

February 2, 2011

The Honorable Roy Takumi, Chair
House Committee on Education
State Capitol, Room 309
Honolulu, HI 96813

Re: HB 1310 - Relating to Schools

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

While the Foundation usually comments on public finance measures relating to taxation, we believe that HB 1310 deserves your careful consideration as the legislature attempts to grapple again with an extraordinary shortfall in the state general fund budget.

HB 1310 would allow a school that has been designated by the Board of Education for closure for the purpose of consolidation to remain open if the Board determines that tuition imposed at that school would produce revenue equal to the estimated cost savings had the school been closed. Should the Board make that determination, then the tuition would be imposed. The measure directs the Board to establish procedures for the imposition of the tuition and for the transfer of any student whose parent or guardian chooses not to pay the tuition.

In recent months the public has witnessed a number of protests by students, parents, and teachers of schools that have been designated for closure. While there have been a variety of reasons put forth, the bottom line is that keeping these schools open where enrollment has been declining comes at a cost not only to taxpayers but to students as well as we see at the opposite end, classrooms that are over crowded.

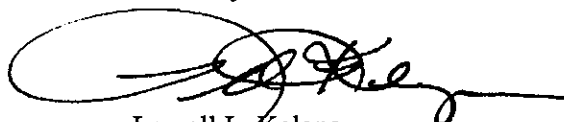
While we would all like to think that we can afford the luxury of three or four students per teacher, we cannot afford it. Consider not only the student teacher ratios, the cost of utilities per student, the school janitor, the school secretary, the principal, etc., are all fixed costs no matter how many students attend that school.

If parents, students, and teachers want these schools to remain open, then they must also be willing to bear the cost of the inefficiency they represent. We, as taxpayers, are willing to pay for the education of our children, but that cost must be reasonable and affordable. What the consolidation process tells us is that these schools are not cost efficient. Keeping these schools open also steals from other schools and other students as these are resources that could have provided the necessary services and instructors at those schools.

When and until the parents, students, and teachers in these schools designated for closure make the connection between the cost of keeping these schools open and their pocket book, they will continue to object to the closure of those schools. Therefore, we believe HB 1310 deserves your consideration in helping to make the connection very real for these parents, students, and teachers.

Instead of asking the rest of the taxpaying public to pick up the subsidy for these schools, those who directly benefit from these inefficient operations should be asked to pay for this extraordinary service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lowell L. Kalapa', with a large, sweeping flourish on the left side.

Lowell L. Kalapa
President

LLK/jad

February 2, 2011

David O'Neal
94-1038 Kaiamu Street
Waipahu, HI 96797

Representative Roy Takumi, Chair
Representative Della Au Belatti, Vice Chair
Committee on Education Members

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1310, Closure and Consolidation of Schools; Tuition

Dear Chair Takumi, Vice Chair Belatti, and Committee Members:

I am writing to you today, asking for your support of this bill.

As we have all seen from recent Board of Education community meetings, any attempt at school closures or consolidations is met with very passionate resistance from the affected communities. This usually ends with a decision to keep the status quo in response to the public outcry, and thus eliminating the much-needed cost savings these closures and consolidations would provide. While aging communities in Honolulu and other areas have dwindling school enrollments, those of us on the Leeward Coast are faced with continuous overcrowding in our schools, with limited funds for additional construction.

HB1310 is an excellent example of smart government that solves both issues. It will allow the Department of Education to realize the cost savings that are necessary, and at the same time allow for low-enrollment schools dear to their communities, to remain open if the support is there. This will free up monies to be used in areas where the demand is greatest.

I humbly ask for your support of HB1310, and hope it will pass unanimously out of your Committee.

Sincerely,

David O'Neal
Waipahu Neighborhood Board Member, Sub-District 1
Royal Kunia Community Association Government Affairs Chair

CC: Representative Sharon Har
Representative Ty Cullen
Representative Angus McKelvey