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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2015

RE: S.B. 833 - RELATING TO PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

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. 833**, relating to public charter schools.

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. 833**.

LATE

Testimony SB833
Senate Education Committee
February 6, 2015 Conference Room 229 1:15pm
OPPOSE

Dear Chair Kidani and committee,

I am in strong opposition to Senate Bill 833. Charter schools have been experiencing financial hardships for the past 6 years. Our per-pupil remains stagnated at \$6000 and still there is no support for the three basics of education: facilities, food programs, and transportation. We are good financial managers. We are not magicians. Funding public education students at different levels is unacceptable. During the “fiscal cliff” all governments faced in 2008, Hawaii charters lost one third of their per-pupil funding. In just two years, the charter school per pupil allocation went from \$8500 per pupil to \$5360 per pupil. ARRA funds or stimulus funds helped us survive. Many schools set aside those funds to carry them through the lean years. HAAS operated in the red for three years, but had the ARRA funds to cover our losses. The language in this bill could have caused the closure of HAAS and other fiscally responsible schools.

With this brief history of charter school financing, I want you to find ways to help our children, not find ways to compromise their choice in education. I have problems with the phrase “sole discretion”. Authority is given to a body of volunteers (Public Charter School Commission) who rely heavily on their Executive Director for information. What would be his/their definition of “financial insolvency”? Who would be involved in the review process, if any, to make that determination? It would be a gross mistake to remove due process from charter schools, one that could be challenged in a court of law.

Charter Schools are already complying with rigorous accountability and compliance requirements (Academic, Financial, and Governance) which are ample and timely. We report out several times a year on financial statements as well as complete a third party audit annually. These reports should be used pro-actively to help schools sustain their financial viability. I find it hard to believe that we need a STOP/PANIC button to immediately close a school. We instead need a help/support fiscal team that can guide the school back to financial solvency. Let’s promote positive action versus negative action.

Another point of contention in this law is in the phrase: “the school shall be deemed to have voluntarily surrendered its charter”. We’ve all been to PTSA meetings where volunteers are asked for. “Any volunteers to sit on the fund raising event coming up in two days?” might be a common question. The chair may then say “Seeing none, I deem Robert and Jane to be volunteers on that committee.” The Commission should not have the right to deem a school a volunteer to give up its charter.

The intent of this particular part of the law (Section 302D-17) was specifically for the authorizer (read Commission) to take immediate and necessary action for serious health and safety issues. I see the validity in that. But again, I fail to see the justification to leave it to the “sole discretion” of anyone or body of people without a process or administrative rules to give the school a chance to respond or dispute the classification. The phrase “sole discretion” should be eliminated from the language of this or any legislation. Last time I checked, Hawaii is still a state of the United States of America and democracy should stand at the forefront.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Steve Hirakami

Director, Hawaii Academy of Arts & Science PCS

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [EDU Testimony](#)
Cc: aandrea99@aol.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB833 on Feb 6, 2015 13:15PM
Date: Thursday, February 05, 2015 6:40:08 PM

SB833

Submitted on: 2/5/2015

Testimony for EDU on Feb 6, 2015 13:15PM in Conference Room 229

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Andrea Quinn	Individual	Oppose	No

Comments: Please do not pass this bill. The bill is unclear on who or what entity "the authorizer" would be that is given the decision-making power of whether a school should remain open or closed. The authorizer therefore has the potential to be ruled by financial interests, rather than for the benefit of children and their families. Additionally, children from public schools outperform those from charter schools. Charter schools need more, not less, regulation and oversight.

Please note that testimony submitted less than 24 hours prior to the hearing, improperly identified, or directed to the incorrect office, may not be posted online or distributed to the committee prior to the convening of the public hearing.

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