



STATE OF HAWAII

Executive Office on Early Learning

Ke'ena Ho'okele Ho'ona'auao Pae Kamali'i o Hawai'i Moku'aina
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

TO: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
House Committee on Education

FROM: Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

SUBJECT: Testimony on H.B. No. 2399 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING
Committee: EDN
Date: Tuesday, February 17, 2026
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Location: Conference Room 309

Executive Office on Early Learning's Position: **SUPPORT**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments in support of H.B. No. 2399 and defers to the Hawai'i State Public Charter School Commission regarding implementation and funding.

This measure aligns with the Early Learning Board's current framework of policy priorities, which is grounded in the Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan. Specifically, the bill advances State Plan Building Block 5: Access to Early Care and Learning Opportunities by ensuring that prekindergarten (PreK) only public charter schools have the resources needed to succeed.

The public charter school PreK program is an important part of Hawai'i's mixed-delivery early learning system, expanding the availability of free, high-quality early learning opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. The establishment of the first PreK-only public charter schools further diversifies program options and introduces an innovative approach to increasing system capacity. This model supports continued progress toward the goal of universal access to preschool for all three- and four-year-olds in Hawai'i, established by Act 46, SLH 2020.

Most public charter school PreK classrooms operate within existing charter schools and benefit from shared overhead and administrative support that is not reflected in the PreK program budget. In contrast, standalone PreK-only schools must independently cover these costs. Increasing the per-classroom allocation for standalone PreK-only schools will help ensure a

sustainable financial model and provide the resources necessary to maintain a high-quality early learning environment.

We appreciate the Legislature's ongoing investment and shared commitment to strengthening Hawai'i's early learning system for our youngest keiki and their 'ohana. Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments in support of H.B. No. 2399.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



MAKALAPUA ALENCASTRE, ED. D.
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1100, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

FOR: HB 2399 RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING
DATE: February 17, 2026
TIME: 2:00 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Education
ROOM: Conference Room 309 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in **SUPPORT of HB 2399** which provides funding to the Commission to increase funding to pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools.

The Commission recently authorized two new pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools, Parkway Village Preschool in Kapolei and Waikiki Community Preschool which serve about 170 students in ten Pre-K classrooms. Both schools utilize a public-private partnership model that relies on assistance from the non-profit organizations, Parents and Children Together (PACT) and the Waikiki Community Center, that originally applied for and were granted Pre-K only charter schools.

Additional funding for these programs, in the amount of \$790,000, has been requested to provide administrative support and facilities funding to the Pre-K only school as current Pre-K funding is provided on a per classroom basis. Each Pre-K classroom is funded at \$171,000; of that amount, \$115,000 (67%) is for personnel costs.

The Commission appreciates the Legislature’s consideration of this request and the assistance to the Pre-K only schools that this measure provides. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

To: House Committee on Education
Re: HB 2399-Relating to an Early Learning
Hawai'i State Capitol Room 309 & Via Videoconference February 17, 2026,
2:00 PM

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB 2399**. This bill appropriates funds to the State Public Charter School Commission for prekindergarten-only public charter schools.

HB 2399 is a critical investment in fulfilling the promise of Act 46, which commits Hawai'i to providing universal access to early learning for all three and four-year-olds by 2032. In 2025, the state took a historic step forward by launching the nation's first pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools, opening ten classrooms in Kapolei and Waikīkī. Demand was immediate, with all classrooms enrolling to capacity.

These schools expand access to high-quality, FREE early education with no eligibility requirements beyond age. For families, this means continuity of care and the assurance that their children can access developmentally appropriate early learning regardless of income.

High-quality early education is foundational to child development. Children who participate in strong early learning programs demonstrate improved language, literacy, and social-emotional skills and are better prepared for kindergarten and long-term academic success. To maintain that quality, preschool classrooms require appropriate staffing ratios, specialized educators, and strong administrative support systems.

As stand-alone campuses, Pre-K-only charter schools do not benefit from the shared infrastructure present in larger PreK-12 schools. The current per-classroom funding allocation does not fully cover the *true cost* of operating a high-quality preschool program. To maintain compliance with Union requirements and still ensure the delivery of high quality, continuous care, these programs need additional support.

HB 2399 provides targeted support for the 2026-2027 school year to stabilize operations, ensure appropriate staffing levels, and allow these schools to focus on long-term sustainability rather than short-term financial risk. Strengthening this model is essential not only to preserving current seats but also to responsibly scaling access statewide as we move toward universal preschool access.

Hawai'i has made meaningful progress toward expanding early learning opportunities. HB 2399 ensures that this progress is sustainable, high-quality, and aligned with the state's long-term educational commitments.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please **PASS HB 2399**.



waikikicommunitycenter.org

TO: House Education Committee

RE: HB 2399 Relating to Early Learning

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

My name is Caroline Hayashi, and I serve as President of Waikiki Community Center (WCC). I would like to express my **strong support for HB 2399**.

