



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 0154, SD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education to develop and implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, subject to income eligibility. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/2050. (SD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of SB 0154, SD1, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the Department's Board of Education-approved budget.

The Department's School Food Services Branch (SFSB) operates the school meal program, which serves the Department's non-charter schools. It uses the income eligibility participation requirements set by the United States Department of Agriculture.

The Department supports the development and implementation of a school meal subsidy program if the Department receives funding to subsidize the price of the meal for students who qualify for reduced-price or paid meals only. The Department estimates this amount to be approximately \$18,000,000 for the school year. These funds account for the current price students who qualify for reduced-price or paid meals pay for in a school year.

It is critical to note that should meal participation increase, the cost to fund this subsidy would increase. Currently, approximately 50% of students participate in lunch, and 14%

participate in breakfast.

In addition, these funds do not cover the losses the SFSB would incur with increased operational costs. The SFSB has experienced a high food cost escalation for this fiscal year. It expects price increases to continue, though not at the rate it experienced this year, where approximately 80% of food cost increased by 42%. The SFSB has calculated per plate costs to be \$8.27 for lunch and \$4.47 for breakfast for SY 2021-2022. Due to the food cost increase observed for SY 2022-2023, the per plate cost will be \$8.98 for lunch and \$4.86 for breakfast.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



STATE OF HAWAII
STATE COUNCIL
ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
TELEPHONE: (808) 586-8100 FAX: (808) 586-7543
March 16, 2023

The Honorable Representative Justin H Woodson, Chair
House Committee on Education
The Thirty-Second Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Woodson and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: SB154 SD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

The Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities **SUPPORTS SB154 SD1**, which requires the Department of Education to develop and implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, subject to income eligibility. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/2050. (SD1)

Malnutrition in children can cause a developmental delay and may worsen or cause a developmental disability. Members of the Intellectual/Developmental Disability (I/DD) community are disproportionately lower income, and any programs designed to relieve financial pressure from families will also benefit our community. Families with parents or children who have I/DD but do not qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch can still have their financial need met through this program.

Children who attend schools under the Hawai'i Department of Education deserve access to healthy and filling lunches. SB154 will ensure that all families who need aid, including I/DD community members, will be able to make sure their children get the food they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support of SB154 SD1**.

Sincerely,

Daintry Bartoldus
Executive Administrator



STATE OF HAWAII
Executive Office on Early Learning
2759 South King Street
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

March 15, 2023

TO: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Lisa Marten, Vice Chair
House Committee on Education

FROM: Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

SUBJECT: Measure: S.B. No. 154 S.D. 1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION
Hearing Date: Thursday, March 16, 2023
Time: 2:00 pm
Location: Conference Room 309

EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING'S POSITION: Support

EOEL supports the intention of S.B. No. 154 S.D. 1 and defers to the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE).

Nutritious meals are integral to children's growth, development, and learning and in many cases, school meals may be the only way children have access to healthy, nutritious meals. EOEL is committed to supporting young children's growth, development, and learning and is committed to working collaboratively with stakeholders, including the HIDOE, to expand these opportunities for young children across the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.



SD154 SD1
RELATING TO EDUCATION
House Committee on Education

March 16, 2023

2:00 PM

Room 309

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **STRONGLY SUPPORTS SB154 SD1**, which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to develop a school meal subsidy program for students attending DOE schools that are not otherwise eligible for free lunch under existing programs.

School lunch is widely recognized as critical for student health and well-being. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that “[r]esearch shows that students who participate in the school meal programs consume more whole grains, milk, fruits, and vegetables during meal times and have better overall diet quality, than nonparticipants. And, eating breakfast at school is associated with better attendance rates, fewer missed school days, and better test scores.”¹

For Native Hawaiians especially, such a program would benefit our youngest and most vulnerable keiki. The majority of Native Hawaiian families, in Hawai‘i, are unable to make ends meet,² with 63% of Native Hawaiians reporting that they are finding it difficult to get by.³ Native Hawaiians have the lowest household income.⁴ Native Hawaiians have the highest poverty rates for individuals and families.⁵ For those facing the harshest of economic disparities, a free school lunch can make a world of difference.

