

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: 02/02/2023

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB 0828 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the department of education to establish a student bus fare rate system to include free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program. Appropriates funds.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) provides comments and raises some concerns relating to HB 828. The Department supports the goal to provide free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free or reduced lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program.

One concern is due to limited resources, the timing of reviewing and processing the applications, approvals, and distribution of passes may be delayed. Streamlining and automating the information in one central system may alleviate some of these issues.

The Department is appreciative of an appropriation in this measure provided it does not adversely affect the priorities in the Department's Board of Education-approved budget.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



Hawai'i
Children's Action Network Speaks!
Building a unified voice for Hawai'i's children

Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501c4 nonprofit committed to advocating for children and their families. Our core issues are safety, health, and education.

To: House Committee on Education

Re: **HB 828 - Relating to School Transportation**

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 309 & Via Videoconference
February 2, 2023, 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten, and Committee Members,

On behalf of HCAN Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT with suggested amendments to HB 828, relating to school transportation**. This bill requires the department of education (DOE) to establish a student bus fare rate system to include free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program.

Currently, DOE students who qualify for free lunch in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) – their families earn up to 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) – are eligible for free bus passes. However, those that qualify for reduced-price lunch – between 130% and 185% of the FPL – are NOT.

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, but currently she must pay \$72 per quarter per child for bus passes, or \$576 per school year. That is a major expense for a family that's already struggling to make ends meet.

The pandemic has exacerbated a long-standing problem of chronic absenteeism among DOE students.⁴ Those absences have been concentrated in rural areas and among historically marginalized populations.⁵ Not surprisingly, research shows that access to school bus rides helps vulnerable student populations reduce their absences.⁶

Some other vulnerable students – including foster, homeless and some with disabilities – currently qualify for free bus passes. Therefore **we suggest striking the line, “(2) Students who do not qualify under paragraph (1) shall pay the full rate for a bus pass” from this bill in order to avoid inadvertently denying them free school transportation.**

Thank you,

Nicole Woo, Director of Research and Economic Policy

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

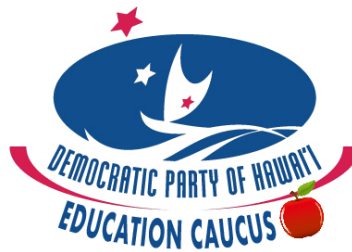
² <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

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

⁴ <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/ConnectWithUs/MediaRoom/PressReleases/Pages/2021-22-Strive-HI-performance-data-reflect-positive-progress-in-HIDOE-student-academic-recovery-and-acceleration.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.civilbeat.org/2022/01/student-absences-soared-above-30-in-some-hawaii-schools/>

⁶ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED622132.pdf>



HOUSE BILL 828, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

FEBRUARY 2, 2023 · HOUSE EDUCATION
COMMITTEE · CHAIR REP. JUSTIN H. WOODSON

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports HB 828, relating to student transportation, which requires the department of education to establish a student bus fare rate system to include free bus passes for students whose household qualifies the student for free or reduced price lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program.

Currently, the Hawai'i Department of Education provides regular bus service to meet school transportation requirements and ensure adequate attendance for children. According to HIDEOE, 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.

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.** 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

HB-828

Submitted on: 1/31/2023 7:12:45 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/2/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Richelle Tagawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is imperative that this bill is passed to ensure our students have equal access to a free education. Especially in rural communities, providing free transportation for students to school is essential. Families are unable to afford to live near the schools in the district. So therefore, they live farther away. And yet still, there is no extra money to pay for bus passes. Why don't all students have the same access to our state paid education?

Please vote for and pass House Bill 828 to ensure that all students have the same opportunity to get to school. Thank you.

Chair Justin Woodson
Vice Chair Lisa Marten

House Committee on Education

Thursday, February 2, 2023
2:00PM

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB828 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten, Members of the House Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Jun Shin. I am a graduate of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and a current member of the Hawai‘i State Youth Commission, testifying as an individual in **SUPPORT** of **HB828**, Relating to Student Transportation.

Making sure you have reliable transportation is important for everyone, including for students going to school. Providing free bus passes to students who may have trouble accessing transportation due to economic hardships takes the burden/worries off of the backs of families and allows the child/children to just focus on being a kid.

Please **PASS HB828** out of your committee.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Jun Shin,
State House District 23 | State Senate District 12
Cell: 808-255-6663
Email: junshinbusiness729@gmail.com

HB-828

Submitted on: 2/1/2023 7:39:29 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/2/2023 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

As a parent of a child who attends a public school, I wholeheartedly support the initiative to provide free bus transportation for all kids who qualify for free or reduced breakfast and lunch. This policy would greatly benefit families like mine who struggle to make ends meet and would not have the means to provide transportation to and from school.

Having access to free bus transportation would provide children with a safe and reliable mode of transportation to and from school, allowing them to attend school regularly and not miss out on important educational opportunities. It would also reduce the burden on working parents who would otherwise need to arrange for transportation for their children.

In addition, this initiative would promote equity and ensure that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to quality education. It would also create a level playing field for children from low-income families and help to close the achievement gap in education.

In conclusion, providing free bus transportation for all kids who qualify for free or reduced breakfast and lunch is a step in the right direction towards providing equal educational opportunities for all children. I fully support this initiative and believe it would have a positive impact on the lives of many families and children here on the Big Island.

HB-828

Submitted on: 2/1/2023 10:45:20 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/2/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shauna Springer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Kāko‘o wau! I support!