

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 KŪKĀKŪKA

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

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

Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Friday, February 6, 2026
1:00PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 229

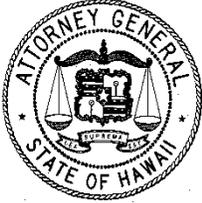
In consideration of
SB2391, RELATING TO EDUCATION

Chair Elefante, Chair Kim and the members of the committee on Labor and Technology and Committee on Education:

The Office of Collective Bargaining (OCB) appreciates the intent of SB2391 which provides annual salary step increases for public school teachers who have completed a year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements; however, we must respectfully oppose this measure.

Wage, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment are subject to negotiations as provided in Hawaii Revised Statutes, §89-9. We note that the 2016 legislature agreed when nearly identical provisions proposed in this measure were repealed.

We are available to answer any questions or provide further information as needed.



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
S.B. NO. 2391, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

BEFORE THE:
SENATE COMMITTEES ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY AND ON EDUCATION

DATE: Friday, February 6, 2026 **TIME:** 1:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 229

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Amanda L. Donlin, Deputy Attorney General, or
Jeffrey T. Kent, Deputy Attorney General

Chairs Elefante and Kim and Members of the Committees:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments regarding this bill.

This bill seeks to provide automatic step increases in teacher salaries for each year of satisfactory service completed, subject to the availability of funds. However, the bill conflicts with section 89-9(a), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), which makes "wages" a mandatory subject of collective bargaining.

Pursuant to section 89-2, HRS, the term "wages" includes the number of incremental and longevity steps. As written, the bill would therefore conflict with chapter 89, HRS, because wages, including incremental and longevity steps, are subject to negotiation through collective bargaining. Further, where there is contrary legislation, section 89-19, HRS, provides that adjustments made in accordance with chapter 89 shall take precedence over all contrary legislation.

The bill's current wording is similar to section 302A-626, HRS, formerly section 297-34, HRS, which was enacted prior to Hawaii's collective bargaining laws for public employment. Section 302A-626, HRS, was repealed by Act 87, Session Laws of Hawaii 2016. That repeal provided consistency within the law because section 302A-626, HRS, had been rendered obsolete by the collective bargaining law, which requires longevity steps and movement between steps in the salary range to be negotiated

through collective bargaining. Reinserting similar wording in chapter 302A through this bill could again create a conflict with chapter 89.

To promote consistency with chapter 89, HRS, the Department recommends that, in subsection (a) of the new section proposed to be added to chapter 302A by section 2 of this bill (page 2, lines 12-13), the phrase, "Pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement negotiated for bargaining unit (5)," be replaced with, "Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9,"

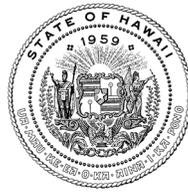
The Department also recommends the following amendments for consistency with the HRS. On page 2, lines 15-16, and in subsection (b) beginning on page 2, line 18, the bill refers to a range of HRS sections (i.e., sections 302A-602 to 302A-639, and section 302A-701) that address requirements applicable to teachers. As drafted, this range does not include the full set of relevant sections, as it omits section 302A-601.5, HRS, at the front end and sections 302A-641 and 302A-642, HRS, at the back end. On page 2, lines 15-17, the amendment to include the full statutory range would read as follows:

. . . who have complied with the other requirements of sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642, and 302A-701, as applicable, shall be entitled to an annual increment. (Emphasis added.)

Regarding the proposed new subsection (b) beginning on page 2, line 18, the statutory wording would be more consistent with the HRS if it refers to the full range of 302A provisions described above; and includes a specific reference to section 302A-624, HRS, which applies to the three-year "maximum increment step or in any longevity step" term. The proposed amendment would read as follows:

(b) Teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step pursuant to section 302A-624 and who have complied with the other requirements of sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642, and 302A-701, as applicable, shall receive longevity step increases, subject to the availability of funds. (Emphasis added.)

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.



