

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2963

LATE TESTIMONY

House Committee on Finance
Wednesday, February 10, 2010
2:00 pm, Conference Room 308

Submitted by: Marguerite Butler Higa, Dept. of Zoology, UH, and Member, SOSHawaii

Submitted to: House of Representatives, Committee on Finance

Chair, Marcus Oshiro, Vice-Chair Marilyn Lee, and Honorable Committee Members

Hearing Date and Time: Wednesday, February 10, 2010, 2:00 pm, Room 308

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Number of Copies Requested: 15 (one for each committee member) + 2 originals for Chair and Vice-Chair.

Chair Oshiro, Vice-Chair Lee, and Finance Committee Members, Good Afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB2963, which authorizes the appropriation of \$50 million of the Emergency and Budget Reserve to the General Fund to be used this fiscal year for education.

I am a proud graduate of Mililani High School, spent 20 years on the mainland and abroad earning my Ph.D. and postdoctoral training, and I have now returned to serve my state as a faculty member at UH in the department of Zoology.

I am a practicing scientist. In the four years I have been at UH, I have brought in \$1M of federal funding for basic research in biology and environmental science, and I work every day to improve students' mastery of Science, Technology, and Math (STEM). I am only a scientist, but even I know that there is money in technology. What we need is a trained workforce.

Today's technology careers require mastery of MULTIPLE disciplines. In my area: biology, mathematical modeling, computer analysis, communication skills. Mastering skills takes TIME. Even before the furloughs, our students were already behind. Our biology curriculum has a built-in year of remedial biology, because many students are underprepared for college-level work. Furloughs are setting Hawaii on a backwards course with the global economy.

I am also a mother of a 3rd grader at Noelani school, and I volunteer to provide remedial help. Today's curriculum is chock full of hundreds of mandatory standards. The effect has been to fly through the topics to cover ground quickly, leaving no time at all for reinforcement, mastery, and exploring the implications of new concepts. For example, some of my young friends are struggling with multiplication. They don't know how to count by 3's, which then makes it incredibly difficult to learn the multiplication tables. Meanwhile their classmates are rushing on to problems involving combinations of addition and multiplication, and which involve parsing out multiple-step word problems. They are hopelessly lost, there is no time for remedial help, and if they get the remedial help they miss out on the instruction for the next topic. There goes another person dropping out of the technology workforce.

This is happening all over the islands, at all grade levels. As a member of Save Our Schools Hawaii, I've seen through the "1000 student voices about Furlough Fridays" campaign that students at all age levels and communities are suffering. High schoolers from Mililani, Farrington, and Waianae are all worried that they may fail because of lost instructional time. More time for homework does not do you any good if you don't get it. Elementary school and middle school kids worry that their "brain cells are dying," that they are "becoming stupid," that they are losing ground -- losing the knowledge and skills that they had earlier in the year!

Students are outraged by the inequity of it all. They very clearly recognize that it is not "shared sacrifice" -- they say that "it is not fair that private school kids get to go to school and learn and they don't." And their private school colleagues have written letters pleading for an end to furloughs "to let their friends go to school too, because they are smart and deserve to go to school too."

Many students have expressed worry, fear, and mourning for their lost future. "How will they get into college, buy a house, have a family?" Public school children DO care, and they do go on to do great things and contribute to society.

Finally, they express alarm that no one seems to care about them. What would our plantation ancestors think? Those who sacrificed EVERYTHING so that their children could go to school and obtain a college education. Because education is the path to a better life. How can we take budgetary dollars away from the futures of 170,000 school children to balance the deficit today? One would never take food from a baby to feed a sick adult, because everyone recognizes that a starving baby will never be the same again, even if they are well-fed later in life.

There are many problems in our society, but we must find other solutions to the budget deficit. Education must be our first priority. The futures of 170,000 children and their families MUST take priority for the \$50M investment.

Thank you very much.

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Wednesday, February 10, 2010
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Submitted by: Clare Hanusz and Jill Tao, Members, SOSHawaii

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Chair Oshiro, Vice-Chair Lee, and Finance Committee Members, Good Afternoon.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB2963, which authorizes the appropriation of \$50 million of the Emergency and Budget Reserve to the General Fund to be used this fiscal year for education. SOSHawaii has been asking state leaders to listen to the voices of the keiki and end the so-called "Furlough Fridays" which have meant hardship for children and parents, and national embarrassment for the state of Hawai'i.

We support this legislation for four main reasons:

First, it would allow children to return to school this year, rather than waiting until the fall. This is something that all parties to the original agreement have said they wish to do, and the funding support would go a long way toward making this a reality.

