oversight — it changes the *location and frequency* of testing.

2. No Hawai‘i data demonstrates homeschool academic failure

Despite existing regulation, there is no publicly released statewide dataset showing homeschool students in Hawai‘i perform below public school averages.
The Department of Education accountability system reports public-school outcomes but does not report homeschool academic deficiencies as a policy problem.
https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/data-reports/school-reports/

Public policy should be proportional to demonstrated risk. Without Hawai‘i outcome data identifying an academic gap, mandatory annual state testing expands regulation without evidence of necessity.

3. National research consistently shows homeschool students meet or exceed averages

Across decades of research:

• Homeschooled students score **15–25 percentile points higher** on standardized achievement tests than public-school students
National Home Education Research Institute
https://nheri.org/homeschool-academic-achievement-fact-sheet/

• Many studies place homeschool achievement around the **65th–80th percentile**, above the public-school average near the 50th percentile
https://crowncounseling.com/statistics/public-school-vs-homeschool/

• Over **78% of peer-reviewed studies** find homeschool students perform statistically significantly better academically
https://nheri.org/academic-achievement-homeschool-students/

• Homeschooled students demonstrate higher graduation rates and strong college performance
https://nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/

These findings are consistent across income levels, parental education levels, and teaching credentials
https://gshenh.org/academic-achievement-comparison-of-home-education-to-public-education/

4. The bill replaces individualized evaluation with institutional measurement

Homeschool education is inherently individualized. Hawai‘i law currently allows multiple assessment methods — standardized testing, portfolio review, or certified evaluation — precisely because students progress at different developmental rates.
https://crhe.org/state-by-state/hawaii/

HB2376 would move toward a single institutional metric without evidence that the existing flexible evaluation system fails children.

Conclusion

Hawai‘i already regulates homeschooling and requires academic verification. No Hawai‘i-specific data shows homeschoolers are academically at risk, while national research consistently shows equal or better outcomes compared to traditional schooling.

Public regulation should respond to demonstrated problems. At this time, HB2376 expands requirements without presenting evidence that current law is insufficient.

Additionally, many families choose homeschooling specifically to provide individualized education and avoid the bureaucratic inefficiencies inherent in large institutional systems. Parents maintain the primary responsibility for directing the upbringing and education of their

children, and additional mandates should require clear justification of necessity before restricting that freedom.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the committee to defer HB2376.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:00:03 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Edward Anastas	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HOUSE BILL 2376
Relating to Homeschooling Assessments

To: House Education Committee
Hearing Date: February 17, 2026
Hearing Time: 2:00 PM

POSITION: STRONG OPPOSITION

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I write to express strong opposition to HB 2376, which would impose unprecedented government control over homeschooling families and mandate seven years of in-person state testing at public schools.

HAWAII ALREADY HAS ADEQUATE ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

Current Hawai‘i law requires annual assessments for homeschoolers, with standardized testing required in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. This bill would expand testing to SEVEN grades (3-8 plus grade 11)—an unnecessary burden that goes far beyond existing Department of Education regulations.

ELIMINATION OF PARENTAL CHOICE

This bill eliminates parental choice by banning third-party standardized achievement tests such as the California Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and Stanford Achievement Test. These established assessments have served homeschooling families well for decades and can be administered flexibly to accommodate individual student needs.

HB 2376 would make Hawai‘i the first state in the nation to give homeschooling students no option but state-administered tests. This is not progress—it's government overreach.

STANDARDIZED TESTING: WHAT THE RESEARCH ACTUALLY SHOWS

Proponents of standardized testing often claim these assessments provide objective measures of learning. However, decades of peer-reviewed research reveals significant problems:

1. TESTING CREATES NARROW CURRICULUM
Research published in Education Week documents that schools reduce time spent on social studies, arts, and science to focus exclusively on tested subjects. This "teaching to the test" phenomenon has been documented in studies by researchers including Counsell (2011), who found that high-stakes testing creates a culture of fear and pressure that leads educators to artificially inflate scores rather than provide comprehensive learning.

2. SOCIOECONOMIC BIAS, NOT ACADEMIC MEASUREMENT
Harvard research demonstrates that socioeconomic status is a stronger predictor of SAT scores than actual schooling or grade level. Studies from ResearchGate (2024) show that standardized tests perpetuate educational inequities—wealthy families have greater access to test preparation resources, creating an uneven playing field that measures privilege rather than knowledge.

3. FAILS TO MEASURE CRITICAL THINKING
Research from FairTest and other educational organizations shows that standardized tests reward quick answers to superficial questions. They do not measure the ability to think deeply, creatively, or critically—the very skills that define real education and prepare students for meaningful work and citizenship.

4. QUESTIONABLE PREDICTIVE VALUE
While some claim standardized tests predict future success, researchers including Kohn (2014) have challenged these assertions, finding that admission tests are "not very effective as predictors of future academic performance, much less as predictors of professional success."

5. THE HOMESCHOOL "MATH GAP"
Studies by Kunzman & Gaither (2013) and multiple other researchers consistently show that when family background variables are controlled, homeschoolers score below average in math despite performing well in other subjects. This suggests that one-size-fits-all testing may not be the appropriate measure for diverse educational approaches.

LOGISTICAL NIGHTMARE FOR FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

This bill requires all testing to take place in person at local schools—another national first. Given the documented difficulties families have had accessing optional testing at public schools (PSAT, SAT, ACT), this mandate poses severe logistical challenges for both homeschool families and public school districts.

Schools will be forced to accommodate potentially hundreds of homeschooled students across multiple grade levels, coordinate testing schedules, provide adequate facilities, and assign proctors—all while managing their own students' needs.

KINDERGARTEN AND EARLY GRADES TESTING

HB 2376 would require homeschooled students to undergo Kindergarten Entry Assessment plus Universal Screening at the start of grades 1 and 2. That's three additional years of testing for young children who are just beginning their educational journey. Research consistently shows that young children's test scores are particularly unreliable and that testing anxiety can undermine confidence and overall academic achievement.

CONSTITUTIONAL VIOLATIONS: FUNDAMENTAL PARENTAL RIGHTS

HB 2376 raises serious constitutional concerns under both federal and state law. The U.S. Supreme Court has consistently recognized parental rights to direct their children's education as fundamental constitutional rights protected by the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause.

KEY SUPREME COURT PRECEDENTS:

1. MEYER v. NEBRASKA (1923)
The Supreme Court established that the "liberty" protected by the Fourteenth Amendment includes the fundamental right of parents to control their children's education. The Court struck down a Nebraska law restricting teaching of foreign languages, holding that the right to direct a child's education is "essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men."

2. PIERCE v. SOCIETY OF SISTERS (1925)
The Court struck down an Oregon law mandating public school attendance, affirming that "the child is not the mere creature of the state" and that parents have the constitutional right to direct the upbringing and education of their children. This case unequivocally established parental rights as fundamental.

3. FARRINGTON v. TOKUSHIGE (1927)
In a case involving Hawaiian regulation of private language schools, the Supreme Court held that excessive state control over curriculum, teachers, and textbooks was unconstitutional. The Court stated that such enforcement would "deprive parents of fair opportunity to procure for their children instruction which they think important and we cannot say is harmful."

This case is particularly relevant because it involved HAWAII specifically and established that the state cannot comprehensively regulate private education choices.

4. WISCONSIN v. YODER (1972)
The Court reinforced that when state educational regulations conflict with parental rights—especially those grounded in religious beliefs—the state must demonstrate a compelling interest using the least restrictive means. The Court emphasized that states cannot impose educational requirements that eliminate parental choice in how children are educated.

STRICT SCRUTINY ANALYSIS:

When a fundamental right is at stake, courts apply "strict scrutiny"—the highest level of judicial review. Under strict scrutiny, the government must prove:
1. A compelling governmental interest

2. That the law is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest
3. That it uses the least restrictive means possible

HB 2376 fails this test:

• LACK OF COMPELLING INTEREST: Hawai‘i already requires annual assessments including standardized testing in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. The state has not demonstrated any compelling reason why expanding to seven grades of testing is necessary, particularly when current requirements are already being met.

• NOT NARROWLY TAILORED: The bill eliminates ALL alternative testing options and mandates in-person state testing—the most restrictive approach possible. This is the opposite of "narrowly tailored."

• NOT LEAST RESTRICTIVE MEANS: Multiple less restrictive alternatives exist, including the current system which allows parents to choose between state tests and established third-party assessments. The bill unnecessarily eliminates parental choice.

HAWAII CONSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Hawai‘i has considered multiple "Parents' Bill of Rights" bills (HB2295, HB1715, HB1393) that recognize the fundamental right of parents to direct the education of their children. While these bills have not yet passed, they reflect legislative recognition of parental rights grounded in U.S. Supreme Court precedent dating back 100 years.