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) notes that “[r]esearch shows that receiving free or reduced-price school lunches reduces food insecurity, obesity rates, and poor health.”⁶ FRAC notes especially that “[b]ehavioral, emotional, and mental health, and academic problems are more prevalent among children and adolescents struggling with

¹ CDC, *School Meals*, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/schoolmeals.htm>, last accessed March 15, 2023.

² Aloha United Way / United for ALICE, *ALICE in Hawai‘i: 2022 Facts and Figures*, Nov. 2022, p.6.

³ *Id.* at 9.

⁴ Dept. of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, *Demographic, Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics for Selected Race Groups in Hawaii*, March 2018, p.3.

⁵ *Id.* at 13.

⁶ Food Research & Action Center, *Benefits of School Lunch*, available at <https://frac.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program/benefits-school-lunch#:~:text=Research%20shows%20that%20receiving%20free,especially%20for%20fruits%20and%20vegetables>, last accessed March 15, 2023



SD154 SD1
RELATING TO EDUCATION
House Committee on Education

hunger”, that “[c]hildren and adolescents experiencing hunger have lower math scores and poorer grades”, and that “[c]hildren with hunger are more likely to have repeated a grade, received special education services, or received mental health counseling, than low-income children who do not experience hunger.”⁷

By addressing school hunger for children who do not already qualify for free school lunch through existing programs, this measure will help our most vulnerable residents by feeding hungry keiki so that they can continue to learn in a safe and healthy environment.

OHA appreciates the opportunity to express our **SUPPORT** for **SB154 SD1** and urges the Legislature to pass this measure. Mahalo nui loa.

⁷ *Id.*



HIPHI Board

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Kaiser Permanente

May Okihiro, MD, MS
John A. Burns School of Medicine,
Department of Pediatrics

Titiimaea Ta'ase, JD
State of Hawai'i, Deputy Public Defender

HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community Health
Worker Initiative

COVID-19 Response

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

Date: March 14, 2023

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair
Representative Lisa Marten, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Education

Re: Strong Support for SB 154 SD1, Relating to Education

Hrg: Thursday, March 16, 2023, at 2:00 PM, Conf Rm 309

The Obesity Prevention Task Force (OPTF), a program of Hawai'i Public Health Instituteⁱ (HIPHI), is in **strong support of SB 154 SD1**, which would provide school meal subsidies for those students and families who do not qualify for free school 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. All students, regardless of income, are given the opportunity to attend school. The same should be true of the food served at school. Food is an absolute necessity for families and students regardless of income.

Discriminating against those whose income is just above the threshold or who have not successfully filled out the paperwork creates many adverse outcomes. Students are hungry, families miss or cannot afford lunch payments, or they must budget away from other areas of their life. Hawai'i needs to support all students, regardless of income, in receiving free meals.

Current Subsidies Are Not Enough

Families with incomes above 133% of the federal poverty line require support but are not getting it.ⁱⁱ Families of 4 earning just \$42,000 per year are not eligible for free school meals but earn less than half of what is needed to be self-sufficient.ⁱⁱⁱ 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.^{iv} The arbitrary cut-off at 133% of the federal poverty line hurts children and does not accurately reflect the needs of our local families.

Ending the benefits cliff is necessary to stop penalizing families earning slightly more than the maximum benefits threshold. A family with two children loses thousands of dollars in benefits simply because their income is slightly more than the allowable amount.

Creating a Culture for All

The stigma that exists for students and families who cannot afford meals is real and leads to negative outcomes including hunger, lowered self-worth, and the potential for bullying. It is not something that should exist. Judgment should not be placed upon parents or their children due to their financial situation.

In addition, running out of lunch money happens far too often to many families. The angst that is felt by a student whose balance is low is not something that any child should experience. Freeing all of our families from the burden of maintaining a lunch fund is a benefit to all of Hawai'i. This program will support all students to feel welcomed. Students cannot be ready to learn unless their basic needs are met. Ensuring that all children are being fed helps to meet those needs.

