



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

Date: 02/05/2026

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: EDN

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB2534, RELATING TO ROBOTICS.

Purpose of Bill: Appropriates moneys to the Department of Education to establish robotics as an interscholastic sport.

Department's Position: Comments

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) agrees with the Legislature on the value of robotics education as outlined in HB 2534 but the Department cannot support the bill in its current form. However, the Department looks forward to working with the Legislature to find a way forward.

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, and creativity, and have contributed to student engagement and success across the State.

In Hawaii, interscholastic offerings are determined through league associations, which assess local conditions and determine whether a sport can be appropriately implemented across participating schools. Robotics programs currently operate in a variety of extracurricular and competitive formats across the State, with differences in scope, resources, staffing, and local capacity. Conditions are not uniform statewide, and implementation considerations vary by island, school, and community.

HB 2534 proposes establishing robotics as an interscholastic sport and appropriating funds for that purpose. Should robotics be established statewide as an interscholastic sport, the Department anticipates costs related to personnel, equipment, competition operations, transportation, and administrative support. While robotics differs from traditional athletic programs, statewide implementation would require clear operational structures and sustainable resources to support equitable participation across schools.

The Department would benefit from Sections 2 and 3 of this measure, which establish robotics as an interscholastic sport and appropriate funds for that purpose; 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.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



MAKALAPUA ALENCASTRE, ED. D.
CHAIRPERSON

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

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

FOR: HB 2534 RELATING TO ROBOTICS
DATE: February 5, 2026
TIME: 2:00 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Education
ROOM: Conference Room 309 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

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

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony in **SUPPORT of HB 2534** which ensures high-quality science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education and strengthens the State’s technology workforce by appropriating moneys to establish robotics as an interscholastic sport.

Public charter school students participate in robotics, as well as other technology based programs, and would benefit from this measure. The Commission is available to work with this committee, the DOE, and our public charter schools in moving this legislation forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:57:20 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katie Ta	Kalani High School Robotics (Team Magma 3008)	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

My name is Katie Ta, and I am from District 4. I am currently a junior attending Kalani High School and am one of the captains of our robotics team. My team is known in the community for supporting and starting STEM extracurriculars for 3000+ keiki. However, we could not do this without significant efforts to secure funding from private organizations. Our students work hard to learn the processes of grant writing, sponsorship retention, and fundraising. Not all teams have this pre-established foundation of experienced students and mentors.

To make STEM more accessible for all Hawai'i youth, I am reaching out to humbly request that your committee pass HB 2534. This bill addresses significant disparities in the lack of funding for robotics programs. It will help protect the educational programs necessary to sustain our local STEM industries and workforce, as robotics teaches diverse skills ranging from engineering and leadership to marketing. I support this bill because it supports me, the youth of Hawai'i, and our future.

Say YES to STEM.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 7:48:25 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joshua Tom	Saber Dynamics	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

The Saber Dynamics robotics team, 8871, recognizes the importance and need for the continual support of these educational programs for STEM.

In a study entitled "Brain Drain: Characteristics of Hawai'i-Born Adults on the U.S. Mainland" by the Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism Research and Economic Analysis Division, quote "This suggests that it is not higher wages, per se, that are encouraging people to move to the mainland, but the types of jobs available on the mainland instead. For those earning STEM or NSF-defined science and engineering degrees, a higher percentage of Hawai'i-borns living on the mainland are in STEM or science and engineering occupations, compared to Hawai'i-borns who stay in Hawai'i."

It is clear to see why we have a brain drain here in Hawaii. We are losing jobs. We are losing workers. We are losing our economy to the mainland while the mainland continues to send foreigners to colonize our lands, steal our homes, and take advantage of our 'aina.

By enabling our students young, we instill passion. We know how far this drives our keiki. From the three elementary schools our team mentors, we clearly saw the impact of these robotics programs statewide. Our feeder elementary school, Holomua, is a three year international qualifying team. This year alone, our keiki had won first place in Core Values.

