

**SB-2551**

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 8:17:05 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/13/2026 1:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
amy agbayani	Testifying for The Legal Clinic	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

The Legal Clinic is a non-profit organization that provides legal representation and support for low-income immigrants. We strongly support hb1840 requiring the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a Visiting International Education Permit aligned with the duration of an educators J-1 visa. The bill will help Hawai'i address teacher shortages by providing competent teachers where there are shortages in various geographic areas and disciplines. These teachers are able to work in our multicultural classrooms. In addition, J-1 visa holders with cultural and linguistic skills can work with students from these backgrounds. The Department of Education currently has over 200 J-1 visateachers from the Philippines and administrators attest the program helps meet teacher shortages and the teachers perform valuable service to their students. My personal contact with some of these teachers and comments from my community contacts makes me confident that these teachers and the students are well-served. These J-1 visa teachers can serve at any of the public schools and can teach in multicultural classrooms. It is also important to note that they were assigned to some schools with high proportion of local and immigrant Filipino students. As noted, Filipino students are the largest ethnic group in the public schools and immigrants from the Philippines represent the largest country of origin group, making up nearly half—or 45.8 percent—of all immigrants in Hawai'i. Currently there are 32,044 (10%) students who are enrolled in programs to learn English.

We support this bill as it will benefit our schools by meeting tacher shortages in our schools. I respectfully request your support.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

**SB-2551**

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 12:42:07 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/13/2026 1:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Douglas Boyer	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Dear Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of S.B. No. 2551, which requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator’s J-1 visa program.

As the Principal of Lāna‘i High and Elementary School, I have seen firsthand how the J-1 international teacher program has strengthened our school community. As a rural and geographically isolated school, recruiting and retaining qualified teachers continues to be one of our greatest challenges. Currently, J-1 teachers fill 21 of our 62 teaching positions on campus. This represents a significant portion of our instructional workforce. Without these educators, our ability to fully staff classrooms and provide comprehensive programming for students would be severely impacted.

The island of Lāna‘i has a strong Filipino presence, and our school community reflects that heritage. Filipino students make up 49% of our total school population, representing approximately 306 students at LHES. Many of our J-1 teachers share similar cultural backgrounds and, in some cases, come from the same regions of the Philippines as our families. Their ability to communicate with parents and community members in their native language strengthens trust, improves family engagement, and deepens school-home partnerships. This cultural and linguistic connection helps families feel seen, heard, and valued, and it builds a stronger, more unified school community.

Our J-1 teachers are not entry-level educators. Many hold advanced degrees, including master’s and doctorate degrees, and other postgraduate credentials. They bring years of classroom experience from their home countries and abroad. Several have received professional awards and recognition for instructional excellence, and some have served as master teachers and mentors in their previous schools. Their depth of knowledge, instructional expertise, and professionalism significantly enhance the quality of education we are able to offer our students.

Importantly, the presence of these educators has allowed our school to expand learning opportunities. With the additional expertise and staffing stability provided through the J-1 program, we have been able to broaden course offerings and introduce new classes that reflect the interests and cultural backgrounds of our students, including Filipino language courses. These offerings strengthen cultural identity and heritage for many of our students while

promoting multilingualism and global awareness for all learners. For a small rural school, the ability to diversify and enrich our academic program is transformative.

Beyond the classroom, our J-1 teachers are active participants in the Lāna‘i community. They volunteer with local organizations, support school and island events, participate in cultural celebrations, and contribute their time and talents in meaningful ways. They are not temporary visitors who remain separate from the community; they become part of the fabric of Lāna‘i. Their commitment to giving back strengthens relationships between the school and the broader community and reinforces the sense of unity that defines our island.

Beyond credentials, these educators enrich our campus with global perspectives that broaden our students’ understanding of the world. For our students on Lāna‘i, exposure to educators with international experience fosters cultural awareness, global competence, and expanded aspirations for their futures.

To further illustrate the need for flexibility in our licensure system, consider Professor John Hattie, a world-renowned educational researcher from Australia and author of *Visible Learning*, whose work synthesizes over 1,000 meta-analyses on factors influencing student achievement. Dr. Hattie has served as a professor, educational leader, and global advisor to school systems around the world. It is worth asking: under our current licensure framework, would a scholar of his caliber—despite extraordinary credentials, decades of experience, and international recognition—be able to seamlessly obtain certification to teach in Hawai‘i? If the answer is no, then we must carefully examine whether our policies are structured to attract and retain the highest-quality educators for our students.

