



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:** SB2391, SD2, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Provides annual salary step increases for public schools and public charter school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, HRS, and subject to funds appropriated by the Legislature. Effective 1/1/2077. (SD2)

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) respectfully provides comments on SB 2391, SD 2.

The Department appreciates the Legislature's continued efforts to improve the Department's ability to attract and retain quality employees to support Hawaii's K-12 public schools. Providing automatic step increases in teacher salaries for each year of satisfactory service completed has the potential to be a powerful tool to achieve that goal.

The measure explicitly provides automatic step increases for teachers for each year of satisfactory service. Bargaining Unit 5 (BU5) covers more than just teachers; it also includes librarians, counselors, and resource teachers.

If the Legislature proceeds with authorizing this measure, the Department recommends an adjustment to the language to include all members of BU5.

The Department believes that all of its employees serve diverse yet equally important roles to help ensure student achievement. In light of this, the Department encourages the Legislature to consider including all other Bargaining Units in acknowledgment of the tremendous team effort it takes to ensure a successful Department. Therefore, the Department urges the Legislature to consider including step movements for the following Bargaining Units in this measure:

- Bargaining Unit 1 - Blue-Collar Non-Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 2 - Blue-Collar Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 3 - White-Collar Non-Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 4 - White-Collar Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 6 - Educational Officers
- Bargaining Unit 9 - Registered Professional Nurses

- Bargaining Unit 10 - Institutional, Health, and Correction Officers
- Bargaining Unit 13 - Professional and Scientific Employees

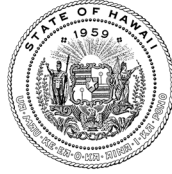
The Department notes that Section 89-9 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes requires negotiations between the employer and the exclusive representative with respect to wages. While it is the Legislature's prerogative whether to approve or reject requests for appropriation of funds, including those resulting from a tentative agreement for a collective bargaining agreement under Section 89-9, this measure would expand the rejection of the requested fund appropriation beyond the cost item portions of the agreement and render the entire collective bargaining agreement void and unenforceable.

Finally, should the Legislature proceed with authorizing this measure, the Department respectfully requests that the Legislature simultaneously include the funds necessary to implement these step movements into the Department's base budget going forward, and include language that would limit the effects of a legislative rejection of requests for appropriation of funds to only "cost items" as defined under Section 89-2 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2391, SD 2.

**JOSH GREEN, M. D.**  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LT. GOVERNOR  
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



**J.N. MUSTO, PhD**  
CHIEF NEGOTIATOR  
KE PO'O KUKĀKŪKA

**STATE OF HAWAI'I | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I**  
**OFFICE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**  
**KE KE'ENA MĀLAMA LIMAHANA AUPUNI**  
**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**  
**KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA**  
235 S. BERETANIA STREET, SUITE 1201  
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96813-2437

Statement of  
**J.N. Musto, PhD**  
Chief Negotiator, Office of Collective Bargaining

Before the  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE EDUCATION**  
Tuesday, March 24, 2026  
9:30AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 309

In consideration of  
**SB2391 SD2, RELATING TO EDUCATION**

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

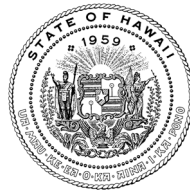
The Office of Collective Bargaining (OCB) appreciates the intent of SB2391 SD2, which would provide automatic salary step increases and longevity increases for public school and public charter school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service, and if those items are negotiated into collective bargaining agreement under HRS §89-9 and subject to funds appropriated by the legislature. However, OCB must respectfully oppose this measure.

Wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment are subject to negotiations as provided under HRS §89-9; this includes step movement and longevity steps. We note that similar statutory language was repealed in 2016 because the legislature agreed that these matters must be negotiated through collective bargaining.

OCB recognizes that SB2391 SD2, provides language clarifying that increases would apply only if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement; however, it is important to be clear about what that means in practice: step movement and longevity increases must still be negotiated each time the parties bargain a new contract.

They are not automatically carried from one contract to the next as this measure would call for. Chapter 89 clearly requires all cost items such as step movements to be negotiated and if agreed upon, they are subject to appropriation by the appropriate legislative bodies.

