



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 02/08/2024

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB 1540 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

Purpose of Bill: Requires eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision, which provides federal funds to help schools offer free meals to all students. Appropriates moneys for any difference between federal funds amounts and costs of providing free meals. Declares that the general fund expenditure ceiling will be exceeded.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) provides comments on HB 1540.

Although the Department would like every school to participate in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program and provide free breakfast and lunch to all students, adding on schools may come with a financial cost to the Department.

Based on the new minimum identified student percentage (ISP) threshold of 25% recently set by USDA, the entire Department would qualify for CEP with an ISP of 28%. This means that 28% of meals would qualify for the free rate reimbursement and 72% of meals would qualify for the paid rate reimbursement. The USDA reimburses the Department at a much higher rate for free versus paid meals. It would cost the Department an estimated \$60,354,085.24 to have all schools participate in the CEP program, resulting in a loss for the program. Please note that school ISPs can change over time, which may result in a different ISP for the Department.

When reviewing the Department's ability to elect more schools to participate, the Department must also take into account the School Food Services Branch's (SFSB) current financial position and the fiscal viability of this decision. To note, the SFSB has a projected shortfall of \$20 million for FY 2024 and is asking for an emergency appropriation in House Bill 2402 and Senate Bill 3091.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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TO: Committee on Education

FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 8, 2024
TIME: 2pm
PLACE: 309

RE: HB1540 Relating to School Meals

Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee,

HFIA is in support of this measure. Unfortunately, Hawaii has one of the highest instances of childhood food insecurity in the nation. One in six keiki in Hawaii face hunger.

The pandemic highlighted the incredibly important role that school meals play in childhood nutrition. California, Maine, Colorado, Minnesota, New Mexico, Vermont, Michigan, and Massachusetts have all passed free Healthy School Meals for All policies. These policies have shown a range of benefits, above and beyond reducing childhood hunger. These have been improvements in academic performance and even positive outcomes for behavior.

Securing federal funding for these important programs is an investment in our keiki and our future.

We encourage the committee to pass this measure and we thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Food+ Policy Internship 2024

food@purplemaia.org

February 7, 2024

Subject: *HB1540 - Relating to School Meals*

Aloha Chair Justin Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and the House Committee of Education,

Mahalo distinguished legislators for taking the time to review this testimony being submitted **IN SUPPORT** of **HB1540** which would support free meals in our public schools. The bill would require eligible schools to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), a federal program that provides funds to help schools offer free meals to all students. The bill would also appropriate funds for any difference between federal funds and the costs of providing free school meals.

With many still recovering from the economic impacts of COVID-19 shutdowns and the increase in the price of basic essentials on the rise, the need to ensure our children are well nourished and prepared to be successful is more important than ever. With food and housing insecurity on the rise, 2 of 3 households struggle to make ends meet, we need to ensure that our keiki are given inclusivity and economic justice at our learning institutions to enforce positive outcomes for their feeling of belonging and worth in society. Making sure children get access to educational tools to become community contributors will be enhanced when they are able to congregate with their peers during mealtime without stigma. The current issues with school meal applications such as language barriers, income verification, or fears surrounding personal information disclosures as well as federal poverty threshold limits prevent families in need to obtain meals for their kids.

Hawaii is one of the few states that allow schools to deny food to kids with negative accounts. We must also consider how the keiki who are denied a meal due to their negative balance must feel knowing that already prepared food gets thrown away. It is not only wasteful but adds additional costs for disposal. It would seem that the school system would rather dump perfectly good food than give it to a hungry student. Imagine instead of having distracted, disruptive, and

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2024, the cohort of interns are undergrads and graduate students from throughout the UH System. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.



Food+ Policy Internship 2024

food@purplemaia.org

disheartened young minds who could eventually go to stealing food before or after school, we have engaged, encouraged, and excited pupils who feel valued and loved.

Which version would be more thankful to be in school, more willing to participate, and likely to remember that their experience was better because we put their well-being first? There are other states that have embraced this and we can join them as leaders in our nation. We can enforce aloha throughout their educational career and give the families the care they deserve.

We urge the committee to pass HB1540. We would like to thank Chair Justin Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and the House Committee of Education, for considering the comments herein.