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

WRITTEN ONLY

TESTIMONY BY SETH S. COLBY, Ph.D.
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
TO THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION
AND LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY
ON
SENATE BILL NO. 2391

**February 6, 2026
1:00 p.m.
Room 229 and Videoconference**

RELATING TO EDUCATION

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

Senate Bill No. 2391 provides Bargaining Unit (BU) 5 teachers who have completed a year's satisfactory service and who have complied with the other requirements of Sections 302A-602 to 302A-639 and 302A-701, as applicable, an annual increment negotiated pursuant to a collective bargaining (CB) agreement. In addition, the bill provides longevity step increases for teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step and who have complied with the other requirements of Sections 302A-602 to 302A-639 and 302A-701, as applicable.

B&F opposes this measure because it is contrary to the CB process. This measure preferentially directs the outcome of CB negotiations for a select BU.

While the Legislature has the authority to set the scope of CB, the Legislature did this in setting up a process in Chapter 89, HRS. This bill disrupts that process due to its partial return to directly legislated wages and working conditions for public employees.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.



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

Date: 02/06/2026

Time: 01:00 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: LBT/EDU

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB2391, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement negotiated for Bargaining Unit (5) and subject to the availability of funds, provides annual salary step increases for public school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements.

Department's Position:

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

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 to 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.

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.

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

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 3:05:02 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Weber-Yarbrough	Testifying for Teach For America Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Anne Weber-Yarbrough and I'm testifying in support of SB2391, relating to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As part of TFA Hawai'i, this bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention. Having placed and supported over 1,100 teachers in underserved schools over the past 20 years, and with over 600 alumni and corps members in Hawai'i, all children deserve access to a well-trained and properly supported educator workforce.

We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i.

Mahalo,

Anne Weber-Yarbrough

TFA Hawai'i

Managing Director, Regional Initiatives



TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB2391, RELATING TO EDUCATION

SENATE COMMITTEES ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY & EDUCATION

February 6, 2026

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **strongly supports SB2391**. Our party platform is rooted in the belief that a high-quality, free public education is a fundamental right for every child in our islands. However, that right is being undermined by a systemic failure to recruit and retain a professional, certified teaching workforce.

Hawai'i is currently facing a "mess" caused by radical shifts in federal priorities. The recent federal budget—touted as a "Big Beautiful Bill"—has instead resulted in deep cuts to the federal funding Hawai'i relies on for social services and education. This federal abandonment makes it more urgent than ever that we stabilize our internal workforce by asking those who have benefited most from the current economy—the wealthy—to pay their fair share to protect our public institutions.

The crisis in our classrooms is undeniable:

- **The Compensation Gap:** When adjusted for our state's astronomical cost of living, Hawai'i teachers are the **lowest-paid in the nation**. A teacher in Honolulu faces a pay disparity of roughly **\$75,000** compared to their peers in Los Angeles. This "paradise tax" is driving our local talent to the mainland.
- **De-professionalization of Teaching:** Because we cannot retain certified staff, the DOE is forced to rely on "emergency hires." It is unacceptable that current policies allow individuals with as little as a high school diploma to lead a classroom. All of our students deserve certified experts, not stop-gap measures.
- **Reliance on J-1 Visas:** The Department's increasing dependency on J-1 visa teachers creates a revolving door of educators. While we value these international partners, a stable education system cannot be built on temporary visas; it must be built on a permanent, local workforce that understands our community.

SB 2391 provides a clear, structural solution: **automatic salary step increases**. In nearly every other state, salary steps are a predictable reward for experience. In Hawai'i, they have been subject to the

whims of the bargaining table, leading to stagnant wages and "salary compression" that insults our veteran educators.

If we care about the future of Hawai'i, we must provide the basic incentives required to keep teachers in the profession. We cannot afford to lose 40% of our teachers within their first five years. By ensuring predictable raises and professional pay, we can end the era of emergency hires and ensure every classroom is led by a qualified professional.

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i urges this committee to pass SB 2391 and reinvest in the educators who are the backbone of our democracy.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB2391. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:09:22 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Piikea Kalakau-Baarde	Testifying for TFA Hawai'i	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

My name is Pi'ikea Kalakau-Baarde, and I work at Teach for America Hawai'i. I'm a former public school teacher and now support TFA Hawai'i's local initiatives, including our corps member programming, early literacy, alumni leadership development, external affairs, and more.

