



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

**Date:** 03/03/2026

**Time:** 02:00 PM

**Location:** 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**Committee:** FIN

**Department:** Education

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

**Title of Bill:** HB2534, HD1, RELATING TO ROBOTICS.

**Purpose of Bill:** Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to establish robotics as an interscholastic sport. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) agrees with the Legislature on the value of robotics education as outlined in HB2534 HD1 and appreciates the intent of the bill, and offers comments and strong concerns.

The Department recognizes the value of robotics education in providing students with meaningful, hands-on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning opportunities. Robotics programs support critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, and have contributed to student engagement and success across the State.

While robotics is already a highly successful program within the Department, with schools earning national and international recognition, reclassifying it as an interscholastic sport may create unintended barriers. Specifically, interscholastic sports are subject to strict seasonal windows and mandatory "restricted periods" two times a year. Imposing these athletic scheduling rules could hinder robotics teams, which currently operate with the flexibility needed for year-round competition. Additionally, adding a new sport necessitates significant financial resources for coaching salaries, bus transportation, and equipment.

In Hawaii, interscholastic sports offerings are determined through league associations which assess whether a sport can be appropriately implemented across participating schools. Each league has established procedures to propose and approve new athletic programs. To date, robotics has not been formally proposed as an interscholastic sport in any of the 4 public school leagues (Oahu, Kauai, Maui, or Hawaii).

In reviewing how other states approach robotics, Texas and Connecticut are two examples that, while they list robotics as "interscholastic," operationally treat it like an academic team activity centrally organized and separate from athletic sports. There is no state athletic association that has robotics as an interscholastic athletic sport. Thus, in the Hawai'i Department of Education, it is not appropriate for robotics to

be included as an interscholastic sport, and perhaps a different structure should be explored.

The Department would benefit from Sections 2 and 3 of this measure which appropriates funds if robotics is established as an interscholastic sport, however, given the fiscal constraints facing the State, the Department respectfully asks that funding instead be appropriated to priorities identified in its Board-approved budget.

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

## **HB2534 (Relating to Robotics)**

**Submitted by:** Adria Fung, Robotics Education Specialist, Hawai'i Space Grant Consortium

To Chair Todd and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing the opportunity to provide testimony to HB 2534.

Hawai'i Space Grant Consortium (HSGC) administered at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, develops and runs interdisciplinary education, research, and public service programs related to space science, Earth science, remote sensing, human exploration and development of space, small satellites, and aerospace technology across the Hawaiian Islands. HSGC is dedicated to the development and support of future scientists and engineers.

Our program supports statewide K-12 STEM education and workforce development, including supporting and overseeing the VEX Robotics programs and the annual Hawai'i VEX State Championships, which engage students across elementary, middle, and high schools. Robotics is an interdisciplinary field that combines engineering, computer science, mathematics, and applied hands-on learning and problem-solving. Currently, there are over 230 VEX Robotics teams on Oahu, Maui County, and Hawai'i Island. Statewide, robotics participation includes approximately 450 teams, representing about 120 public, private, and charter schools, and more than 3,000 students. These students participate in multiple competitive robotics programs, including VEX Robotics and FIRST.

While we strongly **support** expanded investment in robotics education statewide, we **do not support** classifying robotics as a sanctioned interscholastic sport. Competitive robotics programs operate within various frameworks, each with its own set of rules and regulations. The main benefits are in academic development, workforce development, and hands-on STEM learning.

We encourage the State to consider increased support for robotics education through agencies and partners such as Department of Education and Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, Hawai'i FIRST Robotics, and Hawai'i Space Grant Consortium. Priority areas include:

- Professional development and continuing education for new and veteran educators and coaches
- Classroom and competitive robotics equipment, kits, and materials

- Tournament registration costs
- Expansion of equitable access to robotics programs across the islands

Supporting statewide robotics education through academic and workforce preparation structures will better support long-term student outcomes while maintaining program quality.

Through my participation as a Hawai'i robotics student, pursuing robotics engineering studies, and now giving back to support robotics education at home, I have seen the importance of robotics programs and how it can create meaningful pathways to college, careers, and workforce development.

Thank you for your consideration.

Adria Fung

Robotics Education Specialist

Hawai'i Space Grant Consortium, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa



Written Statement of  
**DR. PATRICK SULLIVAN**  
**FOUNDER & CEO, OCEANIT**

Before the  
**HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, March 3, 2026  
2:00 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 308 and Videoconference

In Support of  
**HB2534 HD1 RELATING TO ROBOTICS**

To: Chair Representative Chris Todd, Vice Chair Representative Jenna Takenouchi,  
and Members of the Committee

From: Dr. Patrick Sullivan, Founder & CEO, OCEANIT

Re: Testimony in Support of HB2534 HD1

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

Oceanit Laboratories, Inc. respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of HB2534 HD1, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to establish robotics as an interscholastic sport.

Oceanit is a Hawai'i-born technology and innovation company celebrating 40 years of operation in the State. Headquartered in Honolulu, Oceanit employs scientists, engineers, and technologists across disciplines including artificial intelligence, advanced materials, environmental science, biotechnology, and aerospace. Our work spans federal and state contracts that address some of the most pressing challenges facing Hawaii and the nation. We are deeply invested in cultivating the next generation of STEM professionals, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because our business depends on it.

Oceanit strongly supports this measure for several reasons:

Robotics builds the exact skills our workforce needs: At Oceanit, we look for employees who combine technical proficiency with creative problem-solving, teamwork, and the ability to work under pressure toward a shared goal. These are precisely the competencies that robotics programs develop. Students who compete in FIRST and VEX Robotics learn to design, build, code, and iterate—skills that translate directly to careers in engineering, data science, environmental monitoring, and the many other fields in which Oceanit operates.

Hawai'i cannot afford to lose its STEM pipeline: As the bill notes, a higher percentage of Hawai'i-born STEM graduates currently live on the continent than in Hawai'i. This is a trend that threatens Hawai'i's economic diversification and long-term resilience. Every robotics team that dissolves due to lack of funding is a missed opportunity to inspire a student who might otherwise stay in Hawai'i—or return after college—to build their

career here. Recognizing robotics as an interscholastic sport provides the institutional support and consistent funding that these programs need to survive and grow.