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



JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM  
HAWAII EMPLOYER-UNION HEALTH BENEFITS TRUST FUND  
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

SETH S. COLBY, Ph.D.  
DIRECTOR

SABRINA NASIR  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE**  
*Ka 'Oihana Mālama Mo'ohelu a Kālā*  
P.O. BOX 150  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96810-0150

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RESEARCH OFFICE  
BUDGET, PROGRAM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DIVISION  
FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION DIVISION  
OFFICE OF FEDERAL AWARDS MANAGEMENT

TESTIMONY BY SETH S. COLBY, Ph.D.  
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE  
TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR  
ON  
SENATE BILL NO. 2391, S.D. 2

**March 24, 2026**  
**9:30 a.m.**  
**Room 309 and Videoconference**

RELATING TO EDUCATION

The Department of Budget and Finance (B&F) opposes this bill.

Senate Bill No. 2391, S.D. 2, provides an annual increment if negotiated into a collective bargaining (CB) agreement (CBA) pursuant to Section 89-9, and subject to sufficient funding by a specific appropriation enacted by the Legislature, for: 1) public school teachers who have completed a year's satisfactory service and complied with the other requirements of Sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642 and 302A-701, as applicable; and 2) public charter school teachers who have completed a year's satisfactory service and complied with other specific requirements of Chapter 302D. In addition, the bill provides longevity step increases if negotiated into a CBA pursuant to Section 89-9, and subject to sufficient funding by a specific appropriation enacted by the Legislature, for: 1) public school teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step and complied with the other requirements of Sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642 and 302A-701, as applicable; and 2) public charter school teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their

maximum increment step or in any longevity step and complied with other specific requirements of Chapter 302D.

B&F opposes this measure because, while the bill acknowledges that these annual salary increments and longevity step increases would apply if negotiated into a CBA, the bill nevertheless legislates specific wage outcomes that are already subject to mandatory CB under Chapter 89, HRS, and preferentially directs the outcome of CB negotiations for a select BU.

While the Legislature has the authority to establish the overall scope of CB, it has already exercised that authority by creating the statutory framework in Chapter 89, HRS. Directly legislating outcomes that fall within mandatory subjects of bargaining, such as wages or step movements, circumvents the very structure the Legislature established, disrupts the CB process, and represents a partial return to pre-Chapter 89 practices of legislated wages and working conditions for public employees.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.



# ‘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 2391 SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2391 SD2 - Relating to Education which would provide annual salary step increases for public schools and public charter schools who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements as determined by the Department of Education and collective bargaining agreements. The University of Hawai'i believes that an increase in educators' salaries is long overdue and is necessary for the recruitment and retention of educators in our public schools and public charter schools.

UH respectfully notes, however, that the structure of the proposed salary increase implementation is directly related to collective bargaining, therefore UH 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.



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96819  
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**Osa Tui, Jr.**  
President

**Logan Okita**  
Vice President

**Cheney Kaku**  
Secretary-Treasurer

**Andrea Eshelman**  
Executive Director

## TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR

**Item: SB 2391, SD2 – Relating to Education**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing: Thursday, 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 (HSTA) **strongly supports** S.B. 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This measure is essential to addressing the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention.

Teachers in Hawai'i are financially struggling under the weight of the state's high cost of living. Once adjusted for these expenses, our educators are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes directly to a staggering turnover rate. Nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state altogether within five years of starting. This high attrition poses a significant problem for our students and the stability of our schools.

Establishing automatic step increases is a priority for our educators and aligns with our current Unit 5 collective bargaining agreement. The collective bargaining agreement explicitly states that "the parties recognize that annual incremental step movements are a viable recruiting and retention tool."

The negotiated language further specifies: "Teachers who are not at the top of the salary schedule and who have effective evaluations shall move to the next highest step of the corresponding class at the beginning of each school year. Annual incremental step movements are subject to funding."

S.B. 2391, SD2 establishes the annual step increases that mirror this negotiated agreement. It provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom by ensuring salary progression is a consistent part of their professional career.

The importance of this stability is also echoed in the *2025 HIDOE Teacher Compensation Report*. This study states: "Automatic annual step progression is the norm across most states and is strongly linked to teacher expectations of fairness...A shift to automatic steps would reinforce trust and potentially improve attrition."

By providing these increases, the State is sending a clear message that it values the experience of its educators. We respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo.



## **SENATE BILL 2391 SD2, RELATING TO EDUCATION**

MARCH 24, 2026 · LAB HEARING

**POSITION:** Support.

**RATIONALE:** The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** SB 2391 SD2, relating to education, which provides annual salary step increases for public schools and public charter school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, HRS, and subject to the availability of funds.