I am in support of SB2391, which relates to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i.

As a State Approved Teacher Educator Program (SATEP), one of the biggest barriers to recruitment that we face year over year is teacher pay, especially when coupled with the high cost of living in Hawai'i. Like the recently enacted and continued hard-to-staff differentials, automatic step increases in teacher salaries would help to attract high-quality professionals into open teaching positions, as well as retain them in years to come.

We stand on our written testimony and are available for any questions. We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i and look forward to seeing the progress made at the legislature this year.

Mahalo,

Pi'ikea Kalakau-Baarde, EdD



UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

THE SENATE KA 'AHA KENEKOA

THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE REGULAR SESSION OF 2026

COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY

Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair
Senator Rachele Lamosao, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Friday, February 6, 2026, 1:00 PM
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony on SB2391 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

Chairs Elefante and Kim, Vice Chairs Lamosao and Kidani, 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, which, pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement negotiated for Bargaining Unit 5 and subject to the availability of funds, provides annual salary step increases for public school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements.

UPW recognizes the issues that this bill is trying to address and strongly supports better compensation for members of Bargaining Unit 5. 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. We believe that the Legislature is not the appropriate authority to approve such salary increases prior to being collectively bargained between the employer and exclusive representative.

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.

HEADQUARTERS

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Toll Free - Molokai/Lanai only

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 1:51:48 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Pauahi Auerbach	Testifying for Teach For America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

My name is Erin Pauahi Auerbach, and I am the Head of Development for the Teach For America Hawai'i Region.

I am in support of SB2391, which relates to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i.

In addition to my fundraising role, I have also supported incoming corps members (1st year teachers) as they confirm or decline their TFA offers to teach here in the islands.

Annual salary – and the ability to afford basic living expenses in Hawai'i – is the number one question that is asked, and is the most significant barrier for corps members as they consider their offers.

The ability to thrive as a young adult who is just embarking on a teaching career here in Hawai'i, while also paying student loans, affording licensure costs/fees, etc, remains a burden to many fine leaders who would otherwise truly make deep and lasting impact on our keiki.

While recent increases have made entry level salaries more palatable at ~\$52K, this is less than \$8,000 above the ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained) Household Survival budget of \$44,292, as projected for a single adult in 2023.

Hard-to-staff differentials and automatic step increases in teacher salaries would indeed help us to attract high-quality leaders to fill open teaching positions. And, it will help our teachers to stay in their roles year over year allowing them to progress in their career HERE in Hawai'i, rather than in a more affordable market on the continent.

We stand on our written testimony and are available for any questions. We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i and look forward to seeing the progress made at the legislature this year.

Me ka mahalo nui,

Erin Pauahi Auerbach

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 2:32:38 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Meilan Akaka Manfre	Testifying for Teach For America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

My name is Meilan Akaka Manfre, and I serve as the executive director of Teach for America Hawai'i. I'm a former public school teacher and public school parent.

I'm reaching out in support of SB2391, which relates to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i.

As a State Approved Teacher Educator Program (SATEP), one of the most persistent barriers to recruiting and retaining educators in Hawai'i is inadequate compensation, particularly given the state's high cost of living. Establishing automatic annual salary step increases would affirm teaching as a valued profession by providing educators with predictable and transparent salary growth.

Clear and reliable compensation pathways help aspiring and early-career teachers commit to the profession for the long term and support retention during the years when educators are most likely to leave the classroom. Automatic step increases would also help honor the state's investment in teacher preparation and contribute to stable, high-quality learning environments for Hawai'i's students.

We stand on our written testimony and are available for any questions. We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i and look forward to seeing the progress made at the legislature this year.

Mahalo,

Meilan Akaka Manfre

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 3:22:25 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grace Brown	Testifying for Teach for America Hawai'i	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

My name is Grace Brown, and I work at Teach for America Hawai'i. I'm a proud product of Hawai'i public schools and a former public school teacher. I now support TFA Hawai'i's local initiatives and external affairs.