However, the current licensure process creates barriers that make it difficult for these highly accomplished educators to remain in Hawai‘i for the full duration of their exchange eligibility. For a small school like ours, turnover has an outsized impact on instructional continuity and student relationships. Aligning the visiting international educator permit with the duration of the J-1 visa program would provide much-needed stability, improve retention, and allow our students to benefit from the full five years of service these teachers are eligible to provide.

S.B. No. 2551 is a practical and equitable solution that directly supports rural schools like Lāna‘i High and Elementary. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,  
Douglas Boyer  
Principal  
Lāna‘i High and Elementary School



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

**Date:** 02/13/2026

**Time:** 01:05 PM

**Location:** CR 229 & Videoconference

**Committee:** EDU

**Department:** Education

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

**Title of Bill:** SB2551, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator's J-1 visa program. Repeals 6/30/2031.

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 2551, which would develop a visiting international educator permit that would align with the full duration of the federal J-1 teacher exchange program. Federal law allows J-1 teachers to serve for up to five years, yet Hawaii's current three-year permit can force authorized teachers out of classrooms early. Aligning state policy with the full J-1 term will help ensure students benefit from the complete period of service these educators are approved to provide.

Students benefit from stability when teachers can remain in classrooms without disruption, particularly in hard-to-staff schools. J-1 teachers are fully trained and licensed professionals in their home countries and are placed in high-need areas such as special education, secondary math, and science.

Having a visiting international educator permit that aligns with the full J-1 program also maximizes the State's investment in recruitment, onboarding, and support. Allowing teachers to serve the full authorized term improves workforce stability and ensures Hawaii's students receive the greatest benefit from these experienced educators.

The Department remains committed to working with the Legislature to develop comprehensive solutions to our educator workforce challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2551.



**STATE OF HAWAII**

**HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD**

650 IWILEI ROAD, SUITE 268  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

February 13, 2026

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

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

**DATE:** February 13, 2025

**TIME:** 1:05 pm

**LOCATION:** Conference Room 229 and Video Conference

**TITLE OF BILL:** SB 2551 J-1 Visa Program; Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board; Visiting International Educator Permit

**POSITION:** Opposes SB 2551

**Chair Kim, Vice-Chair Kidani, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:**

**The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) respectfully opposes SB2551**, relating to education, which would require the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator's J-1 visa program.

In the preamble of this bill, it states that the purpose of this bill is aimed at exposing Filipino children to Filipino educators which in turn would inspire Filipino children to consider careers in education, this statement is conclusory and pigeonholes all ethnically Filipino children together regardless as to whether they have been born and raised in Hawai'i or from the Philippines.

The bill states that since the implementation of the J-1 Visa program it has been a resounding success. The HTSB responds by stating that what is meant by the term "resounding success" applies to the increase in the number of internationally certified teachers that have been currently employed in public schools statewide and those that are set to arrive in 2026-2027 and **that the resounding success is not correlated with students' improved academic performance.**

**This bill incorrectly states that the State's existing rules limit the full potential of prospective international teachers participating in the J-1 visa program. The HTSB issues licenses based on whether the applicant meets the criteria set forth by law.** International applicants are entitled to be issued the types of permits or licenses that they are entitled to hold. International applicants have applied for licenses and permits and those that have met the qualifications for licensure have been issued the appropriate licenses.

HTSB is tasked by law to establish licensing and certification standards that govern teacher licensing and certification in Hawai'i to ensure that public-school children in Hawai'i are taught by teachers who are qualified to practice the profession of teaching.

HTSB is only administratively attached to the Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE). The legislature intentionally separated HTSB from the HIDOE to ensure that the licensing body would not be the same department or entity as the employer as this would pose an inherent conflict of interest. This bill deprives HTSB of its ability and autonomy to establish its own licensing and certification standards and instead mandates HTSB to lower its licensing requirements for internationally certified teachers.