For decades, WCC operated a high-quality private nonprofit preschool serving primarily low- to moderate-income ALICE families — households who are working hard but struggling to make ends meet. Our mission has always been clear: to help close the achievement gap between children from lower-income families and their more advantaged peers.

Research consistently shows that high-quality early learning is one of the most powerful tools we have to close that gap. In August 2025, we made the decision to convert to a Pre-K-only public charter school so that more ALICE families could access tuition-free, high-quality preschool. Removing the financial barrier to access was the right decision for our community.

Before conversion, over 98% of our children met or exceeded developmental benchmarks, and 100% entered kindergarten ready to learn. That level of quality is not accidental — it is the result of intentional staffing, strong instructional leadership, and comprehensive support for children of all abilities.

As a public Pre-K charter, we now serve children across the full spectrum of needs. We must ensure appropriate staffing ratios, classroom coverage, compliance requirements, and sufficient support to meet those needs while preserving quality and continuity of care.

When we applied to convert, we understood there would be a funding gap and committed to fundraising to help bridge it — and we will continue to do so. However, as a stand-alone early learning campus, we do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger K-12 schools. In practice, maintaining high standards, ensuring adequate classroom coverage, and meeting all operational requirements requires more staffing support than originally anticipated.

We are not asking the State to fully replace philanthropy. WCC has always fundraised for our programs, and we will continue to do so. What we are asking for is targeted support that stabilizes this new public model so that we can focus on quality and long-term sustainability rather than short-term financial risk.

HB 2399 is not simply about balancing a budget. It is about protecting the quality of early education at the very moment Hawai'i is expanding access statewide.

If we believe that early learning is foundational — and the research clearly shows it is — then we must ensure these classrooms are staffed and supported in a way that allows children to thrive.

Waikiki Community Center remains deeply committed to this model and to the families we serve. With thoughtful support through HB 2399, we can continue delivering the high-quality early learning our keiki deserve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify. I respectfully urge you to PASS HB 2399.



**Parents And
Children Together**

**BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS
THAT MATTER MOST**

ParentsAndChildrenTogether.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2399 RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

TO: Chair Woodson, Vice-Chair La Chica, & Members,
House Committee on Education

FROM: Trisha Kajimura, Vice-President of Strategy and External Affairs

DATE: February 17, 2026 at 2:00 PM

Parents and Children Together (PACT) supports HB 2399 Relating to Early Learning, which appropriates funds to the State Public Charter School Commission for prekindergarten-only public charter schools.

Founded in 1968, PACT is a statewide community-based organization providing a wide array of innovative and educational social services to families in need. Assisting more than 18,000 people across the state annually, we help identify, address, and successfully resolve challenges through our 20 programs. Among our services are early education programs, domestic violence prevention and intervention programs, child abuse prevention and intervention programs, childhood sexual abuse supportive group services, child and adolescent behavioral health programs, sex trafficking intervention, poverty prevention and community building programs.

In 2023, PACT applied to start the state's first Pre-K-only public charter school, Parkway Village Preschool (PVP), which opened in May of 2025 is now fully enrolled to its capacity of 80 three and four year old students in four classrooms. PVP is built into the affordable rental housing community of Parkway Village in Kapolei. The development of PVP was a first of its kind partnership between Kobayashi Group, Kamehameha Schools and PACT to open the first Pre-K-only charter school through the authorization of the Charter Commission. PACT's current role with the school is to provide administrative services and early education expertise.

The Charter Commission's funding of Pre-K-only charter schools is at a rate of \$171,000 per classroom per year. At the time of PACT's application, PACT estimated a budget of \$205,272 per classroom per year and expected to fundraise to make up the difference and provide high-quality early education for PVP's students.

However, the actual cost of operating these classrooms is \$277,806 per classroom per year, making the current financial model unsustainable. The main reason for the higher-than-expected costs is that the school doesn't have the benefit of the infrastructure of a larger school. Original staffing of 9 classroom staff and 2 administrative staff is insufficient to handle the administrative requirements of the school along with the coverage needed in the classroom.

In partnership with the board, PACT has been seeking grant funding to cover the school's expenses but the gap is simply too big and we respectfully request that the appropriation in this bill match the Charter

Commission's internal request for \$790,000. This would raise per classroom funding to \$250,000 per year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact me at (808) 847-3285 or tkajimura@pacthawaii.org if you have any questions.





TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2399 RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

February 17, 2026 2:00 PM

To: House Committee on Education: Chair Justin Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, Members

From: Parkway Village Preschool Governing Board: Kim Gould, Margaret Takahashi, Dawn Kurisu, Sunny Kim, Alana Kobayashi Pakkala

The Parkway Village Preschool (PVP) Governing Board strongly supports HB 2399, which appropriates funds to the State Public Charter School Commission for prekindergarten-only public charter schools to increase the per-classroom funding rate.