I am in support of SB2391, which relates to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i.

As a State Approved Teacher Educator Program (SAATEP), we understand that compensation plays an important role in who is able to enter and remain in Hawai'i's public school classrooms. With the state's high cost of living, predictable salary growth can make a meaningful difference for aspiring and early-career educators.

Establishing automatic annual salary step increases would reinforce teaching as a profession worthy of long-term commitment by providing stability and clarity in compensation. For those who choose to learn, teach, and build their lives in Hawai'i, reliable salary progression supports retention, honors the dedication educators bring to their schools, and helps sustain strong, consistent learning environments for students across the state.

We stand on our written testimony and are available for any questions. We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i and look forward to seeing the progress made at the legislature this year.

Mahalo,

Grace Brown



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Osa Tui, Jr.
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Logan Okita
Vice President

Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Andrea Eshelman
Executive Director

**TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY
&
THE HAWAI'I SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

Item: SB 2391 – Relating to Education

Position: Support

Hearing: Friday, February 6, 2026, 1:00 pm, Room 229

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

Dear Chairs Elefante and Kim, Vice Chairs Lamosao and Kidani, and members of the committees,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) **strongly supports** S.B. 2391, 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 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.

LATE



SENATE BILL 2391, RELATING TO EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 6, 2026 · LBT/EDU HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** SB 2391, relating to education, which, pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement negotiated for Bargaining Unit (5) and subject to funding, provides annual salary step increases for public school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements.

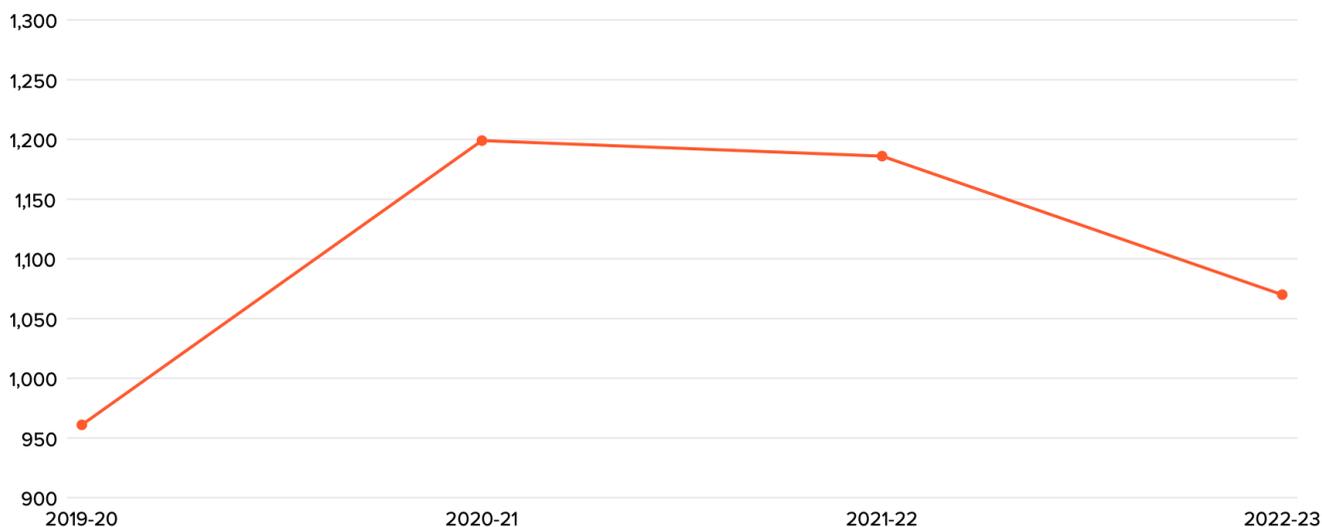
Teachers are the most important professionals in increasing student achievement. According to numerous studies, however, Hawai'i's average teacher salaries are the lowest in the nation when adjusted for cost of living. A 2020 study conducted by APA Consulting on behalf of the Hawai'i Department of Education 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.**

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 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 · 808-679-7454

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 8:48:28 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Justin Hughey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Committee on Labor and Technology, Committee on Education, and Committee on Ways and Means Hearing Date: February 2026 Measure: SB 2391 – Relating to Education (Automatic Step Increases)

When: Feb 6, 2026 1:00 PM

Room: CR 229 & Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT

Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committees,

My name is Justin Hughey, and I am a second-grade teacher. I am writing to you today in strong support of SB 2391. This bill is a vital step toward professionalizing our workforce and ensuring that every child in Hawaii is taught by a qualified, certified educator.