**HTSB knows this bill was well-intentioned, but it is not the answer to the problem. Part of the solution could be for individuals interested in teaching in our state to take their Praxis exams before they even come to the U.S., as Praxis is international and offers testing in their home countries. In fact, some individuals have started taking at least one Praxis test before they move here.** The Praxis tests they struggle with most are the Praxis Core Reading and Writing tests, which are foundational skills aligned with our standards and taught in our schools. Currently, 34 J1 Visa holders have also been placed in classrooms that are outside their teaching license in their home country. For example, an individual might be licensed in their country in Secondary Mathematics, but in Hawai'i they have been placed in a 2nd-grade elementary classroom. This is concerning for our students who need the foundational reading and writing skills. We are glad that HIDOE is now offering Praxis study support for these J-1 Visa holders, as they all need to take the Praxis Core, and the reading and writing tests are what they struggle with most. Principals have also been reimbursing them for passed Praxis tests, but this is up to the principal, depending on their Title II funding.

At the National Conference for State Legislatures (NCSL) a few years back, there was a labor session and a resolution that specifically dealt the protecting those with J1 Visas. **They decided to add language to the NCSL resolution to protect J1 teachers from 3rd party companies offering J1 Visa holders these high-interest loan (up to 50% compounded interest loans).** These companies even charged J1 Visa holders a licensing fee even when states, such as ours, **has no licensing fee.** Other states have had major problems with this type of activity, before we even heard about it in Hawai'i, so these states were letting us know. NCSL Passed this resolution with those protections for J1 teachers. This is how our J1 visa holders should be protected. They need to be protected from these loan sharks.

Here are links to documents that explain more that were shared at NCSL. AFL-CIO [Use and Abuse of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Teacher Program — Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO](#) Note: Make sure you check out the articles they include citations as well at the bottom of this report. Here is also a report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) [Importing Educators: Causes and Consequences of International Teacher Recruitment](#) who is more aware of this problem as it hit them first. [Start on page 17 to see the fraud and the recruiting tactics that are being used.]

At HTSB we only have 4 Licensing Specialists that review all applications for licensure or permits in the State of Hawai'i, even if they do not intend to teach here in Hawai'i. There is no licensing fee for all who apply for a license or permit in the State of Hawai'i since we are now funded by the legislature for our operations. HTSB used to rely on licensing fees, but now we have ZERO licensing fees, since being funded by the legislature. While these foreign certified teachers have to pay for testing fees, they do not have to pay any licensing or permit fees as we do not charge any.

**Other states, like Alaska, do charge a licensing fee (About \$200), along with Nevada, and North Carolina.**

From HTSB's understanding, and from what we have been told, J-1 teachers are being paid as provisional license holder, although only holding an Emergency Hire Permit. They may also be paid at a higher rate because of their years of teaching experience, but you would have to find out from their employer, HODOE for more information.

Any other profession requires international license holders to meet the licensure requirements of the profession in that state. This is true of professions such as physicians, pilots, attorneys, engineers, nurses, and mental health counselors, and the list goes on. They must demonstrate proficiency in the language and pass tests that verify their skills and knowledge meet local standards.

Teaching is a profession that should be held to the same standards. Our students deserve quality teachers.

**This bill removes HTSB's authority to determine licensing and certification standards for all teachers in the State of Hawai'i, ensuring that children in public schools are provided with qualified teachers.** HTSB is fully capable of licensing and issuing permits to teachers from in-state, out-of-state, and other countries, in accordance with the current licensing and permit laws outlined in Hawaii Revised Statutes §302A and Hawaii Administrative Rules Chapter 54.

Therefore, we humbly ask this committee to **oppose** this bill.



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2875 and SB2551 - RELATING TO EDUCATION

### Senate Committee on Education

Sen. Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

Sen. Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair

February 12, 2026

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The Legal Clinic supports SB2875 and SB2551, both of which direct the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to develop an alternative pathway for visiting international educators to obtain permits aligned with the duration of their J-1 visas.

As a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing immigrant justice across Hawai'i through immigration legal services, community education, and policy advocacy, TLC welcomes and commends the fair and transparent pathway these bills will create for qualified noncitizen professionals to access stability and contribute fully to Hawai'i's schools and communities during their authorized stay.

SB2875 and SB2551 recognize the important role international educators play in strengthening Hawai'i's educational system. J-1 educators are experienced, trained professionals who are often placed in hard-to-fill positions and schools facing persistent staffing shortages. Currently, Hawai'i's three-year emergency hire permit often forces effective J-1 teachers to leave prematurely, disrupting student learning, especially in rural and neighbor island schools.

