



Hawaii State Senate
Committee on Ways and Means
February 27, 2014

Chair Ige, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB2516 SD1 and SB2517 SD1. This testimony is in support allowing charter schools access to facilities funding both through the charter commission and through general obligation bonds.

I am the Founder and School Leader for SEEQS, the School for Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability. We are the state's newest public charter school; we were authorized in December 2012 and opened our doors to our founding class of more than sixty 6th and 7th graders in August 2013. While we are incredibly proud of the work our students are doing and have done thus far, the intent of my testimony is to provide a first-hand account of the desperate financial challenges of finding an appropriate facility--especially in Honolulu--that we can afford on the meager existing per-pupil funding.

As a brand new school, we began with a small founding class; this enabled us to begin our school with just a few classes, and develop our systems, processes, and school culture before we grow to a larger school, as is consistent with best practices in charter schools across the country. However, we face with a serious financial challenge. Sixty-five students multiplied by the per-pupil allocation of approximately \$6100 gives us an operating budget of just over \$400,000. With those funds, we must pay our five core teachers--as a secondary school our students need access to Science and History in addition to English Language Arts and Mathematics, plus Arts--as well as our two administrators. Our school is run by a School Leader/Principal and a School Manager. As you can estimate, paying fair salaries for our employees uses up the bulk of our revenues provided by per-pupil allocation. We also had to purchase curricular materials, technology, infrastructure, and provide professional development for our teachers. And then we must pay rent! Our current facility, in which we will barely fit by the end of our second year, costs us more than \$9,000 per month in rent and utilities.

By full size, our school will reach approximately 420 students. Accordingly, by full size we will need on the order of 25,000 to 35,000 square feet to house our facility. Commercial real estate prices ranging from \$1.35 to \$2.00 per month and up per square foot. There is no doubt--we cannot afford a facility of that size at this point, and even in the future this will stretch our budget beyond our capacity to handle.

Unless we are able to find a rent-free facility, which we have not been able to do, we will need to do significant fundraising in order to cover our facilities costs regardless of the rent price. Any fundraising we do--and any extra time we spend searching for a facility year after year--is time that we spend away from working with students.

Our school was authorized, through an incredibly rigorous process, based on our vision for a school that is based on best practices in education, as well as community need and interest. Our successes already in this first year, as well as the already high demand for next year's enrollment (more than 100 applications for sixty spots with still two weeks to go of open enrollment!) are a testament to the great success our school can be as part of the Hawaii state public school system. We want to spend as much time as possible making our school successful for our students, and we believe that our primary role as a school is to focus on what's happening **inside** the school, working with teachers, students and content. Facilities support and funding from the legislature will enable us to do the work we set out to do, and that we were authorized to do.

Mahalo for your consideration.
Buffy Cushman-Patz
SEEQS Founder and School Leader

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [WAM Testimony](#)
Cc: caben5@aol.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM
Date: Thursday, February 27, 2014 12:07:01 AM



SB2516

Submitted on: 2/27/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Cara Beneski	Individual	Support	No

Comments: WHEA is consistently among the top high schools in the state. WHEA students have to take DOE tests in tents and outdoors. Half of WHEA's Senior Class is already enrolled in college through the UH Running Start Program.

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From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [WAM Testimony](#)
Cc: kaikani7@yahoo.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM
Date: Wednesday, February 26, 2014 1:13:24 PM

SB2516

Submitted on: 2/26/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Gina Little	Individual	Comments Only	No

Comments: I am in support of this bill. Hawaii's charter schools have shown they are an excellent choice for families. They deserve state facilities funding as they are also public schools.

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From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [WAM Testimony](#)
Cc: jkissida@gmail.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM
Date: Wednesday, February 26, 2014 1:23:37 PM

SB2516

Submitted on: 2/26/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Jonathan Kissida	Individual	Support	No

Comments: All students deserve equal funding to support their education.

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To: [WAM Testimony](#)
Cc: reeftour@aol.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM
Date: Thursday, February 27, 2014 8:17:03 AM

SB2516

Submitted on: 2/27/2014

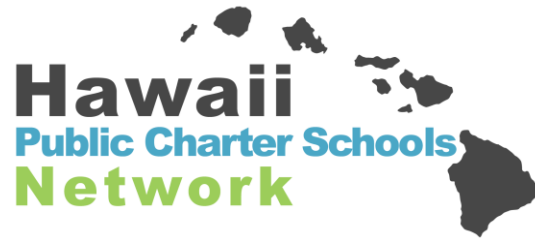
Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Kathy Takahashi	Individual	Support	No

Comments: facilities funding is a critical issue for education. In Hawaii, start-up charter schools have paid the costs of their facilities from operational funds. Please provide support for our keiki and provide facilities funding. Please vote in favor of this measure.