Teachers are the most important professionals in increasing student achievement. According to numerous studies, however, Hawai'i's average teacher salaries are the lowest in the nation when adjusted for cost of living. A 2020 study conducted by APA Consulting on behalf of the Hawai'i Department of Education found that when compared with other high-cost geographic locations, Hawai'i teachers are paid \$7,700 to \$26,000 less than their peers in school districts with similar costs of living, depending on length of service.

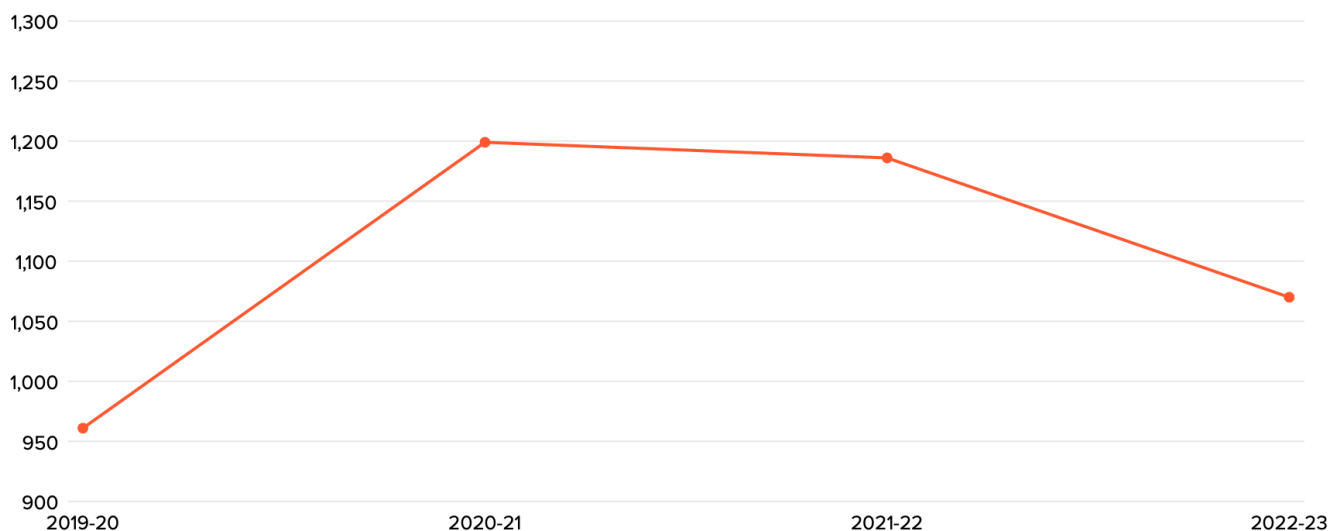
While that pay gap is decreasing because of the legislature's effort to fund differential pay increases and resolve salary compression in recent years, teachers are still underpaid compared to other professions that require a similar level of education. **Restoring guaranteed annual increments, more commonly known as "step increases," would significantly help to alleviate that gap.**

**Kris Coffield, Chairperson • Camron Hurt, Vice Chairperson •  
Amy Perruso and Justin Hughey, SCC Members**

A 2022 survey by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University placed Hawai'i among the 10 states with the lowest teacher-to-population ratio. Moreover, as *Honolulu Civil Beat* reported in August of 2024, voluntary teacher separations remain high, at over 1,000 per year (see chart below).

### Voluntary teacher separations, 2019 to 2023

The number of teachers annually leaving the DOE remains high but has started to decline following the pandemic.



DOE has not released data for the 2023-24 school year.

Chart: Megan Tagami/Civil Beat • Source: [Hawaii DOE](#)

These trends are further exacerbated by the aging teacher workforce. The Hawai'i State Teachers Association has repeatedly cautioned against being overly optimistic about positive teacher retention data, with a wave of experienced educators expected to retire in the next few years.

**Moreover, the state is over reliant on unlicensed teachers to fill vacant positions. A December 2025 report found that 48 percent of new teachers in classrooms statewide are not fully licensed. As the Honolulu Star-Advertiser's editorial board recently wrote, "That is completely unacceptable."** Strengthening teacher pay improves workforce retention. A Stanford University analysis found that raising wages by 10 percent reduces high school dropout rates by 3 to 4 percent. Similarly, a Florida study showed that pay raises reduced teacher attrition by up to 25 percent for hard-to-fill subject areas.

