

TESTIMONY
HCR 289 HD1

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Dear WTL/JGO Committee Members:

Thank you for giving the public the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of HCR 289/SB 1. As an academic, I have been researching food politics issues for four years now. As a community member, I have also been involved with efforts on the North Shore of O'ahu to provide a salad bar for the Sunset Beach Elementary School children for the past two years.

Farm to school programs can have many interrelated positive impacts as stated in the resolution: keeping dollars and jobs in Hawai'i; providing fresh, nutritious produce to students; instilling healthy eating habits in Hawai'i's keiki; supporting Hawai'i's farmers; keeping agricultural lands intact by preventing development; and reducing our dependence on imported food thereby moving Hawai'i towards sustainability and food security.

HCR 289/SB1 is an excellent opportunity to advance the farm to school process in Hawai'i. The CTHAR feasibility study cited in the bill has provided much of the information and links to resources that individual school staff, the statewide educational system, farmers, vendors, and distributors need in order to determine how to best work toward increasing the amount of fresh, locally grown produce provided in school lunches for Hawai'i's children.

Once we were finally successful in implementing the salad bar at Sunset Beach Elementary one day a week, we have gotten an overwhelmingly positive response from staff, faculty and most importantly students at the school. There is less food waste, and many of the students come back asking for seconds once they have finished their salads. However, while the salad bar is a victory in and of itself, there is more to do. For example, the iceberg lettuce we serve the children comes prepackaged from the mainland and has a chlorinated aftertaste, since the distributors ostensibly use the chemical to preserve the "freshness" of the cut lettuce so that it doesn't turn brown. If we were able to procure local produce, there would be benefits for farmers of course, and students as well, since they would be served fresh local produce instead of chlorinated iceberg lettuce. Several cafeteria managers throughout the DOE system have figured out how to do this within the DOE guidelines, and have even been recognized by School Food services for their efforts. We should applaud them and help the DOE model other school food service programs after their hard work.

In previous testimony against the bill, the DOE representative asserted that the DOE serves nutritious lunches that meet (and even exceed) the USDA nutrition guidelines for school lunches. The problem is that the USDA guidelines for school lunches are antiquated and in great need of revision. They are still

based on the premise that children, especially those receiving free or reduced school lunches, need an abundant amount of calories from school food since they may be unable to get them at home. This may have been the case when the USDA guidelines were originally implemented, however, at this point our children are in greater danger of *overnutrition* rather than malnutrition. They may be getting calories, but as a volunteer for the aforementioned salad bar once a week, I can attest that the calories that they are receiving are most decidedly NOT nutritious and very empty. So while the DOE may be exceeding the USDA calorie requirement for school breakfasts and lunches, this has now become a disservice to our students, rather than helping them.

This resolution should enable the procurement process for the DOE to source produce more easily directly from Hawai'i farmers and to make sure that the 5 week school lunch calendar can be amended to include healthier (and local) alternatives within the federal guidelines. Again, this can be done since there are several cafeteria managers within the DOE system successfully serving healthy and nutritious lunches with as much local produce as possible. One cafeteria manager attested that he has been able to save money from his budget because there has been so much reduction of waste. Many farm-to-school programs on the mainland have also seen a reduction of waste as well as a return to operating in the black, rather than losing money each month through inventive, locally-sourced menus. Please see this Dec/Jan 2009 Edutopia Magazine article for an example of a fiscally challenged school district in Baltimore, Maryland making positive changes in their school lunches, providing healthy and locally grown vegetarian alternatives. Their cafeteria actually makes money! (<http://www.edutopia.org/green-schools-food-service-environment>)

Please support this resolution and farm to school in Hawai'i. It's important for our environment, for our children, and for our future.

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