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Hawaii State Senate
Committee on Ways and Means

DATE: Thursday, February 27, 2014
TIME: 9:00 a.m.
PLACE: Conference Room 211, Hawaii State Capitol

Chair Ige, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

Re: SB2516 SD1 – Strong Support

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on SB2516 Relating to Education. Hawaii Public Charter Schools Network (HPCSN) is committed to quality education for all public school students in Hawaii through our support of, and work with, Hawaii’s public charter schools. The number one priority for HPCSN this legislative session is to help make progress to address the financial challenges, most especially with facilities, that exist for Hawaii’s public charter schools. Our objectives are:

- 1) to gain facilities funding/support for charter schools in a variety of scenarios;
- 2) to reassure legislators that the charter accountability system is fair, strong and getting stronger;
- 3) to make reasonable and incremental progress on facilities funding; and,
- 4) during the process, to provide transparency and good data to help inform decisions.

This bill appropriates \$1.2m to the state public charter school commission to allocate to charter schools for facilities projects based, in part, on the need and performance of the charter schools.

In 2005 the Legislative Reference Bureau in its report entitled, *On the Level? Policy, Law and the Charter School Movement* stated, “Unlike their public school, conversion school, and school-within-school counterparts, start-up schools must rent or build facilities, or ask the public to donate facilities, or both. The cost of building public schools is usually spread out over twenty years through the issuance of general obligation bonds. Neither the BOE, the HIDOE, nor individual public schools are responsible for debt service—or the payment of principal and interest on these bonds. These bonds are the responsibility of the State, and are backed by it’s the full faith and credit (i.e., taxing power).” Some

charter schools have facilities on state land and have access through the normal CIP process - others do not (see attachment).

Solutions are not easy given the state's many priorities for funding. This bill is one part of a small group of bills to address funding and facilities support for charter schools. Previously, stumbling blocks would be identified during discussions that would stop progress instead of work toward solutions. Now, the DOE, BOE, Dept. of Budget and Finance, State Public Charter School Commission and charter schools, through an informal working group, expressed their willingness to work through these challenges. HPCSN strongly supports the following bills as they relate to funding and facilities support:

- SB2516/HB2438 is funded by general funds and has the flexibility to provide facilities funding to charter schools that are currently not on state land. This solution also moves from previous efforts to obtain per pupil facilities funding to all charter schools to a more nuanced process that considers charter school performance and need.
- SB2517 proposes to address a more consistent way to fund charter school facilities for charter schools on state land.
- SB2518/HB1789 adds a line item to the state budget separate from the charter school per pupil funding to acknowledge the significant and growing responsibilities of each and every charter school governing board since the passing of Act 130 SLH of 2012. The charter school governance structure is very different from the HIDOE model. This will allow charter schools additional funds to start to build a shared system of supports that charter schools lost when the Charter School Administrative Office was eliminated.
- HB2576 proposes a special fund and a tax credit system to support charter school facilities.

Mahalo for your support of Hawaii's public students, their families and public charter schools.



Lynn Finnegan
Executive Director

Attachments



From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [WAM Testimony](#)
Cc: mgauvin@biodiesel.com
Subject: *Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM*
Date: Wednesday, February 26, 2014 1:33:55 PM

SB2516

Submitted on: 2/26/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Mae Gauvin	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

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Cc: kaimaia.mb@gmail.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM
Date: Thursday, February 27, 2014 7:01:05 PM

SB2516

Submitted on: 2/27/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Maggie Biegler	Individual	Comments Only	No

Comments: Aloha, I am a parent and a registered voter. I believe in freedom of choice in public education. Charter schools are public schools and my tax dollars help to pay for public education and facilities. This should be accepted equally for ALL public schools; including charter schools. Mahalo.

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From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [WAM Testimony](#)
Cc: martivictorcampbell@gmail.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM
Date: Thursday, February 27, 2014 6:31:44 AM



SB2516

Submitted on: 2/27/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Marta Campbell	Individual	Support	No

Comments: It is discriminatory that my child who goes to a charter school does not get the same benefit of facilities funding as DOE public schools. I pay my taxes, yet my child does not get equal treatment in this regard. Please support and fund all of Hawaii's public school children's learning. Charter schools are public schools, too.

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Chair Ige, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Education Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB2516. This testimony is in support of facilities funding to charter schools.

