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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2015

RE: S.B. 600 – MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION FOR KUA O KA LA
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AND THE HAWAII ACADEMY OF ARTS
AND SCIENCE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

PERSON TESTIFYING: WIL OKABE
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

The Honorable Chair Michelle Kidani, Honorable Vice Chair Breene Harimoto and
Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) **supports S.B. 600**, relating to making
an emergency appropriation for Ka O Ka La public charter school and the Hawaii
Academy of Arts and Science public charter school.

HSTA is the exclusive representative of more than 13,500 public and charter school
teachers statewide. HSTA is the state affiliate, of the 3.2 million members of the
National Education Association.

Over 20 years ago, the state of Hawai'i committed itself to embracing the educational
innovations made possible outside of the Department of Education by enacting public
charter school legislation.

Since then, the state has further committed itself by enacting legislation to expand our
public charter school system.

The legislation before you provides our public charter school system the assistance
needed to be the best it can be. HSTA supports innovation in public education. The
core assumptions that inform the charter school concepts - innovation, autonomy, and
accountability - indicate that charter schools have the potential to facilitate positive
change and should be qualitatively different from what is available in mainstream public
schools.

As such, on behalf of Hawai'i's 13,500 public and public charter school teachers, the
Hawai'i State Teachers' Association stands in **support of S.B. 600.**

LATE

Testimony SB600
Senate Education Committee
February 6, 2015 Conference Room 229 1:15pm
Support

Dear Chair Kidani and committee,

I am in support of Senate Bill 600 for many reasons, but the main reason I stand before you today is for the roughly 600 students that attend HAAS, the 100 full and part time employees, and the hundreds of parents and general community that support our Public Charter School. Although funding for facilities, food, and transportation remain high on my legislative priorities, I am here today to make a special request. Please support this emergency appropriation bill for HAAS and our neighbor charter school, Kua o ka La. On August 7, 2014 which was our second student day of school, East Hawaii Island experienced a life-threatening disaster: Hurricane Iselle. I am still referring to it as a hurricane because when it hit landfall at Kapoho, it still had hurricane force winds. Our majestic mountains, Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, diminished the force of the winds that eventually lessened the impact the storm had on the rest of the State. The aftermath of the storm which included closed roads, no electricity, water, and communication led to an aftershock with human consequences. Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome was prevalent in our community.

In September 2014, our community was just recovering from Iselle, when reports of a lava threat began to consume the news on radio, television, and front pages of the newspaper. When the threat approached within a couple of hundred yards from Pahoia village, residents, businesses, and yes, even schools moved out of the area. HAAS was right in the "blue line" (Digital Elevation Model or path of steepest descent) of the lava flow but found that its options for relocation was not fiscally feasible. Meanwhile neighboring Keonepoko Elementary was entirely relocated to Keaau. The North side students of Pahoia High and Intermediate were integrated into Keaau Middle and Keaau High schools. These moves were supported by central DOE.

This situation drew attention to the fact that charter schools in the State do not have access to emergency funds or disaster relief funds. In recent visits to HAAS by WAM chair Jill Tokuda, Senate Education chair, Michele Kidani, and Governor David Ige, I pointed out to them that the lack of disaster relief for charter schools was a major omission or oversight in creating a charter school system. So we come before you today to ask that you support our two charter schools in Puna, HAAS and Kua o ka La and give us the resources to mitigate the impacts of lava cutting off our main access to Puna Makai: Highway 130, commonly called the Keaau Pahoia Road.

Thank you in advance for supporting our children and for the opportunity to testify.

Steve Hirakami

Director, Hawaii Academy of Arts & Science PCS

LATE

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Subject to continuing the funding of a school (Kua O Ka La public charter school)
that is rated "Far Below Standards on the most recent API report. See page 26:
http://media.wix.com/ugd/448fc8_005c5d261ea04897974f1237b96d1062.pdf