

STATE OF HAWAII

HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD

650 IWILEI ROAD, SUITE 268

HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

March 24, 2026

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR

PERSON TESTIFYING: Mitzie Higa, Licensing Specialist, on behalf of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB)

DATE: March 24, 2026

TIME: 9:30 am

LOCATION: Conference Room 309 and Video Conference

TITLE OF BILL: SB 2125 SD1HD1 Teacher Licensing; Emergency Hire; Exemptions; Licensure Progress

POSITION: Opposes SB 2125 SD1HD1

Chair Jackson Sayama, and Members of the House Committee on Labor:

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) respectfully opposes SB2125,SD1, HD1 which permits the Department of Education to hire unlicensed individuals as teachers on an emergency basis for five, rather than three, years. Requires that unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis make continuous and verifiable progress toward satisfying licensing requirements.

HTSB wants to point out that the Emergency Hire Permit was created with the intention to be an exception, not the norm. This is evident in the criteria set forth by statute. It was created for hard-to-fill areas, and individuals were given three years to become licensed. **The purpose of Chapter 302A is to have licensed, qualified teachers teaching our public school children in Hawai'i. The three-year mark was to ensure that individuals would enter a State Approved Teacher Education Program (SATEP) as soon as possible while getting paid as a full-time teacher. A SATEP for an Emergency Hire teacher does not take three years to complete as is the norm, as it was intended.**

To qualify for an Emergency Hire Permit (EHP) an applicant already must have a bachelor's degree as part of the requirements for an EHP, their SATEP will be a graduate degree, so it will take 1-2 years. If exigent circumstances beyond the individuals' control prevent them from obtaining licensure within three years, the Hawai'i Administrative Rules already allow HTSB to suspend the rules and grant the individual a fourth Emergency Hire Permit. Also, those with J-1 Visas, or those who attended a State Approved Teacher Education Program on the mainland, who already have a teaching degree, just need to pass their Praxis tests, and what they really need, that the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) is now, as of this year, offering study help for these exams for J-1 Visa holders. Applicants are able to pass these Praxis exams, before they apply for a license, or within their first year, and then become a licensed teacher, and they will earn a higher salary because of it.

This bill will only delay the completion of a SATEP for our teachers with Emergency Hire Permits in a timely manner and cause students in our public school system to be without a qualified, licensed teacher for five (5) years instead of three (3).

HTSB's position is grounded in our Vision of a highly esteemed public education system supported by rigorous professional teacher standards that foster student success, and our Mission to collaboratively set high licensing and credentialing standards that:

1. **Ensure every child in Hawai'i has a qualified teacher**
2. Promote professionalism and teaching excellence
3. Build public confidence in the teaching profession
4. Strengthen accountability to the public

Extending Emergency Hire Permits beyond three years directly conflicts with these commitments.

High-quality, equitable education depends on **well-prepared teachers** who are equipped to persevere and grow during their early years in the classroom. **Research and experience show that teachers who enter through fast-track or alternative routes, particularly in urban districts, often begin underprepared and leave the profession at higher rates. Our state's Emergency Hire Permit structure is designed to mitigate this by requiring individuals to pursue an official teaching degree within the three-year window, or if they are teachers with a degree, but received their teaching degree from an out-of-state or an out-of-country institution, then they just need to pass the Praxis tests for Core, Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT), and Content.**

To qualify for an Emergency Hire Permit, individuals must already hold a **bachelor's degree**. Completing a post-baccalaureate program or master's degree typically requires only one to two years, well within the existing three-year timeframe. Extending the permit to five years would allow individuals with any bachelor's degree, even in unrelated fields such as fashion design, to teach in our elementary or special education classrooms, or any classroom, for a longer period without completing the essential pedagogical preparation.

These facts are especially concerning because Emergency Hire teachers are most often placed in elementary and special education classrooms, where strong foundations in literacy, numeracy, differentiated instruction, and support for multilingual learners are critical. In some cases, students have had Emergency Hire teachers every year of elementary school. As we continue to address learning loss from the COVID-19 years, **further lowering preparation expectations would compound existing challenges.**

Other states that have reduced their qualification standards are now experiencing negative consequences from those policy shifts. More data may be found here-[\[Responding to the Data How Texas Is Re-thinking Teacher Certification.pdf\]](#) Hawai'i should not follow that path. Doing so would be a disservice not only to our keiki, but also to individuals who aspire to become fully licensed, highly qualified teachers in our communities.