**Contact: [educationcaucusdph@gmail.com](mailto:educationcaucusdph@gmail.com) · 808-679-7454**

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 7:16:13 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Laverne Moore	O`ahu HSTA-Retired Teachers	Support	In Person

Comments:

**To: House Committee on Labor & Government Operations**

**From: Laverne Moore, President, O`ahu HSTA-Retired Teachers**

**Position: Strong Support**

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

**I am writing on behalf of the O`ahu HSTA-Retired Teachers in strong support of SB2391, SD2.**

**As retired educators, we remain deeply committed to the future of Hawai`i's public education system. We know firsthand that the success of our students depends on the stability and morale of our teaching workforce. The current lack of predictable step increases makes it difficult to retain the dedicated teachers our keiki deserve.**

**SB2391, SD2 is a vital step toward professionalizing teacher compensation by making step increases automatic. This measure:**

- Honors Experience: Recognizes the growing expertise of teachers as they progress in their careers.**
- Supports Retention: Provides the financial stability needed to keep quality teachers in our classrooms.**
- Shows Solidarity: Demonstrates that the state values its educators, just as we retired teachers value the colleagues who have followed in our footsteps.**

**We urge you to pass this bill to ensure a stronger, more stable future for Hawai`i's schools.**

**Mahalo,**

**Laverne Moore, President, O`ahu HSTA-Retired Teachers**





## UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE  
REGULAR SESSION OF 2026**

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

Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 AM  
Conference Room 309 & Videoconference

**Re: Testimony on SB2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION**

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

The United Public Workers, AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO (“UPW”) is the exclusive bargaining representative for approximately 14,000 public employees, which includes blue collar, non-supervisory employees in Bargaining Unit 1 and institutional, health, and correctional employees in Bargaining Unit 10, in the State of Hawaii and various counties.

UPW provides comments on SB2391, SD2, which provides annual salary step increases for public school and public charter school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, HRS, and subject to funds appropriated by the Legislature.

UPW recognizes the issues that this bill is trying to address and strongly supports better compensation for public and charter school teachers. However, we are gravely concerned by any legislation that could potentially circumvent, or even undermine, the collective bargaining provisions in Chapter 89, Hawaii Revised Statutes. Despite a provision that states the proposed step increases would be subject to collect bargaining and the availability of funds, we remain concerned.

Statutorily codifying annual wage increases could create a precedent where exclusive representatives feel compelled to seek better contract provisions through legislation rather than negotiating with employers.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

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**HEADQUARTERS**

1426 North School Street  
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Phone 808.847.2631

**HAWAII**

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Hilo, Hawaii 96720-4336  
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**KAUAI**

2970 Kele Street, Suite 213  
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**MAUI**

841 Kolu Street  
Wailuku, Hawaii 96793-1436  
Phone 808.244.0815

1.866.454.4166

Toll Free - Molokai/Lanai only

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 2:38:56 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kian Guan Au	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Bill: SB2391

Committee: House Committee on Labor & Public Employment (LAB)

Hearing Date: March 24, 2026, 9:30 AM

Position: Support

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee on Labor & Public Employment:

Aloha,

My name is Kian Guan Au, and I am a constituent from Honolulu (ZIP 96821). I am writing in strong support of SB2391, which would establish automatic annual salary step increases for public school teachers who meet satisfactory performance standards.

As a public school special education teacher, I see firsthand how workforce stability is essential to maintaining effective schools. Teacher retention remains a persistent challenge, particularly in high-need areas such as special education, where continuity and experience are critical for student success.

Predictable salary step increases are a fundamental component of a stable and professional workforce. They recognize continued service and provide teachers with a clear and reliable pathway for career progression. When compensation structures are uncertain, schools face increased turnover, which disrupts learning environments and places additional strain on remaining staff.

SB2391 supports a more stable and sustainable educator workforce by reinforcing predictable, earned compensation tied to satisfactory service. Strengthening retention helps ensure that students benefit from experienced teachers and consistent instruction.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support SB2391 and advance this important measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Kian Guan Au

Honolulu, HI 96821

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/21/2026 2:38:29 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Hope McKeen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama, vice chair Lee and committee members,

As a 20-year veteran of Hawai'i's classrooms, I have seen firsthand the toll that financial instability takes on our schools. It is a painful reality that when adjusted for the cost of living, our educators are the lowest-paid in the country. This isn't just a statistic; it translates to a revolving door of talent. When nearly 50% of new teachers leave within five years, our students lose the continuity and mentorship they deserve.

