

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

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

Date: 03/16/2023

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB 0971, SD2 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on county bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes. Effective 7/1/2050. (SD2)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 971, SD 2, which allows the continuation of the successful Expanding Ridership to Educate Students in School (EXPRESS) pilot program and expands it to include charter school high school students.

The school bus driver shortages continue to affect transportation options for students. Allowing high school students access to public transportation helps address the driver shortage while providing opportunities to improve their overall well-being and increase access to educational and social opportunities.

Usage of the HOLO card program on Oahu from October through December 2022 shows that students have tapped their EXPRESS cards between 38,000 – 43,000 times between Monday through Friday and 11,000 – 15,000 on the weekends. Students are riding most frequently at 7:00 a.m. and between 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m., which is consistent with most high school bell times.

If funding were provided to continue this program, the Department would have the means to include public charter schools. At the time of inception, the Student Transportation Services branch utilized funds from their general fund allocation to support this program, so charter

schools were not included in this initial pilot.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony for this measure.

JOSH GREEN. M.D.
GOVERNOR



CATHY K. IKEDA
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>
1111 Bishop Street, Suite 516, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

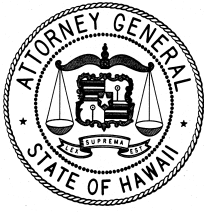
FOR: SB971 SD2 Relating to Student Transportation
DATE: March 16, 2023
TIME: 2:00 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Education
ROOM: Conference Room 309 & Videoconference
FROM: Yvonne Lau, Interim Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony in **SUPPORT of SB 971 SD2** which appropriates funds to the Department of Education (DOE) to provide public high school students and charter school students with bus passes. The measure also requires the DOE to collect data on city bus pass usage by public high school students and charter school students and requires an annual report from the DOE.

The Commission appreciates that this measure provides the funding needed to make this program available to charter school students; the Commission will be available to assist the DOE as needed in effectuating the requirements of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE, 2023**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

S.B. NO. 971, S.D. 2, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Thursday, March 16, 2023

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 309

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

The bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) to collect certain data on county bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students. The bill also requires an annual report to the Legislature and appropriates funds to the DOE to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes.

The Department respectfully recommends the following revisions:

- (1) To clarify that the bill covers charter *high* school students, rather than *all* charter school students, which we understand is the intent of the bill, we suggest adding "high" between "charter" and "school students" on: page 4, lines 15 and 19; page 5, line 1; and page 6, line 2, of the bill.
- (2) The DOE is not responsible for the provision of bus transportation for individual charter schools and their students. Individual charter schools are in charge of deciding whether and to what extent they will provide transportation to and from a student's home and charter school. For those reasons, we recommend that the Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission (Commission) be involved in the collection of data referenced in the bill, and a separate appropriation should be made to the Commission to offer bus passes to charter high school students. References to the Commission should be added to the provisions on: page 4, lines 13-15;

page 4, line 20, through page 5, line 2; and page 5, lines 11-16.

Additionally, the words "and charter school" on page 6, line 2, should be deleted from the appropriation to the DOE in section 3 of the bill and a separate appropriation to the Commission to provide bus passes to charter high school students and the expenditure of those moneys should be added to the bill. Purpose (3) at page 4, lines 17-19, should also add wording to clarify that the appropriations are separate.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION
COMMISSION
POST OFFICE BOX 621
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

Co-Chairs:
Chair, DLNR
Director, OPSD

Commissioners:
Chair, Senate AEN
Chair, Senate WTL
Chair, House EEP
Chair, House WAL
Chairperson, HTA
Chairperson, DOA
CEO, OHA
Chairperson, DHHL
Director, DBEDT
Director, DOT
Director, DOH
Chairperson, DOE
Director, C+C DPP
Director, Maui DP
Director, Hawai'i DP
Director, Kaua'i DP
The Adjutant General
Manager, CZM

**Testimony of
Leah Laramee
Coordinator, Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission**

**Before the House Committee on
EDUCATION**

**Thursday, March 16, 2023
2:00 PM**

State Capitol, Via Videoconference, Conference Room 309

**In support of
Senate Bill 971 Senate Draft 2
RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION**

Senate Bill 971 SD2 requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on county bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes. **The Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission (Commission) supports this measure.**

Free and reduced access to public transportation delivers on Hawai'i's climate, equity, and public health goals. The Commission recognizes we need more significant investments in pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities. Moving people around with safer and sustainable transportation options that integrate walking, bicycling, rolling, transit, and wheelchair use while connecting routes to all of a region's geographic areas can improve community development, foster economic revitalization, link people to the health care system, schools, and jobs, improve air quality and help address climate change.