Oceanit is ready to be a partner: We would welcome the opportunity to host robotics teams at our facilities so students can see firsthand the kinds of careers available to them right here in Hawai'i. We want students to walk through our labs, meet our engineers, and understand that the skills they are learning in robotics competitions can lead to meaningful, well-paying careers right here at home. Whether through mentorship, facility tours, or internship opportunities, Oceanit is committed to helping make this program successful.

Federal funding uncertainty makes state investment essential: Recent federal funding cuts have already impacted several Hawai'i robotics teams. Relying on competitive grants alone is not a sustainable model. By establishing robotics as a sanctioned interscholastic sport, the State provides a stable funding mechanism that ensures programs are not subject to the unpredictability of external grants. This is a smart, long-term investment in Hawai'i's workforce and economy.

As a company that has grown and thrived in Hawai'i for four decades, Oceanit understands the importance of a robust local STEM workforce. HB2534 HD1 is a practical, forward-looking investment in our keiki and in the future of Hawai'i's innovation economy.

We respectfully urge the Committee to pass this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 2:06:32 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>    |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Hai Yang Martin     | Waialua Robotics    | Support                   | Remotely Via Zoom |

Comments:

**Robotics is not just any after-school activity out there. It provides life skills for students all around the world. Robotics offers an intense, competitive environment for everyone participating, with teamwork and intellectual abilities in an inclusive, accessible sport. EVERYONE can compete and go pro, finding careers like our alumni in engineering, medical fields, education, and vocations like mechanic, machinist, and Airline pilot.**

**Robotics has provided me, as well as many other students, with an educational experience I would never have received in class. It has allowed me to communicate with my peers, as you would in a sports team, as I learn how to use advanced machinery and connect with people around the world in our common interests. If robotics became a sport, this experience could become more accessible to students all across Hawaii.**

**By supporting robotics programs, the State can ensure that Hawaii’s youth will receive access to stable career paths while simultaneously stimulating economic growth. Funding can be used to keep talented individuals on our island and further educational innovation. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of keiki across the state.**

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 10:09:18 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b>              | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Bryce Kaneshiro     | Oahu Interscholastic Association | Comments                  | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

While robotics provides invaluable educational experiences and positive outcomes for students, my comments today focus strictly on whether the interscholastic athletic framework is the appropriate venue for this program.

As a member of the Hawaii High School Athletic Association (HHSAA), the Oahu Interscholastic Association (OIA) maintains that robotics is not a natural fit for an athletic designation. Our position is based on several structural and financial inconsistencies:

Interscholastic athletics operate under a standardized seasonal model (Fall, Winter, and Spring). Each sport adheres to a specific start date and a single-season duration. Conversely, robotics begins its build cycle at the start of the academic year and spans multiple seasons. Furthermore, HHSAA regulations mandate two "red periods" (totaling six weeks) where coaches may not contact players, allowing students to pursue other sports. Enforcing these mandatory breaks would be detrimental to the technical progress of a robotics build.

All recognized sports follow a three-hour maximum daily practice rule. This time limit is insufficient for the complex engineering and testing required in robotics. Subjecting robotics to these athletic bylaws would hinder the students' ability to complete their projects effectively.

Research of other state athletic associations indicates that robotics is not recognized as a sport nationwide. While many states host robust robotics competitions, they are classified as state activities rather than interscholastic athletics.

While bringing robotics under the athletic umbrella might provide funding for teacher-mentors, the equipment costs required to build robots annually far exceed current athletic budgets. Integrating robotics would create a financial burden that the athletic department cannot sustainably support.

In conclusion, while there is an undeniable place for robotics in our schools, classifying it as an interscholastic sport would do more harm than good to both the program and the athletic department.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Bryce Kaneshiro

Executive Director

Oahu Interscholastic Association (OIA)

Members of the HB2534 committee,

The 3880 Tiki Techs FRC team supports HB2543. The Tiki Techs were founded by two students who felt unchallenged in the regular curriculum. Determined to push themselves further, they turned to robotics, working with borrowed tools and the limited funding they could secure. This was over 15 years ago, and since then the team has impacted countless lives and encouraged STEM careers for hundreds of students with 90% of alumni pursuing postsecondary education in a STEM field.

As a robotics team from a Title 1 school it can be very challenging to find funding. To accomplish our community outreach we have a team of 16 mentors who generously give us hundreds of hours of time and effort that our program would crumble without. We are a team of passionate students making an impact on our community, and we are uniquely positioned to do this through our drive to reach underserved sections of our community. This is accomplished by giving each student on our team a space to voice their passion in STEM. A lack of funding can make these goals very challenging to accomplish.

Outside of our own STEM education we focus on community outreach—which can be quite costly. During school breaks we host STEM camps for over 100 3rd–8th grade students, with a goal of an affordable and accessible camp for all to attend. Camp is placed the week after school ends helping bridge the gap between the end of school and the start of most summer camps, easing the stress on families in the community. This year, 15 members of our team led GEMS (Girls Exploring Math and Science), an annual event for 5th grade girls to explore STEM fields with the empowerment and guidance of girls already established in STEM education. Each and every one of these activities costs money to facilitate and it can be quite costly to achieve the community outreach we are trying to achieve. Outside of this our team participated in 16

different competitions each having individual costs. Many of these competitions were won and fed back into our robotics ecosystem. When it comes to our team we are fortunate to have a few sponsors and a mentor who has generously agreed to help us write educational grants, but many teams are not as fortunate. Funding from the state to include programs like ours as a sport will help encourage STEM education in all of our communities. Passing this bill will increase STEM education and the opportunity for students in less fortunate positions to experience robotics and opportunities to build a better future. To give a greater STEM education to our community through our FRC team we support HB2534.

Mahalo,

**Team 3880**

My name is Tyron Hamamoto, current lead mentor and advisor of the robotics program at James Campbell High School team Saber Dynamics and I strongly oppose this measure.

I have spent nearly 25 years of my life investing in the growth and development of robotics in Hawaii from its infancy of 3 active high school teams in one competition back in 2003 and our current standing of today with a multitude of teams of all grade levels in 8 different competitions. As a long time competitor, competition volunteer, team mentor, and coach of robotics in Hawaii I would like to ensure that those reviewing this bill are aware of the negative effects that this transition will have on Robotics in Hawaii.