While Hawai'i faces significant teacher shortages—ranging from 1,000 to 1,200 vacancies at the start of each school year—**lowering standards is not the solution. Instead, our state should invest in strategies that strengthen the profession, including:**

1. **Supporting ways to teacher retention**
2. **Paying off student loans for SATEPs**
3. **Expanding National Board Certified Teacher pathways**
4. **Increasing mentoring and induction support, especially for those with Emergency Hire Permits**
5. **Providing study sessions for those who need to pass Praxis tests**

6. Implementing a Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program with structured guidance and tuition support (Teacher candidates can earn while they learn, without having to pay for tuition, thus they will not accumulate student loans)

The approaches listed above uphold qualified teachers while addressing workforce needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. For the reasons stated above, the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board respectfully **asks the Committee to oppose this bill.**



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

Date: 03/24/2026

Time: 09:30 AM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: LAB

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB2125, HD1, RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING.

Purpose of Bill: Permits the Department of Education to hire unlicensed individuals as teachers on an emergency basis for five, rather than three, years. Requires that unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis make continuous and verifiable progress toward satisfying licensing requirements. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

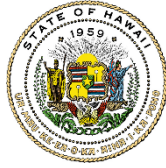
The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 2125, HD1, which would extend the emergency-hire teaching permit from three to five years.

Emergency-hire teachers are a foundational component of Hawaii's educator workforce. The Department relies on approximately 1,000 emergency-hire teachers to meet teacher workforce needs. Hiring on an emergency basis has more than doubled over the last five years, and Neighbor Island schools continue to experience this at higher rates than Oahu – a pattern that reflects structural workforce conditions rather than a temporary gap.

These individuals often bring valuable professional experience and strong community ties. The majority, however, arrive without prerequisites already in hand and must simultaneously complete admission requirements, secure financing, manage coursework, and fulfill a full-time teaching load. Currently, only one in three emergency-hire teachers obtains a license under the current deadline.

Extending the permit to five years would give emergency-hire teachers a realistic path to licensure and reduce the churn that falls hardest on Hawaii's most vulnerable schools. SB 2125, HD1 supports steady, documented progress toward licensure while protecting instructional quality and preserving the Department's investment in local recruitment.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2125, HD1.



STATE OF HAWAII

Executive Office on Early Learning

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

TO: Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair
House Committee on Labor

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

SUBJECT: Testimony on S.B. No. 2125, H.D. 1 – RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING.

Committee: LAB
Date: Tuesday, March 24, 2026
Time: 9:30 a.m.
Location: Conference Room 309

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

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments in support of S.B. 2125, H.D. 1, a bill that adjusts the length of time the Hawai'i State Department of Education (HIDOE) may employ emergency hire permit holders.

This measure aligns with the Early Learning Board's current framework of policy priorities, which are grounded in the Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan. Specifically, the bill advances State Plan Building Block 4: Early Childhood Workforce, by providing additional flexibility to HIDOE, EOEL, and the Hawai'i State Public Charter School Commission (HSPCSC) to meet the staffing needs of the public PreK system.

EOEL supports the current draft of the bill which extends, rather than eliminates, the time limit. This approach responds to workforce realities while maintaining a defined, time-limited permit structure, and ensures that emergency hire permits serve as temporary bridges to full licensure, not permanent or parallel hiring pathways.

This bill helps address a unique situation currently facing our Public PreK workforce. Highly qualified EOEL Public PreK teachers must have graduated from a State-Approved Teacher Education Program (SATEP) and hold a teaching license in Early Childhood Education. This is a set of qualifications for which there had been no significant demand prior to the recent expansion of the Public PreK program, which began in 2023.

