



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

**Date:** 02/26/2026

**Time:** 10:00 AM

**Location:** 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**Committee:** FIN

**Department:** Education

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

**Title of Bill:** HB2437, HD1, RELATING TO ARTS EDUCATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Appropriates funds to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts for the Artists in the Schools Program. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education supports HB 2437 H.D.1 and defers to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts as to the implementation of the Artists in Schools program.

The Artists in the Schools program, managed by the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, provides supplemental access to high-quality arts education, a foundation of whole-child development that fosters increased student engagement and academic success. By embedding professional teaching artists directly into public school classrooms, students across the state, particularly those in rural and Title I communities, may receive meaningful, standards-based arts experiences. The Department appreciates this long standing partnership with the Artists in the Schools program.

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



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Honolulu, HI 96813

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**Testimony of KAREN EWALD, Executive Director  
State Foundation on Culture and the Arts**

**Before the  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026 Conference Room 308 at 10:00AM**

**HOUSE BILL 2437\_HD1  
RELATING TO  
ARTS EDUCATION**

Dear Chair Todd and members of the Committee,

SFCA **SUPPORTS** H.B. 2437\_HD1 which appropriates funds to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts for the Artists in the Schools program.

The Artists in the Schools arts residency grants provide engaging, creative, and fun learning experiences based on the Fine Arts standards for all grade levels, through residencies with qualified, trained teaching artists from the [Artistic Teaching Partners \(ATP\) Roster](#). Many of these teaching artists integrate their art form with other core curriculum areas, such as language arts, math, social studies, and science, meeting both Fine Arts and other core standards. For many students, the Artists in the Schools program is the one main access point to arts education.

There has been an increase in demand for the AITS program, with more applications for residences in public and charter schools throughout the state of Hawaii. Applications have steadily increased in numbers since the pandemic, starting at 97 applications in 2020 to 132 applications in 2025. This serves as a testament to the popularity and positive impact of the program. The appropriation in this measure is appreciated and supported, as the SFCA was unable to fund 25 applications that were approved by the review panel in Fiscal Year 2026.

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

**TO:** HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair  
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the Committee

**FROM:** Elise Inouye, Director of Policy & Public Affairs

**RE:** Testimony in Support for HB 2437 HD 1, Relating to Arts Education

**DATE:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 at 10:00 am

**LOCATION:** Conference Room 308

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The Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) **supports** HB 2437 HD 1, relating to arts education. This bill would appropriate funding to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA) for the Artists in the Schools (AITS) program. For over 18 years, HCF has partnered with the SFCA by awarding funding to increase access to arts education at public and charter schools through the AITS program.

AITS brings dance, drama/theatre, literary arts, mime, music, puppetry, and visual arts to classrooms across the state, increasing access to arts education. However, the demand for the AITS program from public and charter schools is greater than the current available funds. The funding from this bill is essential to increase the reach of this program across the state, especially for Title I schools and schools in rural communities.

HCF believes that when opportunities to practice and participate in arts and culture are inclusive and accessible to everyone, from keiki to kūpuna, we will have a healthier community in Hawai'i. That is why we are committed to increasing access to arts and culture as a priority area within HCF's CHANGE Framework.

Supporting the arts and culture community contributes significantly to the well-being of Hawai'i's residents, including keiki. One of the teaching artists for the AITS program shared that through the AITS residencies, "students not only developed visual art skills, but also deepened their sense of identity, connection to place, and belonging within their community." **Please advance HB 2437 HD 1** to continue to affirm the importance of arts and culture in Hawai'i.



## Hawai'i Arts Alliance

### Testimony in Support of HB2437 (HD1) Relating to Arts Education | Artists-in-the-Schools

**HEARING DATE & TIME:** 02/26/2026 10:00 AM

**ROOM:** 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**COMMITTEE:** FINANCE

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

Hawai'i Arts Alliance **strongly supports** HB2437 (HD1).

This bill invests in the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts' Artists-in-the-Schools (AITS) program, which embeds professional teaching artists in classrooms to support student engagement, whole-child development, and essential 21st-century skills.

Through our statewide work, we see firsthand the powerful impact teaching artists have on students and school communities. Currently, approximately 100–135 schools out of Hawai'i's roughly 300 public and public charter schools benefit from AITS each year. While this reach is meaningful, it also highlights how many schools remain unserved.

Additional funding will help stabilize existing partnerships and expand access to schools that currently do not receive AITS services—particularly in underserved communities. This investment allows us to strengthen what's working while extending arts education opportunities to more students across all islands.

