

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
GM 655, Charlene Cuaresma
Senate Committee on Education
Friday, April 8, 2011
1:15pm
Senate Conference Room 225

Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

By
Agnes Malate
P.O. Box 61501; Honolulu, Hawai'i 96839π
E-mail: armalate@yahoo.com
Phone: 388-3019

My name is Agnes Malate. I am a product of the State of Hawai'i's public education system and proud to be a graduate of Waipahu High School and the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UH Manoa). I immigrated to Hawaii from the Philippines and am grateful for the opportunities that having an advanced degree have unlocked for me. I am a few of the fortunate ones from my high school's class of 1981 who entered UH Manoa directly, earned a bachelor's degree, and went on to obtain a master's degree in Educational Foundations.

Thirty years later the number of students from Waipahu and other schools in the Leeward district entering college remains below the overall rate from all public and private schools. In Fall 2010, University of Hawai'i enrollment data indicates that **38.1%** of the 14,052 public and private school students who graduated from high school in June 2010 entered the University of Hawai'i System. Entry rates of students from public schools in the Leeward District beyond the H-1/H-2 merge were all lower with the exception of Kapolei at 40.4%. Of the 1601 students who graduated from Campbell, Nanakuli, Waianae and Waipahu, **less than one-third (30.9%)** entered the UH system, only **6.8%** (109) into UH four-year institutions, and even less went to the Manoa campus at **4.3%** (69). This is but one indicator of the challenges facing the students and the schools in these four school complexes where under **one-fifth (4 out of 25)** elementary, middle, and secondary schools met NCLB standards without conditions.

I believe Charlene Cuaresma's background and extensive experience working in the Leeward area and diverse populations throughout the state qualifies her to serve as a member of the Board of Education. Ms. Cuaresma has first-hand knowledge of the struggles facing the public school students and teachers having attended public schools from K-12 and taught health education to high school students. Her efforts to ensure that all of Hawai'i's people have equal rights to education, justice, and high quality of life is well recognized by the community and as a result was awarded the United Filipino Community Council Humanitarian Award and the Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights Martin Luther King Jr. Award.

My association with Ms. Cuaresma dates back to the late 1990s when she was the coordinator of the Health Careers Opportunity Program and I was working at the John A. Burns School of Medicine's Imi Ho`ola Post-Baccalaureate Program. Since then we have worked together on various projects advancing education, labor rights, and community and civic issues. The success of our endeavors is in no small way a result of Ms. Cuaresma's leadership, indefatigable spirit, tireless advocacy, and efforts to bring various segments of the community together. She is committed to building each community's capacity and ensuring that not only is "No Child Is Left Behind" but that "No Citizen is Left Behind." Ms. Cuaresma is a team player and is as comfortable interacting with people from the boardroom to the grassroots community. She is not one to seek accolades and finds gratification in knowing that she is contributing to making society better for all. She is compassionate and has a keen understanding of the struggles that many students, families, and communities face in the Leeward District. However, her grasp of Hawai'i's community extends beyond this area. She currently lives on the Windward side of Oahu and has lived in Kalihi and East Honolulu.

Ms. Cuaresma's advocacy skill is complemented by her management experience. She has managed federal and state projects and is experienced in writing grants, managing budgets, implementing objectives, and evaluating outcomes. I believe Ms. Cuaresma has the combination of skills, experience, and background that will be an asset to the Board. Her leadership style is collaborative. However, she is an independent thinker and is not afraid to take an unpopular stand, if appropriate.

I respectfully request your approval and confirmation of Charlene Cuaresma's appointment to the Board of Education. I wholeheartedly support Ms. Cuaresma's appointment and have every confidence that she will bring fresh perspective and solutions to address the educational needs of Hawai'i's multicultural society and improve the educational system.