We continue to work with the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board and higher education partners to ensure pathways are responsive to this new demand. However, until the system adjusts, options for emergency permit holders teaching in EOEL public PreK classrooms to obtain a license in Early Childhood Education remain extremely limited.

There are no post-baccalaureate programs in the State that lead to a teaching license in Early Childhood Education, which is often the fastest route to licensure. In addition, there is only one active Master's degree program in Hawai'i that leads to initial licensure in Early Childhood Education, offered by Chaminade University.

Informal feedback from emergency permit holders currently teaching in EOEL classrooms underscores both their commitment to the profession and the structural challenges they face as they pursue licensure. They estimate that completing their programs will take between two and four years, and some shared that they pursued a second bachelor's degree, not by choice, but due to the limited availability of alternative pathways. In addition, we've heard from teachers who struggle to piece together financial support for coursework outside of the University of Hawai'i system, which is not currently eligible for the State's Early Childhood Educator Stipend program. Given these challenges, extending the permit limit to five years would meaningfully reduce pressure, allowing them to better balance coursework with full-time teaching responsibilities and personal obligations as they pursue licensure.

We appreciate the Legislature's ongoing investment and shared commitment to strengthening Hawai'i's early learning system for our youngest keiki and their 'ohana. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of S.B. No. 2125, H.D. 1.



‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAI‘I

Legislative Testimony

Hō‘ike Mana‘o I Mua O Ka ‘Aha‘ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Labor
Tuesday, March 24 2026 at 9:30 a.m.

By

Nathan Murata, Dean
College of Education

and

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD
Interim Provost

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

SB 2125 SD1 HD1 – RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING

Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2125 SD1 HD1 - Relating to Teacher Licensing which permits the Department of Education to hire unlicensed individuals as teachers on an emergency basis for five, rather than three years. The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa College of Education believes that an extension to five years allows for time to licensure completion.

UH respectfully notes, however, that hiring practices especially for emergency hires and unlicensed individuals are the direct responsibility of the Hawai‘i Department of Education, therefore UH system will defer to the Hawai‘i Department of Education.

Mahalo for your continued commitment to Hawai‘i’s students and educators, and for considering these comments as you refine this important measure.



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Andrea Eshelman
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR

Item: SB 2125, SD1, HD1 – Relating to Teacher Licensing

Position: Support

Hearing: Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 am, Room 309

Submitter: Osa Tui, Jr., President - Hawai'i State Teachers Association

Dear Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association **supports** S.B. 2125, SD1, HD1 to help address the state's persistent teacher shortage. By extending the employment limit for emergency hires from three to five years, this bill allows schools to retain dedicated educators who are already established in their classrooms but may need additional time to complete the licensing process.

This change provides much-needed stability for students and schools without compromising professional standards. Completing a licensure program—which often includes student teaching and rigorous exams—is incredibly difficult while managing a full-time classroom workload. Under the existing law, a teacher who is performing well but has not completed every requirement by the end of their third year will be let go.

Extending the timeline will allow the education system to capitalize on the valuable experience an emergency hire has gained. It also helps circumvent the difficulties associated with vacant positions and the use of long-term substitutes.

S.B. 2125, SD1, HD1 maintains important protections by ensuring unlicensed individuals are only hired when no licensed teacher is available. It also preserves transparency through regular reporting to the board regarding the progress of these hires and the status of teacher shortages across the state.

Mahalo.

SB-2125-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 10:07:53 PM

Testimony for LAB on 3/24/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
amy agbayani	The Legal Clinic for Immigrants	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Testimony in support submitted by

Amy Agbayani, President The Legal Clinic

The Legal Clinic is a non-profit organization that provides legal representation and support for low-income immigrants. We strongly support sb2125 that permits emergency hire teachers to teach for 5 years. The 5 year duration would apply to all emergency hire teachers including J-1 visa teachers consistent with the 5 year duration of an educators J-1 visas.

The bill will help Hawai'i address teacher shortages by providing competent teachers particularly where there are shortages in various geographic areas and disciplines. The Department of Education currently has over 200 J-1 visa teachers from the Philippines and administrators attest the program helps meet teacher shortages and the teachers perform valuable service to their students. My personal contact with some of these teachers and comments from my community contacts makes me confident that these teachers and the students are well-served.