However, these programs are under threat. Within the past decade, we have lost several teams from k-12 schools. This is due to funding cuts from the federal DOE, COVID, and lack of recognition, especially our teachers.

ROBOTICS IS CONSIDERED A CLUB ACTIVITY. TEACHERS AND MENTORS ARE NOT PAID FOR THEIR TIME.

This has driven many away from providing these opportunities for mentoring these programs, as seen at Illima Intermediate, Kamehameha Schools, Aiea High School, and several others. Nanakuli High School is currently under threat of facing this same fate.

By recognizing robotics as sport, we are able to fund our mentors with coach pay. This will help ensure interest, especially in teachers who are unable to commit the time and effort it takes to run a team for free.

Once kids are out of a robotics team, we see interest drop fast. At Kaimiloa Elementary school, one student came up to our team and said "I think I am not going to pursue robotics anymore and focus on only volleyball." When we asked her why, she said "Because Illima does not have a team anyway, why should I continue?"

It is clear that once a student is stripped of opportunity, they do not continue to build their knowledge and their passion. We see that this bill will ensure that our STEM students will not lose their passion, but it will blossom into thriving industries that will support our economy.

We must continue to fight for these efforts as it is the only way to save Hawaii from the brain drain. By teaching our keiki young, we instill the passion that will linger with them far beyond the 12th grade.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 11:11:29 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Ohana Unity Party & Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

****Aloha Chair and Honorable Members of the Committees,****

As Chairman of the Ohana Unity Party and a passionate advocate for empowering our keiki through education, innovation, and opportunities that build a stronger future for our Hawaiian Islands, I submit this written testimony in the strongest possible support of ****House Bill 2534****. This forward-thinking legislation establishes robotics as an interscholastic sport in Hawaii, appropriating funds to support its implementation and minimizing administrative barriers for teams. In an election year when voters seek leaders who invest in youth development and economic growth, this bill positions you and the Committees as visionary champions of STEM education—fostering skills that will drive Hawaii's technology workforce and inspire generations. HB2534 recognizes robotics as an interscholastic sport, acknowledging its demands for teamwork, physical endurance, and strategic thinking—qualities that rival traditional athletics. It directs the Department of Education to minimize documentation required for team participation and appropriates general revenues (for fiscal year 2026-2027) to fund its establishment as a competitive platform. Effective July 1, 2026, this bill builds on Hawaii's legacy of robotics success while addressing funding shortfalls that have led to the loss of teams.

****Why I Stand Strongly in Support of HB2534 – Compelling Reasons and Data-Driven Urgency****

1. ****Boosting STEM Education and Critical Skills for Our Keiki**** Robotics provides hands-on learning in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. Hawaii's programs like FIRST and VEX engage over 2,500 students annually, with teams achieving national and international acclaim. Yet, since 2009, we've lost numerous high school teams due to insufficient resources, mentors, and funding cuts—exacerbating a statewide STEM workforce shortage. Data shows: Only 15% of Hawaii high school graduates pursue STEM degrees (DBEDT, 2025), and a higher percentage of Hawaii-born STEM professionals live on the mainland (DBEDT, 2025). Recognizing robotics as a sport sustains programs, increases participation by 20–30% (similar to sanctioned robotics in Texas and Connecticut), and prepares youth for high-demand jobs—where STEM occupations grow 10.5% nationally (BLS, 2025) but lag in Hawaii.

2. ****Alignment with Aloha, Innovation, and Cultural Empowerment**** The Dalai Lama teaches: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice

compassion." Mahatma Gandhi reminds us: "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." HB2534 embodies these by investing in our keiki's futures, especially Native Hawaiian youth who are overrepresented in vulnerable populations (64% of trafficking survivors) and underrepresented in STEM fields. Robotics fosters resilience and creativity—key to breaking cycles of trauma—while honoring our values of kuleana (responsibility) and innovation rooted in ancestral ingenuity.

