

From: Yahna Kawaa <yahna@hawaii.edu>  
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2017 10:23 AM  
To: JUDtestimony  
Subject: Testimony for SB 683 and SB 686

Chair Nishimoto and Members of the Committee:

My name is Yahna Kawa'a. I am a teacher from the Windward District on O'ahu. I am submitting testimony **in support** of **SB 683** and **SB 686** to increase funding for public schools.

Our children are our future. When teachers instruct their students, they build the foundation for equality and prosperity for tomorrow's generations. Every dollar invested in our community's public schools yields exponential returns, not just for our economy, but also for the promise of a more open and democratic society.

Supporting these proposals will lift Hawai'i's schools into the 21st Century. A vote for these measures is a vote for lower class sizes that allow teachers to connect with their students, whole child education that includes the arts and Hawaiian studies, providing resources and services for students with special needs, and professional pay that reflects the value of our hardworking teachers.

We need additional funding for our public schools, because our school will not be able to fund and support teaching and administrative positions next year. Our school will lose a special education teaching position and a vice-principal position. However, the work load and responsibilities remain and must be placed on teachers and the principal, creating stressful work environment. This is unacceptable.

Our principal has worked tirelessly to improve our school in many ways to provide educational opportunities that enrich the lives of students by providing students with teachers trained in art, music and physical education. These classes afford creative outlets for children and a balanced and well-rounded educational experience, classes for which their private school peers are undoubtedly provided without question. These three positions have created "time" within the day for teachers to meet, review and discuss data, curriculum, field trips and share ideas. Without appropriate funding, these positions and collaboration time would disappear – and everyone loses!

Our principal was able to secure \$200 for each teacher this year, most of which went to replenishing office and student supplies – staples, glue, rubber bands, envelopes, labels, folders, expo pens, construction paper and play sand. I also needed a lockable filing cabinet for confidential files, but did not have enough money for that. I found a rusty one on Craigslist for \$10, but ended up with a second-hand one from my colleague. The bottom drawer sticks, making a racket when I open it, but my roommates are so nice and never complain.

I work in the Head Start program, as a special education teacher (DOE) supporting students with disabilities in the inclusion setting. Funding for special education is so important because the student population is very needy. Money not only pays for teachers, but materials, and special education support positions and services (e.g., assistants, therapists) for children who need it most. However, the remaining students in our classroom (Head Start only) come from low-income families. Parents are struggling which creates a stressful home environment for children. As a result, Head Start and the Department of Education provide educational opportunities and supports for children and their families - those who need it most. Aren't they worth every penny?

Fortunately, there are alternatives to a lack of financial support. A dear friend and colleague at Waimanalo Elementary introduced me to DonorsChoose, an online site that connects teachers with donors interested in funding classroom projects. Through the site (and the generous support of 4 donors, of a former parent, colleague, high school classmate and retired teacher who lived in Hawaii), we now have 2 new Silver Rider tricycles. The total cost was \$402.28. This exceeded my budget. The children love riding the bikes because our campus is relatively flat. Each day, children rush to add their names to the sign-up sheet and wait for a turn, which as we know, for preschoolers, is a challenge. There are usually 7-10 names on the list and with the limits on time many don't have a chance to ride, resulting in tears, frowns and long faces. With appropriate funding, we can build our fleet to 18 tricycles so the children can ride to and from breakfast and lunch everyday thereby supporting their physical development and emotional well-being. With your kokua, our schools will receive much needed financial support.

To deliver the schools our keiki deserve, please support these bills. We need your help. Mahalo.

Aloha,

Yahna Kawa'a, Windward District, O'ahu

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Support Ms. Kawaa's classroom at [DonorsChoose](#)

"Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning." - Fred Rogers