Mahalo,
Janine Mariano & Hawaii Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

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Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Hui

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce
Development

Date: February 7, 2024

To: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Education

Re: HB 1540 Relating to School Meals

Hrg: Thursday, February 8, 2024 2:00 PM

Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, convened by the Hawai'i Public Health Instituteⁱ appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **Support of HB1540**, which would require eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision.

Everyone deserves access to an education and food.

Access to free public education is not given only to those who can least afford it and the same should be true of the food needed to thrive in school. This bill would expand access to free school meals to around 100 more Hawai'i schools. Increasing the number of students eligible for free school meals would be a significant benefit to them, allowing them better access to healthy meals.

Current subsidies are not enough.

Families with incomes above 133% of the federal poverty line require support but are not getting it.ⁱⁱ These ALICE families do not qualify for free lunches despite having significant needs. 1 in 3 Hawai'i households are part of the ALICE population who need increased support.ⁱⁱⁱ Expanding free school meals to additional schools will help end this benefits cliff for thousands of new students.

Please consider our testimony in support of HB1775 and pass this bill.

Sincerely,

Nate Hix
Social Impact Policy Manager
Hawai'i Public Health Institute

ⁱ The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20220504.114330/>



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for H.B. 1540 – Relating to School Meals
House Committee on Education
Thursday February 8, 2024, at 2:00PM

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **H.B. 1540**, which would require eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which provides federal funds to help schools offer free meals to all students, and appropriates money for any difference between the federal funds amount and cost of providing free school meals.

School breakfast and lunch provide our students with the essential nutrition they need in order to continue to learn throughout the school day. Access to this essential school supply should not be withheld based on students' ability to pay.

Federal eligibility for free or reduced price meals requires that households earn below 130% or 185% of the federal poverty level (\$44,850 or \$63,825, respectively, annually for a family of four in 2024). However, Hawai'i's costs of living require that a family with two adults and two children make at least \$104,000 to simply survive.¹ This leaves many households ineligible for any meaningful assistance yet unable to make ends meet.

Requiring participation in CEP is a tested strategy that many states have used on their journey to achieving a universal free school meals program. Leveraging CEP potentially allows participating schools to draw down more federal funds than they would otherwise based on the number of identified students living in poverty (ISP) that attend that school. In school year 2022-2023, 38% (106) of DOE's 257 sites participated in CEP. In October 2023, the USDA issued a rule change lowering the CEP eligibility percentage to 25% resulting in a more than 30% increase in the number of DOE schools now eligible for CEP (72 to 162 eligible schools). It should be noted that some schools face significant administrative and financial barriers to participate in CEP and requiring participation may negatively impact those schools meal programs. For example, a school with an identified student percentage (students directly certified for free or reduced price meals through mean tested programs like SNAP) of 30% but has a student body where 50% of children are certified through free and reduced price meal applications, that school might lose out additional federal funding by opting into the CEP with only a 30% ISP. Thus, we want to emphasize the need for technical assistance and support to be provided to schools to successfully enroll and stay enrolled in the CEP program and highlight any additional monies or staff that may be required to provide that much needed support.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter. We are pleased that the Hawai'i legislature is paying attention to this important issue because hungry keiki cannot learn. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

¹ Aloha United Way. ALICE in the Crosscurrents: COVID and Financial Hardship in Hawai'i (2023)

To: House Committee on Education
Re: **HB 1540 – Relating to School Meals**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
February 8, 2024, 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of HB 1540**. This bill requires eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision, which provides federal funds to help schools offer free meals to all students, and appropriates moneys for any difference between federal funds amounts and costs of providing free meals.

Hawai'i public schools provide students with access to meals through federal school meal programs, such as the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. This bill would provide free meals to those students who qualify for reduced-price school meals, which means that their families earn between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level.

Especially with the FPL underestimating the true extent of poverty in Hawaii,¹ reduced-price lunch students and their families are not able to afford the basics. While the income eligibility limit for reduced-price lunch is about \$59,000 for a family of four,² the “bare-minimum costs of basic necessities” for that same family is more than \$100,000, according to the *ALICE in Hawai'i* report.³

In other words, a single mom with two children who makes \$35,000 a year qualifies for reduced-price school meals, which means that she would need to pay about \$250 for her children to have school meals. Relieving her of this financial can ensure that she's able to pay for other essentials, like rent or food at home, that her family needs.