PVP was the first Pre-K only charter school and opened in May of 2025. It is in its first school year of operation, serving at full capacity with four classrooms and 80 students. We are thrilled to offer public high-quality, FREE early education for three- and four-year-olds in the affordable housing community of Parkway Village in Kapolei. The reception of this school by the community has been filled with excitement and the engagement of parents, grandparents, and neighbors.

PVP was the first of only two Pre-K only charter schools to open in the state and represents a new model of public-private partnership for the development of new early learning centers. Being the first of its kind, there were many unknowns related to operating costs. State Public Charter School Commission funding for this type of school is \$171,000 per classroom per year. Actual operating costs are \$277, 806 per classroom for the 2025-2026 school year, putting the long-term sustainability of this funding model in doubt.

The main reason that actual costs are higher than projected is that a Pre-K only charter school does not have the benefit of the infrastructure and economies of scale that a larger school does. More staffing than initially planned is needed to ensure that union requirements are met and classrooms are covered.

Parkway Village Preschool plans to continue fundraising to supplement its allocation and respectfully requests that you help close this funding gap and ensure that the Pre-K only charter school model can grow and succeed in our state.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 11:37:39 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julia Wong	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

I support

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 4:25:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jill Okimura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2399

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 5:05:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chela Sheets	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We are reliant on this funding with our third and final child currently in preschool. Please support this bill for the future of us and other working families as we try to do the best we can in this economy.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 5:08:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
upasana pati	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support as this is important for us working families here

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 6:40:53 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johanna Tokunaga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: House Committee on Education

Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB2399 – Relating to Early Learning

Aloha,

I strongly support HB2399, which appropriates funds for pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools.

In 2025, Hawai‘i launched two pre-K only charter schools serving ten classrooms. These schools expand access to high-quality, tuition-free early education and help the state move toward universal preschool access. All classrooms opened fully enrolled, demonstrating strong demand from families.

However, as stand-alone schools, pre-K only charters do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger campuses. Current funding levels do not fully cover the true cost of operating a safe, high-quality preschool — particularly staffing, which is essential for safety, quality, and continuity of care.

This bill provides critical stabilization funding so these schools can focus on sustainability and serving families rather than managing financial shortfalls. Investing in early learning strengthens our workforce, supports working families, and benefits our keiki long-term.

Please support HB2399.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Johanna Tokunaga

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:28:53 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
simeon miranda	Embassy Suites Waikiki/ Waikiki Community Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: House Committee on Education

Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB2399 – Relating to Early Learning

Aloha,

I strongly support HB2399, which appropriates funds for pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools.

In 2025, Hawai‘i launched two pre-K only charter schools serving ten classrooms. These schools expand access to high-quality, tuition-free early education and help the state move toward universal preschool access. All classrooms opened fully enrolled, demonstrating strong demand from families.

However, as stand-alone schools, pre-K only charters do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger campuses. Current funding levels do not fully cover the true cost of operating a safe, high-quality preschool — particularly staffing, which is essential for safety, quality, and continuity of care.

This bill provides critical stabilization funding so these schools can focus on sustainability and serving families rather than managing financial shortfalls. Investing in early learning strengthens our workforce, supports working families, and benefits our keiki long-term.

Please support HB2399.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Simeon Miranda

Past Chair Waikiki Community Center

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 7:16:05 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chrystalle Anger	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free preschool is so important to working families who are struggling to make ends meet. Please support this bill!

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 11:42:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jinjoo Han	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:49:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Moran	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill. Free preschool is so important for our working families.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 8:16:47 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

2399 HB RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.

To: House Committee on Education

Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB2399 – Relating to Early Learning

Aloha,

My name is Lorie Nagata and I strongly support HB2399, which appropriates funds for pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools.

In 2025, Hawai'i launched two pre-K only charter schools serving ten classrooms. These schools expand access to high-quality, tuition-free early education and help the state move toward universal preschool access. All classrooms opened fully enrolled, demonstrating strong demand from families.

However, as stand-alone schools, pre-K only charters do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger campuses. Current funding levels do not fully cover the true cost of operating a safe, high-quality preschool — particularly staffing, which is essential for safety, quality, and continuity of care.

This bill provides critical stabilization funding so these schools can focus on sustainability and serving families rather than managing financial shortfalls. Investing in early learning strengthens our workforce, supports working families, and benefits our keiki long-term.

Please support HB2399. Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 12:30:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shana Lee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free preschool is so important to working families who are struggling to make ends meet. Please support this bill!

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 3:44:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carol Linde	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB2399 to strengthen Pre-K Only Charters. These programs provide free, high-quality early education for Hawai'i's keiki and critical support for working families. They deserve stable funding to continue serving our communities.

