



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

Date: 04/06/2026

Time: 01:00 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: EDU

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SCR101, URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, IN COORDINATION WITH THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO TRANSITION THE SCHOOL BUSES USED FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TO ELECTRIC BUSES TO EXPAND THE BENEFITS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED IN OTHER PLACES.

Purpose of Bill: Urging The Department Of Education, In Coordination With The Board Of Education, To Develop A Plan To Transition The School Buses Used For Public Transportation To Electric Buses To Expand The Benefits Already Demonstrated In Other Places.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on SCR 101 regarding the transition to electric school buses. While the long-term environmental benefits of electrification are well recognized, current conditions in Hawaii present significant financial, operational, and infrastructure challenges that should be carefully weighed before initiating transition planning.

Electric school buses remain two to three times more expensive, costing between \$300,000 to \$480,000 and diesel models typically costing between \$110,000 to \$130,000. High upfront costs remain substantial and would likely be even higher in Hawaii due to geography and import factors. Moreover, projected long-term cost savings depend on low electricity prices, robust charging infrastructure, and predictable operating conditions—none of which are presently assured statewide.

Nationwide, school districts have documented significant reliability issues with electric buses, including vehicle breakdowns, heating failures, and unavailable parts. In some cases, districts have reverted to diesel after manufacturers were unable to provide warranty or repair support following bankruptcy. Hawai'i's unique operating environment—including rural routes, interisland separation, and limited maintenance depots—would magnify these challenges and could disrupt student transportation.

Hawaiian Electric's Charge Up eBus Pilot demonstrates that Hawai'i's charging infrastructure is still in early development. Only three participation agreements have been executed, just one site is near completion, and another remains in permitting through 2026. The pilot supports only up to 20 charging ports, far below what would be required for statewide Department operations. HECO has also cited supply-chain constraints, lengthy landowner approvals, high labor costs, and permitting complexity, all of which increase risk. Since the Department contracts school bus transportation services statewide, any infrastructure delays could halt bus operations across entire regions.

Federal support—critical for other states' successful adoption—is currently unavailable. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has overhauled the \$5 billion Clean School Bus Program and cancelled the entire 2024 rebate round, leaving many districts nationwide without anticipated funds. EPA has confirmed that funding is not currently available and is only collecting comments for a future 2026 funding opportunity—not awarding grants. Reports persist in funding freezes, with some awardees stating the EPA has withheld previously obligated funds. Without federal cost-sharing, Hawaii may shoulder nearly all upfront vehicle and infrastructure expenses.

While the Department supports exploring clean transportation solutions, premature planning for full fleet electrification is not advisable at this time given the significant financial, reliability, and infrastructure challenges outlined above.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

SCR-101

Submitted on: 4/3/2026 9:00:59 PM

Testimony for EDU on 4/6/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, OPPOSE w/comment THE PROBLEM WITH DOE STUDENT BUS TRANSPORTATION IS NOT THE BUS BUT THE SHORTAGE OF DRIVERS. IN ADDITION, THE DOE BUS SERVICE IS OPERATED BY A PRIVATE VENDOR AND NOT THE DOE/SOH.

95 SR URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, IN COORDINATION WITH THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO TRANSITION THE SCHOOL BUSES USED FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TO ELECTRIC BUSES TO EXPAND THE BENEFITS ALREADY DEMONSTRATED IN OTHER PLACES.