In order to provide **free breakfast and lunch to only reduced-price students**, we estimate it would cost about **\$790,000 per year**. We based our calculations on the free, reduced-price and paid student participation in school meals in Hawai'i during the 2018-19 school year⁴ and the current school meal prices.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please pass this bill.

Thank you,
Nicole Woo, Director of Research and Economic Policy

¹ <https://hiappleseed.org/blog/official-poverty-data-obscures-reality-in-hawaii>

²

<https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

³ <https://www.auw.org/sites/default/files/pictures/ALICE%20in%20Hawaii%20-%202022%20Facts%20and%20Figures%20Full%20Report.pdf>

⁴ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolMealsReport2022.pdf>



2024 Network Members

- City and County of Honolulu
- County of Hawai'i
- Hawai'i Appleseed
- Hawai'i Children's Action Network
- Hawai'i Department of Agriculture
- Hawai'i Food Bank
- Hawai'i Good Food Alliance
- Hawai'i Public Health Institute
- Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Health Center
- Lanakila Pacific
- Mālama Kaua'i
- Maui Nui Food Alliance
- Parents and Children Together
- Supersistence
- The Food Basket Inc., Hawai'i Island's Food Bank
- The Pantry, by Feeding Hawai'i Together
- UH Center for Indigenous Innovation/ Health Equity
- Wai'anae Coast Comprehensive Health Center
- Hawaiihungeraction.org

House Committee on Education

February 8, 2024 at 2:00PM

RE: Support for HB 1540, Relating to School Meals

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i Hunger Action Network, a coalition of more than twenty local organizations with the mission to advocate for food security for Hawai'i households, appreciates the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT of HB 1540**. This bill would require eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision, thereby eliminating student meal fees at these schools.

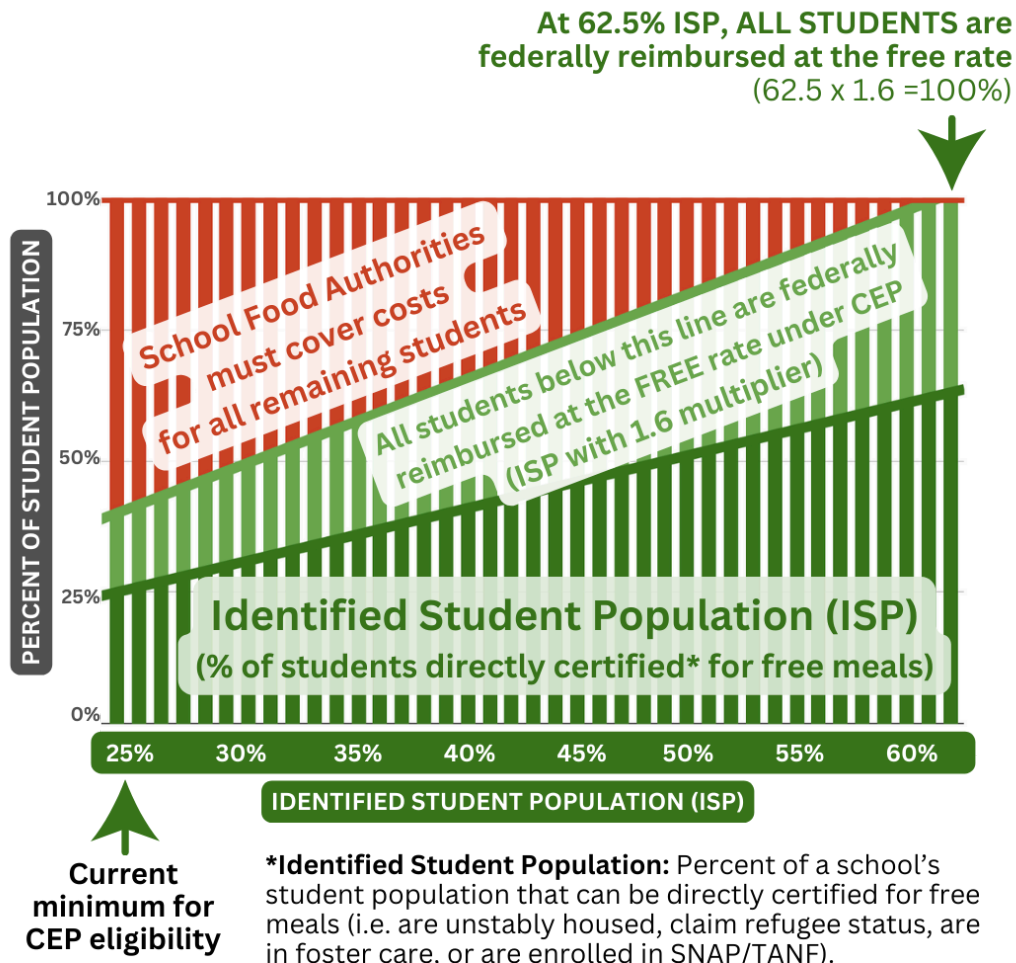
Providing school breakfast and lunch free of charge is a crucial strategy to guarantee that every child receives the necessary nutrition for growth and well-being. Overwhelming evidence has shown how important school meals are for children's growth, neurocognitive development, behavior, test scores, and for household food security. Our network members believe that nutritious meals should be part of EVERY child's school day. This bill would take us one step closer to that goal.

