



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 2256 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

**Purpose of Bill:** Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements. Appropriates funds.

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) provides comments on HB 2256.

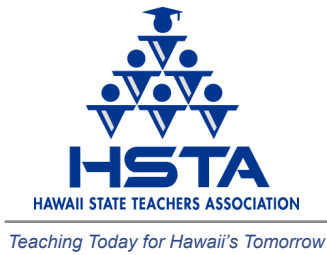
The school meal program operates in each of the Department's non-charter schools and offers meals to its students in elementary through high school. The Department understands the importance of child nutrition and its role in improving overall student health and agrees that children should have adequate meals provided to them.

The Department would request an amendment that the appropriation in this measure be directed to the Department's School Food Services Branch (SFSB) which manages the school food program operations and the state funding for the Department's non-charter schools.

Currently, the Department is working to calculate what the potential cost might be of providing free school meals for those students that qualify for a reduced price breakfast and lunch.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.





1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawaii 96819  
Tel: (808) 833-2711 • Fax: (808) 839-7106 • Web: www.hsta.org

**LATE**

**Osa Tui, Jr.**  
President

**Logan Okita**  
Vice President

**Lisa Thompson**  
Secretary-Treasurer

**Ann Mahi**  
Executive Director

## TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAII HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: **HB2256 - Relating to school meals**  
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** HB2256 which, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements.

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.



**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. 2256 – 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. 2256, 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:

- (1) Require the Department of Education to provide every student a free or reduced-priced breakfast or lunch based on the student's household eligibility; and
- (2) Appropriate an unspecified amount of general funds for fiscal year 2024-2025 to provide for universal free school breakfasts and lunches after federal funding is accounted.

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.

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@hawaiiipca.net](mailto:eabe@hawaiiipca.net).



1050 Bishop St. PMB 235 | Honolulu, HI 96813  
P: 808-533-1292 | e: info@hawaiiifood.com

#### **Executive Officers**

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**Joe Carter**, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, *Advisor*  
**Eddie Asato**, Pint Size Hawaii, *Immediate Past Chair*

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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: HB2256 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. Several states have already adopted universal school meal programs. These programs are a commonsense way to make sure all our keiki have access to nutritious food, regardless of income level, with no stigma.

School meals have been shown to increase overall health for kids. Preliminary data from areas where school wide free meals have been enacted also show improved academic performance, as well as a decrease in suspension among certain students. It's not hard to understand that kids who aren't hungry do better in school and behave better.

Ensuring that our kids have easy, consistent access to healthy food should be a top priority for our state. This bill will help make that happen, we encourage the committee to pass this measure and we thank you for the opportunity to testify.



## HIPHI Board

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University of Hawai'i at Hilo

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University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu

Jennifer José Lo, MD  
Hawai'i Health Partners

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John A. Burns School of Medicine,  
Department of Pediatrics

Kathleen Roche, MS, RN, CENP  
Kaiser Permanente

Dina Shek, JD  
Medical-Legal Partnership  
For Children in Hawai'i

Garret Sugai  
HMSA

JoAnn Tsark, MPH  
John A. Burns School of Medicine,  
Native Hawaiian Research Office

## HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a  
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &  
Evaluation

Community Health  
Worker Initiatives

COVID-19 Response

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free  
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 2256 Relating to School Meals

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

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Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, convened by the Hawai'i Public Health Institute<sup>i</sup> appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **Support of HB2256**, which would provide free school meals to students who are eligible for reduced priced meals.

### 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 10,000 more students.<sup>ii</sup> This would be a benefit to these households as they would have better and more affordable 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 enough of it.<sup>iii</sup> 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.<sup>iv</sup> Expanding free school meals to additional students will help end this benefits cliff for thousands of new students and their families. Please pass this bill.

Sincerely,

Nate Hix

Social Impact Policy Manager  
Hawai'i Public Health Institute

<sup>i</sup> 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.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://hcnp.hawaii.gov/fiscal/>

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

<sup>iv</sup> <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. 2256 – Relating to School Meals  
House Committee on Education  
Thursday February 8, 2024, at 2:00PM

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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. 2256**, which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to eliminate the reduced-price meal copay, allowing students that qualify for and receive reduced-price meals to eat for free without any payment from their families.

School breakfast and lunch provide our students with the essential nutrition they need in order to continue to learn throughout the school day.

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.<sup>1</sup> This leaves many households ineligible for meaningful assistance yet unable to make ends meet.