There is no single solution to bettering built environments. Instead, community, state and federal governments, along with advocacy groups and community members, must work together to implement policies and guide investments, such as those listed in this bill, that will allow for people to navigate their cities and towns outside of personal vehicles.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

711 KAPIOLANI BOULEVARD, SUITE 1600
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
Phone: (808) 768-8305 • Fax: (808) 768-4730 • Internet: www.honolulu.gov

RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR



J. ROGER MORTON
DIRECTOR

JON Y. NOUCHI
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

TESTIMONY OF J. ROGER MORTON
DIRECTOR OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION

Thursday, March 16, 2023, 2:00 PM, Via Videoconference

TO: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair, Representative Lisa Marten, Vice Chair,
and Members of the Committee on Education

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 971, SENATE DRAFT 2, RELATING
TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

The Department of Transportation Services (DTS) of the City and County of Honolulu (City) **strongly supports** Senate Bill 971, Senate Draft 2 (SB 971 SD2), relating to student transportation.

DTS partnered with the Department of Education (DOE) in September of 2022 to help launch the EXPRESS pilot program, allowing all DOE students in grades 9-12 access to public transportation at no cost to families. The program was launched, in part, to help address the school bus driver shortage, remove transportation barriers to non-school hour programming and empower students to develop healthy public transit habits at an early age.

From the inception of the pilot program through January 2023, DTS has recorded the following usage from DOE students utilizing the EXPRESS program:

2022	Number of HOLO Card Taps (Boardings)
Oct	40,206
Nov	95,003
Dec	93,837
2023	
Jan	80,136
Grand Total	309,182

The highest recorded times for usage were Monday – Friday, from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., which aligns with DOE school bell times. The second highest usage for the school week were from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., indicating students are able to participate in after school hour activities and catching the bus home afterwards. Weekend taps for students were about 15,000 – 20,300.

House Committee on Education
Testimony on S.B. No. 971, SD2, Relating to Student Transportation
March 16, 2023

DTS is aware that allowing students free access to public transportation is common practice in several major cities around the world and has shown positive outcomes for families and students alike as it increases their access to not only education, but medical care, food and shelter resources, libraries, and other social opportunities. Additionally, the annual cost of public transportation is less than half the cost of school bus service per student. According to the National Center for Education Statistics the average cost of school bus service was \$1,152 per student per school year (2018 - 2019 data). That amount is likely to be at least 10% higher in Hawai'i, compared to the annual cost of a youth bus pass at \$480 a year per student.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support.



Email: communications@ulupono.com

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Thursday, March 16, 2023 — 2:00 p.m.

Ulupono Initiative supports SB 971 SD2, Relating to Student Transportation.

Dear Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Micah Munekata, and I am the Director of Government Affairs at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy and clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

Ulupono supports SB 971 SD2, which requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on city bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students; requires an annual report to the Legislature; and, appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes.

In addition to the numerous educational benefits for students, this measure would help meet many community goals and make transportation choices more affordable across all islands. Specifically, these types of complementary and supportive programs from the State help us support our communities more effectively to:

- **Improve congestion**—Up to 20–30% of morning traffic can be generated by parents driving their children to school.¹
- **Reduce our climate impacts**—It is not possible to rely exclusively on the electrification of the current system to meet our climate goal of carbon net neutrality by 2045.² We need those who want to walk, bike and bus to be able to do so as conveniently as possible. This also includes students and their families.
- **Lower the cost of living in Hawai'i**—If we can help our households' shed cars, we can help them save up to \$16,200 per year while reducing the indirect public costs associated with vehicle ownership that amount to \$11.2 billion per year in Hawai'i.³ In addition, housing can become more affordable if we don't dedicate so much land and financial resources to expensive, space-intensive car dependency.

¹ <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2012/09/05/september-brings-back-to-school-jump-in-traffic-congestion/>

² Presentation at Hawaii Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission Meeting 4/6/2022
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqwhX8RI_IQ

³ "The Costs of the Vehicle Economy in Hawai'i," <https://ulupono.com/news-listing/report-examines-hawaii-s-21-8-billion-vehicle-economy/>.