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a federal provision of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) that extends free meals to all students at schools where at least 25% of the student population meet certain eligibility criteria (i.e. are unstably housed, in foster care, or enrolled in SNAP/TANF).

As the figure on the following page of our testimony explains, when schools opt to use the CEP, the federal government will cover not only the cost for the students "directly certified," but will add a multiplier (currently 1.6) to extend free meals to students that may not be captured by the state's direct certification databases.

Currently, 92 DOE schools opt to use CEP. These schools were selected because they are at or above 62.5% ISP, which—with the 1.6 multiplier—means that the school gets reimbursed for all students at the free rate. This bill would extend that benefit to all schools over 25% ISP—potentially doubling the number of schools where all students eat for free.¹

As the figure shows, the state would be responsible for covering the costs above the 1.6 multiplier. However, note that CEP offers a significant decrease in administrative burden; participating schools no longer have to collect free and reduced price lunch forms from parents.



We thank you for considering our testimony in support of this bill, which would be a significant step toward ensuring no child in Hawai'i ever goes hungry at school. Mahalo for considering HB 1540.

¹ CEP allows districts to group schools that are close to one another to maximize ISP, so the actual number of schools this bill would cover could vary.

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LATE

Thirty-Second Legislature, State of Hawai'i
Regular Session of 2024
House Committee on Education

Testimony by IATSE 665
February 8th, 2024

H.B. 1540 - RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the House Committee,

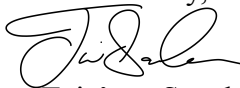
My name is Tuia'ana Scanlan, International Trustee and president of IATSE Local 665, the union representing technicians in the entertainment industry in Hawai'i. **Local 665 strongly supports HB 1540**, relating to education.

A 2022 study by Aloha United Way found that 44% of Hawai'i's households are below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold. 54% of Hawai'i households with children are below this threshold as well. The report "reflects a significant increase in local households who slipped from ALICE into poverty [...] especially affecting Hawaiian and Pacific Islander households, female-led households, and households with children" (https://www.hawaiihealthmatters.org/content/sites/hawaii/ALICE_in_Hawaii_-_2022_Facts_and_Figures_Full_Report.pdf)

A majority of households in the state of Hawai'i with children are barely making ends meet, even though the head(s) of the household is/are employed. HB 1540 will significantly relieve a portion of the economic burden that working families in Hawai'i are struggling to shoulder. The last thing that a child should have to worry about is whether or not they're going to have enough to eat today. HB 1540 will not only increase the quality of life for these children, it will increase both proficiency and growth metrics for these students because a child who no longer needs to focus on survival can repurpose that energy toward thriving.

IATSE 665 humbly asks for your committee's support of HB 1540. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

In Solidarity,



Tuia'ana Scanlan
International Trustee
President, IATSE 665 (he/him/his)



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TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAII HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: **HB1540 - Relating to education**

Position: **Support**

Hearing: **February 8, 2024, 2:00 p.m., Conference Room 309**

Submitter: **Osa Tui, Jr. – President, Hawai'i State Teachers Association**

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association **supports** HB1540 which requires eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision, which provides federal funds to help schools offer free meals to all students and appropriates moneys for any difference between federal funds amounts and costs of providing free meals.