My first and foremost concern is financial. Currently, Teams sustain themselves primarily using grants and donations from nonprofit organizations, corporations, and government entities such as the Department of Defense. Financially, competing teams utilize anywhere from \$1000 to upwards of \$250,000 or more depending on the amount of competitions they attend through the course of the calendar year. These costs include, tournament entry fees, travel costs, materials costs, and many more related to general operations. Robotics moving to an athletic classification will make teams unable to acquire funding from many of these sources and will make hosting a team in any capacity unsustainable unless state athletics has some means for teams to acquire a replacement of the aforementioned sources.

My second major concern is logistical. Through consulting with my athletics director, my understanding is that athletics, regardless of what they are, would need to fall into a season. Robotics does not follow seasons, nor are our competitions controlled by a state or county entity. All scholastic robotics programs are run by private entities existing outside of the State of Hawaii. It is also my understanding that this may pose a serious problem as school athletics do not deal with external private entities. Becoming a sport may make it impossible for teams to compete at a high level with teams from around the world if we are not allowed to participate year round in multiple different competitions. There is also the concern for elementary and middle school level teams, those levels of school don't have athletics departments, how will this impact them? Will their coaches also be eligible for compensation as the high school level teams would? If not, this creates a situation of inequity within the robotics community.

My Third concern is operational. Teams typically operate on a meeting schedule that best suits their needs depending on the competitions they participate in. It is my understanding that athletics can and does restrict the amount of time teams are allowed to meet and practice. If your average robotics program were to be subjected to these restrictions, many would fail to compete at a high level if at all as some teams currently meet upwards of 60 hours a week to meet deadlines or practice during the busy portions of the competition seasons. Restricting this to the typical athletics timeline would be unsustainable for many teams.

My final concern is also logistical in nature. Becoming a sport will inevitably increase the work load on coaches and mentors. One of the biggest challenges in starting and sustaining a team is finding a coach or mentor that is willing to put in the time and effort necessary to field a team. It is already challenging to navigate the red tape of the Hawaii Department of Education

system as many aspects of our competition and timelines do not align with typical DOE timelines. For example, a team that earns a ticket to one of several world championship events may have as little as two weeks to plan travel and attend the event, teams have already needed to decline this opportunity due to current restrictions and becoming a sport may very well make an already questionable situation worse. We as mentors are already spread thin and many will not want the additional responsibility.

I hope my concerns are heard because in addition to my program at James Campbell High School. Other long time programs will likely close their doors should this bill be allowed to pass. I strongly oppose this bill because I do not want to see 25 years of hard work by a lot of people including previous state Governors, Senators, and Legislators potentially be damaged irreparably by unnecessary changes. I highly encourage the committee to defer the measure in its current wording. Thank you for your attention to robotics in Hawaii, we would appreciate support in other capacities potentially during a different legislative session with a bill better focused on benefiting robotics education in Hawaii.

Thank you,

Tyron Hamamoto  
James Campbell High School  
Team Saber Dynamics lead Mentor and Advisor

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/27/2026 6:43:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Bryan silver        | Individual          | Oppose                    | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

**Re: HB2534 (Relating to Robotics)**

**To: Chair and Members of the House Committee on Finance**

**From: Bryan Silver, Engineering and Robotics Teacher, Kalani High School; FIRST Robotics Competition Regional Director, Hawai‘i**

**Date: 27 February 2026**

**Position: Oppose classifying robotics as an interscholastic sport, Support robotics appropriations**

**Aloha Chair and Members of the House Committee on Finance,**

**I submit this testimony in opposition to classifying robotics as an interscholastic sport, and in strong support of stable state appropriations for K-12 robotics education.**

**Robotics is a high-impact academic program that builds engineering, computer science, math application, communication, and project management through hands-on problem solving. It strengthens Hawai‘i’s workforce pipeline and keeps students engaged in school through authentic, team-based challenges.**

**Why invest now**

**Statewide robotics participation includes approximately 450 teams and roughly 3,000 students across public, charter, and private schools, spanning programs such as FIRST, VEX, drones, and underwater robotics. Robotics creates clear pathways to college and careers, including scholarship opportunities, internships, and high-demand technical skills.**

**A proven approach already exists**

**Hawai‘i has previously seen growth through statewide investment models such as Act 111 and related efforts. The most effective strategy is direct investment in robotics as education and workforce development, with clear accountability and practical access to funds.**

**Why “sport” classification is the wrong mechanism**

**Robotics has competition, but its primary purpose is academic and workforce preparation. A “sport” structure can reduce participation and slow operations because it can introduce:**

- **Increased compliance and paperwork not aligned to academic programs**
- **Delays in purchasing and reimbursement that do not match short build seasons**
- **Restrictions that disadvantage charter, private, and nonprofit team models**
- **Risk of reduced outside sponsorship and community support under athletics-style governance**
- **Barriers for neighbor island teams and resource-limited schools**

**What funding should cover (high impact, directly supports students and educators)  
Appropriations should be structured to reduce attrition and expand access by covering:**

- **Registration and event fees**
- **Startup kits, replacement parts, tools, and equipment**
- **Neighbor island travel support**
- **Coach and teacher stipends to recruit and retain advisors**
- **Professional development and continuing education for educators**

**Funding request (Finance focus)**

**To make statewide impact, I recommend \$7 million over the three-year budgeting period, targeted to direct supports listed above, with guardrails to minimize administrative loss and maximize classroom and team-level benefit.**

#### **Recommended structure for distribution and accountability**

- **Establish a statewide robotics education grant program (not an interscholastic sport program)**
- **Keep DOE as the state agency, while authorizing distribution and event operations through proven partner organizations with financial controls and statewide capacity (examples include Hawai'i Space Grant Consortium, Hawai'i FIRST Robotics, and workforce partners such as DLIR)**
- **Ensure eligibility for public, charter, and private schools**
- **Require annual reporting on participation, neighbor island access, team retention, and student outcomes**

#### **Closing**

**I strongly oppose HB2534's directive to classify robotics as a sport. Hawai'i should invest in robotics through an education and workforce framework that maximizes participation and minimizes barriers. With this structural change, the bill can become a durable statewide solution that expands opportunity for keiki and strengthens Hawai'i's future workforce.**

**Mahalo for your consideration.**

**Educationally yours,**

**Bryan Silver**

**Engineering and Robotics Teacher, Kalani High School  
FIRST Robotics Competition Regional Director, Hawai'i  
Hawai'i State Teacher of the Year 2025**

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/27/2026 9:15:32 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Susan Duffy         | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

**Strongly support.** The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism has identified the ongoing loss of Hawai‘i-born STEM graduates to the mainland. Robotics is one of the strongest pipelines we have to retain talent locally.