The Hawai‘i Constitution Article I, Section 5 protects the right to privacy. Mandatory in-person testing at public schools creates unnecessary government surveillance and intrusion into family educational decisions.

EXCESSIVE STATE REGULATION:

In Meyer v. Nebraska, the Supreme Court warned that state laws can "unreasonably interfere with the power of parents to control their children's education." HB 2376 represents exactly this type of unreasonable interference by:
- Eliminating parental choice of assessment methods
- Requiring physical presence at government facilities
- Imposing uniform standards that ignore individual student needs
- Creating a surveillance mechanism to monitor homeschooling families

FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT DUE PROCESS:

Legal scholars note that parental rights in education are substantive rights protected by the Due Process Clause. The right to direct a child's education encompasses not just the choice to homeschool, but the ability to determine the methods and content of that education within reasonable state oversight.

HB 2376 goes beyond "reasonable" oversight and becomes the kind of "comprehensive regulation" that courts have repeatedly struck down as unconstitutional.

UNDERMINES INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION

Hawai‘i Code R. § 8-12-15 recognizes that homeschool curriculum should "take into account the interests, needs and abilities of the child." HB 2376 directly contradicts this principle by imposing uniform statewide standards on all homeschool students.

Homeschool families often choose this educational path specifically for the flexibility it offers students with special learning needs, different learning paces, or unique talents that don't fit traditional models. Mandating seven years of state testing eliminates this flexibility and forces a one-size-fits-all approach that contradicts the very purpose of homeschooling.

IDENTIFICATION DOUBLE STANDARD

It's worth noting an interesting inconsistency in Hawai‘i's approach to identity verification:

Hawai‘i does NOT require identification to vote in person. In 2019, the state actually repealed the statute that allowed election officials to request voter ID. Hawai‘i is one of only 14 states that don't require voters to present identification at polling places (source: Ballotpedia voter ID database).

Yet this bill would mandate that homeschooled children—some as young as five years old—must present themselves in person at public schools for government testing. What identification will be required? Will children need to show ID that adults don't need to vote?

The bill is silent on these practical questions, yet it creates a system where the state exercises MORE oversight of homeschooled children taking tests than it does of adults exercising their fundamental right to vote.

This isn't about election integrity or testing integrity—it's about government priorities. Apparently, the state trusts adults to vote without ID verification, but doesn't trust parents to assess their own children's education without mandatory in-person government monitoring.

SETS DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

If Hawai‘i passes this bill, it will become the first state in the nation to:
- Eliminate all alternative standardized testing options for homeschoolers
- Mandate in-person testing at public schools with no flexibility
- Require ten total years of assessment (7 standardized tests plus 3 early screening assessments)

This unprecedented level of government intrusion into family education decisions sets a dangerous precedent that other states may follow.

CONCLUSION

Current Hawai‘i law already requires adequate assessment of homeschooled students. HB 2376 is an unnecessary expansion of government control that:
- Eliminates parental choice and flexibility
- Imposes logistical burdens on families and schools
- Relies on standardized testing despite decades of research questioning its effectiveness
- Creates unprecedented government oversight of homeschooling

The evidence is clear: standardized testing measures socioeconomic advantage more than learning, narrows curriculum, fails to assess critical thinking, and creates pressure that undermines genuine education.

I urge this committee to OPPOSE HB 2376 and protect the rights of Hawai‘i families to educate their children according to their individual needs.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Anastas
PO Box 1054, Makawao, HI 96768
politics@anastas.org
02/16/2026

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:07:50 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Bryant	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 2376

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Jennifer Bryant, and I am a resident of Kaimuki. I am testifying in strong opposition to HB 2376, which would mandate in-person testing at public schools for homeschooled children beginning in the 2027-2028 school year.

1. This Bill Creates an Unjust Double Standard

Current Hawaii homeschool law prohibits homeschooling families from participating in public school sports and extracurricular activities. HB 2376 would force homeschoolers to participate in public school testing while still denying them access to these other public resources. If the state wishes to require homeschoolers to use public school facilities for testing, it should also grant them access to other programs their tax dollars support.

2. The Bill Offers No Demonstrated Benefit to Homeschooled Children

The bill's text fails to explain how this mandate would improve outcomes for homeschooled students. Research consistently shows that homeschoolers already excel academically, scoring 15-25 percentile points higher on standardized tests than their public school peers and enjoying higher college acceptance rates.

Meanwhile, decades of increased testing in public schools has not improved educational outcomes. Since the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act mandated extensive testing, results have remained stagnant or declined. By 2024, only 35% of 12th graders were proficient in reading and 22% in math—the lowest levels in 20 years.

Hawaii's public education system currently ranks 42nd nationally, and the U.S. ranks 31st worldwide. Given these realities, it's unclear why homeschoolers—who are demonstrably succeeding—should be subjected to a testing regime that has failed to improve public school performance.

Current Hawaii homeschool law already requires regular testing, providing adequate accountability and state monitoring of student progress.

3. The Mandate Is Logistically Impractical

Implementation would create significant burdens for both families and the Department of Education:

Do Hawaii's public schools have the capacity and resources to proctor tests for thousands of additional students?

Families choose homeschooling specifically for its flexibility in scheduling and travel. This mandate would eliminate that core benefit.

For large families, coordinating drop-offs at multiple school campuses while arranging childcare for younger children would be exceptionally difficult. I am personally unable to attend this hearing in person because we are a one-car family and my husband already had a meeting scheduled.

Conclusion

Current Hawaii homeschool law strikes an appropriate balance between respecting families' constitutional right to direct their children's education and ensuring reasonable accountability. This bill attempts to fix what is not broken while our state faces many genuine educational challenges that deserve legislative attention.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 2376 and stand for the interests of homeschooling families.

Jennifer Bryant,

Kaimuki (Honolulu), Oahu

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:17:56 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paige Uyehara	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Representative Justin Woodson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Paige Uyehara and I am representing myself as a concerned resident of Hawai‘i. I am submitting testimony in **strong opposition** to HB2376. There are 3 reasons why **I oppose** this bill.

1) This bill imposes unnecessary burdens on homeschooling families by imposing 6 years of additional testing. Is there data showing that the current testing requirements for grades 3,5, 8, and 10 are not sufficient? Without data there would be no justification to impose the new testing requirements.

2) Not allowing 3rd party tests places unnecessary restrictions on testing options. Does data exist showing that 3rd party tests such as the California Achievement, Iowa, or Stanford Achievement Tests are inadequate?

3) Requiring students to take tests at the local school would cause hardship on families who have children with special needs who choose homeschooling to cater to the needs of their child.

As a mother who, along with my husband, homeschooled our 3 children, I can testify that homeschooling with the **existing** requirements allowed us as parents to provide the best possible education taylored to the needs of our children. Because of their homeschool education, our sons are now able to serve their community and country as a member of the US Coast Guard and as a Federal Firefighter. Our daughter is currently attending Leeward Community College and aspires to become a DOE school teacher.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to vote **NO** on HB2376.

Sincerly,

Paige Uyehara

91-1018D Hoomaka Street

Ewa Beach, HI. 96706

(808)398-1640

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:22:26 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karla Furumizo	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Karla, a homeschooling parent from Ewa Beach, and I strongly oppose SB3193.
For over ten years, I have homeschooled my children in Hawai‘i. This intentional choice required me to set aside my career so I could prioritize their education, safety, and well-being. I chose homeschooling specifically to avoid entanglement with the DOE and the "teach-to-the-test" model that has contributed to declining outcomes.
Hawai‘i's current homeschool law already provides adequate accountability, and SB3193 offers no documented findings showing any deficiency or widespread problem that would justify new mandates. This bill would burden responsible families while offering no evidence of improved safety or academic benefit. Its primary effect is to increase DOE testing numbers and funding—not to support homeschoolers.
The DOE continues to face well-documented challenges (including chronic absenteeism, declining academic performance, teacher misconduct, drugs, and campus safety concerns, etc). These issues should be addressed within the DOE, not shifted onto families who are already successfully educating their children.
Homeschoolers are not asking for state resources—only that our freedoms be protected and that unnecessary oversight not be imposed on families who are thriving under the current law.
For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose SB3193.
Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:32:31 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zheray Wong	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose bill HB2376. I have been homeschooling my five children for six years. My three oldest children started homeschooling when they were 7th, 5th, and 4th grade. At the beginning of our homeschool year they tested two years behind. It took my two oldest children two years to be at level, and three years for my youngest child to be at level. They are currently in grades 9th, 10th, and 12th and are all testing above their grade level as well as my 12th grader testing out of high school. We have used the California Achievement Test for six years to report to the public schools their end of year report. Those years that my children were behind would've reflected on their testing if done in the public school system, and they would have been categorized amongst their peers as such. Homeschooling and the freedom to test at our pace has allowed my children to achieve what they weren't able to do while they were in the public school system. My two youngest children are currently 4th and 6th grade and have been homeschooling since 2020. They both are testing above their grade level. Requiring homeschooling students to test in the public school system is a one-size-fits all approach that contradicts the customizable nature of homeschooling. Homeschooling families should have the freedom to choose whether or not to test according to the state standards, and should have the freedom to choose which testing they will use, as well as the location and environment. Standardized testing doesn't take into consideration students who have learning difficulties like dyscalculia and dyslexia. Some student have test anxiety that results in poor test scores even though they know the material.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:24:34 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sara Kahele	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

my name is Sara Kahele and I oppose HB 2376. I have been homeschooling my five children for the past 16 years.

