

COMMUNITY REPORT

SENATE DISTRICT 18 | FEBRUARY 2025

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Michelle
KIDANI

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Aloha Friends and Neighbors,

With the 33rd Legislative Session well underway, I'm pleased to share key developments from our work in the Senate, along with updates pertaining to education. The Senate Education and Higher Education committees held its first hearings, where we discussed vital issues impacting our students and educators. I highly encourage you to participate in the conversation by submitting public testimony. This session, I am prioritizing legislation that directly supports our students, teachers, and families. Among my key bills:

- **SB1300 SD1** – ALICE Meal Subsidies: Ensures students from asset-limited, income-constrained, employed (ALICE) households receive meal subsidies, addressing gaps in access to proper nutrition for families who do not qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.
- **SB1391 SD1** – Classroom Supplies for Teachers: Continues funding for the Department of Education's DonorsChoose app, allowing the public to support teachers by donating to classroom projects and essential supplies.
- **SB598 SD1** – Hawai'i Hope Card Program: Establishes a program within the Department of the Attorney General to issue hope cards to individuals with long-term protective orders, providing a convenient way to access critical information.

Last month, I had the privilege of attending the 2025 Hawai'i State of the State Address, where Governor Josh Green outlined the administration's priorities for the year ahead. Education remains a critical focus, and I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues to ensure meaningful progress for our students and educators. I'm also proud of our state public school students as they recently wrapped up the Secondary Student Conference. We also recognized the 30-year anniversary of charter school law in Hawai'i by presenting the Charter School Commission with a certificate during a Senate floor session.

As we navigate the first set of legislative deadlines, my hope is that we continue working together to strengthen educational opportunities for all of Hawai'i. Mahalo for your support and engagement!



Senator Kidani greeting members of the AARP advocacy group at the 2025 State of the State Address.



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Secondary Student Conference

The Hawai'i State Student Council (HSSC) held part of their two-day Secondary Student Conference (SSC) at the Capitol. This year's theme was "Choice to Voice," a call to turn advocacy into action through legislative engagement. For over 50 years, students from all over the state have gathered at the conference to apply their diverse viewpoints in addressing educational issues. HSSC is the official voice of Hawai'i's 170,000 public school students, and it was such a pleasure having some of these student leaders at the Capitol, and welcoming them to my office.

I enjoy supporting HSSC's conferences and other activities that give students a chance to learn more about the legislative process. These students are our state's future, and I encourage students from grades 7-12 to learn more about HSSC (<https://www.hawaiiistuco.com/>) and get involved.



[Left]: Senator Kidani and breakout session attendees: Tyler Agarpao - Waipahu HS, Audrey Shum - Roosevelt HS, Audrey Sheehan - Roosevelt HS, Olivia-Butterfly Rodriguez - Roosevelt HS, Tiffany Victoria Tolentino - Waipahu HS, Jayce Nakamura - Waipahu HS, Arianna Cadina - Roosevelt HS, Mia Aisha Fetalco - Campbell HS, Jasmine Miyake - Roosevelt HS, Izeah Almogela - Waipahu HS, Andrea Antonio - Keaau Middle School, Jennifer Nguyen- Radford HA, Rayden Aoki - Kaiser HS, Caleb Leong - Kaiser HS, Kealani Valdez -Roosevelt HS. [Right]: Senator Kidani leading a breakout session on legislative engagement.

DOE Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) Conference

I had the privilege of attending the DOE Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) Conference, where Hawai'i's future leaders showcased their skills, innovation, and passion for career and technical education. This event gathered students from across the state to engage in hands-on learning, leadership development, and industry connections.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) plays a vital role in preparing students for the workforce by equipping them with practical skills and real-world experience. It was inspiring to see so many bright young minds taking steps toward successful careers in fields like healthcare, engineering, business, and more!



Viewing student displays with State CTE Ed. Specialist Daniel Addis, left, and Superintendent Hayashi, right.

Diamond Jubilee: Celebrating Constituent Iwalani Tseu's 75th Birthday



Kumu Hula `Iwalani Tseu

Mililani's Kumu Hula 'Iwalani Wahinekapu Walsh Tseu was recognized at the Filipino Community Center for her immense contributions to Hawai'i's cultural and artistic legacy. With over 55 years in the entertainment industry, 'Iwalani has dedicated her life to perpetuating Hawaiian dance, music, and values worldwide, serving as the Executive Director of Huilwa Academy and the founder of Iwalani's School of Dance in Japan and China. I am proud to call her a friend and role model to many.

'Iwalani's efforts through the 'Iwalani Foundation and Honouliuli Healing Garden furthers her commitment to uplifting the community and cancer awareness. I celebrate 'Iwalani's 75th birthday and extend my heartfelt wishes for continued success spreading aloha!

