



MidWeek

This column by Senator Michelle Kidani was published in MidWeek's **Central VOICE** section on Wednesday, January 27, 2016.

Legislative session underway

The State Capitol is again filled with the bustle of lawmakers, staff, state agencies and citizens, as our 60 working day session began just a few days ago. The state operates on a two-year budget cycle, and this is the time when we consider possible changes to second year expenditures in the 12 months that begin on July first. Hearings on state agency budget requests have been underway for several weeks. It's a good time to find out from the departments where they are on projects and programs we allocated money for in past sessions, and to strengthen or otherwise re-direct those that may not be effective.

Senate sessions are underway on most weekdays through the first week of May.

The public is welcome to observe the sessions from the gallery. Please call my office at 586-7100 if you plan to visit the Capitol.



Focus on Education

As Chair of the Senate Committee on Education, my efforts will focus on Hawaii's public schools. We continually need to keep fighting for funding so our teachers and students have what they need for success in their classrooms; our principals and administrators can continue to be innovative and flexible to provide leadership and incentives that support that success. I am so proud of the student achievements in public schools in Senate District 18; students, principals and teachers have been daily inspirations and I love to brag about them to my friends and colleagues.

Beginning in the 2016-2017 school year, Congress has given the states a new mandate with passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Act is a successor to the federal No Child Left Behind Act and significantly reduces federal government's role in elementary and secondary education. Annual standardized test requirements are retained, but the states are required to develop their own challenging standards for reading, math and science. The goal is to more closely align levels of achievement with entrance requirements for higher education and career and technical education programs.

With new responsibilities for raising and measuring education standards shifted to the states, it will be important for us to keep tabs on the Department of Education's adaptation to ESSA. At my Education Committee hearings over the last few weeks, the DOE has committed to moving forward by incorporating their Strive HI program into ESSA. It is my hope that the DOE and Superintendent Matayoshi will include input and feedback from principals, teachers and the general community in this effort.

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We work closely with our counterparts in the House of Representatives. With me at a hearing above are House Education Chair Representative Roy Takumi and (to his left) Vice Chair Takashi Ohno.

Your voice is important

Public participation in our hearings and discussion of the issues is an important part of what we do. There are numerous ways to get involved – finding out about bills on subjects that are of interest to you, decide how we will vote.

Many of the Legislature’s information resources are available online. Link to <http://capitol.hawaii.gov> and you’ll be able to find bills with just a simple word search. Once you have found a bill you may be interested in, you can find out when it’s been scheduled for a hearing and even send testimony about the issue online from this site. The site has won national awards for the kinds of information it makes available, and how easy it is to use with a minimum of orientation.

If you still need help, contact the Legislature’s Public Access staff at 587-0478. They’re extremely knowledgeable and helpful and can walk you through the process step-by-step either on the phone or in person in room 401 on the fourth floor of the Capitol. My staff and I can help too, and we would welcome a visit to room 228; we’ll be happy to see you!