3. **Real-World Example: The Impact on Hawaii's Youth and Communities** Since Waialua High School's first robotics program in 1999, Hawaii teams have thrived, but federal cuts and high costs (hundreds to thousands per competition) have threatened sustainability. A public hearing would highlight stories like those from Maui and James Campbell high schools, where teams were lost due to resource gaps—denying students pathways to STEM careers. By establishing robotics as a sport, HB2534 ensures year-round support, mentorship, and competition—boosting graduation rates by 15% for participants (FIRST Impact Study, 2024) and inspiring Native Hawaiian keiki to lead in technology.

4. **Economic and Workforce Benefits – A Smart Investment** Hawaii's technology sector contributes \$3.5 billion to GDP but faces a talent shortage—only 25% of STEM jobs filled locally (DBEDT, 2025). Robotics alumni are 2.5 times more likely to pursue STEM careers (FIRST Longitudinal Study, 2023). The bill's appropriation (for FY 2026-2027) is a modest investment yielding high returns: Sustained programs could add 1,000+ STEM graduates annually, growing our economy by \$100 million+ (extrapolated from national data). Minimizing documentation reduces barriers, increasing access for underserved schools.

5. **Broader Context: Ties to Equity, Trauma Prevention, and Systemic Reform** The Epstein files exposed exploitation of vulnerable youth—patterns mirrored in Hawaii's foster care (50% Native Hawaiian placements) and trafficking crises (average exploitation age 11). Robotics builds protective skills like teamwork and problem-solving, reducing vulnerability. This bill complements reforms like compassionate release (HB1628/SB2688) and child advocacy (HB1517) by empowering keiki through education—preventing cycles of despair.

Conclusion and Renewed Call to Action HB2534 is innovative, essential, and overdue. It will inspire our keiki, strengthen our workforce, reduce economic disparities, and position Hawaii as a STEM leader. I again urge the Chair to schedule a public hearing promptly, inviting educators, students, Native Hawaiian leaders, parents, and community members to contribute—ensuring this bill reflects our collective vision. In an election year, this is an opportunity to showcase leadership that invests in our future—earning the admiration of voters who value aloha and progress.

Mahalo nui loa for your consideration and service to our islands. I am available for questions or oral testimony if needed. In solidarity for innovation, empowerment, and ohana,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I. Ohana Unity Party, Chairman www.Ohanaunityparty.com Presidentbillionaire@gmail.com

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 1:33:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Reese Sekiya	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

My name is Reese Sekiya from district 4 and I support H.B. No. 253 because I have seen what happens to students when robotics programs are funded and what happens when they are not.

Robotics gives students a place to grow confidence, learn how to work through failure, and see themselves as capable problem solvers. Many students who struggle in traditional classrooms thrive in robotics because they can learn by doing and by working with a team.

When funding is uncertain, these opportunities disappear. Teams shut down, mentors leave, and students are left without programs they depend on. Once a team is gone, it is very difficult to rebuild. Students do not get that time or opportunity back.

Stable funding is essential to keep these programs alive and accessible. Recognizing robotics as an interscholastic sport would help ensure students across the state can continue to benefit from an experience that shapes their education and future.

I respectfully urge your support of H.B. No. 253.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 12:54:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sam Atuatasi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice-Chair La Chica, and members of the committee on Education:

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support** for House Bill No. 2534. My name is Sam Atuatasi, and I am the current head captain of FIRST robotics team 2896, the MechaMonarchs, of Damien Memorial School. We strongly support the passage of this bill due to the current lack of funding for robotics programs across the state. Funding is not only necessary to compete with top teams, but also to help support STEM initiatives through local high school teams. Through this bill, competitive robotics will allow for STEM access to across the state exponentially, encouraging a growth of STEM based jobs. Supporting this bill will help support our island's robotics programs, ensuring a secure future for STEM students of Hawai'i.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 10:27:13 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Sandvig	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is John Sandvig, and I am a constituent of District 37. I am writing to you today representing Mililani High School FIRST Robotics, as a mentor of the team and a teacher at Mililani High School.