S.B. 2391, SD1 honors the language already established in our Unit 5 collective bargaining agreement, which recognizes annual step increases as a vital tool for recruitment and retention. By codifying these increases, this bill provides the "predictability" cited in the 2025 HIDOE Teacher Compensation Report as essential for building trust and reducing attrition. After two decades in this profession, I can tell you that a clear path to salary progression is what keeps a teacher in the classroom. I urge this committee to pass this measure and show our educators that their experience is valued.

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 8:58:07 AM

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

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

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 2391, SD2

Relating to Education (Automatic Step Increases)

To: Chair and Members of the Committee

From: Tiffany Edwards Hunt

Position: Teacher, Keaau Middle School; Member, HSTA Government Relations Committee

Testimony: Strong Support

My name is Tiffany Edwards Hunt. I teach at Keaau Middle School, and I serve on the HSTA Government Relations Committee. In these roles, I see a revolving door of talented educators who come to Hawaii with a passion for teaching, only to leave because the math of survival simply doesn't add up.

We are currently asking professional, career educators to live in a state of "permanent adolescence." It is a heartbreaking reality that many of my colleagues—experienced adults with advanced degrees—are forced to share homes, rent out spare rooms, and split kitchens and bathrooms just to remain in the districts where they are assigned to teach. This isn't just a "cost of living" issue; it is a dignity.

We need a paradigm shift in how we value the teaching profession in Hawaii. SB 2391, SD2 is a critical step toward that shift. By establishing automatic step increases, this legislation provides:

- Predictability: Teachers need to know that their years of service will result in a predictable, livable wage increase.
- Retention: When teachers can envision a financial future where they can afford a home of their own, they stay. When they stay, our students thrive.
- Equity: This bill levels the playing field, ensuring that "career teachers" aren't penalized for their commitment to the classroom.

While the funding must be secured to ensure these raises are realized, the policy change itself is a necessary signal to every educator in the state: We see your struggle, and we value your permanence. If we want our students to have stability in their classrooms, we must first provide stability in the lives of their teachers. I strongly urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD2.

Mahalo for your time and for your support of Hawaii's educators.

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 11:25:14 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Anika Agerlie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the committee, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Anika Agerlie

Hōnaunau Elementary School Teacher

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 11:33:35 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Hannah Hokenson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Hannah Hokenson

Konawaena Elementary School

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 11:48:40 AM

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

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

Comments:

Aloha Committee Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and committee members,

I am writing in support of SB2391, SD2. As a public school teacher, it is important for me to see the State support our efforts by providing annual step increases every year for each teacher. I am one of struggling teachers who have to work multiple side jobs to make ends meet. This is a step in the right direction and strongly urge your committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Michelle Siores

Kahului Elementary School/BKKKM District

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 11:49:37 AM

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

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

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Jessica Sobocinski and I am a resident of Ka‘awaloa, HI and teach first grade at Hōnaunau Elementary School. I am writing in STRONG support of SB2391 SD2! I love my job, and I love my community. However, with the rising cost of living I am struggling to afford to remain in Hawai‘i on my current salary. I have been teaching in the DOE for 4 years, and in that time I have only had one step increase. All of my other raises were due to my own efforts to take professional development courses for reclassification. Annual step increases would increase teacher retention, allowing more teachers to stay in Hawai‘i. Additionally, annual step increases explicitly honor teachers' years of service.

Mahalo,

Jess

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 3:08:51 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Logan Okita	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR**

**RE: SB 2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 a.m.**

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

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Logan Okita

Nimitz Elementary School

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 6:34:12 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rae A Yamanaka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am a retired teacher and am in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Rae Yamanaka

Big Island retired teacher

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 7:06:10 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alapa'i	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama and committee members,

I am a public school teacher at Ke Kula 'o 'Ehunuikaimalino, and I am urging you to pass **SB 2391, SD2**.

We all know the stats: Hawai'i's teachers are effectively the lowest paid in the U.S. when adjusted for cost of living. But the stat that hurts the most is the 50% turnover rate. We are losing a generation of educators because the financial math just doesn't add up.

Automatic step increases are a common-sense solution to provide the stability we need to stay in the profession we love. Let's make it possible for Hawai'i's teachers to actually afford to live in the communities we serve.