It was exciting when the U.S. Department of Agriculture lowered the minimum identified student percentage for the Community Eligibility Provision regulations from 40 percent to 25 percent. Every single student at CEP eligible schools qualify for free meals when the percentage of students who are automatically identified as qualifying for free meals through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is at least 25 percent of the school. It was dismaying when the Hawai'i Department of Education did not apply for CEP status for the additional schools that should have qualified after the rule change in October of last year.

One of the things teachers tell their students in advance of testing days is to be sure to have a good breakfast. When students are hungry, it affects their performance in school. As grocery prices for families continue to rise, food insecurity rises as well. Too often, students who want to eat are denied a meal by no fault of their own as they find themselves in circumstances that they never wanted to be in. Ensuring that all students who go to their school cafeterias can receive a breakfast and lunch is important to allow them to keep their thoughts on their studies and not on hunger.

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 3:24:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Scott Kidd	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure and also would call for oversight to ensure locally sourced foods are used whenever possible. Free school lunches need to be appealing and meet required nutrition needs for the appropriate age groups they are being presented too. Cut the junk foods and soda!



**Testimony to the House Committee on Education
Thursday, February 8, 2024; 2:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 309
Via Videoconference**

RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 1540 – RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** House Bill No. 1540, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines to over 150,000 patients each year who live in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

The bill, as received by your Committee, would maximize the receipt of federal funds available for free school meals by requiring eligible schools to participate in the community eligibility provision.

For many of Hawaii's families, the only consistent source of food for our children has been the meals provided at the public schools. Hawaii's underprivileged and rural communities are extremely vulnerable to changing economic conditions. With inflation on the rise, entire families are struggling to put food on the table on a consistent basis. All one needs to do is visit various food distribution events and see the large number of people who wait to receive surplus food.

On previous measures heard by this Committee, the Department of Education testified that it accumulated a deficit of over \$20 million for its school food service operations because of inflationary cost increases. In school year 2022-2023, more than 80 percent of the Department's food costs increased by 42 percent, resulting in the need for additional funds.

Given the limitations in state resources, it is vital for the State to maximize the receipt of federal funds for this important responsibility.

For this reason, the HPCA supports this bill and urges your favorable consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or eabe@hawaiiPCA.net.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 4:35:40 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
kelly anne olayan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill which is in conjunction with HB1775 to provide free lunches to all keiki of Hawai'i in public DOE schools. If inmates eat free, KEIKI SHOULD EAT FREE!!!

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 5:39:02 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Will Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support HB1540.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 7:08:44 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
cheryl burghardt	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

COMMENTS: I understand that the 3 different bills for free breakfast and lunch are our efforts to ensure that it gets passed. This bill which requires eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision, which provides federal funds to help schools offer free meals to all students. Appropriates moneys for any difference between federal funds amounts and costs of providing free meals. Declares that the general fund expenditure ceiling will be exceeded.

Dealing with the Federal Govt. brings rules and regulations that sometimes make more barriers to the actual goal than we think. Having taught in public schools for over 40 years, I can say that often the rules that come with the Feds. bring issues that we could avoid by the state /local communities taking care of feeding the children. We have so much potential with farm to school.

Please find a way to make free lunch and breakfast a way for ALL children in ALL communities. We can.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 8:00:43 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
tia pearson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Not all students can eat everyday. These bills help them be able to eat at least during school hours.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 8:06:43 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
K. H.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a resident of House District 28 and Senate District 13. I support HB1540.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 12:44:27 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kevin Maurice Sledge	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Esteemed committee chair and members,

My name is Kevin Sledge and I am an educator here in Hawai'i. I am writing to express my support for HB1540 that would ensure funding for free breakfast and lunch for all students in Hawai'i regardless of ability to pay. I know first-hand the negative effect hunger can have on students' performance in class. I have seen students lethargic because of hunger; unable to engage fully in learning for thinking of lunchtime. This being so, I have even seen some of those same students not go get lunch because they don't have funds in their accounts. I have seen students relying on their friends to share with them so that they have something to eat. Students have asked me if I have snacks in my classroom and when I can, I try to ensure that I have snacks available for such students. No student should be forced to cope with hunger while at school for the inability to pay for meals. Furthermore, no student should have to bear the social stigma of not being able to pay or for qualifying for free and reduced lunch as under the current system. None of those things would continue to be a barrier for students if they are all provided breakfast and lunch for free. I believe that it is within the reach of our legislature to make this a reality for our Hawai'i students. I implore you to make it so. Thank you, committee, for this opportunity to submit testimony.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 6:21:18 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeenna Canche	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 7, 2024

