



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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By

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And

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SCR 66 Requesting the Convening of a Task Force to Determine How to Expand
School Gardens Programs Statewide

Chairs Tokuda and Green, Vice Chairs Kidani and Nishihara and Members of the Committees, My name is Sylvia Yuen and I am the Interim Dean of the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. We support expanding school garden programs statewide and would be willing partners in a task force.

There is a growing U.S. movement for the “greening” of school yards through gardens at school sites. Schools across the state of Hawai'i have taken advantage of this opportunity to promote healthy youth development. School gardens serve as outdoor “learning laboratories”, can be aesthetically pleasing spaces for children to play, and perhaps most importantly, serve as places to promote the consumption of fresh produce among young people who are part of a population with elevated rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Learning across the curriculum—in subjects including science, math, nutrition, environmental studies and health—can be part of school garden programs.

In schools that grow edible produce, students learn science and nutrition concepts relevant to growing food while they work in the garden. Food growing school garden programs keep one central health-related focus, and evidence supports this, is the stimulation of school children to increase their consumption of fresh produce. In a world where many of these students subsist on diets heavily based upon packaged foods or from fast food restaurants, school gardens provide alternatives. In the same world where low-income income and ethnic minority children are more likely to be obese and often with lower academic achievement, school gardens can be an effective and relatively low-cost mechanism to reduce these health and educational disparities.

School garden programs that focus on providing hands-on inquiry to promote learning in science and mathematics provide teachers with alternatives to meet mandated learning

objectives. Other benefits of school garden programs are that in some school garden programs, parental involvement and student "bonding" and good feelings toward their school have grown.

In summary, school garden programs provide opportunities to advance STEM learning, provide healthy outcomes, and can benefit the overall school environment. We support SCR 66.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.