Mahalo,

Alapa'i Kaulia

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 9:02:45 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Davelyn Lokelani Han	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR

RE: SB 2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION -Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

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

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Na‘u nō me ka ha‘aha‘a

Davelyn Lokelani Han

Kualapu‘u Public Conversion Charter School

Moloka‘i

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 10:52:47 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Misty Figueira	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of SB2391.

I am currently in my sixth year as a teacher in Hawai‘i, and during that time I have seen many dedicated educators enter the profession—and just as many leave. The reality of teaching here is that passion for students is often not enough to sustain a long-term career when the cost of living continues to rise and compensation does not keep pace.

Even as a special education teacher receiving a \$10,000 differential, I, like many of my colleagues, still need to work a second job to make ends meet. This is not sustainable. It takes time, energy, and focus away from the work our students deserve. I have watched talented, committed teachers leave not because they lacked skill or dedication, but because they simply could not afford to stay.

SB2391 is an important step toward addressing this issue. Providing consistent, predictable step increases acknowledges the value of experience and encourages teachers to remain in the profession. Stability in the workforce directly benefits students, schools, and communities.

If we want to retain effective educators and provide continuity for our students, we must make teaching a financially viable long-term career in Hawai‘i.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

Sincerely,  
Misty Figueira

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 8:04:30 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Briann Starkey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR**

**RE: SB 2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 a.m.**

**Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the committee,**

**I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases**

**for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘is teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.**

**This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers**

**leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem**

**for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.**

**Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to**

**remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.**

**Mahalo,**

**Briann Starkey**

**Teacher, Kualapuu Public Charter School, Moloka'i**

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 8:31:42 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jodi Beaty	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR**

**RE: SB 2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 a.m.**

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

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate, with nearly half of our teachers leaving the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Mahalo,  
Jodi Beaty

Mokapu Elementary / Windward District

**March 22, 2026**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR**

RE: SB 2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

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

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,



Taija-Rae Tancayo  
Pre-School SpEd Teacher  
Kaunakakai Elementary School

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 8:59:23 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tes Kaulia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR

RE: SB 2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

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

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo Nui,

Tes Kaulia

Maunaloa Elementary School, Molokai

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 9:15:55 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Wendy Espaniola	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR

RE: SB 2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

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

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Wendy Espaniola  
Maunaloa Elementary School/Maunaloa, Molokai

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 9:23:54 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Inga Park Okuna	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am a retired public school educator writing in strong support of SB2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. Too many times during my career, I saw teachers leave the field or leave the island due to the high cost of living. I believe you are aware that when adjusted for the cost of living, Hawaii teachers are at the bottom end compared to their peers on the continent. This has created a shortage of qualified teachers, which in turn significantly impacts our students.

I hope you will pass this measure to help us attract and retain teachers! Let Hawaii be a place that recognizes and honors the incredibly important work of our teachers. I still serve on accreditation teams and I have seen the struggles and the successes in schools as they deal with high teacher turnover or long term subs filling positions, when what they need is stability. Schools are working so hard to continually improve instruction but they can't do that without qualified teachers who are able to gain the years to improve their craft.

My own children all attended public schools and I am so grateful for the education they received. We really need to keep our classroom teachers!

Mahalo for your consideration of this bill,

Inga Park Okuna

Retired School Counselor

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR

RE: SB 2391, SD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

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

I am writing in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,  
Lori Inouye  
Molokai Middle School

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 9:31:01 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauren Mokihana Jones	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD2, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I experience and witness how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates financial hardship for myself and my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate—nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. High attrition destabilizes our schools, limits our students' potential, and threatens Hawai'i's future.

At our school's Career Fair this year, the Honolulu Police Department repeatedly emphasized their starting pay exceeds that of HiDOE teachers—without requiring a degree. They highlighted regular pay increases, overtime opportunities, and advancement. This school year, one of our teachers left the classroom to join HPD. While community policing serves an important role, educators should not be positioned as a lower priority. Hawai'i's ali'i understood that education is the foundation of a thriving lāhui—our monarchy established a public education system that achieved near-universal literacy. We must honor that legacy.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our profession and is committed to strengthening Hawai'i through strong public schools and dedicated educators.

**I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.**

Mahalo,

Lauren Mokihana Jones, MEd-CS

MLL teacher, Waipahu Intermediate School, Leeward District

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

My name is **John Fitzpatrick**, and I am a science teacher at **Kūlanihākoʻi High School**. I stand in **strong support of SB 2391** (and its companion HB 1890), which would finally provide automatic annual step increases to our educators. If passed, this would mark the first time this century that Hawaiʻi educators receive the annual step increases we have rightfully earned.