If we are serious about economic diversification, local workforce development, and providing meaningful career pathways for our youth, then we must treat robotics as what it truly is: a competitive academic sport that prepares students for the future.

I respectfully urge this Committee to pass this bill.

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/27/2026 11:33:43 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Sheila Medeiros     | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair Nakamura and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sheila Medeiros, a resident of Kapolei, Hawaii.

I strongly support HB 2534, HD1, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to establish robotics as an interscholastic sport. This bill will sustain and expand vital hands-on STEM education, combat the loss of teams due to funding shortages and mentor gaps, and help retain Hawaii’s talent in high-demand tech careers.

Since 1999, programs like FIRST and VEX have engaged over 2,500 students statewide in critical thinking, problem-solving, and engineering. Yet, since 2009, many teams—including at Maui High and James Campbell High—have folded amid rising costs, year-round demands, and federal cuts.

Recognizing robotics as a sport (as Texas and Connecticut do) provides structure, reduces barriers, and aligns with DOE pathways. Robotics demands teamwork, endurance, strategy, and competition—qualifying it fully as a sport that inspires crowds and keiki.

Most critically, robotics alumni overwhelmingly enter STEM fields, but too many Hawaii-born professionals leave for the mainland (per DBEDT data). Stable funding will boost workforce development, economic growth, and local opportunities.

The bill’s call to minimize documentation ensures accessibility. I urge swift passage and full appropriation to protect these programs for our students’ future.

Mahalo for supporting Hawaii’s keiki and innovation.

Sincerely,  
Sheila Medeiros  
Kapolei, Hawaii

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 10:07:23 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Linda Miyata        | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

**I am in support of HB2534**

- **It builds industry here locally, especially our engineering workforce, which is in a constant decline, leaving us to rely on foreign contract workers instead of local engineers and architects**
- **Provides students in disadvantaged areas the opportunities to be competitive in their career interests. Allows schools such as Castle, Aiea, and even Kamehameha to restart teams/start new teams. Will help prevent Nanakuli HS team from going extinct**
- **Provides students other options outside of traditional sports to be both competitive and physically involved in competitions (more physically demanding then esports)**

**Mahalo for supporting HB 2534.**

**Linda**

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 5:09:07 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| An Vo               | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

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

My name is An and I'm a public health student on O'ahu. I'm testifying in strong support of HB2534 HD1.

I never had the opportunity to join a robotics team in school. The closest thing I did was STEM class in 6th grade, where me and my class contributed to the start of a school garden and got to try cucumbers that we grew. As an adult, I volunteer for a STEM program at elementary schools, and I wish I had this opportunity to learn STEM and engage in robotics when I was young.

Please support HB2534 HD1 so that we can have more students in STEM.

Mahalo nui loa,  
An  
Honolulu, HI

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 9:07:24 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Taryn Miyasato      | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

My name is Taryn Miyasato from the Ewa district. I am reaching out to you to humbly request that your committee passes the HB 2534. This bill will address important issues regarding the lack of funding for robotics programs. It will continue to protect the educational programs that are necessary for sustaining our local STEM industries. I support this bill because this bill supports me. Robotics is a program where you use innovative skills and come together as a community, not only to meet new people, but also to learn from each other. Robotics has taught me how to work as an individual and also work in a team. Robotics has inspired me to switch my major from Nursing to Biomedical Engineering, as well as to transfer to a college that will best support me. Robotics has an impact not only on me (and other alumni), but also on our current K-12 students. Say Yes to STEM.

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 11:20:17 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Vernelle Oku        | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

I support this bill.

thank you for helping to keep our children engaged in technology and teamwork competitions that are fun and educational!

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 12:35:52 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Rain K. Kahula Yong | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of this bill to appropriate funds to the Department of Education to establish robotics as an interscholastic sport.

Robotics provides students with meaningful, hands-on opportunities to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and perseverance. Recognizing robotics as an interscholastic sport elevates STEM learning to the same level of importance as traditional athletics and ensures that students with diverse strengths have equitable access to competitive opportunities.

This measure also creates a powerful and exciting avenue for our keiki in Hawai‘i, who are too often prioritized last when it comes to innovation, funding, and access to emerging opportunities. Our students deserve to be at the forefront when it comes to preparing for future careers in technology, engineering, and design.

I have personally witnessed that students and young adults who pursue robotics and similar STEM pathways are often recruited into meaningful, high-level opportunities including projects connected to organizations such as NASA. When we invest early in robotics, we are not just funding a club; we are opening doors to real, competitive career pathways that extend far beyond our islands.

For many students, robotics is where they find their confidence, their voice, and their future pathway. This investment supports innovation, workforce development, and educational equity across our state.

Mahalo for your consideration and strong support of this measure.

Respectfully,

Rain Yong, Second grade teacher at Ka Waihona o ka Na‘auao

Leeward District

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 12:39:32 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| richard Enright     | Individual          | Oppose                    | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

HB2534 should not be considered as a robotics mentor this bill will not be beneficial to robotics programs. Robotic programs are unique and year long, they required multiple trips to the mainland every year to be competitive against world competition. As such being placed under an existing organization like the OIA or any other current state program would not meet the needs of the robotic community. What robotics and all academic after school programs need is funding from the state. Unfortunately as I have been teaching for 20 years here in Hawaii the perception of most people is academics does not matter after school only sports. This is a terrible situation as the saying is student/athlete but the reality from the house, senate, BOE and DOE is athlete and no students. Lets take a look at a robotics program supplies for our students. They learn mechanical engineering, software engineering, electrical/electronic engineering, public speaking, teamwork amongst their teammates but also with their partners at competition. If you were to look at the robotics students compared to the athletes they would be the ones scoring higher on the standardized test, which for some reason is considered a benchmark for student learning. So why is it that we have plenty of money to keep adding more sports programs but know money for academic programs, in my estimation it is a failure of leadership!

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 2:31:49 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| TERI SAVAIINAEA     | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair Todd and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB2534.

If we are serious about preparing our students for the future, we must prioritize math and science—subjects that are measurable, tested, and directly tied to workforce readiness. Establishing robotics as an interscholastic sport reinforces STEM education in a structured, competitive environment that promotes discipline, teamwork, accountability, and real-world problem-solving.