- **Make bus transit more family-friendly**—At the high end, a family of four on O‘ahu currently could pay up to \$18 per trip.⁴ If one parent has a monthly pass and the kids now are free, that transit becomes a much more affordable option. Although not the intent of this bill, it is an additional benefit.

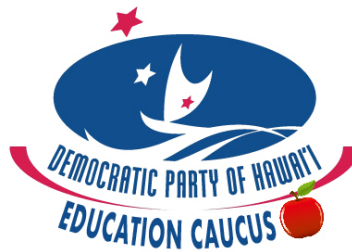
As Hawai‘i’s transportation needs are increasingly complex and challenging, we appreciate the state exploring and supporting the many different policies that help improve our transportation choices in our communities

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Micah Munekata
Director of Government Affairs

⁴ Round-trip for 2 adults at \$3 per leg and 2 kids fares at \$1.50 per leg. No monthly pass discount assumed.



SENATE BILL 971, SD2, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

MARCH 16, 2023 · HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
· CHAIR REP. JUSTIN H. WOODSON

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** SB 971, SD2, relating to student transportation, which requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on city bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students; requires an annual report to the Legislature; and appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes.

Currently, the Hawai'i Department of Education provides regular bus service to meet school transportation requirements and ensure adequate attendance for children. According to HIDOE, an average of 35,090 regular education students ride the bus each day, along with 3,359 special education students. Bus service is essential for students who lack other transportation options, especially those who live in remote communities or face financial hardship.

A nationwide shortage of bus drivers that is being experienced by 80 percent of school districts has caused route cancellations and transportation disruptions for many working families. Around 33,000 students across the islands the rely on DOE school buses to commute to and from school each day. Yet, **150 out of 700 bus driver positions were left vacant as of September of 2022,** despite efforts to increase pay and provide recruitment incentives.

To qualify for regular bus service, students in grades kindergarten through five must reside a mile or more, and students in grades six through twelve must reside 1.5 miles or more, from the school within their geographic area in which they are enrolled. Students who qualify for bus service may receive a free bus pass if they meet eligibility requirements or pay \$36.00 for quarterly one-way trips, \$72.00 for quarterly round trips, or \$10.00 for ten coupons. A student who qualifies for *free* lunch under the free and reduced-price lunch program is eligible for a free bus pass. **Yet, free bus passes are not given to students who qualify for reduced price lunch.**

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, bus service has become a tremendous challenge for remote communities. On Hawai'i Island, for instance, bus routes have been routinely cancelled because of a lack of drivers in areas that are already exceedingly large and that require lengthy travel times for students—in some cases, students must travel over 1.5 hours to reach their schools. These areas also tend to be some of the most impoverished districts in our state.

Families of students at Ka'u High School and Pahala Elementary (one campus), for instance, have a median annual income of \$39,751, less than half of the state average of \$83,173 for families of public school students. According to the most recent STRIVE HI report, 63 percent of students at Ka'u High and Pahala Elementary missed fifteen or more school days. **This data shows the strong correlation between poverty and chronic absenteeism, a problem that is exacerbated by the lack of affordable transportation options for working families.**

Therefore, passage of this measure would assist many impoverished families in obtaining transportation for their keiki and, thus, reduce the chronic absenteeism that prevents children from reaching their full potential.

Kris Coffield · Chairperson, DPH Education Caucus · (808) 679-7454 · kriscoffield@gmail.com

FOR: **SB971 SD2, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION**

HEARING: Thursday, March 16, 2023, 2:00 pm, Conference Room 309

IN SUPPORT

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Martin, and members of the Committee on Education,

My name is Vi Schap and I am a UH Manoa Master of Social Work student currently gaining my practicum hours at Family Court, Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) unit, where we receive referrals for Truancy Court. I am testifying **in favor of SB 971** Relating to Student Transportation, which requires the Department of Education to collect data, give an annual report to the Legislature, and, in turn, appropriate funds to the Department of Education for high school and charter school students' city bus passes.

Truancy has risen since the Covid-19 pandemic and is an essential issue of the state. I have been a student intern at Family Court PINS unit since August 2022, and through my experience, I learned many minors with truant behavior report issues making it to school.