I am the chair for the SEEQS (School of Examining Essential Questions of Sustainability) 'Ohana Events and Fundraising Parent Committee. My son is currently in the 6th grade. We were ecstatic to be blessed with the opportunity to be part of the newest sustainability-based charter school. Besides the common core subjects and sustainability, the school also teaches the arts, physical activity and technology. All of these values are very important to me and I am happy my son has the opportunity to experience all the school has to offer. He has grown academically, socially, philosophically, artistically, athletically, and has become well versed in technology since last summer. I am a single parent and receive EBT Food Stamp Benefits for my family. Before we discovered SEEQS, my son applied to two private schools in hopes we could get financial aid if accepted but did not get in. Last summer, we ended up relocating to another neighborhood so he could be in a favorable school district. We found out about SEEQS, applied, and then enrolled two weeks prior to starting the 2013-14 school year. After our lease expired, we relocated to the Kaimuki area so we would be a lot closer to SEEQS. As you can see, quality education is very important to us.

Since the beginning of the school year, I have witnessed and experienced the challenges the wonderful and dedicated staff of SEEQS has to face. The school has a faculty of 10, with only 6 teachers, 1 assistant teacher, an after school coordinator, the school founder/leader, and the school manager. The staff wears many hats and logs many hours before and after school to help their student body of sixty-five students. Besides their work during school hours, the teachers spend extra time having meetings before and after school at least twice a week. They also help out with community-building and fundraising events. Some are on school grounds (rented by the Salvation Army) and others are outside of school.

Throughout the school year, we have put in many efforts to raise funds for the school. We had a grand opening event, a pau hana event with donated raffle prizes, merchandise (T-shirts, reusable water bottles, hats, and stickers) with the SEEQS logo, a science-fair type of event at Fresh Café (where we accepted donations and sold merchandise), and most recently, a phone-a-thon where we called previous donors to ask for more donations. We have potlucks on campus to encourage bonding among the families. The SEEQS faculty puts in extra time to help out at these events, but this time could also be spent on teacher development or curriculum planning instead of constantly attending fundraising events on top of their demanding schedule.

We have some upcoming events that will provide opportunities for fundraising, but we are still about 1/3 away from our goal of \$400,000 for the school year to

properly pay the school staff, provide course materials for the students, technology, infrastructure, and professional development.

We are renting a building at the Salvation Army property. Although we are grateful there is space for gardening and composting, the student body will increase every school year until there are 420 students. The Salvation Army is only a temporary home because the lease is for two years, and will obviously not be able to accommodate the student body at maximum capacity when it includes high schoolers.

By full size, our school will reach approximately 420 students. Accordingly, by full size we will need on the order of 25,000 to 35,000 square feet to house our facility. Commercial real estate prices ranging from \$1.35 to \$2.00 per month and up per square foot. There is no doubt—we cannot afford a facility of that size at this point, and even in the future this will stretch our budget beyond our capacity to handle.

Unless we are able to find a rent-free facility, which we have not been able to do, we will need to do significant fundraising in order to cover our facilities costs regardless of the rent price. Any fundraising we do—and any extra time we spend searching for a facility year after year—is time that we spend away from working with students.

Our school was authorized, through an incredibly rigorous process, based on our vision for a school that is based on best practices in education, as well as community need and interest. Our successes already in this first year, as well as the already high demand for next year's enrollment (more than 70 applications for sixty spots within the first two weeks of open enrollment!) are a testament to the great success our school can be as part of the Hawaii state public school system. We want to spend as much time as possible making our school successful for our students, and we believe that our primary role as a school is to focus on what's happening **inside** the school, working with teachers, students and content. Facilities support and funding from the legislature will enable us to do the work we set out to do, and that we were authorized to do.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Michelle Umipeg
SEEQS Parent
SEEQS 'Ohana Events and Fundraising Chair

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [WAM Testimony](#)
Cc: mgorresen@fastmail.net
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM
Date: Thursday, February 27, 2014 12:12:02 PM

SB2516

Submitted on: 2/27/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Paulo M. Gorresen	Individual	Support	No

Comments: My son goes to Hawaii Academy of Arts and Sciences on Hawaii Island, which is an excellent school at which he receives considerable support. As a taxpayer, I am angered that my taxes are not supporting charter schools in a manner equivalent to that of conventional public schools. It is unjust that charter schools must use funds from their general appropriations to pay for facilities. The public deserves to have as broad an educational choice as possible, and charter schools contribute to the diversity that makes Hawaii a vibrant culture and society. I urge you to unequivocally support SB2516, SB2517 and HB2576. Aloha, P. M. Gorresen

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Date: Thursday, February 27, 2014 1:07:24 PM

SB2516

Submitted on: 2/27/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Peter Yoes	Individual	Support	No

Comments: I fully support this bill - thank-you for ensuring all public school children receive equal facilities funding.

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Cc: rwa96720@yahoo.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB2516 on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM
Date: Wednesday, February 26, 2014 9:46:05 PM



SB2516

Submitted on: 2/26/2014

Testimony for WAM on Feb 27, 2014 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Randall Winston Albright	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Aloha, Please support our children with facility funding. Every child deserves an equal education. If we do not fund the keiki equally, they do not receive equal opportunity. Mahalo

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