We have followed all the states rules and regulations. I have graduated two children from homeschool. They were both registered at Campbell high school. Campbell high school never once contacted me to inform me of my compliance or of testing days and times. From what I understand, that high school is heavily overpopulated and doesn't have the capacity to care for homeschoolers in addition to the many students they already have to care for.

on top of that, it is a violation of our right to fully homeschool our children the way we see fit. My children always test above their grade levels. One of the reasons we homeschool is because it fits our flexible schedule so we don't have to follow the Department of Education's schedule. Homeschooling allows us to have our children Play multiple instruments, and participate in different groups that meet during the day while everyone else is in school.

I understand that there are other intentions behind the purpose of this bill… And perhaps we should be looking at the entities that are failing children. Like CPS.

I have given up my personal career and made multiple sacrifices to give my children the best education they could possibly receive. Their education is my priority and no one cares about that more than my husband and I.

Mahalo,

Sara Kahele

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 7:27:54 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonah Stewart	Coalition for Responsible Home Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear House Education Committee,

I am submitting this statement on behalf of the Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE), where I am the director of programs and principal investigator for our research activities. CRHE is the only national organization that advocates for an approach to homeschooling grounded in children's rights. I write to convey our organization's support for HB 2376, which would ensure that homeschooled children receive the same assessments for educational progress as their peers at conventional school.

While homeschooling can facilitate exceptionally high academic outcomes, there is evidence that homeschooling can be associated not only with negative academic and life outcomes, but also child maltreatment. Research has demonstrated repeatedly that homeschool alumni attend college at lower rates, and work for less pay, than their counterparts in school. According to one national-scale study, homeschooled high school students were two to three times more likely to report being behind grade level than peers. Regular assessment is a reasonable and effective mechanism for ensuring homeschooled students are on pace with their peers. As the only organization in the homeschooling space operated by people who were homeschooled, we regularly run focus groups with alumni, who overwhelmingly express that being tested would have helped them prepare for life after graduation.

HB 2376 also requires that homeschooled students take their exams in person, which addresses a critical loophole in safeguarding that has led to fatal consequences for homeschooled children, including Hawaiian child Geanna Bradley who died in 2024 from the effects of abuse consistent with torture. Our research shows abusive caregivers pull children from school to "homeschool" in order to evade scrutiny and escalate abuse. We maintain the Homeschooling's Invisible Children database, which has identified over 500 publicly documented cases of abuse and neglect that have resulted in over 230 fatalities of homeschooled children in the United States. Nearly half of fatal cases involve caregivers removing children from school, commonly after—or even during—a social services investigation into the family. Once children are removed from school, it is exceedingly difficult for them to encounter mandated reporters. Of 515 cases, only six percent of cases (n=33) came to light because a professional noticed abuse and intervened.

We see devastating outcomes like these because no state—not even states with comparatively robust oversight policies like Hawaii—requires that homeschooled children be seen outside the home at any point during their schooling. We have documented cases in which children are

critically unwell, or even already dead for months, while caregivers continue to submit homeschooling paperwork. Responsible families who homeschool in their children's best interest should have no reason to fear their children entering a school facility to take an exam.

Hawaii is already a national leader in homeschooling protections, but it lacks key safeguards to ensure all homeschooled children receive a quality education in a safe home. The passage of HB 2376 would make considerable headway in closing these gaps.

Sincerely,

Jonah Stewart, Ph.D.

With support from research team members: Elizabeth Bartmess, Madolyn Henderson, and Chelsea McCracken, Ph.D.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:29:55 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Bergin	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Parents should be able to create their own curriculum for the following reasons:

Homeschooled students consistently outperform their traditionally schooled peers academically, according to multiple studies. They typically score **15 to 30 percentile points higher** on standardized tests like the SAT and ACT, with homeschooled students averaging **1190 on the SAT** compared to **1060** for public school students. Research from the National Home Education Research Institute shows that **78% of peer-reviewed studies** find homeschooled students perform significantly better academically.

Social and emotional outcomes are also strong: A Harvard University study found homeschooled children were **one-third more likely to volunteer** and reported higher levels of forgiveness and religious participation in adulthood. Over **87% of studies** on social and emotional development show homeschooled students perform better in areas like self-esteem, family cohesion, and leadership.

College outcomes are competitive: Homeschooled students have a **college acceptance rate of 87%**, compared to 68% for public school graduates, and a **higher first-year GPA** in college. Despite a lower high school graduation rate (66.7% vs. 91% for public schools), this may reflect different pathways, as **74% of homeschooled students pursue college**, and many attend top-tier institutions.

Key advantages include personalized learning, flexibility, and protection from bullying and peer pressure. However, some report challenges with social integration and making friends, especially when transitioning to traditional schools. Overall, research indicates homeschooled students are well-prepared for higher education and adult life.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:37:43 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erik Eck	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Legislators,

I oppose HB 2376. The reason we homeschool is so that we are not held back by and forced to study for the standardized tests.

Think how it would be if we held public school kids accountable to tests on our ciriculum.

Homeschool was key during Covid. Please do not hinder this orgnaic capability.

Sincerely,

Erik Eck

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:42:06 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jasmine Crosley	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a homeschooling parent of an autistic boy, this will make his schooling process much more difficult, potentially causing unnecessary stress and anxiety around test taking. Please do not do this to the children. Many parents already struggle with school, like myself. I think if you created a coalition of homeschooling parents and got their input on what resources they could use to create a more unison and evenly distributed education educational system for those of us that want to stay home with our kids.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:54:33 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sanja Bergin	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Homeschool families often choose homeschooling for the flexibility it offers to their students, including those with special learning needs. This bill would limit parent's ability to meet the individual needs of each student.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

Representative Justin H. Woodson
House Education Committee

H.B.2376

Feb. 17, 2026

Writing in Opposition to H.B. 2376

Aloha, and thank you for your attention to my testimony. While I believe this bill aims to address fears of neglect, I think Hawaii would benefit more from implementing proven methods to mitigate neglect such as case manager oversight (as done in some states). Standardized testing is a poor mechanism to detect or eliminate neglect. Moreover, forced standardized testing will introduce all the negative consequences onto the children that homeschooling is specifically designed to avoid (e.g., safety and one-size-fits-all education).

My name is Katie Elledge, and I am a homeschool parent of two students in second and fifth grade. I also have a Bachelor of Elementary Education from NAU and have taught in charter school as well as substituting in elementary, middle, and high school public schools in Arizona. I was also home schooled for much of my education. I believe I can give an insider's perspective on why this bill is bad for students, bad for teachers, and will not accomplish the primary goals it is intended to achieve.

I understand that this bill intends to address fears that homeschool children might be subject to control and abuse because they are not daily in the presence of mandatory reporters who might notice and intervene. I find this concern laudable. No child should suffer. But submitting children to yearly standardized testing does not accomplish this goal. While a teacher would physically see students, a testing environment is hardly conducive to monitoring their wellbeing. Additionally, children between birth and kindergarten are just as vulnerable and yet no one is suggesting they be tested yearly. There are better ways to check on children.

Which leads to the practicalities. Having taught during standardized testing I know that teachers spend days and weeks preparing their students' classroom behavior and expectations. This plan would take students, many who have never sat in standard classrooms, and ask them to follow classroom norms and routines that are completely foreign to their typical learning routines in a room with unfamiliar teachers and classmates and expect that these kids will perform to their best abilities. Homeschool teachers have differentiated their curriculum to fit their individual students, many advanced in some areas or remedial in others. Suddenly, these students would be required to face testing that does not align with their curriculum in

completely new surroundings. Surely, you can see this is a recipe for student failure and class disruptions. This bill will cause a significant amount of stress for classroom teachers who are already stretched thin.

