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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON
HOUSING and EDUCATION

RE: SB 2855 - RELATING TO TEACHER HOUSING

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2018

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Espero, Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association **supports and suggests amendments for SB 2855**, relating to teacher housing.

Hawai'i continues to suffer from a shortage of qualified teachers. According to the DOE's STRIVE HI accountability reports, for the 2017-2018 school year, the state saw 1,011 SATEP vacancies, up from 920 SATEP vacancies in 2016-2017, including a slight increase in SPED SATEP vacancies, from 290 in 2016-2017 to 311 in 2017-2018. As we have noted to the Board of Education at previous hearings, SPED teacher attrition has led to a situation in which 1 out of every 6 SPED teachers have not completed a state-sanctioned teacher training program. Our teacher shortage problem is further clarified in the DOE's 2016-2017 Employment Report, which shows that teacher resignations increased from 781 in 2015-2016 to 850 in 2016-2017. Similarly in-state SATEP hires decreased from 404 to 387 over that time span, while out-of-state SATEP hires increased from 508 to 572. Teacher attrition is worse in high-poverty areas. In the Nanakuli-Waianae Complex Area, for example, an astounding 18 out of 19 SPED teachers hired for the 2017-2018 school year do not have a special education license.

Financial incentives are a key strategy for the recruitment and retention of teachers, particularly given that Hawai'i's teacher salaries continue to trail the nation when adjusted for cost of living. To recruit and retain effective educators, policymakers must find ways to lessen the financial burden of being a public school teacher. Establishing a housing voucher program is a good first step. In the islands, where new housing rarely becomes available, the percentage of renters who face

cost burdens—financial handicaps incurred by people spending over 30 percent of their income on housing—is roughly 57 percent, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Many of those cash-strapped renters are state educators, who are chronically underpaid. To make ends meet, many teachers are forced to pick up second and third jobs, live in cramped studio apartments, and cut back on necessities like medical care. Thus, a housing voucher program would assist teachers in attaining sustainable and stable residency, while staving off crushing debt burdens. It would also make the teaching profession more attractive by increasing educators’ purchasing power through the subsidization of rent and mortgages in the state with the nation’s highest housing costs.

That said, we urge your committee to amend this measure’s applicability. Currently, the housing voucher program imagined by this bill applies to “classroom teachers,” which is not a legal term. “Teachers,” as defined in HRS §302A-101, means “a person whose duties in the public educational system are primarily teaching or instruction of students or related activities centered primarily on students and who is in close and continuous contact with students, and shall include but not be limited to classroom teachers, school librarians, counselors, registrars, and special education teachers.” We oppose the codification of any distinction between classroom teachers and non-classroom teachers in state law and urge you to amend the measure to include all teachers, who are all covered by the same salary scale.

To take care of the needs of Hawai‘i’s hardworking teachers, the Hawaii State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.