Mahalo for putting keiki first!

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 4:16:29 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Reyn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2399 relating to Early Learning.

Pre-K only charter schools provide high-quality, tuition-free early education with no eligibility barriers beyond age. Demand is clear — all classrooms opened at capacity.

Current funding does not fully cover the cost of operating a stand-alone preschool. This bill ensures families can rely on safe, high-quality early learning options.

Please support HB2399. Mahalo.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2399

Committee on Education

Date: 2/17/26

Time: 2:00 p.m.

Location: Room 309

Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

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

My name is Danny Goya. I am a trauma-informed care facilitator specializing in children ages 0–5, working across Hawai'i with families in all four sectors of early childhood education and care. **I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of HB 2399.**

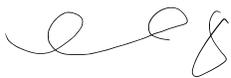
The first five years of life are a period of extraordinary brain development. During this time, children build the neural architecture that supports language, emotional regulation, executive functioning, and healthy relationships. When young children have access to high-quality, developmentally responsive early learning environments, we are not only preparing them for kindergarten but also strengthening protective factors that buffer stress, reduce the long-term impact of trauma, and promote lifelong well-being. In my work, I see firsthand how early learning programs serve as both prevention and intervention. For children who have experienced adversity, high-quality prekindergarten environments provide safety, predictability, and nurturing relationships that help restore a sense of security. For all children, these environments create opportunities to develop self-regulation, curiosity, and confidence before formal schooling begins.

HB 2399 is critical because stable state funding ensures that prekindergarten-only public charter schools can sustain quality staffing, maintain safe learning environments, and expand access for families with limited options. Without reliable funding streams, early learning programs are forced into cycles of uncertainty that directly affect the children and families they serve.

Investing in early childhood education is one of the most cost-effective and evidence-informed strategies available to us as a state. It supports working families, strengthens communities, and reduces long-term costs associated with remediation, behavioral health, and later-life system involvement.

As someone deeply engaged in trauma-informed and resilience-building work throughout our state, I strongly urge you to support HB 2399. Funding early learning is not simply an education decision. It is a long-term investment in Hawai'i's keiki and the future stability of our communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and consideration.



Daniel Goya

Trauma-Informed Care Facilitator

Specializing in Early Childhood (0–5)

Ke Ala Ho'aka, LLC

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 4:40:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Matthew Lamke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Preschool opportunities in Hawaii are so difficult and expensive. This bill is a life saver for children of working families in Hawaii to attend preschool preparing them for life and school experiences that they will surely have to experience! Thank you for your continued support.
Matthew Lamke

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 3:56:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laurie Nakamoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free preschool is so important to working families who are struggling to make ends meet. Pre-K only charter schools are expanding access to high-quality early education. This is why I strongly support HB2399 to ensure these schools can operate safely and sustainably. Mahalo.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 6:58:32 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Parichat Iwakawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill. Preschool is very important for working families who struggling making end meet. This support will make big different.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 4:51:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lillian Truong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2399 relating to Early Learning. Pre-K only charter schools provide high-quality, tuition-free early education with no eligibility barriers beyond age. The demand is clear, with all classrooms opened at capacity. Current funding does not fully cover the cost of operating a stand-alone preschool. This bill ensures families can rely on safe, high-quality early learning options. Please support HB2399. Mahalo.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 11:12:16 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chloe Pua'ena Vierra-Villanueva	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and committee members,

I am testifying in strong support of HB 2399. Please support this measure.

Mahalo,

Pua'ena Vierra-Villanueva

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:47:29 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charlyn Moore	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill that will help parents afford preschool for their 3-5 year old children.
Mahalo!

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:01:09 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Murray	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2399 relating to Early Learning.

Pre-K only charter schools provide high-quality, tuition-free early education with no eligibility barriers beyond age. Demand is clear — all classrooms opened at capacity.

Current funding does not fully cover the cost

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:36:19 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pamela Seelig	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawai'i is expensive, and free preschool is so important for working families struggling to make ends meet.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 9:48:18 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Traci Bush	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly support HB2399, which appropriates funds for pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools.

In 2025, Hawai‘i launched two pre-K only charter schools serving ten classrooms. These schools expand access to high-quality, tuition-free early education and help the state move toward universal preschool access. All classrooms opened fully enrolled, demonstrating strong demand from families.

However, as stand-alone schools, pre-K only charters do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger campuses. Current funding levels do not fully cover the true cost of operating a safe, high-quality preschool — particularly staffing, which is essential for safety, quality, and continuity of care.

This bill provides critical stabilization funding so these schools can focus on sustainability and serving families rather than managing financial shortfalls. Investing in early learning strengthens our workforce, supports working families, and benefits our keiki long-term.

Please support HB2399.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:59:43 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann Kutaka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free preschool is so important to working families who are struggling to make ends meet. Pre-K only charter schools are expanding access to high-quality early education. This is why I strongly support HB2399 to ensure these schools can operate safely and sustainably.