Homeschooled children are already banned from utilizing any public resources like sports, a-la-carte courses, or special needs support. (A practice which should be overturned.) Parents who choose to homeschool their children make a substantial sacrifice to do so without any help from the state, and it is difficult to image that it is in the best interest of children to impose additional burden. Furthermore, this will also place an undue burden upon educators; and choosing to imagine that teachers will simply find the time to make this happen is shortsighted.

Another concern is that many homeschool students have special needs. My children's neurodivergence is one of many reasons I choose to homeschool. I anticipate a good number of homeschool children would need to establish IEPs (Individualized Education Plan) with the school before testing in order to receive necessary and required accommodations. This would add even more work to the classroom teachers managing IEPs for students they only see once a year.

Any possible educational benefits are dubious. Standarized testing is not consistent with research-driven educational best practices, and many choose to homeschool to avoid this tired practice. Forcing children into an unfamiliar and unsafe environment to participate in unnatural testing is more disruptive to their education than could ever be helpful.

Finally, a word about my personal concerns. I do not believe that my children are safe in public school. School shootings and student violence are real concerns and one reason why I choose not to send my students to public schools despite the financial cost and substantial time requirement.

I believe you care deeply for the wellbeing of our kids, and I hope you will agree that there are better ways to support the safety and education of Hawaii's homeschooled children.

Respectfully Yours,

Dr. and Mrs. Elledge

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 5:11:48 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Smart	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2376.

Our public schools do not teach students to keep them at grade level in reading in math. Please focus on the public schools in improving their performance. Whatever the state is doing is counter productive. Don't expand your reach into home school families. Work on improving the results for those who must attend the failing public schools.

Home school students should not be forced to participate in annual tests administered by the state. Parental tracking is sufficient. Parents who take the time to home school want the best for their children.

Home school students are excelling and do not need state intervention.

Do not pass **HB2376.**

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 5:12:07 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tiffany Wright	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm writing this in reference to the HB2376 bill. I want to oppose this bill. This bill takes away all the freedom and rights that homeschool families have. A few reasons families choose to homeschool is so that our children can learn at their own pace and not have to worry, feel stressed, or pressured in their learning environment. If this bill is passed it would be unfairly assessing our homeschooled children. They do not learn the same way non homeschoolers learn. My spouse and I, having experienced public, private, and homeschool, have found that personalized learning is most effective for teaching our children. Even though this notion seems to specifically apply to our own family, homeschoolers still remain a widespread community just as any other public school would. We can specifically personalize our kids learning yet all come together as individual families through homeschooling community events like sports, field trips and socialized meetings. As homeschoolers we learn all day through everyday activities and aren't just limited to a school setting. Our children are learning without even realizing it and without having to put them into a stressful environment. Forcing every child to learn and be tested in one specific way doesn't seem very inclusive considering EVERY single child is different. I OPPOSE THIS BILL.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 5:16:24 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kyle Wright	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm writing this in reference to the HB2376 bill. I want to oppose this bill. This bill takes away all the freedom and rights that homeschool families have. A few reasons families choose to homeschool is so that our children can learn at their own pace and not have to worry, feel stressed, or pressured in their learning environment. If this bill is passed it would be unfairly assessing our homeschooled children. They do not learn the same way non homeschoolers learn. My spouse and I, having experienced public, private, and homeschool, have found that personalized learning is most effective for teaching our children. Even though this notion seems to specifically apply to our own family, homeschoolers still remain a widespread community just as any other public school would. We can specifically personalize our kids learning yet all come together as individual families through homeschooling community events like sports, field trips and socialized meetings. As homeschoolers we learn all day through everyday activities and aren't just limited to a school setting. Our children are learning without even realizing it and without having to put them into a stressful environment. Forcing every child to learn and be tested in one specific way doesn't seem very inclusive considering EVERY single child is different. I OPPOSE THIS BILL.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 5:52:47 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason Billings	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a father currently homeschooling my two daughters, ages 10 and 14. We never planned on homeschooling our children, but COVID changed our situation and ended up leading us down that path - which we've now been doing for nearly 6 years. A big reason for not transitioning back to public school was timed standardized testing. Upon starting to homeschool our children, we quickly realized that their anxiety and stress regarding school were extremely high, which shouldn't be surprising considering their entire world was upended by COVID. We have done a lot of work to reduce stress around education for our children and I think we've been largely successful. We do test our children annually, however we do not spend significant time preparing for it and we do not time it. Our only reason for doing it at all is to show proof, should we be asked, that our children are at or above grade level. As a homeschool parent, I need the flexibility to educate my children in a way that best meets their educational needs. Every homeschool parent has that same right - it ensures that we give our children the best possible educational experience rather than a "one size fits all approach." There are already requirements for homeschool parents to report annually to ensure they are properly educating their children. Forcing us to partake in timed standardized testing does absolutely nothing to help my children's education. If the current regulations are properly enforced, the Department of Education should have enough information to validate that each child that is homeschooled is receiving an appropriate education, nothing more is needed. Whether a child does well on these tests has no impact on their final grades, so why are we forcing this? I understand schools must do this to ensure federal funding is received, but homeschool kids do not play into that equation. We get no money from the State of Hawaii despite the fact that a portion of our taxes go to the education system. It seems like the only argument that can be made to force this testing on homeschool children is because more kids testing may lead to additional federal funding. But considering homeschool children get no benefit from increased federal funding for education, it seems completely unfair to force this. If there is some concern about educational neglect, I again reiterate that annual reporting is already a requirement. If you feel the annual reporting is insufficient, than simply modify the requirements and ask for more information. The vast majority of homeschool parents have a educational system in place that is at least as rigorous as public school and can easily show how we are educating our children. You will find that many homeschool parents do not believe standardized tests add value to their children's education and we do not want to be forced to implement it, particularly when there is no valid justification. Finally, in order for my children to take these tests, it forces my children to go to an environment that they are completely unfamiliar with - thus significantly increasing their stress. It's no different than asking a random public school student to come to my house to take these tests,

despite the fact that they've never met me. I do not want something that, yet again, forces my children's anxiety and stress about education to increase. Thank you for your consideration.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 6:06:50 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maggie Coppenbarger	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

We stand opposed to the HB 2376 bill seeking to be passed as it infringes upon school choice and freedoms in this great country. As I am sure that you know, Hawaii is one of the most unfriendly states to homeschoolers, and yet the other options offered in the state are not ones that meet our own expectations for our children's education. We have used Classical Conversations and even LUOA. These beautiful options for our families education has proven to be deep, classical, encouraging, and engaging, while also promoting in itself assessments and tests. They have done well on every level. We transferred last year with public school. Our son was a freshmen and completed an AP biology course well. Most in his class were seniors. I can understand a desire for the public school to want to have some testing done. But imposing that part of the public school system on others, when we don't use the same techniques, while making it more difficult on your great homeschool families in this beautiful state will in long term allow more and more control of the state. History has shown that free thinkers, classically educated students, and natural explorers are self motivated and some of our richest assets in this country.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Maggie Coppenbarger

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 6:35:34 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Duffy	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strongly oppose this bill.

So let me get this straight. Homeschool families in Hawai‘i — who receive zero funding, zero DOE resources, and zero institutional support — now need to show up at the very public schools they intentionally opted out of… to take the same state tests… so the Department can “monitor progress.”

Because apparently five thousand families educating their own kids just fine isn’t convincing enough.

This bill says it’s about “early identification” and “student success.” That sounds nice. But forgive us if some of us can’t help but wonder — is this really about helping homeschool students… or helping Hawai‘i’s statewide testing numbers?

If Smarter Balanced scores have been struggling, maybe the solution isn’t to import homeschoolers once a year like academic reinforcements.

Back in the day, when we chose to homeschool we did so specifically because we did not want our children defined by standardized testing. Many of us left because the system was too test-heavy, too rigid, too one-size-fits-all. Now homeschooling familiies are being told, “No worries, just come back once a year and sit for the test anyway.”

Mahalo, but no mahalo.

Homeschool education in Hawai‘i is:

- Mastery-based
- Individually paced
- Culturally rooted
- Faith-based for some
- Project-driven for others

It is not standardized by design. That’s the whole point.

And let’s talk practical reality. Neighbor island families? Military families? Kids with anxiety who left public school because the environment wasn’t working? Now they must report in person to a public campus — not because they need help — but because the state wants uniform data.

This feels less like support and more like scoreboard management.

If the DOE is concerned about struggling students, there are already mechanisms to address neglect or genuine educational failure. This bill doesn’t target problems. It sweeps every homeschool family into mandatory compliance.

In Hawai‘i we talk about ohana, trust, and community partnership. This bill replaces trust with suspicion.