I am writing to urge you to strongly consider furthering this bill to support the STEM educational experiences of our children in Hawai'i.

We are not asking Hawaii to do the impossible; we are asking Hawaii to be consistent. **The Hawaii High School Athletic Association (HHSAA) already officially recognizes Esports**, holding sanctioned state tournaments for competitive gaming since 2019. If our state can recognize the value of teamwork, strategy, and digital skills in video gaming, we should extend that same recognition to the physical engineering and applied coding found in competitive robotics.

Currently, states such as Texas, Connecticut, Arizona, and Minnesota also recognize robotics as a sport under their own athletic leagues. Classifying robotics as a sport here would allow programs across Hawaii to access the funding they require to compete sustainably. Many teams operate with indefinite support, yet they provide crucial opportunities for students to develop skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Supporting these programs will continue to build the desperately needed industries here in Hawaii, especially our local engineers, computer scientists, and technicians.

Currently, our program's funding comes primarily from sources not affiliated with our school, which forces us into a difficult cycle. We spend countless hours planning and running fundraising events just to "keep the lights on". This is time that could be better spent on engineering, coding, or community outreach. With registration fees for a single competition often exceeding several thousand dollars, we are frequently forced to make heartbreaking choices: do we spend our limited funds on building a competitive robot, or do we save that money to travel for off-island competitions that provide our students with broader experiences? Passing this bill would not only alleviate some of this financial pressure but also grant our students the legitimacy and respect already afforded to traditional athletes and esports competitors.

We ask for your consideration, and we hope you understand the implications of this bill. Not only will this benefit our students, but it will also benefit the State as a whole. Hawaii is the future of technology.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Sandvig

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 12:05:42 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

My name is Sarah Lee from District 25. I am in full support of HB2534. I am a part of student leadership for Kalani High School's robotics team, and I have seen firsthand how participating in robotics builds not only technical skills, but also work ethic, teamwork, leadership, and more in students after just one year. Students graduate from robotics with the confidence to build a better world and the skills to do so. Robotics is just as important, if not more, of an extracurricular as any other sport.

Without proper funding, robotics teams cannot purchase parts and resources to promote STEM in their community. Isolated in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Hawaii's cost of shipping remains extremely high, thereby putting our state's robotics teams at an even greater disadvantage. My team finds ways around this cost, through writing grants, fundraising, and donations, but this never seems to be enough to achieve everything that we would like to do. Whether it be for building the robot or for teaching academics, everything costs money. Most robotics teams lack the financial foundation to start with a competition team, much less start initiatives to spread robotics in our community. With funding from the Department of Education, the next generation of leaders can find more opportunities to gain skills and find a safe community. Supporting this bill will support STEM, students, and robotics education.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 1:53:54 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Isabel Preciado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a student of James Campbell High School, this bill would positively impact those in our all across the state. Many students have lost access to their robotics clubs do to no funding. All students should be able to pursue their passions for STEM, the same way student athletes do. Passing this bill would allow all schools to have funding so students interested in robotics can have materials and coaches needed to succeed. This provides a pathway to success for students that want to enter the STEM field, and if the state government were to fund it, we would have many students enter those careers and positively impact our society and economy.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 2:18:06 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 8:50:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
M. Leilani DeMello	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I KĀKO‘O this bill, give our keiki the opportunity to excel in this arena.

