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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE

RE: HB 1448, HD 1 - RELATING TO STUDENT MEALS.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2017

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Luke and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association **supports HB 1448, HD 1**, relating to student meals.

In Hawai'i, food insecurity is one of the most pressing manifestations of overall socioeconomic inequality. Over 70,000 public school students eat free or reduced-price meals in our state, though only 40 percent eat school breakfasts. Hawai'i ranks 47th in school breakfast participation rates among qualifying students.

Congress established the National School Lunch Program, in 1946, and School Breakfast Program, fully implemented in 1975, to ensure that low-income students are properly nourished. Yet, many local families struggle to provide nutritious meals for their children. According the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice, in Hawai'i, 15.3 percent of families experience food insecurity, meaning that "they do not always know how they will afford their next meal." An additional 3.9 percent are "very low food secure" families that have significantly reduced food consumption because of economic hardship.

At the same time, 47 percent of all public school students qualify for the Department of Education's free and reduced lunch program, a number that has risen by 20 percent since 2007 because of economic decline and cost of living increases. Low-income students are, again, less likely to receive adequate meals at home, leaving them without the calories necessary to perform basic academic tasks. Cases of chronic hunger can lead to achievement gaps, concentration loss, illness, increased absenteeism, behavioral problems, depression, and misdiagnosed learning

disabilities. Thus, providing a decent meal for our impoverished children—or in this case, ensuring that those meals aren't unnecessarily taken away—is a moral and educational imperative.

Famished students cannot focus. To ensure that our students are well-fed and ready to learn, the Hawaii State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Supporting HB 1448 HD1 Relating to School Meals
House Committee on Finance
Scheduled for Hearing Tuesday, February 28, 2017, 3:00 PM, Conference Room 308

Dear Chair Luke, Vice Chair Cullen, and members of the Committee on Finance:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in SUPPORT of **HB 1448 HD1**, which would allow students from working-poor households to receive free school meals.

The National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program are federal nutrition assistance programs intended to make it possible for all students in the nation to receive nutritious meals at school every day. Participating schools must offer free or reduced-price meals to low-income students, follow federal nutrition and safety standards, and promote school wellness policies. They receive federal funds for each breakfast and lunch served.

Children from low-income families are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. In the 2016-2017 school year, a household of three in this state earning \$30,107 or less would qualify for free school meals and a family of three earning up to \$42,902 would qualify for reduced-price school meals.

Unfortunately, many of our state's low-income families do not seem to be taking full advantage of this assistance. While school breakfast and lunch participation rates rose across the nation from the 2014-15 school year to the 2015-16 school year, Hawai'i's rates decreased, according to the annual School Breakfast Scorecard, released earlier this month by the Food Research & Action Center.

In Hawai'i, the daily average number of free or reduced-price eligible students eating school lunch dropped from 68,379 to 66,811. For breakfast, the number dropped from 29,638 to 28,733. In fact, Hawai'i was the only state that saw a drop in breakfast participation over that period.

As a result, Hawai'i dropped to 47th in the nation in school breakfast participation, according to the Scorecard. On an average school day, only 43 low-income children in Hawai'i participated in the School Breakfast Program for every 100 participating in the National School Lunch Program. Meanwhile, the top-ranked states in the Scorecard, West Virginia and New Mexico, reached almost 84 and 73 low-income students, respectively, with school breakfast for every 100 who received school lunch.

If Hawai'i were to improve its participation rate to 70 eligible kids eating school breakfast per

100 getting school lunch, that would mean 18,000 more low-income students starting their day with school breakfast. It would also mean that the state would bring in an additional \$4.6 million per year in federal funds.

One of the reasons that fewer low-income students are participating in school meals may be that some reduced-price eligible families can't afford the co-pays for school lunch and breakfast.

It is possible that many of these reduced-price eligible students would be able to have free school meals if they lived in another state. That is because the school meal eligibility guidelines are based on the federal poverty level, which does not take into account differences in the cost of living. Since Hawai'i has the highest cost of living among the states, our official poverty rate misses many families.