Mahalo

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 1:37:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shay Chan Hodges	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB2399 to strengthen Pre-K Only Charters. These programs provide free, high-quality early education for Hawai'i's keiki and critical support for working families. They deserve stable funding to continue serving our communities.

[Add your own story!]

Mahalo for putting keiki first!

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:15:37 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ANDREW ISODA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I support HB2399 to strengthen Pre-K Only Charters. These programs provide free, high-quality early education for Hawai'i's keiki and critical support for working families. They deserve stable funding to continue serving our communities.

Mahalo for putting keiki first!

*Andrew Isoda
Lahaina, Mau'i*

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 6:40:53 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lyle J Herman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Passage of this bill is extremely important for hHawaii's families as they struggle to make ends meet and provide the education that is so important for the development of their children. Please help to make life less stressful for these families and support this bill.

Mahalo!

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 12:51:33 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shaun Stone	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HB2399

Relating to Early Learning / Appropriation to the State Public Charter School Commission for Prekindergarten-Only Public Charter Schools

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee(s),

My name is Shaun Stone, and I am a parent testifying in strong support of HB2399. I urge the Committee to fund prekindergarten-only public charter schools in fiscal year 2026-2027.

Hawai‘i’s prekindergarten-only public charter schools expand access to high-quality early learning, especially for families who need full-day programs. These schools offer tuition-free, developmentally appropriate education that helps children build strong social, emotional, and academic foundations for kindergarten and beyond.

Many of these school’s face funding deficits, threatening their ability to serve our keiki. HB2399 will help sustain these programs and align with Hawai‘i’s commitment to universal early education and school readiness for all children.

As a parent on Oahu, I see firsthand how full-day pre-K makes a difference. It eases childcare burdens, helps families maintain employment, and provides equity, especially for low-income families. Early education leads to stronger outcomes and a better workforce for our islands.

HB2399 is a cost-effective way to close achievement gaps, support working families, and build a stronger future for Hawai‘i’s children. My child has benefited tremendously from prekindergarten, gaining confidence and academic readiness. I respectfully urge the Committee to **pass HB2399** and ensure that these vital schools receive the funding they need.

Thank you for your time regarding this important measure.

Sincerely,

Shaun Stone

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 7:39:28 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Neal	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a mom and former preschool teacher I know, early learning is so important in children's educational and social and emotional development. I would not have been able to afford to send my daughter to preschool if it wasn't for the free Waikiki Community Preschool charter change. I've seen so much growth in her over the last 5 months! This bill would be so helpful for struggling families and their keiki!

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 2:36:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Yael hershovich	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free early education is very important for working families

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 11:22:55 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melisa Edwards	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB2399 to fund public charter preschool in Hawai'i. My four year old son was able to go to free preschool this past year, and it helped our family so much. I lost my job, and this program gave my child a safe place to learn and grow. We also have a new baby who will need preschool soon, and we hope this help will still be there. Please support this bill so more families like mine can have this chance.

To: House Committee on Education

Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB2399 – Relating to Early Learning

Aloha,

I strongly support HB2399, which appropriates funds for pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools.

In 2025, Hawai'i launched two pre-K only charter schools serving ten classrooms. These schools expand access to high-quality, tuition-free early education and help the state move toward universal preschool access. All classrooms opened fully enrolled, demonstrating strong demand from families.

However, as stand-alone schools, pre-K only charters do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger campuses. Current funding levels do not fully cover the true cost of operating a safe, high-quality preschool — particularly staffing, which is essential for safety, quality, and continuity of care.

This bill provides critical stabilization funding so these schools can focus on sustainability and serving families rather than managing financial shortfalls. Investing in early learning strengthens our workforce, supports working families, and benefits our keiki long-term.

On a more personal note, I am a retired first and second grade teacher. I have seen how pre-K experiences make so much of a difference in the learning abilities of children. Having pre-K experiences -

Academically:

Ability to listen to stories, talk about them, recognize how words are made up of letters and those words weave a story.

Socially -

Learning to interact with peers; making friends; helping each other; working and playing together

Physically-

Participating in movement activities and outdoor play

These are just a few benefits and experiences that help to expand children's learning and prepare them for the next steps.

Giving our keiki the opportunity to attend a tuition-free pre-K only charter school would mean supporting HB2399 so these schools can be adequately funded and continue to provide quality education and care.

Please support HB2399.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Evelyn Gallagher

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:32:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

To: House Committee on Education

Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB2399 – Relating to Early Learning

Aloha,

I strongly support HB2399, which appropriates funds for pre-kindergarten-only public charter schools.

In 2025, Hawai‘i launched two pre-K only charter schools serving ten classrooms. These schools expand access to high-quality, tuition-free early education and help the state move toward universal preschool access. All classrooms opened fully enrolled, demonstrating strong demand from families.