Eliminating the reduced-price meal copay is a tested strategy that some states have used on their journey to achieving a universal free school meals program. There are three eligibility categories for school meals under the DOE: free, reduced-price, and paid. Students eligible for reduced-price meals pay 30 cents for breakfast and 40 cents for lunch. For school year 2023-2024, of the DOE’s more than 156,000 enrolled students, 7% or nearly 11,000 are eligible for reduced-priced meals.<sup>2</sup>

In the attached one-pager you can find additional information on the trend in school breakfast participation rates by meal type in Hawai‘i and a program cost estimate based on 2018-2019 school year participation data and evidence-based estimates on projected increase in participation when meals are free.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Aloha United Way. ALICE in the Crosscurrents: COVID and Financial Hardship in Hawai‘i (2023)

<sup>2</sup> [Hawaii Child Nutrition Programs October Data 2024 All SFAs](#)

## Estimated State Costs<sup>3</sup>

	Pre-pandemic participation rates <sup>4</sup>	Projected participation rates <sup>5</sup>
<b>Reduced-Price Breakfast Only</b>	\$143,316.00	\$424,244.02
<b>Reduced-Price Lunch Only</b>	\$646,272.00	\$1,632,870.84
<b>Breakfast &amp; Lunch</b>	<b>\$789,588.00</b>	<b>\$2,057,114.86</b>

## Average Daily Breakfast Participation Rates by Meal Type<sup>6</sup>

	Free (F)		Reduced Price (RP)		Paid		Total Students
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
<b>SY13-14</b>	25,771	70.0%	3,709	10.1%	7,354	20.0%	36,834
<b>SY14-15</b>	26,003	69.30%	3,635	9.70%	7,869	21.00%	37,507
<b>SY15-16</b>	25,432	70.40%	3,301	9.10%	7,370	20.40%	36,103
<b>SY16-17</b>	24,327	70.50%	2,921	8.50%	7,275	21.10%	34,522
<b>SY17-18</b>	23,632	72.30%	2,539	7.80%	6,152	19.90%	32,683
<b>SY18-19</b>	22,822	70.50%	2,654	8.20%	6,876	21.30%	32,352

<sup>3</sup> Lost revenue from co-pays only. Does not take into account any changes in administrative costs.

<sup>4</sup> Assumes SY 2018-19 average daily participation rates and SY2022-23 eligibility data for reduced price and paid students for all participating public and charter schools.

<sup>5</sup> Assumes a 6.8% increase for lunch and 12.1% increase for breakfast over SY18-19 average daily participation rates for reduced price, and paid students (USDA estimates).

<sup>6</sup> Appleaseed analysis of the FRAC School Breakfast Report Card SY13-14 to SY17-18





#### 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 2256, 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 2256**. This bill would require the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to public school students in the state of Hawai'i *that are currently only eligible for the USDA's reduced price*.

The overwhelming evidence showing how important school meals are for children's growth, concentration, test scores, and for household food security lead us to believe that nutritious meals should be part of EVERY child's school day—not just those who fill out a form indicating they meet an arbitrary income threshold. That said, this bill would take us one step closer to that goal, by ensuring those who fall slightly above the threshold for free meals would still be able to benefit.

Eligibility thresholds for free school meals require that a family of four makes under \$44,850 per year. For those just over this threshold, there is a "reduced price" category available to families making up to \$63,825 per year—still far below the \$104,000 needed to afford a "survival budget" in Hawai'i.<sup>1</sup>

Since the end of pandemic-era aid programs, more and more Hawai'i families are falling through the cracks, and our network members are

<sup>1</sup> [Aloha United Way \(2023\). ALICE in the Crosscurrents: COVID and financial hardship in Hawai'i](#)

seeing and feeling the impacts first-hand. The demand for food assistance across the state continues to overwhelm our emergency food networks on a day to day basis. The number of schools offering school pantries is climbing year over year, and teachers are being forced to use money from their own personal budgets to stock “snack drawers” for children who show up to school without eating, or who are overdrawn in their school food accounts. They know that their students are hungry, and have no choice but to provide some kind of nourishment if they want them to succeed in school.

The impacts are not isolated to the emergency food system—they are being felt by the state as well. The Hawai‘i DOE has been reporting record meal debt in recent years—more than 2.5 times the rate seen in pre-pandemic times—because many parents simply can’t afford the fees. And sadly, it’s our children who are ultimately paying the price; as little as a \$5 meal debt can result in a child being denied a meal at school, putting them at risk of going hungry and making it harder to learn.