Not every student thrives in traditional athletics. Robotics provides a competitive pathway for students who may not be physical but excel in engineering, coding, and critical thinking. It allows them to represent their schools while developing skills that lead to high-demand, high-skill careers.

This is a practical investment in academic excellence and innovation. It strengthens our students without lowering standards and supports programs that produce measurable results.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB2534.

Mahalo,  
Teri Kia Savaiinaea

Wai'anae resident

Leeward District- Substitute Teacher

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 5:53:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>    |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Tara Gregory        | Individual          | Support                   | Remotely Via Zoom |

Comments:

Aloha and mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB2534 HD1.

My name is Tara Malia Gregory, and I am a former middle school digital media teacher with education and applied background in Neuroscience & Child Development from Vanderbilt University. While my classroom focus was not traditional STEM, digital media education sits at the intersection of technology, design thinking, engineering principles, and problem-solving. I saw firsthand how applied, project-based learning transforms student engagement, confidence, and long-term ambition.

National workforce data shows that STEM occupations are projected to grow at nearly twice the rate of non-STEM careers, and STEM workers earn approximately 20–30% higher median wages. Programs like FIRST Robotics report that over 80% of alumni pursue post-secondary education, and a significant majority enter STEM-related fields.

The return on investment for this bill is substantial, both for students and the State of Hawai‘i.

For students, early exposure to robotics increases college persistence, scholarship attainment, technical literacy, and leadership skills. Structured, year-round extracurricular engagement is also strongly correlated with higher graduation rates and lower risk behaviors. Robotics builds not only engineers, it builds resilient, collaborative young leaders.

For the State, even a modest increase in retaining Hawai‘i-born STEM graduates would strengthen our tax base and reduce ongoing brain drain. Hawai‘i’s economy remains heavily dependent on tourism and federal spending. Investing in robotics strengthens workforce capacity in engineering, AI, renewable energy, defense technology, and digital infrastructure, industries that support economic diversification and long-term resilience.

Additionally, robotics programs often attract private sponsorships, scholarships, and mainland competition revenue. State investment in this space frequently acts as a multiplier, drawing in additional funding and opportunity.

Compared to the high long-term cost of remediation programs or workforce shortages, investing in robotics is a preventative, workforce-building strategy with measurable economic impact.

Recognizing robotics as an interscholastic sport reflects the rigor, discipline, teamwork, and year-round commitment these programs demand. Formal designation would stabilize funding, reduce inequity between schools, and preserve programs that have already been lost due to inconsistent resources.

HB2534 HD1 represents strategic investment in Hawai'i's youth, workforce, and economic future.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Tara Malia Gregory  
Former Middle School Digital Media Teacher  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 6:21:48 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By     | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Allison Schaefer | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

**TESTIMONY OF ALLISON SCHAEFERS**

**IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 2534 HD1 RELATING TO ROBOTICS**

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

My name is Allison Schaefer, and I am the mother of a son who grew up in Hawai‘i’s public schools and was gifted in science and math from an early age. He was not a child who found his place on a field or a court. He found it in STEM—building, testing, and solving problems. But as he moved through the public system, it became clear that students like him had far fewer opportunities than their athletic peers. That is one of the reasons I ultimately moved him to private school: to give him the STEM opportunities he could not access in public school, even though every child in Hawai‘i deserves them.

Hawai‘i’s academic data underscores this need. Only about 40% of students meet math proficiency, and science proficiency remains well below pre-pandemic levels. These gaps reflect what many parents see: bright students who need hands-on, applied STEM learning to stay engaged. Robotics is one of the few programs that reliably strengthens math and science skills while building teamwork, confidence, and problem-solving.

My son’s experience shows what is possible when those opportunities exist. In 2014, as a senior at Damien Memorial School, Joshua Schaefer was part of the school’s first rocketry team. Damien supported math and science by offering the state’s first high school rocketry club and elective rocketry class. Joshua and six classmates built and launched a 30-inch rocket as part of the Team America Rocketry Challenge, meeting national criteria that required precision, engineering discipline, and teamwork.

Those experiences shaped my son’s confidence and future. Likewise, robotics programs often connect students with university labs, industry mentors, and national competitions like FIRST, VEX, and BEST. These experiences deepen technical skills and expand professional network

But it should not take private school tuition to access programs that nurture Hawai‘i’s STEM talent.

What my son learned in rocketry is exactly what students learn in robotics. Both require:

- **Engineering design** — building systems that must perform under real-world conditions.
- **Iterative problem-solving** — test, fail, adjust, and try again.
- **Precision and teamwork** — every measurement, calculation, and role matters.
- **Strategic thinking under pressure** — competitions demand accuracy, timing, and calm decision-making.

These are the same skills Hawai‘i needs in its future STEM workforce. Robotics and rocketry are simply two expressions of the same learning: students applying math and science to solve complex problems with their hands, their minds, and their teams. For these reasons, STEM programs like robotics should be available—and fully supported—in every public school.

H.B. 2534 HD1 would finally give robotics the recognition and stability it deserves by establishing it as an interscholastic sport and providing consistent funding. Robotics demands strategy, endurance, teamwork, and year-round commitment. It builds the very skills Hawai‘i needs to grow its local STEM workforce and keep our talented students rooted here at home.

For students like my son—and for the thousands of keiki coming up behind him—this bill is about belonging, opportunity, and access to a future in STEM, which opens the door to critical thinking skills and better and higher paying job opportunities.

I respectfully urge you to pass H.B. 2534 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify, Allison Schaefers

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 6:34:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By     | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| joshua schaefers | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

**TESTIMONY OF JOSHUA SCHAEFERS IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 2534 HD1 RELATING TO ROBOTICS**

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

My name is Joshua Schaefers, and I grew up in Hawai‘i’s public schools. I was a student who loved math and science, but I struggled to find STEM opportunities in the public system. There was no robotics team, no rocketry program, and very few chances to apply what I was learning. My family eventually moved me to a private school so I could access the hands-on STEM programs I couldn’t get in public school.

That opportunity changed my life. As a senior, I joined Damien Memorial School’s first rocketry team and helped build and launch a rocket for the Team America Rocketry Challenge. The experience taught me engineering design, precision, teamwork, and problem-solving under pressure—the same skills students gain through robotics.

No student should have to leave their public school to access programs that help them discover their strengths. Robotics gives students a place to belong and builds the skills Hawai‘i needs in its future workforce.

H.B. 2534 HD1 would finally give robotics the stability and recognition it deserves by establishing it as an interscholastic sport and ensuring consistent support statewide.