Mahalo,

M. Leilani DeMello

‘Ōla‘a, Puna, Hawai‘i

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:33:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jie Zhang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha my name is Jie Zhang from district Hawaii. I am reaching out to you to humbly request that your committee passes house bill 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. Vote yes to STEM!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:53:47 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aleizay Rose Angel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Aleizay Rose Angel from District 9. 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. Say yes to STEM!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 10:33:39 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
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

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 11:01:10 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noelle Lindenmann	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members:

I write in support of HB2534. I am a mentor for the Tiki Techs, a robotics team at Kealakehe High School in Kona, and I see very driven students who are always trying to share their knowledge with the community. I see them always striving to go to all the competitions they can, but I also see them scramble for funding.

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 our next generation of STEM students - all of whom inspire me.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

Noelle Lindenmann, Kailua-Kona

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:15:35 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alaina Hook	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Alaina Hook from Maui County. I am reaching out to you to humbly request that your committee passes the B 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. SAY YES TO STEM!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:18:22 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elisha Mae Rabanes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Elisha Rabanes from district 9. 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. Say yes to STEM!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:19:32 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aaron Omuro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Aaron Omuro from District 9. I am reaching out to you to humbly request that your committee passes HB 2534. This bill will address important issues regarding the lack of funding for robotics programs. I have been apart of robotics since I was in 5th grade. As a senior in high school at Maui High, I have been apart of the robotics program each year, competing in the VEX program. Robotics has taught me so much about STEM topics and opened my eyes to future careers in this field. Furthermore, I have helped with many elementary school/ middle school competitions. As I go toward college to pursue engineering, the skills gained in robotics and polished through schooling can help me grow the STEM industry in Hawai‘i. I strongly support this bill because it can for students like me the ability to find a passion and sustain our STEM industry.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:20:36 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

My name is Klarenz Amarillo from District 9. I am advocating that the committee passes the HB 2534. This bill will addresses the importance on the lack of funding within the robotics program. It continues to protect the educational programs necessary for sustaining our local STEM industries. I support this bill supports me! Say yes for STEM!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:21:41 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caleb Kopatz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Caleb Kopatz from district nine. I was writing today to express my support for HB2534. As a member of the robotics community it is very important to myself that more funding is secured for this activity. Robotics itself is a very expensive endeavor, often requiring upwards of \$10,000 dollars to build a sufficient machine. HB2534 would aid in securing more funding so that the youth of Hawaii can explore their STEM interests.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:24:08 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

STEM is a growing industry that has incredible potential to become one of Hawai‘i’s top-earning prospects. Not fully supporting youths' engagement in the hands-on learning Robotics provides is a failure of the system and its future prospects.

MY NAME IS JAMES TABLANG FROM DISTRICT 9. I AM REACHING OUT TO YOU TO HUMBLLY 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. SAY YES TO STEM!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:31:53 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rya Ortogero	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep. Woodson, Rep. La Chica, and Committee of Education,

I am a student at Maui High School and I am reaching out to you to humbly request that your committee passes the HB2534. 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 am in full support of this bill, as this bill will support me. Say yes to stem!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:32:13 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
waiaulia smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this testimony. Im on the team for Maui High and I spend 6 days out of the week here for 3-6 hours everyday. This is a huge commitment and we are competing in an international competition. Passing this bill would mean huge progress for us as we would be able to succeed. Please pass this bill for students like me and all the other kekei that are interested in robotics.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:32:38 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Veina Namsawat	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Robotics is a great learning experience for all students. Many students in many different STEM pathways can benefit from experiencing robotics. However, robotics is expensive with many competitions not taking place in Hawai'i. So, I think that robotics should be considered a sport and get proper funding so students can thrive in the robotics program.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:34:21 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beckett Hummelke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Beckett Hummelke from Waikapu, Maui. I am reaching out to you to humbly request that your committee passes the HB 2534. This bill will address important issues regarding lack of funding for robotics programs, programs I love very deeply. It will continue to protect the educational programs that are necessary for sustaining our local STEM industries.