This can be shown by looking to the Census Bureau's supplemental poverty measure, which does incorporate the cost of living as well as receipt of government benefits. According to that measure, Hawai'i has the ninth-highest poverty rate in the nation (as opposed to one of the lowest rates according to the official measure).

According to the supplemental measure, Hawai'i's poverty rate is 16.8%, which is 54% higher than the official state poverty rate of 10.9%. While under the official rate there are 149,000 Hawai'i residents living in poverty, according to the supplemental measure that number jumps to 229,000.

While the school meals eligibility guidelines for Hawai'i are 15% higher than the federal guidelines, that doesn't fully account for the fact that, when cost of living differences are measured, our state's poverty rate is 54% higher. It is likely that many reduced-price eligible families are falling into this gap.

To help alleviate the financial burden of working-poor families, states such as Vermont and Oregon have eliminated the reduced-price category for school meals, allowing those students to receive free meals instead. That is what **HB 1448 HD1** would do in Hawai'i. Considering the immense economic squeeze felt by low-income and working-class households in the state, it would be an effective way to help many of our struggling families and students.

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR



LATE

KATHRYN S. MATAYOSHI
SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 02/28/2017
Time: 03:00 PM
Location: 308
Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Kathryn S. Matayoshi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB 1448, HD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education to provide free school meals to children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, based on the United States Department of Agriculture's most current income eligibility guidelines. Appropriates funds. (HB1448 HD1)

Department's Position:

The Department of Education (DOE) supports HB 1448, HD1, and offers considerations for amendments with regard to the appropriation.

The appropriation out of general funds to cover a deficit of approximately \$1.1 million dollars in special funds to provide free meals to reduced students must be sustainable. Should the reduced eligibility increase, the general fund appropriation must be proportionate to support the fiscal increases.

Further considerations associated with this measure include the increase in bus ridership due to the current DOE rule of free lunch eligibility, and free bus transportation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

February 26, 2017

To: Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair
Representative Ty J.K. Cullen, Vice Chair
Committee on Finance

From: Deborah Zysman, Executive Director
Hawaii Children's Action Network

Re: HB 1488 HD 1 – Relating to School Meals
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 308, February 28, 2017, 3:00 PM

On behalf of Hawaii Children's Action Network (HCAN), we are writing to support HB 1488 HB 1– Relating to School Meals.

By expanding and providing a clear definition of those who should receive free or reduced-price (F/RP) school meals, Hawaii's children will be better cared for and able to learn. The US Department of Agriculture administers this program on the federal level, providing reimbursements to states for the meals served. To participate, a school must offer F/RP meals to low-income students, meet federal nutritional standards, and promote wellness policies. One of the most important functions of the school meals program is to address issues in childhood hunger, nutrition, and health. Additionally, by increasing the participation rates in the especially the breakfast program, Hawaii would receive additional federal funds.

Key facts why school meals are so important for Hawaii's students (www.hiappleseed.org/school-meals):

- Students who come to school hungry cannot focus, and children suffering for food insecurity are unable to grow to their full potential. An alarmingly high number of families struggle to consistently feed their children high-quality meals, an unsurprising problem given the very high cost of living in our state, and particularly the cost of food. Countless studies have shown that increasing breakfast participation improves academic and health outcomes for children. Out of the 70,000 students in Hawaii eating free or reduced price meals, only 40% eat school breakfast often just because they don't get to school on time. Hawaii ranks 47th out of the 50 states for breakfast participation rates being so low.
- Hawaii Participation in School Meal Program : As the economy faltered, Hawaii saw its numbers of F/RP-qualifying children rise. Children with family incomes below 130 percent of the poverty level receive free meals, and a family with a household income between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level qualifies a student for a reduced-price meal. Today, 47 percent of Hawaii's public school children qualify for free and reduced price lunch, an increase of 20 percent since 2007.

For these reasons, HCAN respectfully requests that the committee pass this bill.

HCAN is committed to building a unified voice advocating for Hawaii's children by improving their safety, health, and education. Last fall, HCAN convened input in person and online from more than 50 organizations and individuals that came forward to support or express interest for a number of issues affecting children and families in our state that resulted in the compilation of 2017 Hawai'i Children's Policy Agenda, which can be accessed at <http://www.hawaii-can.org/2017policyagenda>.