These J-1 visa teachers can serve at any of the public schools and can teach in multicultural classrooms. It is also important to note that they were assigned to some schools with high proportion of local and immigrant Filipino students. As noted, Filipino students are the largest ethnic group in the public schools and immigrants from the Philippines represent the largest country of origin group, making up nearly half—or 45.8 percent—of all immigrants in Hawai'i

We support this bill as it will benefit our schools by having emergency hire teachers, including Visiting International Educators available to teach for 5 years.

Mahalo. Amy Agbayani



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2125, SD1, HD1 - RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING

House Committee on Labor

Rep. Jackson Sayama, Chair

Rep. Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: March 24, 2026 | Letter Date: March 23, 2026

Dear Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

The Legal Clinic supports SB2125, SD1, HD1, which strengthens Hawai`i's educator workforce by extending the allowable period for emergency hire teachers from three to five years, while requiring continuous and verifiable progress toward licensure.

As a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing immigrant justice across Hawai`i through immigration legal services, community education, and policy advocacy, TLC supports policies that create fair and practical pathways for individuals – including many noncitizen professionals such as teachers on J-1 visas – who are contributing meaningfully to our communities while working toward professional certification.

SB2125, SD1, HD1 recognizes the realities facing Hawai`i's education system and the individuals stepping in to meet urgent workforce needs. Emergency hire teachers play a critical role in addressing persistent staffing shortages, particularly in hard-to-fill positions and underserved schools. The current three-year limit often forces capable and effective educators out of the classroom before they can complete licensure requirements, disrupting student learning, and undermining workforce stability.

SB2125, SD1, HD1 addresses this challenge by extending the allowable employment period for emergency hires to five years, providing a more realistic and attainable pathway to licensure. For international educators on J-1 visas, a five-year permit period is also helpful because it aligns with the duration of their authorized stay under the J-1 visa program. SB2125, SD1, HD1 further strengthens accountability by requiring emergency hire teachers to demonstrate continuous and verifiable progress toward meeting licensure requirements. This balanced approach supports teacher retention while maintaining clear expectations that educators move steadily toward full certification.

TLC urges the Committee to pass SB2125, SD1, HD1 to support workforce stability for our schools, strengthen educational continuity for our students, and promote fair and practical pathways for the dedicated educators serving Hawai`i's communities.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of The Legal Clinic,

Christina Sablan
Community & Policy Advocate



www.hicir.org | Instagram @hicir
hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights
In SUPPORT of SB2125 SD1
Relating to Teacher Licensing
Hearing: Tuesday, March 23rd, 2026

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

My name is Liza Ryan Gill, testifying on behalf of the **Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR)**, a coalition of immigrant-serving and immigrant-led organizations working statewide to advance policies that protect immigrant and migrant communities and strengthen our shared future. HCIR respectfully submits this testimony **in strong support of SB2125 SD1**.

HCIR is a statewide coalition of immigrant-serving and immigrant-led organizations working to advance policies that protect immigrant and migrant communities and strengthen Hawai‘i’s shared future. Education is one of the most powerful tools we have to promote equity, opportunity, and long-term public well-being, and SB2125 represents an important step toward ensuring that Hawai‘i’s education system serves all students fairly and effectively.

SB2125 SD1 supports educational policies that recognize the diverse realities of Hawai‘i’s students and families, including those from immigrant and mixed-status households. When students feel safe, supported, and valued in their learning environments, they are better able to succeed academically, participate fully in school life, and contribute positively to their communities. Conversely, barriers to access, instability, or exclusionary practices undermine not only individual student outcomes but the strength of our public education system as a whole.

For immigrant and migrant families, schools are often the most trusted public institutions. They are places where children develop skills, confidence, and a sense of belonging. Policies that strengthen inclusivity, clarity, and access in education help ensure that no child is left behind because of language, background, or family circumstances. SB2125 advances these goals by reinforcing Hawai‘i’s commitment to educational equity and student well-being.