Passing this bill is a modest investment that would take us one step closer to truly eradicating childhood hunger in our state. Our network members estimate the cost of this program at just over \$2 million a year.<sup>2</sup> It would also put Hawai‘i on track to join a growing national movement to make sure no child goes hungry. So far, eight states have eradicated school meal fees entirely, and dozens more are expected to follow suit in coming years.

Providing school breakfast and lunch without charge to struggling public school families is a crucial strategy to guarantee that every child receives the necessary nutrition for growth and well-being. Mahalo for your consideration of this bill.

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<sup>2</sup> [Hawai‘i Appleseed \(2024\). Equity on the Menu: The Case for Universal Free School Meals](#)



## TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 8, 2024

### HB 2256, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

### POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawaii **supports** HB 2256, relating to school meals. Pursuant to the “Education” section of the Democratic Party of Hawaii platform, the party supports “an excellent, free public education for students at every level.”

Hungry children can’t learn.

A recent study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research focused on the federal National School Lunch Program's Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools where many students qualified for free or reduced-price meals to provide a free meal to all students. The study examined whether the provision of schoolwide free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision impacted school suspension rates and **estimated that the chances of being suspended multiple times fell in both elementary school and in middle school.**

Moreover, a 2021 study by the Brookings Institute found that schoolwide free meals improve math performance. This is further bolstered by research conducted by the Food Research and Action Center, which has noted that **students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and achievement.** Studies

have clearly demonstrated the link between school meals and student success, which is especially important as schools and educators continue to strategize how to combat the loss of opportunity to learn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, providing free school meals will improve overall health outcomes, both now and in the future. Thirty million students rely on schools to provide them with breakfast and lunch every day in the United States. Those who participate in the school meal program consume breakfasts and lunches of higher nutritional quality than nonparticipants and are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables. **Participation in the school breakfast program is associated with lower body mass index (BMI), lower probability of being overweight, and a lower likelihood of obesity.**

More Americans are sick than they are healthy: half of adults have diabetes or prediabetes; more than half of adults have cardiovascular disease; and 3 in 4 adults are overweight or obese. Healthcare costs account for 29 percent of state budgets and 28 percent of the federal budget. As the National Education Association has stated, through universal free school meals programs, “We can grow generations of healthy eaters and save our country billions.”

Notably, school meals cost less per student when more students participate in a free meal program. An article entitled in *Nutrients* entitled “Universal Free Meals Associated with Lower Meal Costs While Maintaining Nutritional Quality” found that **schools that participated in a universal meal program spent 67 and 58 cents less per lunch and breakfast**, respectively, while maintaining the same nutritional quality. Cost savings are especially important as many schools may face continuing budget cuts.

Nutrition is essential to academic success. This bill will ensure that Hawai'i's keiki are healthy and ready to reach their full potential.

Mahalo nui loa,

**Kris Coffield**  
*Co-Chair, Legislative Committee*  
(808) 679-7454  
kriscoffield@gmail.com

**Abby Simmons**  
*Co-Chair, Legislative Committee*  
(808) 352-6818  
abbyalana808@gmail.com



## **HOUSE BILL 2256, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS**

FEBRUARY 8, 2024 · EDN HEARING

**POSITION:** Support.

**RATIONALE:** The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 2256, relating to school meals, which, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements.

Hungry children can't learn.

A recent study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research focused on the federal National School Lunch Program's Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools where many students qualified for free or reduced-price meals to provide a free meal to all students. The study examined whether the provision of schoolwide free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision impacted school suspension rates and **estimated that the chances of being suspended multiple times fell in both elementary school and in middle school.**

Moreover, a 2021 study by the Brookings Institute found that schoolwide free meals improve math performance. This is further bolstered by research conducted by the Food Research and Action Center, which has noted that **students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and achievement.** Studies have

clearly demonstrated the link between school meals and student success, which is especially important as schools and educators continue to strategize how to combat the loss of opportunity to learn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, providing free school meals will improve overall health outcomes, both now and in the future. Thirty million students rely on schools to provide them with breakfast and lunch every day in the United States. Those who participate in the school meal program consume breakfasts and lunches of higher nutritional quality than nonparticipants and are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables. **Participation in the school breakfast program is associated with lower body mass index (BMI), lower probability of being overweight, and a lower likelihood of obesity.**

More Americans are sick than they are healthy: half of adults have diabetes or prediabetes; more than half of adults have cardiovascular disease; and 3 in 4 adults are overweight or obese. Healthcare costs account for 29 percent of state budgets and 28 percent of the federal budget. As the National Education Association has stated, through universal free school meals programs, “We can grow generations of healthy eaters and save our country billions.”