And respectfully, if the Department wants higher test scores, the solution is improving the public school system — not requiring homeschoolers to pad the average once a year.

Homeschool families are not asking for state funding. They are not asking for special treatment. They are simply asking to be allowed to educate our keiki without being pulled back into a system they intentionally left.

Please don’t fix what isn’t broken. **Oppose this bill.**

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 6:36:18 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carla	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose Bill HB2376 (and it's companion SB3193)...

Vote NO, to Bill HB2376, PLEASE!!

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:03:06 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heidi Akau	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB2376 currently under consideration in the Hawaii State Legislature.

While accountability in education is an important public objective, HB2376 imposes unnecessary and intrusive mandates on homeschooling families across Hawaii. Requiring annual in-person assessments at designated public schools fundamentally alters the existing balance between parental autonomy and state oversight without sufficient evidence that such expanded control is warranted.

Homeschooling in Hawaii already operates within a regulatory framework that allows for documentation of educational progress. HB2376 replaces this flexible, parent-directed model with a centralized compliance structure that may:

- Undermine parental rights to direct the education of their children;
- Impose logistical and administrative burdens on families, particularly those in rural or neighbor island communities;
- Create unnecessary stress and standardized testing pressures that are inconsistent with many homeschooling pedagogies;
- Expand government oversight without demonstrated systemic failure requiring corrective intervention.

There is no clear evidence that homeschooled students in Hawaii are experiencing widespread educational deficiencies that justify mandatory in-person testing requirements. Absent compelling data showing harm or systemic breakdown, expanding regulatory control risks solving a problem that has not been substantiated.

Moreover, mandating physical attendance for assessments erodes the flexibility that defines homeschooling. Families often choose this educational path for individualized instruction, cultural considerations, special learning needs, or philosophical reasons. HB2376 constrains that flexibility in a way that appears disproportionate to its stated objectives.

If the Legislature seeks to improve educational transparency, more targeted, collaborative approaches could be explored—ones that preserve parental authority while addressing legitimate concerns. HB2376, as currently drafted, does not strike that balance.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote against HB2376. Thank you for your time, service, and thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Heidfi Akau

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:14:07 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joycelyn De Lima	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill. As a mother with multiple children & various ages, restricting my homeschooled children abilities to their unique learning needs by doing the required testing at a school is against why we homeschool in the first place. I hold my children at a very high academic standard that I can personalize to their individual needs. Each child has a different learning style & can excel & adapt in different situations where they are valued & have one on one attention when needed. I have no problem submitting test results at the appropriate time of the school year but firmly believe that it should be done at home where I know my child will excel in greatness. Thank you for your time.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

TO: Chairman Woodson and House Education Committee Members

FROM: Danielle Hutchinson

DATE: February 17, 2026

RE: HB2376
IN OPPOSITION

Good afternoon Chairman Woodson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony today. My name is Danielle Hutchinson. I am a homeschooling mother here in Hawaii, and I am writing today to testify against HB2376.

The current law allows homeschooling families to establish our own homeschool calendar. By requiring our students to attend in-person testing, it can interrupt a homeschool instructional plan, especially for families that have multiple students learning at different grade levels. It would force homeschooling families like mine to rearrange the learning plans we have put in place. My family adheres to a 365-day school year. My husband is an active duty soldier, and with his work schedule, possible moves and deployments, and unplanned leave times, this plan works for us. It allows me to space out the lessons my children have in order to have the flexibility needed as a military family. This bill would remove that flexibility from my family and impact how our education plan is structured.

The current law also allows us to test our students in a familiar environment and with any standardized test that best suits our child. By requiring our students to test in the schools, this would remove them from a familiar environment and take away their ability to use a test that fits best within their current homeschooling curriculum. Both of these issues can cause stress for the child and negatively impact their performance, an issue that may be misconstrued as a failing on the side of homeschooling.

While I can understand and appreciate the desire for accountability for homeschool families, removing our rights and abilities as parents to structure our child's education in a way that best suits their individual needs and needs as a family should not be the path taken to ensure each child receives an education. That is why I oppose HB2376.

Sincerely,

Danielle Hutchinson

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:39:08 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Trish	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly oppose this bill, which mandates that homeschooled students report to public schools for annual in-person testing. This legislation represents an unconstitutional overreach into the private lives of families who have chosen a lawful alternative to public education. Homeschooling is built on the principle of customized, parent-led learning—not a one-size-fits-all government curriculum. This bill would force families to align their teaching with public school standards, effectively ending the educational diversity that homeschooling provides .

Furthermore, this mandate is redundant and burdensome. Existing laws already require homeschool accountability through assessments like portfolios or nationally-normed tests . This bill simply adds a costly, unfunded mandate on school districts and an unnecessary intrusion on families. For children with special needs, who often left public school due to a lack of proper accommodation, this testing requirement could be disastrous . There is no evidence that homeschool students are failing to justify this heavy-handed government intervention. I urge you to protect parental rights and vote 'No' on this bill."

Mahalo,

Patricia Pundyke

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:42:59 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sheena Campania	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sheena Campania, and I am a homeschooling parent residing in Mililani, Hawai‘i. I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to HB 2376.

Our family is still fairly new to homeschooling. My daughter attended public school from kindergarten through fifth grade before we made the decision to transition to home education. This was not a decision we made lightly. It came after years of doing our best to support her within the traditional school system while recognizing she needed a more personalized and emotionally supportive learning environment.

I want to be clear that we value teachers deeply. We believe educators work incredibly hard and care about their students. Our decision to homeschool was not rooted in dissatisfaction with teachers, but rather in recognizing that the system itself cannot always accommodate every child’s individual learning style, pace, or emotional needs.

My daughter has always been a bright and imaginative child. From a young age, she had a big vocabulary, loved music, and would even make up her own songs on her guitar. She was full of creativity and light. But over time, it began to feel like those parts of her were being overlooked. She is naturally quiet and observant, and because of that, it sometimes felt like she wasn’t fully seen for who she was as a learner or as a person.

Since beginning our homeschool journey, we’ve seen such meaningful growth in her — not only academically, but emotionally. She is regaining confidence in herself and in her voice. She has always been a strong student, but homeschooling has given her a safe space to truly explore those strengths at her own pace. She’s more engaged, more willing to try, and more connected to learning again. As a parent, watching that light come back has been one of the most affirming parts of this decision.

While I understand the intent behind increased oversight, I do have concerns about the requirement for mandatory in-person state testing at public schools. For families like ours — especially those transitioning from the school system — the flexibility of homeschooling is what allows this kind of growth to happen. Returning to a public school setting for testing could introduce stress that disrupts the individualized progress our children are making.

Hawai‘i already has accountability measures in place for homeschooling families. We document learning, track progress, and have multiple pathways to demonstrate educational growth. This flexibility allows parents to meet their children where they are while still maintaining educational responsibility.

As someone who has experienced both systems, I believe maintaining that flexibility is essential. Homeschooling is not about avoiding accountability — it is about creating an environment where our children can be seen, supported, and allowed to thrive academically, emotionally, and personally.

Mahalo for taking the time to hear from families like ours and for your service to Hawai‘i’s keiki. I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 2376.

Sincerely,
Sheena Campania
Mililani, Hawai‘i

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:03:58 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather Lackey	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

All parents deserve the right to guide their children's education! This is overreaching, and completely unnecessary.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:29:43 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley Stephenson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Parents choose to homeschool for many different reasons. Maybe it's the child has delays, or maybe they have fear of school/large crowds, religious reasons, or the child just learns better with the parent and in a more relaxed home setting. Or just a different style of learning, not sitting in a desk 6-8 hours a day is more suitable for the child. I feel I am responsible for the raising of my children, not the public school system. I should be allowed to choose what I teach my children. Freedoms in our federal constitution back that up. I chose to spend my life teaching them and for the government to continually try to change laws to control it more is almost to a suspicious level. It is an overreach on the government's behalf if this bill proceeds forward. We already submit 4 years of testing and all the rest of years, either a well put together portfolio of their work, or testing done at home. For my 2nd child, he cannot do timed tests. So for him, we buy the (CAT) standardized test that is untimed, and has more questions to make up for the untimed for him. He struggles with learning disability's and making him go in with a lot of other kids in a timed test would do him in. One of my other children has hearing loss and major speech delays. We will be homeschooling him due to this. I do not desire to have to send him in each year to test, when I am perfectly capable of admitting a test for him. Vs him, most likely, going in that week for testing and being made fun of with his hearing aids and/or his speech delays etc. I know how kids can be so mean. I hope you will listen to all the other parents testimony and choose to not pass this bill.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

H.B. No 2376 - RELATING TO EDUCATION.
House Committee on Education
February 17, 2026 - 2:00PM
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 309
By
Gaudy Amaya

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Chica and Members of the Committee,

My name is Gaudy Amaya and I first would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify my **strong opposition** to House Bill No. 2376, which relates to mandated testing for homeschool students. While the Act acknowledges that homeschooling thrives on family flexibility, strong engagement and individualized instruction. These concepts typically imply that a student's education is tailored to their unique needs, pace, learning style, and specific curriculum needs, rather than following a uniform state mandated schedule. However, the ACT creates several rules that seem to go against these core benefits.