Importantly, strong educational policy is also sound public policy. Investments in inclusive and supportive education systems lead to higher graduation rates, a more skilled workforce, and stronger communities. When students are empowered to learn and thrive, Hawai‘i benefits socially, economically, and culturally.

For these reasons, the **Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights respectfully urges the Committee to PASS SB2125 SD1**.



www.hicir.org | Instagram @hicir
hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

With gratitude,

Liza Ryan Gill

Hawai'i Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR)



COMMITTEE ON LABOR
Rep. Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Rep. Mike Lee, Vice Chair

HEARING:
Tuesday, March 24, 2026 at 9:30 am
Via Videoconference and Conference Room 309

TESTIMONY **IN SUPPORT** OF SB 2125, SD1, HD1 - RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING.

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

My name is Veronica Mendoza, Founding Executive Director of Roots Reborn and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui - *The People in Action Maui*. Roots Reborn **strongly supports HB SB 2125, SD1, HD1**, Relating to Education, permits the Department of Education to hire unlicensed individuals as teachers on an emergency basis for five, rather than three, years, and requires that unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis make continuous and verifiable progress toward satisfying licensing requirements.

Roots Reborn is a grassroots, multicultural immigrant-justice and disaster-response organization serving migrant and immigrant communities on Maui and beyond. Born out of the August 2023 wildfires, we immediately stepped in to move aid, navigate systems alongside families, and build the trusted relationships that still anchor our work today. What began as wildfire response has grown into essential infrastructure for immigrant communities facing overlapping crises—from recovery and housing instability to shifting federal policies, increased enforcement, and rising fear.

In our work we have identified risks to our community presented by unnecessary barriers, such as the current limitations for a visiting international educator permit for educators on the J-1 visa program caused by the limit of emergency hires to three years. The federal J-1 program offers foreign teachers an opportunity to teach grades K - 12 in accredited schools, and federal standards provide for a three year visa term that can be extended to five years if certain criteria are met. Senate Bill 2125, SD1, HD1, would make it easier for foreign teachers to extend their visa status from three to five years.

Senate Bill 2125, SD1, HD1 seeks to extend from three to five years the period for which emergency hire teachers may be employed by the Department of Education, facilitating J-1 visa extensions from three to five years, helping foreign teachers stay at our schools longer, reducing turnover and building more integrated school communities. For this reason, Roots Reborn respectfully requests that you vote **in support of SB 2125, SD1, HD1**.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica', written in a cursive style.

Veronica Mendoza

Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*
El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*



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

Testimony in Support of HB1825 / SB2616 and HB1840 / SB2125

Submitted by: The Teacher Lounge Team

Position: Support

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB1825 / SB2616 and HB1840 / SB2125.

Our organization works closely with schools and educators across Hawai'i, including J-1 teachers who are actively serving in classrooms while working toward full licensure. These educators play a critical role in maintaining instructional continuity, particularly in rural, neighbor island, and high-need schools where staffing challenges are most acute.

These teachers are fully committed to Hawai'i's students and are making documented progress toward licensure. However, the current licensure and permit timelines often do not reflect the practical barriers educators face. Required licensure exams involve multiple components that take significant time to prepare for, schedule, and complete successfully. The cumulative cost of exams and preparation materials can exceed \$1,000, creating a substantial financial burden.

Access challenges further complicate the process. On neighbor islands, limited in-person testing capacity can result in long delays that are outside a teacher's control. Virtual testing options are often not viable due to testing restrictions, technology limitations, or living situations that do not meet strict testing environment requirements.

When permit limits are rigidly applied without accounting for these realities, effective teachers may be forced to leave classrooms despite making steady progress toward licensure. This disrupts student learning, strains school communities, and can discourage educators from continuing to serve in Hawai'i.

While the J-1 teacher program allows educators to serve for up to five years, in practice the combined effects of licensure timelines, testing access, and permit limitations often reduce effective classroom service to no more than three years. This shortened window limits schools' ability to retain experienced teachers and undermines the stability that students and school communities need, as well as limits the cultural exchange and soft diplomacy impact of the J-1 teacher exchange program.