Second, it would demonstrate in concrete fashion the state's commitment to its children and the importance of their education. This is a message that the keiki need to hear and believe. Research indicates that children by the age of 6 can distinguish between genuine observations and false praise. In other words, they know when someone is not being honest with them. Talk is cheap, and as Murray Edelman, the famous political scientist once said, if you want to know what people really care about in politics, follow the money, not the talk.

Third, it is a smart investment. These days, smart investments are few and far between, but as a recent January 2010 study by the OECD finds, investment in education will reap exponential gains in the wealth of a state. It yields a bigger payoff over time than tax incentives for business, direct or in-direct subsidies for industry, or short-term management reforms. According to Dr. Eric Hanusek from the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the other authors of the study, the economics of investing in human capital are overwhelming. Nothing else comes close. But they note, that politically, calling for such investment is "difficult", since benefits are not realized immediately, and long-term improvements are much harder to support. However, to quote from the report, "Concluding that change is 'too difficult' would imply foregoing enormous gains to the well-being of OECD nations." (p. 9, "The High Cost of Low Educational Performance: The Long Run Impact of Improving PISA Outcomes", Programme for International Student Assessment, Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), January 2010.)

In other words, if we fail to invest today, right now, in education, the economy of the state will lose, and not just this year. Every year to come will see that loss escalate. This is not an easy decision--there are many voices calling for relief, looking to the state to help during this

rough economic time. But the investment in children, in the state's human capital, can never be a poor choice.

Finally, dollar for dollar, it's the smartest move the state can make, providing the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people. 170,000 children statewide will immediately see the benefits. 17,000 teachers will immediately feel the effects. The parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who have had to "make due" with the little they have now will immediately feel the impact. And the stage will be set--the children will know that the questions that they have been asking of their state leaders, "Does anybody care?" "Can you help us?", can be answered with yes, we do, and yes, we can.

Thank you.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2963**House Committee on Finance****Wednesday, February 10, 2010****2:00 pm, Conference Room 308****Submitted by:** Lois A. Yamauchi, Public Citizen and Member, Save our Schools Hawai'i**Submitted to:** House of Representatives, Committee on Finance

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Chair Oshiro, Vice-Chair Lee, and Finance Committee Members, Good Afternoon.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB2963, which authorizes the appropriation of \$50 million of the Emergency and Budget Reserve to the General Fund to be used this fiscal year for education.

I am a mother of two children in public schools. My son Coe, who is with me attends Manoa Elementary School. I am also a professor of Education at UH Manoa, and attended public schools in Hawai'i myself. I am a graduate of Kalani High School.

I believe that our State has provided quality public education in the past. I am a supporter of public schools and am committed to our family remaining in the public school system—as long as a high quality program is provided. With the implementation of Furlough Fridays, our children have not received a high quality education. There just is not enough time to do so.

I know that there are many competing demands upon the State budget. Yet, education is the foundation of all of these other concerns. For example, I agree that healthcare is important. Yet, an educated citizenry is one that has current knowledge about nutrition, physical exercise, and science. Business and technology is also important. But again, these fields depend upon an educated society that can contribute to launching our State into the forefront of technology

and science. We can't do that, if our schools don't have time for technology or advanced science lessons.

It is well-known that our State has a history of elitism and separatism, with regard to education. The missionaries, upon their arrival in the kingdom of Hawai'i, created schools for their own children that separated their children from those of the Native Hawaiians. From 1924-1949, our public schools also ran what was known as «English Standard Schools» that did not admit children who spoke Hawai'i Creole English (Pidgin). These schools were created largely from pressure from the growing European and American populations who could not afford private schools, but did not want their children to attend school with Hawaiians and Asians (Tamura, 1994).

Today, many in our State who can afford a private school education for their children, choose to enroll their children in these schools. This is still a minority of families, but a larger percentage than in other states. Hawai'i also have the largest percentage of public school teachers who send their children to private schools (Bayer, 2009). I am also aware that many legislators do not send their children to public schools. I am dismayed by these trends. It tells me that many in power may not have a personal investment in public education in our State. Thus, perhaps the reason that the Friday Furloughs were seen as solution to the budget crisis.

I believe that those of us who have more resources and who are in a positions to make decisions should keep in mind that the majority of people in Hawai'i still enroll their children in public schools. They are counting on us to provide quality education that will prepare children in this State for higher education and other opportunities after high school. Those 170,000 children deserve high quality instruction. Not the minimum, or less than minimum, as we now have it with the furloughs.

I know that it is easier for people, who have the resources to send their children to private schools or who can supplement their child's education with additional classes and Furlough Friday programs, to say, «We can afford 170 days of school. We are in a fiscal crisis.» However, this is not acceptable. We must provide a quality education for all children. It is our moral obligation. It is in the best interest of our State.

As a public school graduate, public educator and parent, I urge your support of HB2963. Thank you.