Standardized Testing operates on a "one size fits all", a metric that ignores diverse student backgrounds, learning and needs that make homeschooling successful. Furthermore, it creates logistical barriers for families, particularly those in rural areas or on neighboring islands. There are no provisions in the text for remote testing, online proctoring or alternative sites, which means families in rural areas must travel to a physical location regardless of distance. This can mean significant travel time and transportation costs. If these families have 1st and 2nd graders they would require further trips to the local school. This imposes rigid state mandated appointments that do not account for the challenge for rural living and or families who lack transportation.

Homeschool students must temporarily follow rigid public school rules, including assigned seating, silence, and limited breaks that place homeschooled students at a distinct disadvantage. Which must be used by standardized testing to accurately measure student progress. Which is a major disadvantage of homeschooled students who may not be accustomed to such expectations.

Under this Act, parents no longer have the sole responsibility to determine how or if their child's academic progress is measured. This implies that the State's benchmarks for student success take precedence over a parent's individualized education goals. Suggesting that parental oversight alone is insufficient to guarantee a child's educational success. I urge you to honor the primary role of parents in their children's education. Please vote against HB 2376.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Gaudy Amaya

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:42:08 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nichole A.	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I OPPOSE this bill, it creates an unfair, even hostile environment for children learning in different ways. We know that people, children included, learn differently. These tests only test children in 1 way, when students now can take a California Achievenment test or the Iowa Acheivment test if it suits their learning style better. Shouldn't we be trying to teach each student in the way they learn the best so that no child can be left behind. And it is known that homeschooled students have out tested Hawaii public school students year over year. I encourage the committee to look at diversifying the education styles and testing of the public school sectors instead of forcing more people into their ideas of scholastic molding that isn't appropriate for everyone.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:46:56 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cecilia Mah	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Whom it May Concern--

I am writing to express my concerns with HB2376. I have ten years of service in public education. This requirement (especially for schools years that are not mandated SBAC years- 3rd and 5th) is a complete misunderstanding of how homeschooling functions as a whole. I assure you that homeschooled children are on a path to meet state standards, but may not be on your timeline. This is no indication of a child's ability to success academically as parents are extremely engaged in their child's educational development. I understand the desire to have oversight, but its in my professional opinion this is not the way. Please do not take our right to support our children develop as learners through the plethora of supports we provide them. Our home schooled children are gaining so much life value by engaging with the whole world regularly. This proposed added stress on our children is uncessary especially in the early primary grades.

Respectfully,

Cecilia Mah, Cleared Bilingual Multiple Subject Credential, MS in Education- Emphasis in Math Instruction, Clear School Administration Credential, MS in Educational Leadership.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:11:26 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Pearl	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Opposition to HB2376

To Whom it may concern:

I respectfully submit testimony in opposition to HB2376.

While accountability in education is important, this bill unnecessarily expands government oversight of homeschooling families and restricts long-standing parental choice. Homeschooling in Hawai‘i has operated successfully under a framework that allows flexibility while ensuring educational progress. HB2376 disrupts that balance.

Requiring homeschooled students to take state assessments in person at public schools for grades 3–8 and 11 imposes a one-size-fits-all approach on families who intentionally choose individualized, mastery-based education. Standardized, grade-level testing often does not accurately reflect the progress of students who are working above or below traditional grade levels.

Mandating public school–based testing also creates logistical burdens for families and may cause unnecessary stress for children who are not educated in institutional settings. The added requirements for Kindergarten Entry Assessment and universal screening in grades 1–2 further expand oversight into early childhood education, where development varies widely and rigid testing is often inappropriate.

There has been no demonstrated crisis among Hawai‘i’s homeschooling community that justifies this level of intervention. Policy changes of this magnitude should be driven by clear evidence of need, not assumptions.

HB2376 represents a significant shift away from parental educational freedom and toward increased regulation. I respectfully urge you to vote NO on this measure and preserve the rights of families to direct their children’s education in a manner that best meets their needs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Megan Pearl

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:28:50 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Monica Butler	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Monica Butler, and I am a homeschooling parent on the island of Maui.

I respectfully submit my testimony in opposition to S.B. 3193 as currently written.

I appreciate that this bill acknowledges homeschooling as a valid and beneficial educational option. Many families choose homeschooling because it allows for individualized instruction, flexibility, and strong family involvement—qualities that help children thrive.

My concern is with the requirement for mandatory annual, in-person testing at a public school. This represents a significant change from current law and reduces the flexibility that is central to successful homeschooling.

One of my daughters, in particular, does not perform well in forced testing environments. While she is making steady academic progress at home, in-person standardized testing causes her anxiety and does not accurately reflect her learning or abilities. I know many homeschooling families with similar experiences, especially those with children who learn differently or struggle in institutional testing settings.

Homeschool families in Hawai‘i already comply with notification and assessment requirements, and parents are actively engaged in their children’s education. Replacing flexible assessment options with a one-size-fits-all mandate risks penalizing children who are thriving outside the traditional school model.

If the Legislature wishes to support student well-being and early identification of learning needs, I respectfully ask that you consider less intrusive alternatives, such as allowing families to choose from multiple assessment options or making public school testing optional for homeschoolers who wish to access DOE services.

I urge you to preserve parental choice and the flexibility that allows homeschooling to continue serving Hawai‘i’s keiki well.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Monica Butler

Homeschool Parent, Maui

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:02:58 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keith Yoshimoto	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My wife and I oppose HB 2376. This added testing requirement placed on homeschoolers is not necessary. Homeschoolers are already required by law to submit annual student evaluations or test scores as required by the State. Furthermore, having homeschooled students test at their respective public school will place an additional burden on the public school system. Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,

KT Yoshimoto

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:17:59 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victoria Smith	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 2376

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Victoria Smith, and I am a resident of Mililani. I am testifying in strong opposition to HB 2376, which would mandate in-person testing at public schools for homeschooled children beginning in the 2027-2028 school year.

1. This Bill Creates an Unjust Double Standard Current Hawaii homeschool law prohibits homeschooling families from participating in public school sports and extracurricular activities. HB 2376 would force homeschoolers to participate in public school testing while still denying them access to these other public resources. If the state wishes to require homeschoolers to use public school facilities for testing, it should also grant them access to other programs their tax dollars support.

2. The Bill Offers No Demonstrated Benefit to Homeschooled Children

The bill's text fails to explain how this mandate would improve outcomes for homeschooled students. Research consistently shows that homeschoolers already excel academically, scoring 15-25 percentile points higher on standardized tests than their public school peers and enjoying higher college acceptance rates.

Meanwhile, decades of increased testing in public schools has not improved educational outcomes. Since the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act mandated extensive testing, results have remained stagnant or declined. By 2024, only 35% of 12th graders were proficient in reading and 22% in math—the lowest levels in 20 years.

Hawaii's public education system currently ranks 42nd nationally, and the U.S. ranks 31st worldwide. Given these realities, it's unclear why homeschoolers—who are demonstrably succeeding—should be subjected to a testing regime that has failed to improve public school performance.

Current Hawaii homeschool law already requires regular testing, providing adequate accountability and state monitoring of student progress.

3. The Mandate Is Logistically Impractical

Implementation would create significant burdens for both families and the Department of Education:

Do Hawaii's public schools have the capacity and resources to proctor tests for thousands of additional students?

Families choose homeschooling specifically for its flexibility in scheduling and travel. This mandate would eliminate that core benefit.

For large families, coordinating drop-offs at multiple school campuses while arranging childcare for younger children would be difficult. I am personally unable to attend this hearing in person because my children have a scheduled music class in Mililani but my oldest child will be in attendance with another family.

Conclusion

Current Hawaii homeschool law strikes an appropriate balance between respecting families' constitutional right to direct their children's education and ensuring reasonable accountability. This bill attempts to fix what is not broken while our state faces many genuine educational challenges that deserve legislative attention.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 2376 and stand for the interests of homeschooling families.