I respectfully urge you to pass this bill so every student—no matter their school—has access to meaningful STEM opportunities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify, Joshua Schaefers

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 6:43:07 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By    | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Charmaine Doran | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Honorable Committee Chair & Members:

I am writing today to express my strongest support for House Bill 2534, a measure that aims to help elevate interscholastic robotics as an official sport within the Department of Education.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Representative Reyes Oda for her vision and leadership in introducing this important bill.

This bill is a crucial step forward that recognizes and elevates the incredible and expansive interests our students have in the sport of robotics. This is more than just an after-school club or elective; for many students, it is their passion, their team, and their arena for competition.

In the past, when it comes to interscholastic sports, we have often been slow to act and some times - for decades - we have missed the WAVE of changing sports.

With this bill, Hawaii has the opportunity to join the nation and world in advancement. States like Minnesota, Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Iowa, New York, and Texas have already begun to take steps to officially integrate robotics into their public schools sports. Also, RoboCup will be held in Incheon, South Korea, in 2026—a city that happens to be a sister city of Honolulu.

It also serves as a powerful engine for STEM education and turns it into tangible, exciting sports competitions. This hands-on experience is invaluable in preparing students for high-demand careers - right here in Hawaii.

Equity has long been sought after in scholastic activities. Establishing robotics as a sport, expands access to athletics to a broader *more* diverse range of skilled students. As a sport, *more* students would be extended the recognition, support, and sense of school pride afforded other student athletes. To further the sports program of robotics is to expand access to sports for all.

By officially funding robotic sanctioning, Hawaii isn't just creating a new local sport; it's giving our students a path to compete and excel in a global arena that is already thriving. It wasn't that long ago that skateboarding, snowboarding and SURFING were dismissed by many as just hobbies. Now, these are global, billion-dollar industries and Olympic-level sports. Robotics is on the exact same trajectory.

This is our chance to show our students that we see their passion and respect their arena. By passing HB2534, and with the partnership of the DOE and OIA, we can give these students the recognition they've already earned. I call on both DOE and OIA to actively support this measure.

As a parent of a student who enjoys robotics, I urge you to support HB2534. It's time to expand the playing field.

Let's champion tomorrow.

Mahalo!

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 7:40:30 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Glen Kagamida       | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT!!!

MAHALO!

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 7:51:04 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Enzo Acevedo-Cross  | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

I support HB 2534 relating to robotics. My name is Enzo and I'm in fourth grade at Ahuimanu Elementary School. This is my first year doing robotics at my school and I am already starting to see how robotics brings people together. I've been able to participate in one tournament, but it was challenging for our team to have to funds for it. It was also not easy to have the money for the arena or equipment for our team. That's why I support this bill. It should be easier to participate in robotics at school and pay the teacher who helps coach our club.

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 8:08:09 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Shanae Hatchell     | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

I support this measure. I am high school math teacher on the island of Oahu. Math programs do not get enough support. Math is heavily tested yet not supported enough outside of the classroom. Supporting robotics in a meaningful way, as this bill helps to do, is a step in the right direction.

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 10:13:54 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Noelle Zimdahl      | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Mr. Chair and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Noelle Zimdahl, and I am a parent leader in my community. I am writing to ask that you SUPPORT HB2534. This bill will support STEM learning and promote learning both inside and outside the classroom. Students at many schools across the state participate in robotics clubs, but passing HB2534 would allow them to take this passion even further while also providing the camaraderie of being on a sports team. Given the academic and social-emotional learning gained through robotics and school sports, I implore you to support HB2534 for the success of our Hawai'i students.

Thank you for your time and support.

- Noelle Zimdahl

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 12:18:47 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Kamuela Werner      | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

Aloha,

As a public school teacher who is passionate about helping students apply and express STEM concepts in creative and meaningful ways, I strongly support this bill. Encouraging innovation, critical thinking, and hands-on learning empowers our students to connect their knowledge to real-world challenges and opportunities.

Me ke aloha,

Kamuela Werner

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 5:57:24 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Brett Kulbis        | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Chair Todd 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 SUPPORT BILL HB-2534 HD1**

Hawai'i has a proud history of robotics excellence, beginning with Waialua High School's program in 1999 and bolstered by legislative support in the 2000s, including scholarships for FIRST regional competitions. Today, FIRST and VEX Robotics engage over 2,500 students statewide, building hands-on STEM skills, critical thinking, teamwork, and creative problem-solving—qualities essential for success in any career. These programs are not just extracurricular; they are year-round commitments that demand dedication from students, mentors, and families, much like traditional sports.

HB-2534 HD1 correctly identifies the challenges threatening these programs: funding shortfalls since 2009, loss of high school teams due to insufficient resources and mentor shortages, have left teams at schools like Maui High and James Campbell High vulnerable. Reliance on competitive grants is unreliable and unsustainable. By recognizing robotics as an interscholastic sport, following successful models in other states, Hawai'i can provide consistent support through existing school athletic frameworks, reduce administrative burdens (as the bill wisely directs the DOE to minimize documentation), and leverage community involvement to attract private mentors and sponsors.

From a common sense standpoint, this measure addresses Hawai'i's real workforce challenges. Data from the DBEDT show that too many Hawai'i-born STEM graduates leave for the mainland, weakening our local economy and innovation base. Robotics alumni overwhelmingly enter STEM fields, stable, high-paying careers that reduce reliance on tourism volatility and build self-sufficiency. Supporting these programs is a strategic way to retain homegrown talent, stimulate private-sector growth, and ensure our youth have access to pathways that reward hard work and ingenuity.

HB-2534 HD1 emphasis on robotics as a sport is well-founded. It requires strategic thinking, and teamwork under pressure, while drawing crowds to competitions and fostering community pride.

This recognition will not create new bureaucracy but will integrate robotics into proven athletic structures, maximizing efficiency and impact.

I urge the Committee to advance HB-2534 HD 1 with a sufficient appropriation to make this vision a reality. In a time of fiscal caution, this is not a blank check but a focused investment with clear returns: stronger schools, a more competitive workforce, and a brighter future for Hawai'i. Our keiki deserve the tools to succeed here at home—let's give them the support they need to build it.