SB2875 and SB2551 address this challenge by allowing permits to remain valid for the duration of an educator's J-1 exchange program participation - reducing unnecessary procedural barriers and legal uncertainty, while promoting instructional continuity. International teachers gain greater clarity and security, and students benefit from the full term of service these teachers are authorized to provide.

Mahalo for your leadership in enhancing workforce stability for our schools, strengthening educational continuity for our students, and promoting fair treatment and peace of mind for our visiting international educators.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of The Legal Clinic  
and TLC Board President Amefil Agbayani,

Christina Sablan  
Community & Policy Advocate

February 11, 2026

Hawaii State Senate  
Honorable Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Committee on Education  
Conference Room 229  
Hawaii State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Chair Kim, Vice chair Kidani  
And Members of The Committee on Education  
**RE:** SB2551 Relating to Education

Aloha! My name is Randall Francisco of Hanapepe, Kaua'i. I am writing in strong support of this legislation which provides Hawaii's Department of Education BridgeUSA J1 international educators the full five year period to fulfill the maximum allowable years of this significant program which has uplifted not only students but, also communities from West Kaua'i to Hawai'i island, especially, in critically short-staffed rural communities. On the Garden Island of Kaua'i, since first becoming involved as a community volunteer it has always been my motto "The students' success is the community's success and thus is an important partnership between the Department of Education and the people of Kaua'i. Throughout Kaua'i, many residents are now familiar with the contributions of the teachers in not only teaching but, also throughout their participation in various town-gown events such as at fishing tournaments, parades, food distributions, tutoring students and, most of all, encouraging, inspiring and when necessary, and, appropriately, disciplining students.

2026 is my third year of supporting, partnering and volunteering closely with teachers within the three Kaua'i complexes including West and East Kaua'i. New this year, are teachers who have grown their presence in the Kapa'a complex (Kapa'a Middle School) from one to seven professionals. In another school, a teacher who is now completing his fifth year post-Covid, has watched the number of teachers grow to 10 in year one, 18 in year two and 27 in year three. This increase demonstrates great confidence and capacity of the teachers, administrators, staff, students and communities that this program is indeed working but, also, continues to expand and address this critically shortage national issue. Many teachers in year one have completed the Praxis exam at great sacrifice. As the costs of relocating and beginning from the entry-level emergency hire of newly-hired teachers and at the same time becoming a fiscal constrain that has most teachers deciding to take the exam but, at a great financial and quality-of-life sacrifice and, commitment. Furthermore, unlike their US and newly-hired counterparts, they are unable to work a non-education part-time job in order to survive the financial challenge-burden of living

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Testimony: SB2551: Relating to Education

and teaching in Hawai'i. Extending the program from the current three to five years will significantly help address the financial compression which teachers must endure during the first three years (extremely high rental costs (~33-35%); relocation and administrative costs (~30%); taxes (~28-30%). Any support such as this extension will provide not only Some Economic Relief but, also much needed moral and community support.

I look forward to this bills moving forward throughout the legislative session.

Mahalo Nui Loa for your consideration,

Randall Francisco

Vice President, Hanapepe Economic Alliance

Former President, Kauai Chamber of Commerce and Kauai Filipino Chamber of Commerce

Former President, West Kauai Business & Professional Association

Former Director, Kauai Philippine Cultural Center

Former Vice President, Filipino Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii

Former Dean/Professor, University of Hawaii Community College System

Former Kauai Film Commissioner and Creative Industries, County of Kauai

**SB-2551**

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 8:29:47 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/13/2026 1:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry OPPOSE for the reason of the possibility of ICE AGENTS COMING TO HAWAII!

I do understand of Hawai'i's teachers shortage, but are we subjecting our children to protential disruption from ICE under the Trump administration!

2551 SB RELATING TO EDUCATION.

**LATE**

**SB-2551**

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 1:55:31 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/13/2026 1:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

I stand by my original testimony from the House Bill to support this Bill in the Senate. I believe that there should be an alternative pathway for a visiting international educator permit aligned to the duration of the educator's J-1 visa program. I believe that they have been a huge help for our students especially our keiki. The cultural exchange that is learned through this program.