However, as stand-alone schools, pre-K only charters do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger campuses. Current funding levels do not fully cover the true cost of operating a safe, high-quality preschool — particularly staffing, which is essential for safety, quality, and continuity of care.

This bill provides critical stabilization funding so these schools can focus on sustainability and serving families rather than managing financial shortfalls. Investing in early learning strengthens our workforce, supports working families, and benefits our keiki long-term.

Please support HB2399.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Lisa E. Lee
Honolulu, HI 96822

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:43:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Edward Esperante	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Edward Christopher Esperante, and I am writing to express my strong support for HB2399. I am a resident of Kapolei and, more importantly, the father of a student currently enrolled in a Pre-K charter school.

My wife and I have seen firsthand how vital this program is for our son’s development. In our experience, the school provides:

Tailored Early Education: The curriculum effectively prepares our son for the transition to kindergarten, focusing on both academic and social-emotional milestones. We have seen vast improvement in these areas from the beginning of his enrollment to now, especially in his reading, writing and problem solving skills.

A Supportive Environment: We feel so welcomed and comfortable with the dedicated staff and the nurturing atmosphere that makes our son feel safe and excited to learn every day. We especially like their communication methods via the app that provides critical updates on our son's progress.

Essential Community Resource: These pre-k only charter schools fill a critical gap in our education system and need consistent funding to remain accessible to families like ours.

Specialized Foundation for Success: Unlike traditional settings, these pre-k only charter schools provide a specialized, developmentally appropriate focus that bridges the gap between home and formal elementary education.

As a professional who has worked in the human services field, I understand that the stability provided by early childhood education is a cornerstone for long-term success. Funding these schools is an investment in the future of Hawaii’s keiki.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass HB2399.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 1:54:02 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tessa Korybski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: House Education Committee

I support HB2399 because I know how important preschool is for children to be ready for kindergarten. As a lifelong Hawaii resident, student and recent high school graduate, and now college student, I really benefitted from a great preschool experience. It set the tone for me to have a positive feeling and attitude about school. I was priveledged that my parents could afford to pay for me to attend preschool but I have many friends and know a lot of families who are not in that position. I believe that every child should have the same opportunity to start be successful in school. Thank you.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 2:25:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joslyn Bantilan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free preschool is so important to working families who are struggling to make ends meet. Pre-K only charter schools are expanding access to high-quality early education. This is why I strongly support HB2399 to ensure these schools can operate safely and sustainably. Mahalo.

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 309 and Via Videoconference

State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2399 - RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, Rep. Amato of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I write to you today in **strong support of HB 2399**, Relating to Early Learning, which appropriates funds to the State Public Charter School Commission for prekindergarten-only public charter schools.

I support HB 2399 to strengthen Pre-K Only Charters. These programs provide free, high-quality early education for Hawai'i's keiki and critical support for working families. They deserve stable funding to continue serving our communities.

I respectfully request that you **vote in support of HB 2399**.

Mahalo,

Christine Andrews, JD

Wailuku, Maui

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:06:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Whitton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free preschool is so important to working families who are struggling to make ends meet. Pre-K only charter schools are expanding access to high-quality early education. This is why I strongly support HB2399 to ensure these schools can operate safely and sustainably. Mahalo.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:15:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
nancy Wallace	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free preschool is so important to working families who are struggling to make ends meet. Pre-K only charter schools are expanding access to high-quality early education. This is why I strongly support HB2399 to ensure these schools can operate safely and sustainably.

Mahalo, Nancy Wallace

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 3:15:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Kaakua	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Please pass HB2399 relating to Early Learning. As a parent with kids who are now well beyond preschool age, I am testifying in strong support because free preschool is so important to working families, and to the futures of Hawai'i's next generation. Preschool gave our keiki a solid foundation of education and socialization. We were blessed to have both of our kids in Kamehameha preschool where tuition was manageable for our family. Most other working families do not have access to an affordable preschool and simply cannot afford the high private preschool tuitions. I know many families who therefore do not have their children go to preschool, or delay preschool by a year. This creates an uneven playing field where keiki largely from high-income households are prepared for kindergarten, and keiki from low- and moderate-income households are delayed without the benefit of preschool. We know this is happening in our communities on every island, and this bill provides a tangible way to fix the problem, and strengthen outcomes for soon-to-be preschoolers and all future Hawai'i keiki.

Mahalo,

Laura Kaakua

Barbara A Campbell
1487 Hiikala Place, #30
Honolulu HI 96816

February 16, 2026

TO: House Education Committee

RE: HB 2399 Relating to Early Learning

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

My name is Barbara Campbell, and I am a long time board member and supporter of the Waikiki Community Center (WCC). I would like to express my **strong support for HB 2399**.