As a teacher on the front lines, I see the "mess" created by our state’s chronic inability to recruit and retain local talent. While the federal government touts "Big Beautiful Bills" that result in funding cuts to Hawaii, we are left to pick up the pieces. We are now in a position where we must raise taxes on the wealthy—the ones who have benefited most from the current economic landscape—to fund the basic dignity of a stable classroom for our keiki.

The teacher shortage in Hawaii is not a mystery; it is a math problem. Consider these sobering facts:

- **The Pay Gap:** A teacher in Hawaii earns roughly \$75,000 less in lifetime-adjusted pay than a teacher in Los Angeles when accounting for our astronomical cost of living. We are essentially asking teachers to take a "paradise tax" that prevents them from ever owning a home or raising their own families here.
- **Emergency Hires:** Because we cannot retain certified teachers, the DOE is forced to rely on "emergency hires." It is a heartbreaking reality that in some cases, the requirements for these positions are so low that individuals with little more than a high school diploma can be placed in charge of a classroom. Our 2nd graders deserve experts in literacy and child development, not just "warm bodies" to fill a gap.
- **J-1 Visa Dependency:** We are increasingly relying on J-1 visa teachers from abroad. While these educators are hardworking, the J-1 program is a temporary band-aid, not a

long-term solution. It creates a revolving door in our schools, preventing the long-term mentorship and community stability that our students desperately need.

SB 2391 addresses the root of this crisis by providing automatic salary step increases. Currently, Hawaii is an outlier; in almost every other state, teachers can count on a predictable raises for their years of service. In Hawaii, we have to fight for every step at the bargaining table, leading to "salary compression" where a teacher with 10 years of experience might make nearly the same as a brand-new hire.

If we truly care about the future of Hawaii, we must provide the basic incentives required to keep our local teachers in their classrooms. We cannot keep losing our best educators to the mainland or to other professions. We must stop the "mess" of emergency hiring and temporary visas by making teaching in Hawaii a sustainable, respected career.

I urge you to pass SB 2391 and invest in the people who are building Hawaii's future every single day.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Justin Hughey
Democratic Party of Hawaii, State Central Committee
Education Caucus Rep.

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 2:26:49 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kapono Ciotti	Testifying for Pacific American Foundation	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

My name is Dr. Kapono Ciotti, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Pacific American Foundation (PAF). Our work is grounded in the belief that education is the most profound act of social justice, and that true community transformation begins with the empowerment of our educators.

I am writing in strong support of **SB2391**, regarding annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

At PAF, we work alongside schools to build deep *pilina* between people, systems, and ideas. We know that authentic, ‘āina-based education relies heavily on educators who have the time and stability to develop a deep intimacy with their place and its unique *mo‘okū‘auhau*. When we lose teachers to financial instability, we sever the continuity required for this transformative work; deep learning cannot take root in a transient system.

The high cost of living in Hawai‘i currently acts as a barrier to the longevity of our teaching workforce. Automatic step increases are not just a financial incentive; they are a necessary structural commitment to retaining the high-quality professionals who guide our *keiki*. By stabilizing our workforce, we protect the relationships and institutional knowledge that are vital for culture-based and place-based instruction to succeed.

We stand on our written testimony and are available for any questions. We appreciate your leadership and continued support of public education in Hawai‘i.

Mahalo,

Dr. Kapono Ciotti

Executive Director

Pacific American Foundation

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

My name is John Fitzpatrick and I am a teacher at Kūlanihāko'i High School. I stand in **strong support of SB2391**, which would finally provide automatic annual step increases to our educators after being denied them for over 30 years.