Victoria Smith

Mililani, Hawaii

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 5:24:11 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alice Abellanida	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose this bill. It is more government overreach.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 5:46:26 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mackie Chun	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY OPPOSE HB 2376, this bill takes away my parental rights when it comes to my children's' education. I am asking you to also oppose HB 2376.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 6:01:46 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shawn Reasoner	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am opposed to HB2376.

Hawaii already requires an annual assessment, including standardized tests in grades, 3, 5, 8 and 10. This bill goes beyond what DOE regulations require, and this would entitle unnecessary government control. It also eliminates *our choice* of third-party testing. This is overreach and must be opposed.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 6:27:26 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Letitia Reasoner	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Please oppose HB2376.
Our beautiful state of Hawaii already requires an annual standardized testing assessment in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, where we have a choice of which standardized test to administer. This bill mandates seven years of state testing, eliminating our flexibility. This bill increases government control over homeschooling families and must be opposed.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 7:21:51 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Molly Wright	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Committee of Education

Senate Bill HB2376

Tuesday, February 17, 2026
2:00pm at House Conference Room 309

IN OPPOSITION of Senate Bill HB 2376

Aloha, my name is Molly Wright, a mother of two on Maui. I am writing in strong opposition to HB2376.

We chose homeschooling because it allows us to meet our children in a personal, individual way. We are diligent tomake their education well-rounded and meet them with their best learning style. Freedom in education is a constitutionally protected parental right. HB2376 is additional government oversite, on a small group of people who have freely chosen to step away from the standardized system. Requiring mandatory testing and restricting parental choice for testing of homeschooled children removes freedom.

To require home schooled children to attend testing in a public school setting, with teachers and students and in facilities, they do not know, sets up the child to be stressed and have undo pressure placed on them. Not only would this harm the child, it puts more pressure on teachers, who already are working beyond their capacities. Hawaii already requires standardized tests in 3rd, 5th, 8th and 10th grades, and also requires that annual assessments of each child be submitted. This is already more than many states require.

We, as a family, have chosen to use a standardized test to fulfill the annual assessment requirement. We pay out of pocket to have a test administered, submitting those results to the school district. These test results are an accurate measure of the student as they are administered in an environment and structure the child is familiar with. What purpose is there for a child to be required to do the testing elsewhere.

In review, I ask that you stand up for educational freedom, constitutionally protected parental rights, and respectfully ask you to oppose HB2376.

Sincerely,
Molly Wright

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 7:25:23 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Gayer Jr	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Kakou,

My name is Michael Gayer Jr.

I writing in OPPOSITION to HB2376.

As a homeschool parent, we are able to customize our children's learning to each of our children. We have options and continually refine what best suits each child. Our children almost always are complimented on their well behavior, politeness, and creativity.

We already follow the existing laws. It is unnecessary to add further legislation on this matter.

Mahalo for your time and your attention.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 8:27:48 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laulani Teale	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As a parent of two children who were home schooled, I strongly oppose this measure. It lacks clarity about what is being tested, resources to do said testing, and realistic proof that it will achieve its intent at all.

In my case, I pulled my disabled, nonbinary children out of public school when the level of systemic trauma in their school experience caused serious harm to their well being. Invasive testing would have traumatized them further. As it was, my children tested extremely high, and are now successful and productive members of our community. Further trauma might have interfered with that.

The measure provides no support for families. Home school families receive nothing from the State of Hawai‘i to assist in their children‘s education. How can they be expected to meet new, possibly unreasonable standards of any sort without the basic resources to prepare for these specific new, undetermined criteria?

There are also no realistic accommodations, or funding for accommodations, built into this measure. Without this, discrimination against students with disabilities is a major problem

This measure does not meet basic standards of fairness, reasonable accommodation and accountability. It does not help students -- it harms them severely.

I applaud the intent to protect children from harm, but unfortunately this measure would not accomplish that. A broken Child Welfare system cannot be remedied through further damage to the education system. Children lost through child abuse are a terrible thing. So are children lost through trauma that results in suicide or other death related to bullying and other systemic harm. The latter is much more common, and much easier to test for.

Let‘s focus our energies on solutions that really work.

Aloha,

Laulani Teale

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:23:39 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April Ikeda	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a homeschooling mother of four. This is our ninth year of homeschooling. Three years ago, my oldest daughter had to take the SBA at our local public school, in order to enter Myran B. Thompson Academy charter school (MBTA) the testing was difficult for me because it took us five days to complete the testing. There were four different exams (ELA performance, ELA computer, science, math) which took us five different days to complete because she took two days to finish the writing portion. I had to coordinate each time with the school. Some days I was busy and some days the administrator was busy. I never knew how long the test would take, so I had to clear my schedule to be able to pick her up whenever I got the call saying she was done. I also feel she was at a disadvantage because the environment and test format were all very new to her. I oppose HB 2376. Mahalo.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:34:51 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jamie Toyofuku	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly OPPOSE Hb2376. The DOE system has failed and is currently failing many of our keiki and their ohana. I am a homeschooling parent for almost 5 years now. My children were able to thrive through the success and tremendous support that homeschool communities provided when the DOE could not. They will continue to thrive without the intereference of more regulations and restrictions from Hawaii's DOE. Mahalo.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:44:06 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joelle Seashell	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Parents have the authority and power to choose how their children should be educated. People in Government do not have the right or qualifications to dictate how a parent should educate their children.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:52:13 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tiffany Merrick	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I respectfully oppose HB2376.

1. Standardized testing isn't a good indicator for Hawaii public school students already, of course it wouldn't be for homeschool students whos curriculum is different.

2. Then having them do it at the public school? For what? Its an unfamiliar setting, You think a child will perform well on a test in an unfamiliar setting , or toxic setting if they've experienced it first hand is very unsettling if you want to do that to a child. In this day and age there isn't a good enough reason for the child to have to go in person to a school that is NOT their own.

3. I support others stating this : This bill would require standardized testing in public schools, an unfamiliar and stressful environment for many homeschool students. For some children, homeschooling was chosen specifically to remove them from situations involving bullying, anxiety, or other school related stress. Requiring them to return to that setting for testing will negatively affect both their emotional wellbeing and academic performance.

4. And finally, As a Parent, I should retain the ability to choose appropriate assessments that best reflect my child’s learning.

HB2376 adds unnecessary regulation without proven benefit and limits educational freedom.

I urge you to oppose this bill.

Mahalo

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 10:04:19 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ciera Fong	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I oppose HB2376 bill.

First of all, I'd like to say thank you for caring for our keiki and wanting the best for them. I do not believe this bill is the answer or will get you the results you are hoping for.

These are the reason:

1) not all homeschoolers follow the curriculum of the DOE. For example my children do Classical Conversations which do three different time periods for K-6. Each time period rotates every year so the year that they are studying might not align with the DOE year. They memorize over 400 pieces of information every year and then get tested on it 4 times to try and achieve memory master. The subjects include math, Latin, science, English, history, geography, history timeline and then they have hands on science and fine arts.

So if what my kids are learning isn't lining up with what they will be tested on it will not accurately show what they are learning

2) making the students go into an environment that they aren't familiar with and with people they don't know will put an added stress on them, besides the actual testing, that will completely effect their test results and will not reflect their actual knowledge that they have gained.

I believe continuing with the system that we currently have works.

If you are trying to figure something out to make sure keiki are not getting neglected or abused there needs to be another answer that doesn't negatively effect the other keiki, who's parents are doing right by them.

Mahalo for your time, consideration and care for our keiki!

Blessings to you all,

Ciera Fong

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:26:37 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brian Lawton	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

This bill is a government over reach into the lives of homeschool families. Homeschool families are already testing and are required to test their children per state law. This bill starts the erosion of our 1st amendment rights.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 10:12:41 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dustin Hokama	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for hearing my testimony. As a homeschooling parent of 3 children I believe this bill would have a negative impact on my family. We are currently putting in a lot of time and effort to use the best material that will help our children to excel academically. These extra tests will saddle my family unnecessarily. In person testing with 3 young children and one newborn would be incredibly difficult to coordinate.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 10:48:03 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Neal	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Members of the Committee,

My name is Michelle Neal. I am writing, as a Hawaii homeschooling parent and clinical psychologist, to express my opposition to HB 2376 as it is currently written. Although I am in support of oversight and supportive services for homeschooling families, requiring annual in-person standardized testing at the public school location is not a means to that end.

My family began our homeschooling journey in response to the uncertainty and health concerns we faced with our eldest set to start kindergarten just as the Covid pandemic was unfolding. Ultimately, we have chosen to continue homeschooling as we have come to value so much about the journey, the rich learning opportunities, the flexibility, and our ability to address our different children's learning styles and needs.

Our family is invested in our own educational journey as well as that of other diverse members of our greater homeschooling community. We are invested in supporting oversight that promotes safety and accountability and we do not believe that in-person standardized testing mandates offer a path to achieving that.