For decades, WCC operated a high-quality private nonprofit preschool serving primarily low- to moderate-income ALICE families — households who are working hard but struggling to make ends meet. Our mission has always been clear: to help close the achievement gap between children from lower-income families and their more advantaged peers.

Research consistently shows that high-quality early learning is one of the most powerful tools we have to close that gap. In August 2025, we made the decision to convert to a Pre-K-only public charter school so that more ALICE families could access tuition-free, high-quality preschool. Removing the financial barrier to access was the right decision for our community.

Before conversion, over 98% of our children met or exceeded developmental benchmarks, and 100% entered kindergarten ready to learn. That level of quality is not accidental — it is the result of intentional staffing, strong instructional leadership, and comprehensive support for children of all abilities.

As a public Pre-K charter, we now serve children across the full spectrum of needs. We must ensure appropriate staffing ratios, classroom coverage, compliance requirements, and sufficient support to meet those needs while preserving quality and continuity of care.

When we applied to convert, we understood there would be a funding gap and committed to fundraising to help bridge it — and we will continue to do so. However, as a stand-alone early learning campus, we do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger K-12 schools. In practice, maintaining high standards, ensuring adequate classroom coverage,

and meeting all operational requirements requires more staffing support than originally anticipated.

We are not asking the State to fully replace philanthropy. WCC has always fundraised for our programs, and we will continue to do so. What we are asking for is targeted support that stabilizes this new public model so that we can focus on quality and long-term sustainability rather than short-term financial risk.

HB 2399 is not simply about balancing a budget. It is about protecting the quality of early education at the very moment Hawai'i is expanding access statewide.

If we believe that early learning is foundational — and the research clearly shows it is — then we must ensure these classrooms are staffed and supported in a way that allows children to thrive.

Waikiki Community Center remains deeply committed to this model and to the families we serve. With thoughtful support through HB 2399, we can continue delivering the high-quality early learning our keiki deserve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify. I respectfully urge you to PASS HB 2399.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:07:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Barbara DeBaryshe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of HB 2399, which appropriates additional funds for pre-K only charter schools.

Hawai‘i has a **shortage of high-quality, affordable early learning programs**. Pre-K public charter schools are a a creative way to increase access to this vital resource for our keiki and families and to also make progress towards the goal of universal pre-K.

The **baseline funds provided for the pre-K only charter schools fall well short of actual expenses**. Because of staffing requirements, preschool teacher costs are higher than what is needed for elementary shool classrooms. In fact, the Center for American Progress estimates that high-quality preschool care requires at least \$1,100 per child per month, without taking into account Hawai‘i's higher cost of living. The Waikiki Community Preschool and Parkway Village Preschool are further burdened by being free-standing programs that cannot share an economy of scale enjoyed by pre-K-Grade 5 campuses.

This bill provides critical stabilization funding so these schools can focus on sustainability and serving families rather than managing financial shortfalls.

Although I am a UH employee, I submit this testimony as a private citizen with 30+ years of work in the early childhood field.

Thank you for this oppotunity to share my views.

Sincerely,

Barbara DeBaryshe

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:12:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kenneth C S Pai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2399 relating to Early Learning.

Pre-K only charter schools provide high quality, tuition free early education with no eligibility barriers beyond age. Demand is clear - all classrooms opened at capacity.

Current funding does not fully cover the cost of operating a stand-alone preschool. This bill ensures families can rely on safe, high-quality early learning options.

Please support HB2399. Mahalo, Ken

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:17:42 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Lim	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I write in support of HB2399. State funding should be provided to support prekindergarten public charter schools. Safe, reliable, high-quality early education is important for child development. Pre-K only charter schools provide high-quality, tuition-free, early education. The ability of public Pre-K charter schools to operate on a full-day schedule can also provide vital support for working families. Without adequate and reliable funding, Pre-K public charter schools will struggle to cover their operating costs, which could jeopardize their viability and harm the families that rely on these preschools.

Funds should be appropriated to the state public charter school commission to increase funding to Pre-K only public charter schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 5:50:01 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thomas Foti	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo!

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 5:56:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Desiree Mosiman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 5:56:49 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicole Y Altman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the House Committee on Education:

As a member of the Board of Waikīkī Community Charter Preschool and the mother of three young children, I write in strong support of HB2399.

As a board member, I see what it takes to operate a safe, high-quality stand-alone preschool. Early childhood education requires low adult-to-child ratios, credentialed teachers, and consistent staffing to ensure safe classrooms and strong learning environments. Current funding does not fully reflect the cost of providing that level of care and instruction.

Pre-K-only charter schools expand access to tuition-free preschool without income eligibility barriers beyond age. Demand is clear. Classrooms opened at full enrollment because working families need stable, reliable early learning environments.