To their report, school buses pick up over an hour before school starts, do not pick up in their area, are not accessible due to a lack of safe walking spaces, and many students also have extenuating circumstances that do not allow school bus coverage, such as living in a different school district. Many families experiencing school bus issues cannot drive their children to school every day.

In Truancy Court we recognize that minors age 13 and above have some personal responsibility in their school attendance, along with their parent or guardian. SB 971 ensures that students of this age can fulfill their responsibility, and be encouraged to abide by state law. **When we remove the barriers to entry and promote equity, student attendance will be bolstered.**

For students brought in on a Truancy charge, it is common procedure for Juvenile Client Services to recommend that the court order a city bus pass and alarm clock to be given to the minor. These items are frequently funded by the state, as many parents are unable to afford the high cost of the city bus pass. These items are crucial to helping the student arrive *consistently and on time*. In addition to removing barriers to the child's education, SB 971 will also serve another purpose: creating independence. These children, once grown into adults, will enter the workforce. **These city bus**

passes are tools that can help them grow into successful, responsible adults who can arrive at their job on time, every day, and give back to our community.

It is essential that every child gets an education, which means, we must create equitable transportation opportunities to school. Our city bus is a strong resource that will help students arrive at their school consistently and punctually. It will provide the added benefits of fostering independence in our youth and increasing their access to libraries and prosocial activities. I would like to reiterate that Juvenile Client Services at Family Court already have a common procedure of court ordering the state to pay for a city bus pass for a student charged with Truancy.

The needs of our keiki are clear. SB 971 is the most efficient way to utilize funds and do right by our keiki. **I am in full support of SB 971.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Vi Schap
Master of Social Work Student

From: Emily Warren, Individual (Former Student Transportation Administrator)

To: Representative Woodson, Chair, Representative Marten, Vice Chair and Members of the House Education Committee

Re: Testimony **in support** of Senate Bill 971, Relating to Student Transportation

Thursday, March 16, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 309 Via Videoconference

As a previous Department of Education (DOE) employee working in student transportation, I **strongly support SB 971** relating to student transportation. This bill is a long game investment that will benefit our students, our state budget, and our infrastructure.

Cost of school bus service per student per school year	Cost of public transportation per student per school year	Savings per student
\$1,667	\$400	\$1,267

As you can see from the financial information above, the state stands to save over \$1,200 per student if they choose to ride public transportation vs. a school bus.

DOE student transportation is appropriated \$55 million per year.

Annual school bus service ridership: 33,000

$\$55 \text{ million} / 33,000 \text{ students} = \$1,667$ is the cost of school bus service per student.

As public transit services expand across all islands, it is highly likely that as time passes, more students would choose to utilize public transportation.

While working for student transportation at the DOE, I had the opportunity to talk to dozens of families regarding their transportation challenges and the impact it had on their students. I spoke with a grandmother on Kauai who was taking care of her 3 grandchildren while her daughter worked 2 jobs trying to support the family. She couldn't drive her grandchildren to and from school every day, which affected their ability to participate in sports and other after school activities. The children were missing school on a regular basis until the DOE launched the EXPRESS program, which allowed them access to free public transit (something they could not afford on their own).

I spoke with a couple in Ewa who both worked in the healthcare profession and needed school bus service to get their daughter to and from school due to their work schedules, however there was no room on the bus. The access to public transit allowed their daughter to get to and from school consistently and she was able to participate in an after school academic program that she had previously been unable to attend.

I spoke with a single mother on Maui who relied on school bus service for her daughter and son. When their bus route was suspended due to driver shortages, she had to take vacation hours to get to work late and leave early to drop off and pick her kids from school. Her vacation hours were running out and

she was about to start having to take leave without pay when the EXPRESS program “threw her a lifeline” enabling her kids to take the public transit buses to and from school.

Additionally, as a Board of Directors appointee for the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, I can tell you with 100% certainty that the school bus driver shortage is going to continue to get worse until school bus driving is considered a full-time job with benefits (like most CDL professional driving careers).

As an average taxpayer, I would love to see my tax money go towards a program like this that enables and empowers our youth and by extension, our families. Allowing students access to free public transportation sends a strong message to our communities that you see and understand the foundational challenges to success, which most frequently start with transportation barriers.