Members of the Committee,

Please accept my testimony in support of HB 1540 appropriating money for any difference between federal funds amounts and costs of providing free meals. I have been a World Languages educator in the state of Hawaii for 18 years, and I firmly believe that our keiki deserve the right to an equitable education. Providing students with free school breakfasts and lunches helps to level the playing field for students who are economically disadvantaged. Therefore, I ask that this bill be passed as is, because if it does, we will provide our students with one more tool that they need to be ready to learn when they arrive in our classrooms.

Mahalo,

Jeenna Canche

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 7:22:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brandon Shim	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. My name is Brandon Shim and I have 30 years of working for multi million dollar companies on Maui to provide some of the top meals available world wide to our tourist economy both as an Executive Chef and in wholesale distrobution. Though in the past 4 years I have made a life choice to work as a kitchen manager in the DOE system after seeing the meals my children were getting daily and not being able to understand why visitor were getting better meals than our own children. I have come quickly to understand how importan a meal can be to a child as some don't have consitent supplies of food at home. Not only does this give them the fuel they need to learn and be active but it is also a meeting place to sit down with friends and converse just like we adults do when we meet family and friends out for meals at restaurants.

I can't reiterate how awful of a experience it is for a child to scan for a meal just to find out they have no funds available in their account and to see their faces when they are told they cannot affor a meal today. The same of that interaction will keep children from wanting to through that experience again and will choose rather not to eat in the future. This will take away both needed nutrients for growth mentally and physically along with the mental damage as the child looses his/her chance to sit down and interact with their peirs and could be teased by other students for lack of funds.

Why are we letting this happen when support is available?

Thank you,

Brandon Shim (Father of 4)

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 8:14:55 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaitlyn Champoux	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

I had written a whole essay including studies and citations arguing in favor of free breakfast and lunch to all students within the state. However, as I looked over every claim I realized it all boiled down to this: every child deserves to have access to food no matter what. If we truly want to be a state that claims to care about its youth and upcoming generation, then we need to care about them in all aspects; their education, their health, and their development.

As a teacher, I constantly have to have snacks and food on hand. Many of my students are unable to bring food to school for one reason or another and are in debt with the cafeteria because they can not afford the school lunches or breakfasts. Sometimes, the only food they eat in the school day are the energy bars or peanut butter crackers I am able to provide for them. In no world is this just, especially one in which we have the power to change it.

Please vote to ensure *all* students are fed in both mind *and* body.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 8:30:09 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Fitzpatrick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Honorable Education Committee,

I am a teacher at Kūlanihāko‘i High School and I am in strong support of HB 1540 which would require schools that qualify to be part of a federaly funded program that provides free meals to all our keiki. There are so many students across the state of Hawaii that only get a meal at school. We saw how free meals during the pandemic helped our students. If you are hungry the last thing on your mind is learning how to read, do math, and work positively with your peers.

It is long past time to level the playing field and provide healthy school meals to our haumana.

Please pass HB 1540.

Mahalo,
Fitz

RE: [HB 1540](#) – RELATING TO EDUCATION

Position: Strong Support

February 7, 2024

Chair Woodson, Chair Todd, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Christine Russo and I am a teacher at James Campbell High School. I strongly support this measure.

We put a great deal of emphasis on student outcomes such as test scores however if we want to improve student output we must address student input such as access to qualified teachers and healthy meals. Providing students with food security at school is one step towards helping students have their basic needs met so they can be ready to learn. Providing students with free meals may also be an important tool to help decrease the chronic absenteeism that has plagued schools ever since the Covid-19 Pandemic.

For these reasons, please consider passing this important measure. Mahalo!

Christine Russo

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 9:55:20 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natalie Lalagos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Natalie Lalagos and I teach at Kealakehe High School in Kailua Kona, Hawai'i and I support HB1540 without reservation or hesitation. Almost every day a student will ask me if I have food or a snack because they are hungry and have not eaten that day. They often say they do not have money on their account or are in debt and cannot go to the cafeteria to get anything to eat. We know that when we are hungry we cannot focus and struggle to learn new things-- the same is true for our students.

