



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS  
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

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

**Senate Committee on Ways and Means**

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

10:17 a.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 211 and Videoconference

**In Support**

**Senate Bill No. 2615, Relating to School Cafeteria Meal Costs**

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

The Office of the Governor **supports** S.B. No. 2615, Relating to School Cafeteria Meal Costs. This measure requires the Department of Education to charge not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing a school meal for each school meal.

Research consistently shows that well-fed students perform better academically, have improved concentration and behavior, and experience better long-term health outcomes. Rising meal costs, however, can pose financial challenges for families and discourage participation in school meal programs. By reducing the required level of cost recovery, this bill provides the Department of Education with greater flexibility to offer meals at more affordable prices, ensuring that more students have access to nutritious food during the school day.

Investing in school meals is an investment in Hawaii's future. The Office of the Governor believes this bill is an important step in supporting students and the families who strive to meet their children's needs despite economic hardships.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



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

**Date:** 03/03/2026

**Time:** 10:17 AM

**Location:** CR 211 & Videoconference

**Committee:** WAM

**Department:** Education

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

**Title of Bill:** SB2615, RELATING TO SCHOOL CAFETERIA MEAL COSTS.

**Purpose of Bill:** Requires the Department of Education to charge not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing a school meal for each school meal.

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2615.

The current statute in section 302A-405(a), Hawaii Revised Statutes, would force the Department to increase school meal prices to meet the existing language in the statute that mandates charging half of the cost of preparing the meals.

The cost of producing a lunch in 2024-25 was \$9.05 while the student price was \$2.50, approximately 28% of the total cost. Reducing the required meal cost amount to one-quarter would prevent the Department from increasing the price of school meals on parents. The Department recognizes fee increases would place additional financial burdens on families and could cause less students to purchase school meals, and is balancing that with the fiscal responsibilities of running a statewide school meals program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



## HIPHI Board

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Health

## HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a  
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &  
Evaluation

Community Health  
Worker Initiatives

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Climate Change and Health  
Working Group

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Immunization Coalition

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &  
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: March 2, 2026

To: Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Re: Support for SB 2615, Relating to School Cafeteria Meal Costs

Hrg: Tuesday, March 3, 2026 at 10:17 AM, Conference Room 211

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Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)<sup>1</sup> and the Healthy Eating, Active Living<sup>2</sup> (HEAL) Coalition **supports SB 2615**, which reduces the minimum revenue requirement that the Department of Education must recover through school meal charges in department schools.

One in three families in Hawai'i face food insecurity, leaving many students to go hungry throughout the school day. One in ten keiki in Hawai'i skip meals due to food insecurity. Hawai'i can ensure all students are able to eat by removing this provision and providing free school meals for all students.

### **Meal Revenues Make Up Only a Tiny Fraction of the Education Budget**

The Department of Education has an annual budget of over \$2 billion, with meal revenues totaling around \$20 million per year, or just 1% of the overall budget. Collecting meal prices from students is not necessary to keep the Department of Education functioning. Students receive free education regardless of income level and the nutrition they need to learn should be free too.

### **Many Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies**

The current federal and state free school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility will be increased to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level, but that doesn't include all students who need support. Last year, the Department of Education proposed increasing prices for school meals which, if adopted, would burden these families even more.

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<sup>1</sup> Hawai'i Public Health Institute's mission is to advance health and wellness for the people and islands of Hawai'i. We do this through expanding our understanding of what creates health of people and place, fostering partnerships, and cultivating programs to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

<sup>2</sup> The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.



### Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.<sup>3</sup> By failing to ensure they have access to meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success. Removing the cost provision will expand access to nutritious meals, helping students receive the nourishment they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

Please support removing this cost requirement, and pave the way for free school meals for all keiki.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nate Hix'.

Nate Hix  
Director of Policy and Advocacy

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<sup>3</sup>"Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7282962/>



Date of Hearing: March 3, 2026

To: Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and the Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Subject: **SB 2615**, Relating to School Cafeteria Meal Costs

Aloha,

I am writing in **support of SB 2615**. This bill will reduce the required cost recovery of school meals by 50%, allow DOE to adjust meal prices annually, preserve the requirement to offer free or reduced-price meals based on economic need, and allow the governor to modify pricing rules to avoid jeopardizing federal funding.

Food security in Hawai'i is a serious concern. From 2024-2025, 32% of households, and 11% of households went a whole day without food at least once during the year<sup>1</sup>. For many low-income children, school meals are the best and only opportunity for a nutritious meal. This bill would bridge gaps and alleviate costs on our families, providing food to some of our most vulnerable.

Keiki are our future. Well-nourished students will be more prepared to learn, and investing early in their futures will create long-term success not just for children, but for the state as a whole. To support families across our state and strengthen food security for our keiki, I respectfully **urge this committee to pass SB 2615**.

Mahalo,  
Brandon Kinard & the Food+ Policy Team  
#fixourfoodsystem

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[1] Pirkle, C. M. (2025). The state of food insecurity in Hawai'i 2024–2025. Hawai'i Foodbank.

**The Food+ Policy internship** develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.