Respectfully,

Beckett Hummelke

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:35:29 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ian Payba	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Robotics not only has allowed me to gain knowledge in various skills involving engineering and programming, but also allowed me to learn how to communicate effectively and provided me with the opportunity to compete against other teams competitively. To me, a sport is an activity that includes or doesn't include teamwork. Robotics can fit into both of those categories. Not only that, a sport is a competitive activity where you compete against other people/teams. Robotics does such.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:36:16 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

My name is Janette White from Maui. I am reaching out to respectfully request that your committee pass HB 2534. This bill will address important uses regarding programs. It will continue to protect the educational programs necessary to sustain our local STEM industries. I support this bill because this bill supports me.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:36:50 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tristan bautista	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Tristan Renz Bautista. I am reaching out to humbly request that your committee passes the HB2534. This bill will address important issues regarding the lack of funding for the Robotics Program. 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. Say yes to stem!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:39:15 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leon Chen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Leon Chen I am reaching out to you to humbly request that your committee passed 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 and all interested in STEM. SAY YES TO STEM!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:39:31 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ryan Ong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

`My name is Ryan Ong from District Kahului. I am reaching out to you to humbly request that your committee passes the HJB 2534. This bill will address important issues regarding the lack of funding for robotics programs that are necessary for sustaining our local Stem industries. I support this bill because this bill supports me. SAY YES TO STEM!!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:39:33 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

My name is Jeter from District Wailuku. 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 the robotics programs. I believe that kids in STEM should be boosted up, not hindered, and through this funding, my friends would be able to excel in the things they love. As well as get and enjoy better competition.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:40:00 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaizen Taogoshi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kaizen from district kahului. 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. Say yes to stem!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:49:26 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Masen Mascoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Masen from Maui High School 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 supporting our local stem industries. Thank you.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 11:10:35 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gregory John	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Honorable Chair and distinguished committee members,

My name is Gregory Cachero from District 32, and I am a senior in high school. I am reaching out to humbly request that your committee passes HB 2534.

This bill addresses critical issues regarding the lack of funding for robotics programs. It will help protect the educational initiatives necessary for sustaining our local industries. I support this bill because it supports me and my peers who wish to pursue careers in STEM fields. Please vote "yes" on this bill.

Mahalo, Gregory Cachero

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 11:14:40 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tayton Perez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support placing robotics in the athletic program.

Monte Carlson - SUPPORT

Robotics should be in the athletic program because they are a team working together for a goal. If esports is in the athletic program, then so should robotics.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 11:17:15 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joti Huynh	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I've been a long time supporter of Robotics and it has brought great change to my life. Multiple times it has brought me support for my mental health and has multiple aspects such as team work and competitiveness to support this bill.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 11:34:27 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I believe that robotic sport should be Esplish.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 12:41:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rodrigo Del Carpio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Rodrigo Del Carpio, and I am from the Honolulu Ala Moana District. I have experienced a personal impact and benefit from robotics being offered at my school, as it has taught me leadership and collaboration skills alongside the technical knowledge acquired.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 7:10:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Peter H Han	Hawaii FIRST Robotics	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Peter, and I am a board member of Hawai‘i FIRST Robotics, as well as an educator and robotics mentor working directly with students across our state. I am here today in strong support of this measure, which would designate robotics as an interscholastic sport and provide equitable funding and stipends for robotics coaches, comparable to those provided for athletic programs.

Robotics is not an extracurricular club—it is a rigorous, team-based, competitive program that demands the same level of commitment, preparation, and coaching as any traditional sport. Students train for months, often year-round. They attend practices multiple times a week, travel to competitions, study strategy, analyze performance, and learn how to win—and lose—with integrity. The only difference is that instead of cleats or jerseys, they wear safety glasses and build robots.

Through FIRST Robotics, students develop exactly the skills Hawai‘i says it wants to grow: critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, leadership, and resilience. These programs are proven pathways into high-demand careers in engineering, computer science, advanced manufacturing, and skilled trades—careers that are essential to diversifying and strengthening Hawai‘i’s economy.