If we were to spend the projected approximately 25 million dollars to feed all students every day we would make a marked and immediate difference in the lives of thousands of kids. During the pandemic, when school meals were funded, students were fed and there was no stigma or shame around eating at school. Through HB1540 we could eliminate the stigma associated with receiving free/reduced meals and having lunch debt. I never wish anyone to feel shame or small when eating and sharing in community with others.

During the pandemic we believed that everyone should be fed, and today every one of our students is entitled to that same belief. Feeding our keiki is one of the most fundamentally human and just things we can do as a community. By providing Universal Free School Meals we would see improvements in wellbeing and academics, a reduction in food insecure households, and we would also create a more inclusive campus for all students.

First off, thank you for your leadership and commitment of service to the community. I would like to take this time to submit my testimony in support of HB1540: DOE Universal Free School Breakfasts and Lunches 2024/25. As you know the hard working people of Hawaii are facing hard economic challenges throughout the islands, this is reflected in yhe DOE student meal debt in 2022-23 was \$100K more than 4 times the amount of 2019-20. Unfortunately we are one of the few states that still allows schools to deny meals to students with a negative meal balance. What kind of trauma does this have on the employees that have to refuse a child a meal, the child who has to spend a day in school where food is being thrown away in front of their eyes while they learn hungry and the families that are struggling to get by? How much food is being thrown away if families are having struggles paying for them? Which makes one wonder how many kids are left sad and hungry, how does this impact them physically, mentally and behaviorally. Culturally we all understand that eating together and ensuring nourishment of our keiki are beliefs we can't ever lose sight of upholding. Approving this bill almost certainly begins to show the families of DOE students, most of whom get salary increases < 64% annually, that the legislative system is committed to support the families they serve and care for their children. This is critical during a time in which many basic expense and local tax increases are causing people to move out of state. Mahalo for your time and consideration in this matter.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 10:57:04 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kiri	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kiri Hirota, and I believe that our schools need the appropriate funds to help schools offer free meals to all students.

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 11:55:25 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Diliaur Tellei	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Feed our keiki! They can't learn if they are hungry. Some kids may get their only meal(s) at school which is heartbreaking. Even when kids can afford and access breakfast and lunch on their own, there are always circumstances in which the safety net could and should be extended. And expanding the program to all students could reduce stigma against of free meals at school. "It takes a village"--if so, we have to act like one. I'd be proud to put my tax dollars toward funding this program.

LATE

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 2:07:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Kailiawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am in **STRONG SUPPORT** of this HB1540. I know many families with keiki who are struggling financially. This would help them alot.

Mahalo for allowing me to share my testimony

With grattiude

Leilani

Send DataSend Data

LATE

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 5:02:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Reinalyn M. Terrado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! I am testifying in strong support of HB1540, requiring eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which provides federal funds to help schools offer free meals to all students.

The CEP enables schools that predominantly serve low-income children to offer free, nutritious school meals to all students through the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program without collecting school meal applications and regardless of household income.

Currently, 106 schools in Hawai‘i offer free meals to all students under CEP.

According to the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) database, 17 eligible Hawai‘i schools CHOSE NOT to adopt CEP in the 2022-23 school year.

HB1540 will maximize the receipt of federal funds available for free school meals by requiring eligible schools to participate in the CEP. Students should be provided access to free nutritional meals and that participation in the CEP can improve this access.

With food prices soaring and costs of living on the rise, families in Hawai‘i are struggling to make ends meet. For some students, school breakfasts and lunches are the only meals they receive in a day. The available federal funds through CEP will ensure that every child in an eligible school has the nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

Mahalo for considering my testimony.

Reinalyn M. Terrado, Parent

LATE

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 6:56:40 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deborah Bond-Upson	Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB 1540: Universal Free School Meals in Hawai'i

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee,

Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i has worked to support public schools, and the teachers, families, and students and families relying on quality, equitable, effective education.

Since 2010 we have worked to ensure that the public knows the quality of our public schools and that our schools are responsive to the needs of our families.

The research shows, and we all know, that students who have nutritious meals are more able to focus on their studies. Our schools have the capacity to see that all students have breakfast and or lunch each school day, if funded to do so.