### **The "24-Year Climb" vs. The 12-Step Scale**

Our current salary schedule is designed with 12 steps to reach the top. In any logical professional system, a career teacher should reach the top of the pay scale in 12 years. However, because step increases are currently negotiated and "subject to funding" rather than a standard, we only receive them every other year—if we are lucky. This effectively turns a 12-year career path into a **24-to-30-year climb**.

By the end of our current contract, many teachers like myself will have faced three years out of five years without any step movement. In 2022 we fought really hard to fix this through repricing and now we are on the path to more of the same. This wage compression is not just demoralizing; it makes a lifelong career in Hawaiʻi classrooms financially unsustainable.

### **Fiscal Reality: Priorities, Not Scarcity**

We are frequently told there is "no money" for teachers. However, the fiscal landscape tells a different story:

- **The Rainy Day Fund:** The state currently holds over **\$1.6 billion** in the Emergency Budget Reserve Fund.
- **Tax Cuts:** In 2024, the legislature passed historic income tax cuts for people making above \$250,000 per year.

How can we justify hoarding nearly \$2 billion in reserves or prioritizing massive tax cuts while telling the professionals who educate our future workforce that the state cannot afford the estimated **\$25 million** needed for annual step increases? **We are not asking for a handout; we are asking for a recruitment and retention tool that is standard in almost every other competitive school district in the nation.**

### **The Cost of the "Broken Pipeline"**

In my time as a head faculty representative at Maui Waena, I saw the "exodus" firsthand. I mentored two talented recruits from Chicago who were stunned to find that annual movement wasn't guaranteed here. They have since moved back to the mainland. We are competing in a national market, and **when we cannot promise consistent salary growth, we lose.**

## Real Impact on our Haumāna

The lack of retention is a direct blow to student achievement.

- **The Math Gap:** Recently, while teaching 9th-grade science, I realized many of my students lacked basic elementary-level math skills required for our labs. This gap exists because they lacked consistent, qualified teachers in their formative years.
- **The "Abandonment" Cycle:** Last year, a student told me, *"Mister, you are the best science teacher I have ever had. All my science teachers in middle school dipped out on us."*
- **The Crisis at Kūlanihāko'i:** Just this year, a fellow science colleague left two weeks into the term for a position at a private school with better pay and smaller classes. I scrambled to cover his AP Biology classes so those students wouldn't be left with a long term substitute that had no science background for the year. The look of despair on my 9th graders' faces when they thought they were being "abandoned" again is something I will never forget.
- **Emergency Hires, cultural exchange teachers, and long-term subs** make up 50% of our core classes (English, Math, Social Studies, and Science) at Kūlanihāko'i. Our cultural exchange teachers are forced to leave after 3 or 5 years which is unsustainable having such a large percentage of teachers having to be replaced so frequently.

## Solidarity Across the Campus

I also want to voice support for our **principals, vice principals, and school staff**. Our principals are currently managing "impossible puzzles"—trying to run schools with 20 classroom positions but only 15 teachers. They, too, deserve predictable, annual increases for managing these daily crises. They cross their fingers hoping the “cultural exchange teacher” that will be filling this void is a solid teacher. Just this year we had one of these teachers start in PE at the beginning of quarter 2 and she decided it was not her cup of tea by December.

## Conclusion: A Legislative Solution is Required

We are stuck in a cycle where the employer claims "no funding" during collective bargaining. We need the Legislature to break this cycle. By passing this measure and earmarking funds specifically for annual steps, you ensure that teacher pay is predictable, competitive, and sufficient to keep local teachers in local classrooms.

**Please pass SB 2391.** Help us stop the exodus of talent and give our haumāna the consistent, qualified educators they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and your support of Hawai'i's teachers and students,  
Mista Fitz

**John Fitzpatrick**

Science Educator, Kūlanihāko'i High School

**SB-2391-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 7:37:37 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mike Landes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the committee,

I strongly support SB 2391. If we are serious about providing our keiki with the best opportunities, we need to fully fund our public education system and pay our teachers what they're worth. As a parent of two public school students who deserve better, I urge you to pass this bill and others that will help to retain our best teachers and provide better schools for our students.

Mahalo for your time,

Mike Landes

Kihei