Students benefit most from stability—when teachers are able to remain in their classrooms long enough to build relationships, strengthen instructional practice, and support school culture. Policies that allow reasonable flexibility while maintaining licensure standards help ensure that schools can retain qualified, committed educators while safeguarding educational quality.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support of HB1825 / SB2616 and HB1840 / SB2125. Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Hawai'i's students and schools.

Respectfully submitted,
The Teacher Lounge Team

Your Global Teaching Network

www.teacherlounge.org

COMMITTEE ON LABOR
Rep. Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Rep. Mike Lee, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Tuesday, March 24, 2026 at 9:30 am
Via Videoconference and Conference Room 309

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2125, SD1, HD1 - RELATING TO TEACHER LICENSING.

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

My name is Christine Andrews, and I live in Wailuku, Maui. I am an attorney licensed in Hawaii for over 25 years. Early in my career I worked for many years at the Maui Economic Development Board's Women in Technology Project on gender equity in STEM as a workforce development issue. I focused on issues in recruitment and retention and wrote over ten peer-reviewed papers on best practices in the field.

I submit this testimony to you today in **strong support of SB 2125, SD1, HD1**, Relating to Teacher Licensing, permits the Department of Education to hire unlicensed individuals as teachers on an emergency basis for five, rather than three, years and requires that unlicensed teachers hired on an emergency basis make continuous and verifiable progress toward satisfying licensing requirements.

One of the key workforce development areas I identified in my work with K-12 teachers and administrators and with professors and administrators of our institutions of higher education in Hawaii was the gaps in the education-to-workforce pipeline. This is an issue that we continue to see today when it comes to the education, recruitment and retention of teachers. Before attending law school, I attended the College of Education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, concurrently with a subject matter Master's degree program, to obtain a professional degree in teaching. I completed the coursework and practicum for the professional degree in teaching, but, in order to get a teaching license, at the time, required a one-year, unpaid, teaching practicum with the Department of Education. I could not afford to work for free for a year, so I went to work in a different field which later led me to law school.

That someone like me, who worked full-time while pursuing both a subject-matter Master's degree and a professional degree in teaching, should have switched career tracks away from teaching, after two years of graduate work, because of practical, economic barriers highlighted for me the education-to-workforce barriers between the College of Education at UHM and the Hawaii State Department of Education that contribute to our teacher shortage to this day. While this bill does not address all the barriers, and I would encourage the Committee to question the College and Department on that issue, I do wonder whether the content of this bill would have allowed me to make other choices.

A friend of my daughter's is an energetic and engaging young man with a Bachelor's Degree in Chemistry from the University of California. He does not have a teaching degree, he has a

subject-matter degree in chemistry. After getting his degree in chemistry, he wanted to explore teaching science as a career, and applied as an emergency hire to teach science at Baldwin High School in Wailuku, Maui. In another sign of the dysfunction at the Department of Education, this young man was hired about one week before school started, although he had applied months prior. He had no classroom management experience, there were no curricular materials provided, and yet, under the mentorship of the head of the Baldwin Science Department, he fully embraced his new job.

His first year as an emergency hire science teacher was not without its bumps in the road, but I had the wonderful opportunity to watch him as he found “his calling.” He would come home from school almost every day and say, “I love my job!” Over a year later, he still does. He understood that, under the current law, he would need to get his teaching license within three years to keep this job that he loved. He is currently just over a year and a half into his teaching career. Unfortunately, because he was hired just before the school year started, the uncertainty interfered with his ability to register for teaching degree programs within the UH system designed for emergency hires like him. It is also hard to get a teaching degree within the UH system as a full-time neighbor island teacher. When the end of his first year teaching at Baldwin was complete, there was some difficulty for him in retaining his position, even though the head of the Science Department was leaving for another school and there seemed that there would be no experienced science teachers at Baldwin for the coming year. Part of the barrier for him was that he was not yet enrolled in a teaching degree program, again due to the timing issues with the UH system, and there was pressure now for him to complete the UH system teaching degree within three years, so he instead enrolled in a more costly online teaching degree program out of state so he could keep his job. This is how the current three-year limit for emergency hires can create a barrier for people who want to stay and teach as a profession in Hawaii.