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Nutrition is essential to academic success. This bill will ensure that Hawai'i's keiki are healthy and ready to reach their full potential.

**Kris Coffield · Chairperson, DPH Education Caucus · (808) 679-7454 · [kriscoffield@gmail.com](mailto:kriscoffield@gmail.com)**



# Food+ Policy Internship 2024

[food@purplemaia.org](mailto:food@purplemaia.org)

February 7, 2024

Subject: *HB2256 - 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 **HB2256** which would eliminate the reduced-price copay, allowing students who qualify for and receive reduced-price meals to eat for free without any payment from their families

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 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.

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**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](mailto:food@purplemaia.org)

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 HB2256. 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

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

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President  
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager

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

RE: **HB2256 Relating to Education**

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AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support with comment** on **HB2256**. This measure requires the Department of Education to provide breakfast and lunch, free of charge, to all students qualifying for free or reduced-price school meals beginning school year 2024-2025.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 84,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 40 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

According to the Hawai'i Foodbank, 1 in 4 keiki in Hawai'i may not know where they will get their next meal, and for more than 81,000 keiki, getting the energy they need to learn and grow can be a daily challenge.<sup>1</sup> We need to invest in long-term solutions to support our most vulnerable populations. Providing free breakfast and lunch to students is a step in the right direction.

Proper nutrition is vital for keiki growth and development and may reduce the risk of health conditions like anemia, asthma, hyperactivity and anxiety.<sup>2</sup> This measure would ensure more students have access to a healthy meal that their family may otherwise not be able to afford.

AlohaCare appreciates the intent of HB2256, but we are aligned with our Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) Coalition partner in our **preference for HB1775** which also before this committee. Under HB2256, students may still be denied due to inability to pay or their household's income being even slightly over the income

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<sup>1</sup> <https://hawaiifoodbank.org/keiki/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>



requirements to participate in the reduced school meal criteria. Providing breakfast and lunch for all students under HB1755, regardless of household income, ensures they have a consistent source of nutritious food and can focus on learning, while also removing stigma for students accessing free or reduced meals.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support with comments on HB2256.**

**LATE**

To: House Committee on Education  
Re: **HB 2256 – 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 2256**. This bill, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements and appropriates funds.

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,<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> the "bare-minimum costs of basic necessities" for that same family is more than \$100,000, according to the *ALICE in Hawai'i* report.<sup>3</sup>

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 year<sup>4</sup> and the current school meal prices.

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

Thank you,

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

<sup>2</sup>

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

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

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

Nicole Woo  
Director of Research and Economic Policy

**HB-2256**

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 3:28:21 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Scott Kidd	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure so long as the bill meets the nutritional needs and is appealing to the age groups they are serving. Use locally sourced food when feasible as well.

**HB-2256**

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 5:39:41 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Will Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support HB2256.

**HB-2256**

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 7:04:40 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
cheryl burghardt	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I OPPOSE this bill because there should be NO " meet certain requirements". ALL children should be eligible for free breakfast and lunch. NO questions, no delays. GIVE the communities the free breakfast and lunch that we should have done years ago.

**HB-2256**

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 11:33:00 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Patti Hatzistavrakis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Patti Hatzistavrakis, fully support 2256 HB RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS. By providing all children with free healthy meals at school, they will have the opportunity to focus on and excel in their classwork, and achieve improved health outcomes (physically and mentally). Our children must be assured they will have food available daily. As the future leaders of our communities, our children deserve the opportunity to develop healthy habits and thrive. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of 2256 HB RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS. I appreciate the committee's consideration.



**HB-2256**

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 7:57:10 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
tia pearson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Students can't focus when they are hungry and not all students can eat everyday.

**HB-2256**

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 8:05:10 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
K. H.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a resident of House District 28 and Senate District 13. I support HB2256.

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 HB2256: 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-2256**

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 11:02:25 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kiri	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kiri Hirota and I believe that it is essential to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements. On the other hand, if some students don't meet some of the requirements they should still be provided at least one free breakfast or one free lunch.

**HB-2256**

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 11:47:23 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
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. "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-2256**

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 2:48:28 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Victor K. Ramos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support

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 HB2256 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 HB2256 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.

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Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB2256.

Sincerely,

Judith Ann Armstrong