Arts education belongs in every classroom—it is foundational to student success, creativity, and connection. We respectfully urge your support of HB2437 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Gaye Humphrey  
Executive Director  
Hawai'i Arts Alliance

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:41:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Bob Grossmann, PhD	Afterschool Art 501(c)3	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Funds should be considered, as available, for both traditional and non-traditional school hours to hire artist and buy art supplies.

Afterschool opportunities also allow for additional learning and help to reduce youth-at-risk issues.

The benefit of art programs is well-researched.

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 8:54:39 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslie Baldrige	Kihei Charter School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to strongly urge the continued and increased funding for **professional fine arts teaching artists** in our elementary school classrooms.

While core subjects like math and literacy are the bedrock of education, teaching artists provide the "connective tissue" that makes these subjects stick. They don't just teach children how to draw or dance; they teach them how to think, persevere, and collaborate.

Research and classroom experience consistently show that bringing professional artists into the classroom yields three specific benefits:

- **Bridging the Achievement Gap:** For many students—particularly English Language Learners and those with different learning styles—the arts provide a non-verbal entry point into complex concepts.
- **Social-Emotional Development:** Arts education fosters "soft skills" that are hard to measure but essential for life: empathy, patience during the "messy middle" of a project, and the courage to fail and try again.
- **Academic Reinforcement:** When a teaching artist integrates theater into a history lesson or geometry into a visual arts mural, abstract concepts become tangible.

Beyond the students, teaching artists serve as a vital resource for our overworked classroom teachers. This partnership:

1. **Invigorates Curriculum:** Artists bring fresh, contemporary perspectives that modernize traditional lesson plans.
2. **Reduces Burnout:** The high energy and collaborative nature of arts programming improve the overall school culture and morale.
3. **Future-Proofs Students:** In a 2026 workforce increasingly shaped by automation, the "human" skills of creativity and divergent thinking are the most valuable assets our children can possess.

Funding teaching artists is not a "luxury" or an "extra." It is a direct investment in the cognitive and emotional infrastructure of our students. By supporting this funding, you are ensuring that our schools remain places of discovery, not just places of testing.

I urge you to prioritize this line item to ensure every child has the opportunity to find their voice through expert teaching of the Artists in the Classroom (AITS).

Thank you for your support.

Leslie Baldrige

Kihei Charter School

Elementary/Special Education Director

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:27:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Gerdine Markus	Pacific Academy of Music	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill.

Gerdine Markus, Director Pacific Academy of Music since 1990

Pahoa, HI

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:28:32 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Vicky Robbins	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Please support HB 2437 and Fund Artists-in-the-Schools (AITS). I have been an Advanced Teaching Artist for the last 25 years and have witnessed the value of this program within Hilo schools on Hawaii Island throughout 2 generations. From parents who have been my students, to their children who are now participating and benefitting from learning through the Arts.

Mahalo,

Vicky Robbins

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:10:44 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Yvonne Manipon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2437 to appropriate funds for the ARTISTS in The Schools program administered by the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts. Funding this initiative expands access to high-quality arts education by placing professional artists in classrooms, supporting creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and cultural connection for students across Hawai'i's public schools. Investing in arts learning fosters academic engagement, equity, and preparation for future careers that value innovation and expression.

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 5:43:41 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support of HB2437**, which appropriates funds to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts for the Artists in the Schools Program. As a political cartoonist whose work has appeared in *Civil Beat* and elsewhere, I have seen firsthand how art shapes not only culture but democracy itself. This program is a vital investment in both.

**Art is essential to an open and democratic society.** My own work as a cartoonist depends on the ability to question power, to provoke thought, and to hold the powerful accountable through image and idea. That capacity does not emerge from nowhere. It is cultivated—through exposure, through practice, through mentors who show young people that their voice and their vision matter. The Artists in the Schools Program plants those seeds.

**For decades, this program has brought working artists into classrooms across Hawai‘i.** It has introduced students to hula, chant, woodcarving, painting, theater, and storytelling—not as abstract concepts, but as living practices passed down by practitioners. It has shown young people that art is not a luxury or an extracurricular afterthought, but a fundamental way of understanding ourselves and our place in the world.

**Art also teaches the skills democracy requires.** To make art is to observe closely, to think critically, to persist through failure, and to communicate clearly. These are the same skills required of an engaged citizen. When we fund arts education, we are not just funding creativity; we are funding the next generation of people who will show up, speak out, and hold their leaders accountable.