The Financial Reality: We Can Afford This We often hear that there is "no money" for teachers, yet the fiscal landscape suggests otherwise. In 2024, the legislature passed historic income tax cuts. Furthermore, the state currently holds over **\$1.6 billion** in the Emergency Budget Reserve Fund. How can we justify hoarding nearly \$2 billion in reserves while telling the teachers who educate our future workforce that we cannot afford the estimated \$25 million needed for annual step increases? We are not asking for a handout; we are asking the state to prioritize the retention of the professionals who show up for our keiki every day.

The "Every Other Year" Reality: Our salary schedule is designed with 12 steps to reach the top. Logically, a career teacher should reach the top in 12 years. However, because we historically receive step increases only every other year, **it takes a teacher 24 years to reach the top**, and nearly 30 years to maximize retirement. This wage compression demoralizes experienced teachers. SB2391 would fix this by ensuring movement happens annually, making the 12-year climb a reality and serving as a powerful recruiting tool.

Recruitment and Retention: A Broken Pipeline I previously served as a head faculty representative at Maui Waena. I vividly remember mentoring two teachers recruited from Chicago. They were shocked to learn we did not have annual step increases, which were standard back home. Both have since moved back to the mainland. We are competing in a national market; when we cannot promise consistent salary growth, we lose talent to the mainland or private schools.

Real Impact on Haumāna The lack of retention hits our students hardest. I currently teach Marine Science, Biology, and AP Biology.

- **Academic Gaps:** Recently, during a lab, I realized many students didn't know how to calculate averages because they lacked consistent, qualified math teachers in earlier years.
- **Emotional Toll:** 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 cycle continues: Just this year, my fellow science teacher left two weeks into the school year for Kamehameha Schools to secure better pay. I had to scramble to cover his AP Biology classes so those students wouldn't be left with a long term substitute or emergency hire for the entire year. The despair on my 9th grade students' faces that were losing me to Biology was real—they thought they were being abandoned again and they were going to have one more year without a qualified science teacher.

Impact on My Personal Financial Stability: I calculated the real-world cost of being compressed by three years during this current contract. Without annual step increases, I am losing over \$7,700 in earnings over just these four years. Projected over the next 25 years, that cumulative loss creates a deficit of nearly \$100,000. This is not just lost potential income; it is the difference between security and survival. **It forces teachers like me to live paycheck to paycheck, unable to build a savings account or plan for a stable future.**

A Legislative Solution is Necessary We often hear that step increases should be handled in collective bargaining, but we are stuck in a cycle where the employer claims "no funding" during negotiations. During the last negotiations there was a \$700,000,000 surplus and we were denied annual step increases. We need the Legislature to break this cycle. Please pass SB2391 to stop the exodus of talent and give our haumāna the qualified, consistent teachers they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and support,

John Fitzpatrick

Kūlanihāko'i High School

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 4:48:41 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kori Oros	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairs Elefante and Kim, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kori Harvey Oros, and I submit this testimony in **strong support** of maintaining and funding **automatic step increases for public school teachers in Hawai‘i**.

Automatic step increases function as a **basic retention and stability tool** in a state with one of the highest costs of living in the nation. Without step increases, teachers effectively take a pay cut each year due to inflation, making it increasingly difficult to remain in the profession and continue serving Hawai‘i’s students.

Automatic steps also provide a **transparent and equitable compensation structure**. They recognize professional experience, encourage teachers to remain in classrooms, and avoid subjective or politicized evaluation systems that do not accurately capture the full scope of teaching—especially the mentoring, planning, and emotional labor that directly support student success.

From a fiscal standpoint, retaining experienced teachers through step increases is **more cost-effective** than constant recruitment and training of new hires. Stability saves money and improves outcomes.

Most importantly, automatic step increases send a clear message that Hawai‘i values educators as professionals and views teaching as a sustainable career, not temporary or expendable labor.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Legislature to **fully support and fund automatic step increases for teachers** as a necessary investment in Hawai‘i’s Keiki, schools, and communities.