Mahalo

Brett Kulbis

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 8:29:13 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Justin Delos Reyes  | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

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

**As a former AP Computer Science teacher at James Campbell High School, I am writing to express my strongest support for HB2534 HD1, which seeks to establish robotics as an interscholastic sport in Hawaii.**

**In my classroom, I witnessed firsthand how robotics serves as a critical bridge between theoretical concepts and real-world application. It is not merely an extracurricular activity; it is a rigorous discipline that develops the exact skills critical thinking and creative problem-solving that the 21st-century workforce demands.**

**The Need for Consistent Support**

**During my tenure, I saw the immense pressure placed on our programs. The legislature correctly identifies that many teams, including the one at James Campbell High School, have faced threats to their survival due to inconsistent funding. Unlike traditional seasonal sports, robotics is a year-round commitment requiring multiple mentors and significant financial resources, with competition costs reaching thousands of dollars.**

**Our students should be focused on engineering and strategic thinking, not wondering if a federal funding cut or a denied grant will end their season.**

**Why "Sport" Status Matters**

**Classification as an interscholastic sport is a logical and necessary step for the following reasons:**

- Physical and Mental Rigor: Robotics requires intense teamwork, physical endurance, and strategic thinking.**
- Proven Outcomes: A majority of robotics alumni enter STEM fields. By formalizing this path, we can address the current brain drain where Hawaii-born STEM talent often relocates to the continental United States.**

- **National Precedent: States like Texas and Connecticut have already successfully recognized robotics as a sanctioned sport.**

## **Conclusion**

**By appropriating these funds and streamlining participation documentation, this bill ensures that students at schools like Campbell and Maui High have a stable, high-quality path to the STEM workforce. We must invest in our youth today to ensure Hawaii's economic growth tomorrow.**

**I urge the committee to pass HB2534 HD1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

**Mahalo,**

**Justin Delos Reyes**

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 9:24:33 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>    |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Joshua Tom          | Individual          | Support                   | Remotely Via Zoom |

Comments:

Recognizing robotics as a sport here in Hawaii is crucial for developing our workforce, engaging students, and diversifying our economy.

Back in 2008, both ACT 111 (\$300k) and Dave Lavery’s NASA planetary program (\$1 million) helped start robotics what it is today here in Hawaii. This \$1.3 million helped boost FIRST teams from 7 to 27 in one year alone across both public and private schools.

Under Governor Linda Lingle, robotics teams gained traction and support, helping maintain the teams until her term ended. This \$1.3 million helped sustain teams from 2008-2011.

After 2011, we saw a dip in FIRST teams as sustainable funding was cut and leadership changes occurred.

As of today, these are the current statistics for ALL forms of robotics:

**Current Statistics**

Analysis on team loss, education, and reach

- Lost Kamehameha, Waimea, Hilo, Baldwin, HBA, Sacred Hearts, Aiea,

Nanakuli FIRST teams

- FLL (elementary teams) - decline from over 200 teams to 50
- Held competitions such as the VEX Pan Pacific (2016-2019) - attendance of 112 teams across the entire Pacific; Second largest VEX robotics competition in the world - Gone

4 programs supported in Hawaii- FIRST, VEX, Drones, Underwater Robotics

- FIRST (For Inspiration of Robotics in Science and Technology)
- FIRST Lego League (FLL) ~ 58 teams
- FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) ~ 34 teams
- FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) ~ 26 teams
- VEX (V5 & IQ) Combined ~ 232 teams
- Drones ~ 16 teams
- Underwater Robotics (SeaPerch & RoboSub) - Combined ~ 30 teams

***In total, Hawaii supports 450 robotics teams with an est. 2500-3000 students impacted***

\*Some teams overlap as they compete in multiple competitions

### **For Appropriations Purposes**

Analysis on team directives and financial costs for teams

- Current costs for known competitions
- VEX
- Competition and kit costs ~ \$5,000

- FRC

- Competition and kit costs ~ \$16,000

In order to half registration fees for all teams and cover costs kits across the board, an estimated \$2,000,000 dollars is needed every year

To cover the Congress' 3 year budgeting period, robotics would need \$7 million appropriated to cover all facets needed

### **Appropriation And Spending Coverage**

- Noted that the DOE requires assistance in managing & accounting funds
- Recommended governing bodies to manage appropriated funds
- Hawaii Space Grant Consortium (Runs VEX competitions and initially earned the \$1.3 million distributed by Hawaii's Congress and Dave Lavery's grant)
- Hawaii FIRST Robotics (Runs FIRST competitions across the State)
- Hawaii Academy of Science (Runs Statewide Science Fairs)

### **Major Comments/Concerns Over Bill Wording**

A majority of current robotics teams run their operations as separate non-profit organizations outside of the school for a number of reasons, including

1. Eligibility for grants and sponsorships directly to the teams
2. Ease for purchasing parts instead of going through school's PO systems, especially due to constrained time limits (FRC build season lasts only 6 weeks)
3. Garage/community teams are able to operate

With the current wording of the bill, teams may potentially lose the ability to gain sponsors, purchase necessary equipment, or be shut down entirely.

***HB 2534 is meant to support robotics in Hawaii and grow teams, not diminish or undermine the work already put in place.***

The bill must be amended to address these concerns. Robotics already costs a significant amount, with many teams budgets ranging from \$30 - \$70k per year. By cutting teams off from gaining sponsors, we essentially undermine a majority of established teams.

When surfing was recently recognized as a sport, the organizations initially over it lost the rights to private sponsors under the HHSAA. Consideration **MUST** be taken to ensure that robotics teams do not face these same issues, else we lose several well established teams in the State

***WE MUST CONTINUE TO SUPPORT ROBOTICS CAREFULLY IN ORDER TO NOT CUT FUNDING, BUT TO INCREASE IT.***

## **Relevance**

- Hawaii robotics has grown exponentially since the introduction of ACT 111, however, it has seen a steep decline due to factors such as COVID and the recent federal DOE collapse, which has cut off several teams from the Pell grants sustaining them
- Seen several long term teams leave/plans for resignation, want to see new teachers take over and encourage continued growth of said programs
- Programs have garnered worldwide attention and world class education
- Known students have received full rides to universities such as Rice, Yale, and

MIT

- Will continue to build industry and job opportunities here in Hawaii (referenced in ACT 111)
- 100% graduation rate and university attendance rate from schools such as Campbell and Kalani

*The future of education is robotics*

### **Recommendations**

1. Potential shift away from scholastic sport title and look towards appropriations of \$7 million dollars
2. Have the DOE as a governing body, with assistance from outside organizations
3. Use teacher stipends to for initial 3 year period -> saw exponential growth from initial appropriations from ACT 111, maintained until COVID and Federal DOE dissolution
4. Reform and update bill to ensure appropriation, grants, and other forms of funding are not maintained through the HHSAA to prevent large administrative cuts and ensure accessible funds for all teachers; preferably outside governing body
5. Find alternatives to satisfy all parties

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 10:33:20 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Michelle Pieper     | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Honorable Members,

My name is Michelle “Kumu” Pieper, and I proudly serve the youth of the Wai‘anae Coast. I am in strong support of HB 2534 and the formal recognition of robotics as an interscholastic sport in Hawai‘i.

