

Date: 03/24/2008

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent of Education

Title of Resolution: HCR 071/HR 062 URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO ONLY PURCHASE OR LEASE LARGE SCHOOL BUSES THAT HAVE AN OPERABLE SEAT BELT ASSEMBLY AT ALL DESIGNATED SEATING POSITIONS AND SEAT BACKS THAT ARE AT LEAST TWENTYFOUR INCHES IN HEIGHT.

Purpose of Resolution: Urging the department of education to only purchase or lease large school buses that have an operable seat belt assembly at all designated seating positions and seat backs that are at least twenty-four inches in height.

Department's Position: While the Department of Education (DOE) supports efforts to ensure added safety to its school bus fleet, we do not support House Concurrent Resolution 71 at this time due to Hawaii's impending fiscal austerity and priority for the current Board of Education's budget requests. Furthermore, school buses have been designed to protect students without the use of seat belts and data has shown that riding a school bus, without seat belts, is a safe mode of transport from home to school and back. Most school bus-related injuries occur after students have exited the bus or from injuries sustained in student-to-student altercations while transported. DOE concerns with HCR 071 are set forth:

Inventory of existing buses. DOE currently leases 14 school buses that were acquired new in 2006 with an annual lease payment of \$257,106.51 for seven years. These buses are utilized to transport students within the West Hawaii district. As a result of an ongoing difficulty in recruiting

certified school bus drivers, only 8 buses are used on a daily basis. The DOE does not foresee the need to acquire additional buses through 2013, nor does it project an impending need for more buses beyond the term of the current lease.

Assuring Proper Use of Seat Belts. It is not useful to mandate seat belts in school buses unless there is proper training and monitoring of their use according to applicable manufacturer's specifications. However, to avoid compromising driver safety and to assure proper usage of seat belts, HCR 71 should include a statement of intent to fund the cost of providing trained monitors on each bus. The monitor's objective would be (i) to assure proper usage of seat belts at all times and (ii) to assure that seat belts are not utilized by students for the purpose of injuring other students. A bus monitor would cost at least \$10,000 per bus per year. In addition to the buses it operates, the DOE contracts with others who operate 560 school buses that transport students between home and school daily.

Increasing Student Safety and Welfare. Students' safety and welfare during daily school bus transport can be improved at less cost than seat belts by providing funds to install video cameras in all buses. The installation of video cameras will minimize incidents of inappropriate behavior on school buses. This effort will increase assurance for each student's well-being while transported. The DOE receives more complaints related to inappropriate behavior on school buses than issues regarding seat belts. The cost of video camera systems is approximately \$2500.00 per bus, excluding cost of installation.