



Testimony of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

Committee on Education

Date Time: Wednesday, February 7, 2024, 3:00PM
Location: Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

Measure SB2061
RELATING TO THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CERTIFICATION SUBSIDY PILOT PROGRAM

Dear Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and Committee Members,

The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OahuMPO) supports SB2061.

There is a nationwide school bus driver shortage affecting Hawaii. While the department of education contracts school bus services to various contractors on multiple islands, driver shortages have resulted in the cancellation, temporary suspension, and consolidation of bus routes. The legislature also finds that the school bus driver shortage negatively impacts student attendance and causes difficulties for working parents who juggle jobs and school drop-offs. In addition, the lack of affordable school bus options has made it prohibitively expensive to organize school field trips that enrich student learning. Further evidence finds that the State's severe bus driver shortage is felt disproportionately by families living in rural, underserved areas. The department of education has been forced to implement a series of unconventional programs to provide basic transportation for keiki attending public schools in rural, underserved areas. This occurrence is a public health issue as it affects the education of our keiki and the wellbeing of family structures. As such, a one-year certification subsidy pilot would help to subsidize the costs of training and further encourage capacity building for job seekers willing and able to serve as bus drivers.

SB2061 aligns with the Vision and Goals of the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), by promoting an equitable and resilient transportation system.

The OahuMPO is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on the island of Oahu responsible for carrying out a multimodal transportation planning process, including the development of a long-range (25-year horizon) metropolitan transportation plan, referred to as the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP) that encourages and promotes a safe and efficient transportation system to serve the mobility needs of people and freight (including walkways, bicycles, and transit), fosters economic growth and development, and takes into consideration resiliency needs, while minimizing fuel consumption and air pollution ([23 CFR 450.300](#)).

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Date: 02/07/2024

Time: 03:00 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: Senate Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB 2061 RELATING TO THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CERTIFICATION SUBSIDY PILOT PROGRAM.

Purpose of Bill: Establishes a one-year school bus driver certification subsidy pilot program within the Department of Education. Requires a report to the Legislature. Declares that the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded. Makes an appropriation.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) provides comments on SB 2061.

Although the impact of the school bus driver shortage adversely affects the availability of school transportation services, the cause and scope of the shortage is multi-faceted and complex. The school bus driver shortage is part of a greater nationwide driver shortage whereby professional drivers of all types are in short supply. It is estimated that there are 82,000 vacancies in 2024, according to the American Trucking Association. While the Department is engaged in discussions with transportation providers statewide on addressing immediate and future needs, commercial driver's license (CDL) training is just one facet of the solution. Additional considerations include work hours, hiring, and compensation.

In regards to the school bus driver shortage, current school bus providers already have their own in-house training programs in place to attract and train new, non-CDL drivers. Training includes CDL certification, as well as training for the "S" endorsement required to drive school buses. The school bus providers have the expertise, experience, and resources needed to provide such education. Additionally, the Department is exploring

ways in which to provide transportation utilizing the resources available to it. These strategies include centralized pickup points, which have shown to be effective in the Lahainaluna Complex, and staggered bell schedules.

Additionally, the Department appreciates the appropriation provided in this bill to carry out the work of the pilot program. However, this program was not envisioned when the Department was crafting its budget, and as such, it is not included in the priorities of the Department's Board-approved budget.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on SB 2061.