Many families chose homeschooling to provide alternative paths to social, emotional, and academic success for their children. For learners with neurodivergent learning styles, sensory sensitivities, and anxiety, standardized testing, especially in an unfamiliar setting surrounded by unfamiliar peers, can be extremely stressful and does not provide an accurate assessment of the family's investment, involvement, and learning outcomes. Greater oversight should focus on alternate ways of ensuring children's safety and homeschooler's accountability.

As a part of our education around social studies and civic duty, we are currently following the journey of this bill, the discourse surrounding its creation and adjustment, and the process of involvement that community members such as ourselves can have. My school aged children have both asked that I share their strong negative reaction to this bill in its current draft. When our eldest was in his third grade year, we considered attending the standardized testing at the school although we had a difficult time ascertaining detailed information and support surrounding the potential testing situation and what that would be like for our child. We chose to seek out an alternative testing setup that felt like a better fit for our child and was far less anxiety provoking for him. We submitted the results as a part of our end of the year assessment and evaluation materials. The experience for him was positive and the results seemed to accurately reflect his

strengths as a learner, however, the work samples and curriculum outline that we also submitted were a much better reflection of our commitment to his emotional and academic needs and well being as well as his school work and preformance.

The state currently requires annual assessment and allows flexibility in how families demonstrate progress. Further oversight should maintain multiple pathways for demonstrating progress, proficiency, and areas of struggle. Please maintain assessment options that support diverse learners.

Warm regards and appreciation for your time and consideration.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 10:56:10 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chelsea Castillo	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I stand firmly against HB2376.

Under federal law (ESSA), schools must meet testing participation rates — but parents are not legally required to force their child to take state tests. There is no penalty to families who lawfully refuse. The accountability falls on the institution, not the child.

HB2376 changes that for homeschool families.

Public school parents may refuse testing without risking enrollment. Homeschool families, however, would risk losing their lawful exemption from compulsory attendance if they decline participation.

That is not equality. That is expanded control.

Families are not leaving public schools because they reject accountability. They are leaving because of overcrowded classrooms, long-term substitutes, transportation disruptions, bullying concerns, and a lack of transparency.

Hawai'i public schools receive roughly $20,000 per student per year, and funding is tied to enrollment. Families understand that each child represents funding within the system.

So we must ask - is this about academic improvement, or about protecting enrollment numbers?

Children are not funding units. No funding formula should determine the limits of parental authority.

Homeschool families are documented, accountable, and lawful.

HB2376 is unnecessary and coercive.

Mahalo for your time and consideration. I oppose HB2376.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:02:02 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elena Sumtsova	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members,

My name is Elena Sumtsova, and I am a homeschooling parent on Hawaii Island.

I respectfully submit testimony in strong opposition to HB2376.

Homeschooling families in Hawaii already operate under clear and reasonable requirements. Parents are accountable, children are educated, and the system works. These bills introduce unnecessary, burdensome, and intrusive regulations that undermine parental authority without evidence of a problem that needs fixing.

Requiring homeschooled children to participate in in-person public school assessments and screenings fundamentally changes the nature of homeschooling. Many families choose homeschooling precisely because their children thrive in a different environment, with individualized instruction, flexible pacing, and learning shaped by family values and faith. Forcing participation in public school systems removes that freedom and places an unjustified burden on families who are already providing effective education.

These requirements would disproportionately affect:

families in rural areas,

families with multiple children,

working parents,

children with anxiety or special learning needs,

and families who homeschool for religious reasons.

There is also no evidence that increased regulation improves outcomes for homeschooled students. In fact, national data consistently shows that homeschooled students perform well academically and socially. Regulation should be based on demonstrated need, not assumptions.

As a Christian parent, I believe education is a responsibility entrusted by God first to families. The state has a role, but it must not replace or override parental responsibility where there is no neglect or harm.

These bills move Hawaii away from a model of trust and cooperation and toward one of control and uniformity, which does not reflect the diversity or values of our communities.

I urge you to reject HB2376 and to preserve the freedom, flexibility, and success of homeschooling in Hawaii.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Elena Sumtsova

Homeschooling Parent, Hawaii Island

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:26:56 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Ho	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:44:18 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tessy Kekahuna	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In strong opposition.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:44:18 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Ganzer	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I oppose this bill because homeschoolers do not need more government involvement. All the homeschoolers that I know care a great deal about their children's education and they work very hard to ensure that their children receive a quality education AND grow in character and grace. Character is definitely not something that can be measured by testing.
mahalo for your time.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:50:03 AM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emily Grumling	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am opposing HB2376. Parents in Hawaii who choose to homeschool their children do so for a myriad of reasons. Children learn in different ways, and Hawaii parent's need more freedom to help their children excel in their education through homeschooling. The majority of parent's who homeschool provide their child with a tailored to them education that allows flexibility and one on one attention that the public schools are unable to provide. Adding more regulation to homeschooling, especially to a level no other state has mandated before is a gross overeach of the state on our personal freedom as parents to try our best to provide for our children's education. Many states are going in the opposit direction and provide more support to those who choose to homeschool. Please reject HB2376.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:07:04 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Roache	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2376. Children should not have to take standardized testing at state facilities. Kids should continue to learn at their own pace and their accomplishments at the end of their schooling career would reflect their efforts and hard work throughout their homeschooling journey.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:08:02 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Adams	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We homeschool because we believe to be set apart to equipped, raised , train and discipline our children in the ways of the Lord. I am incharged of my children's education NOT the government . I stand by the 10 amendments The powers not delegated to the United States by the constitution nor prohibited by it to the states are reserved to the respectively or to the people.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:12:22 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sierra Mcveigh	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I sierra Mcveigh Oppose HB2376

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

February 17, 2026

Testimony in Opposition of HB 2376
RELATING TO EDUCATION

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

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Hawai'i already requires an annual assessment for home school students, including standardized tests in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. HB 2376 would unnecessarily mandate several years of state testing and undermine the flexibility that benefits homeschooling, especially for students with special learning needs.

Many friends of mine have shared positive experiences of the flexibility from their own homeschooling experiences and their journey's homeschooling their children. I'm a proud public school graduate and I still support the positive impacts that homeschooling can have. Families are given the flexibility to offer a variety of learning opportunities for their keiki and tailor it to each child's learning style, interests, and goals.

There are other third-party standardized achievement tests that are beneficial for homeschoolers, but HB2376 would take away those options for parents choosing what's best for their children. We respectfully ask that you do not pass HB2376. Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Tani K. Salazar

Tani Kalei Salazar, LSW, MSW

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:25:58 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Devi Ndrejaj	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Standardized testing isn't an effective measurement of student learning. Imposing this would be a great disservice to those who homeschool and are able to learn in more breadth and depth than what testing can capture. Most of the "successful" individuals I know were mediocre or poor test takers. There is a zero feedback loop with testing, other than a "score" that again doesn't measure learning but rather great test taking abilities which can be mutually exclusive.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:27:26 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Loni Hayes-Mazzocco	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2376. I do not believe this bill will accurately work for our homeschooling community.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:33:00 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kim Cordery	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I Appose HB2376.

This Bill puts unnecessary restrictions on those who choose to homeschool.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:28:13 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Gayer	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, HB2376 would require homeschooled students to take annual in-person tests at their local public school. While accountability matters, this bill undermines parental rights and the flexibility that makes homeschooling effective. Families choose homeschooling for individualized education, safety, and values-based reasons. Requiring students into public school settings for mandatory testing creates unnecessary burdens and disregards diverse learning approaches. I urge you to oppose HB2376 and protect educational freedom for Hawaii's homeschooling families.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-2376
Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:46:58 PM
Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nuela Mead	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My daughter has homeschooled her children for 20 years now. They have never missed submitting a placement test or grades to their designated district. She now has 2 children attending the university. One is a Junior and double majoring in social work and Hawaiian language. The other is a sophomore getting her degree in psychology with the hopes of helping with underserved children through a non profit organization where she is an intern at present. She has another child set to graduate who is currently taking college courses along with his high school studies. She also has 3 more that she homeschools. All of these students gave exemplary grades and do very well achieving high scores in both reading and math 2 subjects that our public schools fail abysmally in teaching. Our public school students are being failed by the organization that you are currently trying to force these above average students to be a part of. I know that my grandchildren have done fantastically in this home school program. Please don't pass this bill. What is the purpose of this? Is it to provide better oversight to abused and victimized children? This is not the way. Why should the majority of homeschooling parents, who are very responsible be punished for the actions of a marginal group very disreputable parents or caretakers, who find away around this proposal to achieve their same evil end.