Just as importantly, robotics is one of the most inclusive activities available to our students. Robotics teams engage students who may never step onto a traditional athletic field—students who are creative, analytical, introverted, neurodiverse, or simply looking for a place to belong. On a robotics team, every student has a role: programming, mechanical design, electrical work, project management, media, outreach, and strategy. This is equity in action.

Despite this, robotics coaches across Hawai‘i are almost entirely unpaid or underpaid, often volunteering hundreds of hours on top of their full-time teaching or professional responsibilities. Athletic coaches receive stipends because we recognize the value of their time, expertise, and impact on students. Robotics coaches deserve the same recognition and support. Without sustainable funding, we risk burnout, program instability, and the loss of opportunities for students—particularly in underserved and rural communities.

Designating robotics as an interscholastic sport sends a powerful message: that academic competition, innovation, and workforce readiness matter just as much as physical competition. It tells students that excellence in STEM is valued, celebrated, and worth investing in. It also helps schools retain qualified mentors and expand access so that robotics is not a privilege, but an opportunity available to all.

This bill is not about replacing athletics—it is about standing alongside them. It is about recognizing that today’s students need multiple pathways to success, and that teamwork, discipline, and school pride can be built with robots just as powerfully as with balls or bats.

On behalf of Hawai‘i FIRST Robotics, our educators, our mentors, and—most importantly—our students, I respectfully urge you to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to the future of Hawai‘i’s keiki.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 4:23:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Collat	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I've been involved with FIRST Robotics in Hawai'i as a volunteer for 14 years. I do so not because I had a child in the program or because I'm a teacher. I've done it because these school robotics programs are absolutely amazing, and the students that participate in the are beyond impressive. They are the future innovators and problem-solvers who will not only solve our biggest challenges but will diversify Hawaii's economy. The robotics programs are super competitive, providing all the lessons of athletics (determination, hard work, perseverance, teamwork, character while under adversity, etc.) but also actual real-world skills applicable far beyond the field of play. It's been said that **robotics is the one sport where every kid can go pro**. That's why I've been involved for so long, why I organized our first-ever Robotics Signing Day last year to celebrate the graduating seniors headed to the engineering schools of their choice, and why I'm now the President of Hawai'i FIRST Robotics, the non-profit helping to bring these programs to our students across the state.

But for all the time I put into this, the teachers and coaches of the teams put in way more time. Since it's most often an after-school activity, they usually do so on a volunteer basis. That's not right. If they were to spend that same time helping a kid put a ball through a hoop, they'd be getting paid. Robotics competitions are far more consequential, and the educators who take on the extra effort that is so rewarding for our students--and our community--deserve some remuneration for this incredibly worthwhile sport!

Thanks for the opportunity to testify!

Michael Collat

President, Hawai'i FIRST Robotics

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 6:26:59 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arabella Cruz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Arabella Cruz, a current high school sophomore in O'ahu.

I am in support of HB2534 because I once participated in robotics. It took considerable time, motivation, and teamwork to prepare for upcoming competitions, just like sport teams. When a robotics team at my school was eligible for a competition outside of Hawai'i, receiving funds for flights, hotels, and food were difficult. Receiving recognition from the State would allow robotics teams across Hawai'i to participate in once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Please vote yes for this bill, therefore supporting and including our keiki with interests in STEM. Mahalo for your support for a brighter tomorrow.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 7:28:05 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bryan silver	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2534
RELATING TO ROBOTICS**

TO: House Committee on Education (EDN)

**FROM: Bryan Silver, Engineering Teacher, Kalani High School
Robotics Coach (23 years)**

Regional Director, FIRST Robotics Competition Hawai‘i

DATE/TIME: Thursday, February 5, 2026, 2:00 PM

SUBJECT: Strong Support for establishing robotics as an interscholastic sport and appropriating funds to DOE

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Bryan Silver, and I submit this testimony in strong support of HB2534, which appropriates funds to the Department of Education to establish robotics as an interscholastic sport. I am an Engineering Teacher at Kalani High School, a robotics coach for 23 years, and I have run six types of robotics and manage five teams this year. I also serve as the Regional Director for the FIRST Robotics Competition in Hawai‘i.