30 Years of Charter School Law

My colleague Senator Donna Kim and I were honored to recognize the 30-year anniversary of charter school law in our state. I was also pleased to welcome and meet with former Minnesota Senator Ember Reichgott Junge, who authored the nation's first charter school law and served in her State Senate for almost two decades. Charter schools are an integral part of our education system. In 2024, 12,427 students (out of the DOE's enrollment of 167,649) were enrolled in public charter schools. These institutions have unique focuses geared toward enhancing our keiki's learning process including place-based learning and Hawaiian culture and language.



With former Minnesota Senator Ember Reichgott Junge, left.



[R-L]: Gene Zarro, HI Public Charter Schools Network (HPCSN); HI State Public Charter School Commission (HSPCSC) Chair Makalapua Alencastre; HSPCSC Treasurer Steve Hirakami; Sen. Kim; Sen. Junge; HSPCSC Exec. Dir. Ed Noh

Celebrating William “Bill” Little: Friends of the Library Volunteer of the Year



William “Bill” Little, 2024 FLH Volunteer of the Year

I was honored to attend the Friends of the Library of Hawai‘i’s 145th anniversary celebration and recognize one of our dedicated community members, William “Bill” Little, with a congratulatory Senate certificate. As a longtime constituent and passionate volunteer, Bill has devoted over a decade to supporting Hawai‘i’s public libraries, sharing his expertise in military history, science, and environmental literature.

It was a privilege to recognize Bill’s contributions and celebrate the incredible work of FLH in enhancing library services across the state. Mahalo to Bill and all FLH volunteers for their commitment to literacy, learning, and community!

Kanoelani Rainbow Lanai Building Grand Opening



In front of the Rainbow Lanai with [L-R]: Tracy Takazono - Temp. Assignment VP Kanoelani, Neil Blomberg - Principal Kanoelani, Stacie Kunihsa - Executive Director Leadership Institute, and Lisa Tominaga - VP Kanoelani.

It was a special privilege to attend the grand dedication of the new Rainbow Lanai at Kanoelani Elementary. This nearly 10-million dollar project that I had championed funding for will serve as a valuable space for students, staff, and families for years to come. With the increased population of students, Kanoelani has faced challenges with the proportionate need for shared spaces to host school-wide assemblies and student activities.

During the ceremony, I enjoyed participating in Family Culture Night, a wonderful event that celebrates the diverse backgrounds of Kanoelani’s English Learners (EL) and promotes cultural understanding through interactive activities.

Mahalo to Principal Neil Blomberg and my best wishes for Kanoelani Elementary to continue fostering an inclusive and enriching learning environment for all students!

Moment of Contemplation

One of the recent highlights of the month was the insightful Moment of Contemplation speech delivered on the Senate floor by my legislative aide, **Rianna Ramos**.

Here is a quote from her speech: *“Through collaboration, open communication, and a shared commitment, you have the power to confront and overcome the challenges ahead.”* Rianna shared that Leadership is not a solitary endeavor—it is a collective pursuit that is not defined by a single individual, but by the collective efforts of those who envision a brighter tomorrow.



With Legislative Aide Rianna Ramos.

“Careers in Our Community” - Waiau Elementary School Career Week

I was honored to serve as a presenter at Waiau Elementary School’s “Careers in Our Community” event, where I shared my journey to becoming a legislator and the importance of public service. A special shoutout to my former intern, Justine Jumalon, a proud Waipahu High School graduate and now a dedicated teacher at Waiau Elementary. Justine worked a few months in my office when she was a student at Waipahu. It’s always heartwarming to see former students return to their communities as educators, shaping the minds of future leaders. Mahalo to Waiau Elementary for hosting this event and for their commitment to empowering students through career exploration!



With Ms. Jumalon, back row, far right, and her students.



Sharing my journey in public service with Waiau El. students.

University of Hawai‘i President Wendy Hensel visits Leeward Community College

UH President Wendy Hensel was at Leeward Community College earlier this month. She officially took on her current leadership position on January 1, and Leeward CC was the fourth stop of her tour that involves visiting the campuses and education centers within the UH system. Her day at Leeward CC gave her an opportunity to engage with the college’s students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members. As Vice-Chair of the Committee on Higher Education, I’m looking forward to UH President Hensel’s future contributions to improve our state’s colleges and education centers.

UH Mānoa’s to launch new Bachelor’s in Early Childhood Care & Education

The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa will launch a new Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program in Fall 2025 to address the state's critical shortage of early childhood educators. This full-time, hybrid program will prepare students to support children from birth through age 8, leading to a Hawai‘i teaching license for preschool through third grade. The application deadline is March 1. This initiative aligns with the Ready Keiki program spearheaded by Lieutenant Governor Sylvia Luke, which aims to expand preschool access for all 3- and 4-year-olds by 2032, but is hindered by a shortage of qualified teachers.

The program, developed with input from local communities, meets national professional standards and offers a culturally relevant curriculum. It was created through collaboration between UH Mānoa and several UH community colleges. The new degree program is a critical step in building a well-prepared workforce to support Hawai‘i’s youngest learners and strengthen the state’s future. For more information, visit the College of Education website:

<https://coe.hawaii.edu/elem/news/coe-offers-new-bachelors-degree-in-early-childhood-care-and-education/>