Expanding access at this stage is important because the preschool years are a critical developmental period. As a parent, I understand that the early years are foundational. We know that high-quality preschool supports language, self-regulation, and social development at a stage when children’s growth is rapid and deeply formative.

HB2399 provides stabilization funding so schools can maintain safe classrooms, retain qualified teachers, and provide consistent, high-quality early learning for families.

I respectfully urge your support of HB2399.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Nicole Y Altman

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 6:13:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2399 relating to Early Learning.

Pre-K only charter schools provide high-quality, tuition-free early education with no eligibility barriers beyond age. Demand is clear — all classrooms opened at capacity.

Current funding does not fully cover the cost of operating a stand-alone preschool. This bill ensures families can rely on safe, high-quality early learning options.

Please support HB2399. Mahalo.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 6:51:54 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephen Kaaa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support bill HB 2399.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:19:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kealani Makaiwi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Kealani Makaiwi. I am a Native Hawaiian, a Christian mother of four keiki, and an early childhood educator teaching Hawaiian preschool and parent participation preschools. I write in strong support of HB2399 to strengthen Pre-K Only Charter schools.

Pre-K Only Charters provide free, high-quality early childhood education to Hawai‘i’s keiki and offer critical support to working families. These programs help ensure children enter kindergarten with strong foundations in learning, social-emotional development, and confidence. For many families, especially those in Native Hawaiian and underserved communities, these programs are often the only accessible option for quality early education.

As both a parent and an educator, I see the importance of stability in early learning environments. When programs lack reliable funding, it directly affects children, families, and educators. Stable funding for Pre-K Only Charters allows programs to retain qualified teachers, maintain safe and nurturing classrooms, and build long-term relationships with families—relationships that are essential for young children’s success.

Early childhood education is not just child care; it is a critical investment in Hawai‘i’s future workforce, school readiness, and community well-being. Strengthening Pre-K Only Charters through HB2399 affirms that our youngest learners matter and that families deserve dependable, high-quality options.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass HB2399. Mahalo for your leadership and for putting keiki first.

Me ke aloha nui,

Kealani Makaiwi

Mother & Early Childhood Educator

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 5:59:03 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Adam Altman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this.

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 9:18:20 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrea King	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

As a parent of a young child, I support HB2399 to strengthen Pre-K only charters. In Hawaii, the Big Island, especially, there is a great need for high quality early educational programs/preschools. Funding in this area would allow parents and caregivers to return to work without having the stress or anxiety regarding the care of their keiki during working hours. Currently there are very limited options for no cost preschool programs and parents have to choose between paying the high cost of childcare or staying home with their keiki if the benefits to childcare do not outweigh the cost. I thank you for your consideration.

Andrea King

HB-2399

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:01:58 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paddy Kauhane	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Paddy Kauhane and I am a board member for the Waikiki Community Preschool. I would like to express my strong support for HB 2399.

For decades, Waikiki Community Center operated a high-quality private nonprofit preschool serving primarily low- to moderate-income ALICE families — households who are working hard but struggling to make ends meet. Their mission has always been clear: to help close the achievement gap between children from lower-income families and their more advantaged peers.

Research consistently shows that high-quality early learning is one of the most powerful tools we have to close that gap. In August 2025, WCC made the decision to convert to a Pre-K-only public charter school so that more ALICE families could access tuition-free, high-quality preschool. Removing the financial barrier to access was the right decision for our community.

Before conversion, over 98% of our children met or exceeded developmental benchmarks, and 100% entered kindergarten ready to learn. That level of quality is not accidental — it is the result of intentional staffing, strong instructional leadership, and comprehensive support for children of all abilities.

As a public Pre-K charter, WCP now serves children across the full spectrum of needs. WCP must ensure appropriate staffing ratios, classroom coverage, compliance requirements, and sufficient support to meet those needs while preserving quality and continuity of care.

When we applied to convert, we understood there would be a funding gap and committed to fundraising to help bridge it — and we will continue to do so. However, as a stand-alone early learning campus, we do not benefit from the shared infrastructure of larger K-12 schools. In practice, maintaining high standards, ensuring adequate classroom coverage, and meeting all operational requirements requires more staffing support than originally anticipated.

We are not asking the State to fully replace philanthropy. WCC has always fundraised for our programs, and we will continue to do so. What we are asking for is targeted support that stabilizes this new public model so that we can focus on quality and long-term sustainability rather than short-term financial risk.

HB 2399 is not simply about balancing a budget. It is about protecting the quality of early education at the very moment Hawai'i is expanding access statewide.

If we believe that early learning is foundational — and the research clearly shows it is — then we must ensure these classrooms are staffed and supported in a way that allows children to thrive.

Waikiki Community Center remains deeply committed to this model and to the families we serve. With thoughtful support through HB 2399, we can continue delivering the high quality early learning our keiki deserve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify. I respectfully urge you to PASS HB 2399.

Yours truly,

Paddy Kauhane