It has been a great experience to witness someone who, like me, wants to pursue a teaching career here in Hawaii. We have chronic shortages of teachers, filled now with teachers on J-1 visas. It is important to have skilled, knowledgeable, professional teachers. Allowing people like my friend five rather than three years to complete their teaching degree is more practical, especially for neighbor island emergency hires who are teaching full time. I **request your support of SB 2125, SD1, HD1**, because it will allow people, especially neighbor islanders, with desirable subject-matter degrees a more appropriate amount of time to get their teaching degree so that they can remain in their schools, avoid them having to pay for expensive online programs instead of going through the UH system simply because of a shortage of time under the current law, and help build the pipeline of experienced teachers like my friend to provide an excellent education for our students.

Thank you for your time and for supporting teachers and students by supporting SB2125, SD1, HD1.

Mahalo nui,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.
Wailuku, Maui

Date: March 24, 2026

Time: 9:30am

Location: 309

Committee: Labor

TO: Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the House Committee on Labor

FROM: Barbara Oura Tavares

DATE: March 22, 2026

RE: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of SB2125, SD1, HD1 - Teacher Licensing

POSITION: STRONG SUPPORT

My name is Barbara Oura Tavares, and I am the Principal of Lihikai Elementary School on the island of Maui. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in strong support of SB2125, SD1, HD1, which would allow the Department of Education to hire unlicensed individuals as teachers on an emergency basis for five years, rather than the current three years.

This extension is a vital and reasonable alternative to help maximize our applicant pool and fill the many vacant K-12 teacher positions across our state. Developing and growing people—both students and teachers—is a responsibility I am privileged to have and take very seriously, as it is how I contribute towards building a stronger, more robust community here on Maui. Supporting this bill allows us to protect the investments we have made in our educators.

Please consider the following impacts this bill will have on our schools, particularly on the neighbor islands:

- **Realistic Timelines for Certification:** Teaching full-time is an incredibly demanding job. This bill gives viable candidates the necessary time to acclimate to these demands while simultaneously studying and preparing for the multiple rigorous exams required to earn a Hawaii State Teachers License. Finding one's rhythm and becoming a highly effective educator takes time.
- **Support for International J1 Teachers:** Neighbor island schools have increasingly come to rely on international J1 teachers. It is important to note that these professionals *are* fully licensed and trained in their home countries; however, their licenses are currently unrecognized by the Hawaii Teachers Standards Board. It takes time for foreign educators

to acculturate to life in a new country and to navigate a brand-new educational system.

- **Retention of Hardworking, Dedicated Staff:** At Lihikai Elementary, I currently have 13 J1 teachers. They are strong, resilient people who approach each day with a growth mindset, reflecting their intention and resolve to be successful, licensed teachers in Hawaii. I see them working diligently every single day to improve their educational effectiveness and build strong relationships with students, families, and colleagues. They have become deeply valued members of our school community.

Unfortunately, under the current three-year limitation, we are facing a heartbreaking reality. I have teachers who are just shy of successfully completing their Praxis exams who will be forced to return to the Philippines this June. They are not leaving because they want to, but simply because the clock has run out on their emergency hire status.

These emergency-hired individuals are some of the most determined and hardest-working people I know, and they teach with so much heart. We have invested heavily in them—both in and out of the classroom—to support their journey. Sending them away when they are on the cusp of licensure is a loss for our students, our school, and our community.

Giving these educators five years instead of three will keep dedicated, experienced, and deeply invested teachers in our classrooms where they belong. It will also give schools a chance to recoup their investment, rather than being stuck in a revolving door of new, emergency hires year after year.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB2125, SD1, HD1. I strongly urge the committee to vote YES on this bill and the proposed provisions.

Thank you for your time, your public service, and your thoughtful consideration of these points.

Sincerely,



Barbara Oura Tavares

Principal, Lihikai Elementary School

March 22, 2026

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 2125

Relating to Teacher Licensing (Emergency Hires)

To: Chair of the Committee on Education / Committee on Finance

From: Debra Andres Arellano, PhD

Position: Former Emergency Hire & Former High School Administrator

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong **support** of this measure to extend the emergency hiring period for unlicensed individuals from three years to five years. My support comes from a dual perspective: first, as someone who served as an emergency hire during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and second, as a former high school administrator who has seen firsthand why we need to improve our retention efforts.