Universal free school meal programs help reduce food insecurity, promote equity and justice, improve academic success, and eliminate stigma. Our schools or the district as a whole may qualify for federal funding to finance meals for all students.

HB 1540 requires eligible schools to participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision, which provides federal funds to help schools offer free meals to all students. This bill further appropriates moneys for any difference between federal funds amounts and costs of providing free meals.

[Share a reason why a universal free school meals program would be important to you, your organization, your community etc]

A universal free school meals program in Hawai'i is estimated to cost \$25.5M or only 1% of the DOE's operating budget. A small investment with a huge impact.

We urge the legislature to prioritize and support the implementation of universal free school meals in Hawai'i and to see that our schools and district receive all the federal support for this important step towards health and equity for our keiki.

Mahalo nui loa for supporting the health of our keiki.

**Deborah Bond-Upson
President, Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i**

LATE

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 7:20:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Pickett	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Members of the Legislature,

As a public high school teacher in Kailua-Kona, I am writing to express my strong support for the bills under consideration (H.B.1540, H.B.1775, S.B.2327) that would provide universal free lunch for all students in Hawai'i schools.

Universal Free School Meal (UFSM) programs have proven to be invaluable in ensuring that all students have access to nutritious meals, regardless of their economic circumstances. These programs remove barriers to participation and help address food insecurity among students, which is a growing concern in our community.

In my own classroom, I witness firsthand the impact of food insecurity on students who come to school hungry or skip meals. Many of my students rely on the snacks I, and my colleagues, provide with our own money to get through the day. Implementing a UFSM program would ensure that no student goes hungry and that all students have the fuel they need to learn and thrive.

I urge you to support these bills and prioritize the well-being of our students by providing universal free lunch for all. Thank you for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Pickett

To: Hawaii State House Committee on Education and Committee on Transportation
Hearing Date/Time: Thursday 8, 2024, 2:00pm
Place: Hawaii State Capitol, CR 309 & Videoconference
Re: Judith Ann Armstrong supports HB1540 Relating to School Meals

LATE

Dear Chairs Rep. Justin H. Woodson and Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chairs Rep Trish La Chica and Rep. Darius K. Kila and members of the Committee on Education and Committee on Transportation

I, Judith Ann Armstrong, support HB1540 Relating to School Meals.

The Case for Universal Free School Meals

1. Promote Equity and Justice

1. To qualify for free school meals, a household of 4 would need to make less than \$44,000 per year. This leaves 2 out of 3 Hawai'i households that struggle to make ends meet ineligible for free school meals.

2. Reduce Childhood Food Insecurity

1. A 2022 study of schools implementing UFSM found an almost 5% decline in household food insecurity.

3. Improve Academic Performance

1. Students who eat better do better than students who miss meals. Studies of UFSM in other states have shown large test scores and academic improvements at participating schools.

4. Eliminate Stigma

1. By making meals universally free, UFSM eliminates the stigma associated with having school meal debt, or receiving free or reduced-price meals, creating a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

5. Leverage Shared Investment

1. UFSM requires a significant financial investment (approximately \$25.5M) and there are a web of funding options and community partnerships available to ensure equitable implementation, including federal funding and state and local resources.

A

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB1540.

Sincerely,

Judith Ann Armstrong

LATE

HB-1540

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 8:26:29 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/8/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victoria Miller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB1540

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for the continuation and expansion of the Federal Community Provision program, specifically aimed at eligible schools. This initiative, which provides federal funds to assist schools in offering free meals to all students, plays a crucial role in fostering a healthy and supportive educational environment.

As a concerned member of the community, I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact of this program on our schools. By ensuring that all students have access to nutritious meals, regardless of their economic background, the Federal Community Provision promotes equality and reduces the stigma associated with free meal programs. This not only contributes to the overall well-being of students but also enhances their focus and performance in the classroom.

Moreover, the program aids in creating a more inclusive and compassionate school culture, where every child feels valued and nourished. By addressing the nutritional needs of students, we are investing in their physical health, cognitive development, and overall academic success.

I urge you to continue supporting and strengthening the Federal Community Provision for eligible schools, recognizing its pivotal role in fostering a positive learning environment and ensuring that no child faces barriers to accessing nutritious meals. Your commitment to

this program is an investment in the well-being and future success of our community's children.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I trust that you will consider the profound impact this program has on the lives of students within our community.

From: Victoria Miller