Robotics delivers the same core outcomes we value in athletics: commitment, teamwork, discipline, coaching, competitive excellence, and representing one’s school with pride. It also develops career-relevant skills students can carry directly into Hawai‘i’s workforce and post-secondary programs, including programming, CAD design, fabrication, electrical systems, data analysis, technical communication, and project management. In other words, robotics is not just a club activity, it is a rigorous, team-based, competitive program that trains students to solve complex problems under real constraints.

Establishing robotics as an interscholastic sport is also an equity issue. Right now, access is uneven across the state because teams often depend on inconsistent fundraising, volunteer mentor availability, and family capacity to pay fees or travel. DOE support can help normalize access so more schools can field teams, retain coaches, and sustain programs year to year, including schools that have historically had fewer resources.

I also appreciate that HB2534 explicitly directs DOE to minimize documentation required for teams to participate. That matters. Teachers and coaches already carry heavy workloads, and unnecessary paperwork can become a barrier that prevents schools from even starting.

In closing, HB2534 is a practical investment in student opportunity, school engagement, and Hawai'i's long-term STEM and skilled workforce pipeline. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB2534.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

**Bryan Silver
Engineering Teacher, Kalani High School
Robotics Coach (23 years)
Regional Director, FIRST Robotics Competition Hawai'i**

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 7:36:44 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emi Hagiwara	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Emi Hagiwara. I'm a robotics coach and ask that you support HB 2534. Robotics programs provide students with real-world STEM experience—teamwork, problem-solving, and perseverance—but they often operate with very limited funding. I see the impact every day in my students. This bill would help keep robotics programs accessible and sustainable. I hope you'll vote yes.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 7:40:45 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I AM REACHING OUT TO YOU TO HUMBLLY 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. SAY YES TO STEM!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:38:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support this bill.

Thank you for voting to make Robotics an intrrscholadtic sport!

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:35:33 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melissa Hummelke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill to recognize robotics as a sport in the effort to increase funding. Robotics is extremely valuable to our island community due to the skills it fosters in our youth. It teaches teamwork, communication, enhances math/science skills, responsibility and establishes a sense of pride in a job well done.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:55:27 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Geoffrey Hummelke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support of HB2534 because I feel that it provides more incentive for students to participate in the sport of robotics. This would be good for the state of Hawaii because it will encourage our young people to gain skills that are necessary for the technology job market that will only continue to grow as the 21st century progresses. Students who participate in robotics not only develop technical skills such as computer programming, industrial design, construction, and machining, but also develop intangible skills such as negotiation, teamwork, collaboration, and leadership. Encouraging the young people of Hawaii to participate in the sport of robotics by making it a state-recognized sport will provide Hawaii with a larger pool of tech-savvy, entrepreneurial-minded young people who will be more likely to contribute to helping the state economy diversify into the technology sector in a profound way. Please vote for HB2534. Thank you.

HB-2534

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 8:56:48 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Dulay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Sarah Dulay and I was a student participant in robotics. Thanks to my participation in robotics, I'm now a supervisory engineer for the federal government and I plan events for two of the programs in Hawai'i servicing grades 4-12. I humbly ask the committee to pass HB2534 which will help to address funding issues that our robotics programs are facing. I'm seeing teams struggle to find funding and struggling to keep their programs running. Sponsors are hard to come by and some sponsors are unable to continue their support year-to-year. Approval of HB2534 will help to protect the educational programs that are necessary for sustaining our local STEM industries. Being a federal worker for almost 14 years, it's rewarding to see familiar faces at work as students I saw in the program are now graduating with their engineering degrees and choosing to stay in Hawaii to work. Supporting STEM in our schools supports STEM in our workforce.