I offer my testimony through a cultural lens.

In Hawai‘i, excellence was never defined by physical strength alone. Our kūpuna were intellectual, navigational, and strategic masters. Wayfinding across the Pacific required astronomical knowledge, engineering precision, environmental literacy, discipline, and deep teamwork. The building of wa‘a demanded mathematics and design. The survival of our people depended on innovation, observation, and collective problem-solving.

Robotics is modern wayfinding.

It does not replace canoe paddling.

It does not replace hula.

It expands what excellence looks like.

When we frame robotics as an interscholastic sport, we are not abandoning culture—we are honoring the legacy of innovation that has always defined us as a people. We are acknowledging that today’s navigation tools may include code, sensors, circuitry, and artificial intelligence, just as yesterday’s tools included stars, winds, currents, and carved hulls.

Recognizing robotics as an interscholastic sport ensures that Hawai‘i’s students — especially those from underserved communities — have equitable access to the competitive STEM pathways that define our modern economy.

On the Wai‘anae Coast, many of our students are Native Hawaiian and come from communities that have historically faced systemic inequities. If robotics remains categorized as an extracurricular privilege rather than a recognized sport, access will continue to depend on funding, geography, and outside connections. Formal recognition creates legitimacy, funding pathways, coaching structures, and statewide competition frameworks that level the playing field.

Robotics builds the same core competencies we celebrate in traditional sports:

- Teamwork
- Strategy
- Resilience
- Discipline
- Iteration under pressure
- Leadership

Students design, test, fail, revise, and compete. They learn engineering, coding, systems thinking, and ethical decision-making. They learn to collaborate across roles. They learn to adapt in real time. These are the exact skills required for future careers in renewable energy, climate resilience, healthcare innovation, sustainable agriculture, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies that will shape Hawai‘i’s future.

If we expect our youth to remain in Hawai‘i and contribute meaningfully to our economy, we must equip them with the same baseline technological fluency as their peers nationally and globally. Artificial intelligence and robotics are not future concepts—they are present realities. Our students must not only consume technology; they must be prepared to build, guide, and ethically steward it.

Through a cultural lens, this is about kuleana.

Our ancestors navigated the largest ocean on earth without modern instruments. Today, our students must learn to navigate a digital ocean just as vast. Robotics education ensures they are not passengers in that journey, but navigators.

HB 2534 is not simply about competition—it is about equity, identity, innovation, and opportunity. It is about expanding our definition of excellence while staying rooted in who we are.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your commitment to Hawai‘i’s keiki.

With deep respect,  
Michelle “Kumu” Pieper  
Teacher, Nānākuli High & Inter

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 10:54:40 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Kayla Kobayashi     | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

I support this bill because Hawaii robotics teams and lacking the funding they need to be able to keep their teams afloat. As someone who has done robotics before, I undersand first hand that these robotics programs are extremly important for our keiki. These programs teach kids skills in science, engineering, arts, technology, and mechanics. However, to be able to participate in these robotics competitions, teams need to pay a entrence fee of \$3,000 for FIRST and/or \$250 for VEX. This is a steep price for many teams to pay, on top of travel and material costs. It is imparitive that we protect these programs by offering them a way to get the funding that they need. I humbly urge you to pass this bill as it will not only benefit our keiki, but our community.

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 11:16:19 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Tammy Holt          | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Chair Woodsen, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support HB 2534 (HD1).

- Robotics delivers rigorous, hands on STEM education that builds critical thinking, engineering skills, collaboration, and problem solving.

- Hawaii's FIRST and VEX teams compete nationally and internationally and represent Hawaii nationwide

- Robotics is a 12 month activity. This requires coaching, funding and student commitment comparable to other interscholastic sports.

- Establishing robotics as an interscholastic sport provides structural recognition, consistent support, and equitable access for students statewide.

• This measure strengthens Hawaii's STEM workforce pipeline and workforce readiness.

HB 2534 is a practical investment in innovation, student opportunity, and workforce development.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Tammy Holt

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 2:43:04 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Terri Yoshinaga     | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

- It builds industry here locally, especially our engineering workforce, which is in a constant decline, leaving us to rely on foreign contract workers instead of local engineers and architects
- Provides students in disadvantaged areas the opportunities to be competitive in their career interests. Allows schools such as Castle, Aiea, and even Kamehameha to restart teams/start new teams. Will help prevent Nanakuli HS team from going extinct
- Provides students other options outside of traditional sports to be both competitive and physically involved in competitions (more physically demanding than esports)

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 10:35:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Josiah Orso         | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha my name is Josiah Orso and I am writing in support of HB2534. When I attended Holomua Elementary, I was not really into physical sports. So, when I heard of a school team using legos and robots to compete with other people, I was excited. I had fun competing and I felt like I was contributing to a team. After that, I also participated in robotics when I attended Hawai Technology Academy. With my participation in robotics, it led me to joining a program called GenCyber, which focused more on computer science and it got me interested in more STEM focused subjects, which allowed me to graduate with a degree related to cybersecurity at UH West Oahu. I believe passing this bill will allow more students to properly compete without worrying about not having enough money to fully participate in competitions around the country. Then those students can fully realize their potential and use it to elevate themselves more in college and beyond. Please support this bill!

**HB-2534-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/3/2026 12:32:40 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Donna P. Van Osdol  | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee:

I apologize for submitting this testimony late.

I think this is an interesting and good bill because it looks towards the future about what robotics can become in the arena of competitiveness within our schools

Science is our future, and it will play a major part in our children's and grandchildren's lives. I hope to see someday robotics become an interscholastic sport in high schools. We have absolutely nothing to lose if it is implemented one day.

Thank you for your time. Again, I support this bill.

Donna Van Osdol, Waipio Acres, HI