

**SCR109/SR75****REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO SUPPORT THE CREATION OF
FOREIGN LANGUAGE IMMERSION CLASSES IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

Senate Committee on Education

March 25, 2013

1:30 p.m.

Room 414

The administration of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) offers the following comments on SCR109/SR75, which requests that the Department of Education (DOE) support the creation of foreign language immersion classes in public elementary schools.

OHA agrees that early language immersion is one of the best ways to develop thorough proficiency in language, increase cognitive and academic capacity in all subjects, and foster greater cultural connection and identity. We support all language immersion programs and the rights of parents to prioritize their childrens' multi-lingual capacities in their educations. However, OHA maintains that the State's primary obligation with regard to early education in non-English languages is to fulfill its commitment to revitalizing 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, the co-official language of the State, and the language of the first people of Hawai'i.

Currently, the State's only non-English language immersion program, the Hawaiian Language Immersion Program (HLIP), is offered at 21 public schools and educates more than 2,000 students in kindergarten through the twelfth grade. However, this program continues to face numerous challenges, including issues related to funding, facilities, and appropriate assessment. For example HLIP students have been placed at a severe disadvantage in the state assessment process by being offered direct English-to-Hawaiian translated test instead of an assessment created originally in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. There have been numerous problems—cultural and translation biases, translation inaccuracies, and terminology inconsistencies—reportedly found in the translated Hawai'i State Assessment for Hawaiian language immersion students, which have penalized schools and students.

OHA urges the State to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of this program before looking to build new ones. An alternative may be to utilize the curriculum, materials, teaching capacity, and structure already in place within the HLIP to offer early Hawaiian language courses to the non-HLIP students in public elementary schools. This would allow young students the academic benefits of learning a non-English language as well as a greater appreciation for the native culture of their home state while reducing the financial impact of developing and administering an entirely new curriculum program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on these important measures.