Mahalo

Kori Harvey Oros

HSTA Central Chapter President

Kipapa Grade 3 Teacher

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 11:00:56 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Kim, Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Education and Labor Technology Committee,

Speaking as an individual, I strongly support SB 2391, which would provide automatic annual step increases for teachers who complete a year of satisfactory service. This bill directly responds to findings from the [2025 Teacher Compensation Study](#), which identified inconsistent and unpredictable step movement as a major source of teacher dissatisfaction, reduced morale, and ongoing retention challenges.

Importantly, the study aligns with Senate Concurrent Resolution 142 and Priority II of the HDOE Strategic and Implementation Plan (2023–2029), which calls for improving the teacher pipeline and enhancing conditions for educator success. By creating a predictable, annual step, SB 2391 strengthens the existing salary structure, reinforces trust in the compensation system, and supports teacher retention, an urgent need given that nearly 40% of teachers surveyed expect to leave the classroom within three years.

The UHERO report [Beyond the Price of Paradise](#), from January 2026, further underscores Hawai‘i's outmigration reality. It finds that Hawai‘i combines high living costs with below-average incomes and experiences outmigration patterns similar to economically distressed regions. These conditions make predictable, stable compensation essential for retaining educators and sustaining school communities.

I respectfully urge your support of SB 2391. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Michael Press

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 9:57:52 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacquelyn Hashimoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairs Elefante and Kim, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jacquelyn Hashimoto, I am a resident of Salt Lake/Āliamanu, teach at Kīpapa Elementary and I submit this testimony in **strong support** of maintaining and funding **automatic step increases for public school teachers in Hawai‘i**.

I've been teaching for 15 years and my ohana and I need financial stability.

Automatic would provide a steady and stable structure that recognizes years of service and professional experience. The impact veteran teachers have on keiki show not only in test scores, but in the communities in which those keiki grow.

Automatic step increases function as a **basic retention and stability tool** in a state with one of the highest costs of living in the nation. Without step increases, teachers effectively take a pay cut each year due to inflation, making it increasingly difficult to remain in the profession and continue serving Hawai‘i’s students.

Automatic step increases send a clear message that Hawai‘i values educators as professionals and views teaching as a sustainable career, not temporary or expendable labor.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Legislature to **fully support and fund automatic step increases for teachers** as a necessary investment in Hawai‘i’s Keiki, schools, and communities.

Mahalo,

Jacquelyn Hashimoto

Resident of Salt Lake/Āliamanu

Kīpapa Elementary/Central District

SB-2391

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 12:12:38 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paul McDonnell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Paul McDonnell, and I am a public school teacher in Hawai‘i. I am writing in strong support of SB2391 / HB1890, which would implement automatic step pay increases for educators who complete a year of satisfactory service.

Automatic step increases are the norm across the country and are a basic expectation for teachers entering the profession. In Hawai‘i, however, step movement is uncertain, negotiated irregularly, and dependent on funding decisions that are often beyond an individual educator’s control. This unpredictability creates confusion, undermines morale, and directly contributes to the state’s ongoing recruitment and retention crisis.

The independent teacher compensation study completed last fall clearly confirmed what educators already know: once adjusted for cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers are among the lowest paid in the nation. At the same time, nearly half of new teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. These outcomes are not sustainable for our students, our schools, or our communities.

Automatic step progression is not a bonus or reward—it is a foundational structure that recognizes experience, promotes fairness, and builds trust in the system. Teachers should be able to plan their financial futures with reasonable certainty, especially in one of the most expensive states in the country. When step increases must be bargained year after year, it creates instability that discourages talented educators from staying in Hawai‘i long term.

As a Special Education teacher, I see firsthand how turnover disproportionately harms students with the highest needs. Continuity, experience, and institutional knowledge matter. Retaining skilled educators is not just a workforce issue—it is a student equity issue.

This bill aligns with existing contract language that already recognizes annual step movement as a vital recruitment and retention tool. Codifying automatic step increases, subject to available funding, would improve transparency, reduce confusion, and bring Hawai‘i in line with national standards.

I respectfully urge you to support SB2391 / HB1890 and take a meaningful step toward stabilizing Hawai‘i’s public education workforce.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully,
Paul McDonnell