The Financial and Professional Reality of Emergency Hires

Many people do not realize the immense financial and emotional burden placed on emergency hires. During the pandemic, we stepped in to ensure classrooms remained functional during a global crisis. However, the "unforgiving timeline" of a three-year permit creates a pressure cooker environment.

Emergency hires are often starting at the lowest pay scales—salaries that are, frankly, insulting given the cost of living in Hawai'i. Expecting an educator to manage a full-time classroom, navigate the emotional needs of students, and simultaneously fund and complete a rigorous licensure program within 36 months is often a mathematical and physical impossibility.

An Administrator's Perspective on Retention

In my time as a high school administrator, I saw a recurring, heartbreaking pattern: talented, dedicated "emergency" educators who loved their students but were forced out of the profession. We lose them not because they lack the skill or the heart, but because of:

- **The Rigid Timeline:** Three years is often not enough time to clear bureaucratic and financial hurdles, especially for those on neighbor islands or in high-need areas.
- **Lack of Structural Support:** Emergency hires are often "thrown into the deep end" with minimal mentorship.

- **Financial Exhaustion:** When you combine low starting pay with the high cost of MTEL/Praxis exams and prep courses, many simply cannot afford to stay.

Why Five Years Matters

Extending this period to five years is not "lowering the bar." Instead, it provides a **realistic bridge** to licensure. It allows these educators to gain the stability they need to actually succeed in their certification programs rather than burning out and quitting. When an emergency hire leaves, the students lose the most—they lose a consistent, caring adult who has already started building relationships in the community.

We need to treat our emergency hires as the future of our workforce, not as temporary "band-aids." I urge you to pass this bill to give these dedicated individuals the time, grace, and support they need to become the fully licensed, long-term teachers our keiki deserve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Debra Andres Arellano

Debra Andres Arellano, PhD

SB-2125-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 7:49:50 PM

Testimony for LAB on 3/24/2026 9:30:00 AM

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

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of this legislation that will provide teachers additional time to prepare and take the teacher examinations for licensure. The first 2.5 to three years are indeed a challenge not because they cannot take the test. The significant cost of relocation and then trying to survive the high cost of living, esp., in rural communities from Kauai to Molokai and Kohala, Kau etc. represent significant economic survival challenges. We all know this as both residents and esp., those starting a career. The teachers need additional time to save, prepare and, successfully take the different teacher exams as well as successfully teach students. Any assistance in the short term will contribute to the entire community's success in both investment of teachers and, ultimately, students. Mahalo Nui Loa and Selamat Po.

SB-2125-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 9:50:27 PM

Testimony for LAB on 3/24/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ana Laura Flores-Garcia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Ana Flores, and I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of SB2125, which requires the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator’s J-1 visa program.

I am a multilingual mother and member of our Hawai‘i community. I am testifying as an individual. As a parent raising children here, I understand firsthand the importance of educational consistency and the deeply positive impact that caring, culturally competent educators have on our keiki. Our schools deserve staffing pathways that support classroom stability and promote educational excellence for all students. SB 2125, is critical for this purpose by aligning teacher permitting requirements with the federal J-1 exchange teacher program. When permit timelines are not aligned with J-1 visa durations, it creates avoidable uncertainty for school administrators and visiting international educators alike. This can lead to disruptions in staffing and classroom continuity for our students—especially in schools serving multilingual and culturally diverse communities.

By directing the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board to create an alternative permit pathway that aligns with the J-1 program duration, this bill provides a practical, common-sense solution.

As a parent, I especially appreciate how visiting international educators contribute to the cultural competency and linguistic diversity that reflect our state’s rich heritage. Ensuring pathways that support these educators helps our children see the world in broader, more inclusive ways, and it fosters a learning environment that values diversity and global understanding.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to **PASS SB2125**.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify.

Ana Flores

anaflores.mpa@gmail.com