HB2437 is a modest investment with outsized returns. It supports working artists, enriches our schools, and ensures that every child in Hawai‘i has the opportunity to discover the power of their own creative voice.

I urge you to pass this bill. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:09:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Julie Matheis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Funding arts education is vital for all Hawaii residents, in ways that many people do not recognize. The arts develop critical thinking skills, which are necessary for not only designing everything around us, but also for navigating life. Perpetuating traditional crafts should not be optional. We need to help keiki find ways to create sustainable solutions that work here and abroad. The artists that develop curriculum and educate children throughout the state with this funding understand how arts integration truly creates a deeper level of learning and connection for students engaged in various art forms. When students learn through the arts, neurological connections are made in a variety of ways that allow students to recall and internalize subject matter, which leads to an ability to cross reference knowledge and allow for deeper understanding and a personal connection unlike the disconnected method of lecturing. The therapeutic qualities of art practices are also proven and essential in today's world. We need this funding to develop and inspire the next generation more now than ever. Consider a world without the arts, without crafts & designers. No music, no movies, no Super Bowl performance, no architecture, no artifacts, no products for daily life, no car, no web design, etc, etc, no creative eye anywhere. Please recognize that arts are essential & the creativity around us is what makes all individuals thrive, regardless of whether they are creating or experiencing the arts.

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:10:43 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Laurel Nakanishi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kākou,

I am writing to voice my support for HB 2437 to fund the Artists in the Schools program. As a teaching artist with the AITS program for the past nine years, I have seen the ways that this program positively impacts Hawai'i's keiki. AITS assures arts education for keiki who would not otherwise have access to the arts. Please consider supporting this bill.

Aloha,  
Laurel

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:58:30 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

2437 HB RELATING TO ARTS EDUCATION.

TO INCLUDE ALL DOE/CHARTER SCHOOLS ALONG THE WAI'ANAE COAST

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 9:03:14 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Susan Browne	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in favor of appropriating funds to the SFCA for the Artists In the Schools program. This is the only program that gurantees qulaity arts education for public school students grades K-12. The program has been highly successful for over 40 years. Standards based and taught by teaching artists who go through rigorous training and vetting, these 6-week residencies provide a positive, energetic learning experience for all of our keiki. Many times our most vulnerable students learn through hands-on, artistic expression that can only come from a highly trained teaching artist. Please provide our public school students with an education that rivals private schools.

Mahalo,

Susan Browne

Dear Hawai'i State Legislators,

I strongly support H 2437 to appropriate fund for the *Artists in the Schools* program administered by the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA). Funding this initiative provides access to high-quality arts education by placing professional Teaching Artists in classrooms. Teaching Artists on the SFCA Teaching Artist Roster must be skilled and qualified in both their primary artform and in how to engage students with their artform in the classroom. Many of the Teaching Artists integrate core, standards-based curricula with their artform: science, language arts, social studies, history, and math. Research shows that students that engage subjects through a multi-model learning approach have better retention and understanding of the material covered. Investing in learning through the arts sets students and our society up for success, preparing our youth for future careers that value innovation and creativity.

Sincerely and aloha,

Michael Cowell  
808-779-6084

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 11:02:47 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
susan deuber	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a lifelong educator and former Principal of Voyager Public Charter School. Currently, I am a consultant through my consulting firm - Joining Hands Consulting. I am also a member of the Board of Honolulu Theater for Youth, where i serve as Chair of the Education Committee. Additionally, I served on the AITS Review Panel for multiple years.

I became intimately involved with the Artists in the Schools (AITS) program when Voyager partnered with HTY for many years. HTY offered extensive PD to all teachers and through AITS, we hosted many different artists over the years. I have witnessed the powerful effect of arts education, and the sometimes tranformative effect it, has on teachers and students (many of whom do not respond to more traditional approaches). Feedback from teachers and students following these drama ed activities was ALWAYS positive. The program(s) offer unique art experience that many of our students would not otherwise have access to.....they are valuable beyond measure! In my 25 years as a public educator I have rarely witnessed such an impactful program. In this current climate of high-stakes testing, the ARTS are more important than ever. On behalf of the keiki, the schools, and the artisits, please support this bill.

Respectfully,

Susan Deuber (808)372-0425

**HB-2437-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 3:34:53 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Deborah Ann Harada	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm in support of this bill. Apologies for submitting late.