Please pass this bill to create a Hawai'i where all students have access to school meals.

Mahalo,



Nate Hix
Food Access Policy and Advocacy Coordinator
Hawai'i Public Health Institute

ⁱ Created by the legislature in 2012, the Obesity Prevention Task Force comprises over 60 statewide organizations and makes recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and healthcare environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents. The Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI) convenes the Task Force and supports and promotes policy efforts to create a healthy Hawai'i.

Hawai'i Public Health Institute is a hub for building healthy communities, providing issue-based advocacy, education, and technical assistance through partnerships with government, academia, foundations, business, and community-based organizations.

ⁱⁱ

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

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/annuals/2021/2021-read-self-sufficiency.pdf>

^{iv} <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 SB 154 – Relating to Education
House Committee on Education
Thursday, March 16, 2023, at 2:00PM

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support (with comments) of **SB 154**, which would establish a school meal subsidy program for Hawai'i students who are not eligible for free meals through the National School Lunch program.

Adequate nutrition is essential for children's health, learning, and long-term development. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai'i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home.¹ This means that for many children in Hawai'i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day.

Federal eligibility for free or reduced price meals requires that households earn below 130% of the federal poverty level (\$44,850 annually for a family of four in 2023). However, Hawai'i's costs of living require that a family with two adults and two school age children make between \$70,000 and \$80,000 to survive.²

The federal government covered the full cost of all school meals during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing much needed relief for families that were struggling in an unstable economy. In prior years, school meal debt would still occasionally reach as high as \$60,000 - \$70,000 by the end of the year. However, once meal fees returned post-pandemic, the Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE) saw a rise in school meal debt unlike they had ever seen before, reaching over \$90,000 by November of 2022.

While we support the intent of this bill, we would like to encourage the committee to consider the following amendments to ensure that the policy has the greatest impact:

1. **Maximize federal reimbursements.** The USDA child nutrition programs offer provisions for certain eligible schools to receive larger reimbursements if they meet certain criteria, which would minimize the costs to the state. We offer the following suggested language:

"It is the intent of the legislature that the Department of Education and participating schools use all of the federal funds, federal programs and federal provisions available in carrying out this program."

2. **Include school breakfast in addition to school lunch.** Our calculations (see attached one page brief) show that including a free breakfast each day in addition to lunch would only be about 8 percent of the overall cost of a universal free meal program for the state. In addition, having a nutritious breakfast has been shown to be critically important to children's learning.³

¹ Feeding America estimates of Food Insecurity among the Child (<18 years) Population in Hawai'i (2020)

² Aloha United Way. Hawai'i Household Budgets for each county (2018)

³ Food Research and Action Center. Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning. Retrieved online at <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>

3. **Appropriate program funds to Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs (HCNP) office.** In section 3 of the bill, the funds are appropriated to the HDOE. Although HCNP is currently housed within HDOE, it is a separate agency that oversees all federal child nutrition programs in the state. This will ensure that the program is accessible to charter and other independent schools in addition to public schools.
4. **Clarify whether the subsidy would cover the entire meal cost.** If this is the intent of the subsidy (which we would be in support of), we suggest making this explicit in the bill's language, to avoid the potential for a partial subsidy.

Thank you for considering these comments and suggested amendments in your deliberation of SB 154. As shown in the attached one page brief, six states have already passed policies to fund universal free meals for students, and 22 others (Hawai'i included) are deliberating policies this year. We are pleased that the Hawai'i legislature is paying attention to this important issue at a time when it is clearly gaining momentum across the nation. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

Healthy School Meals for All

Universal Free School Meals: Cost Estimates for the State of Hawai'i

Universal free school meals allow all enrolled children in a school that operates the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program to receive free breakfast and lunch, regardless of their family's income.

Six states have already passed policies to offer free meals, and many others are prepared to follow suit. The Hawai'i legislature is currently considering the following bills that would do the same: [S.B. 154](#) and [H.B. 540](#).

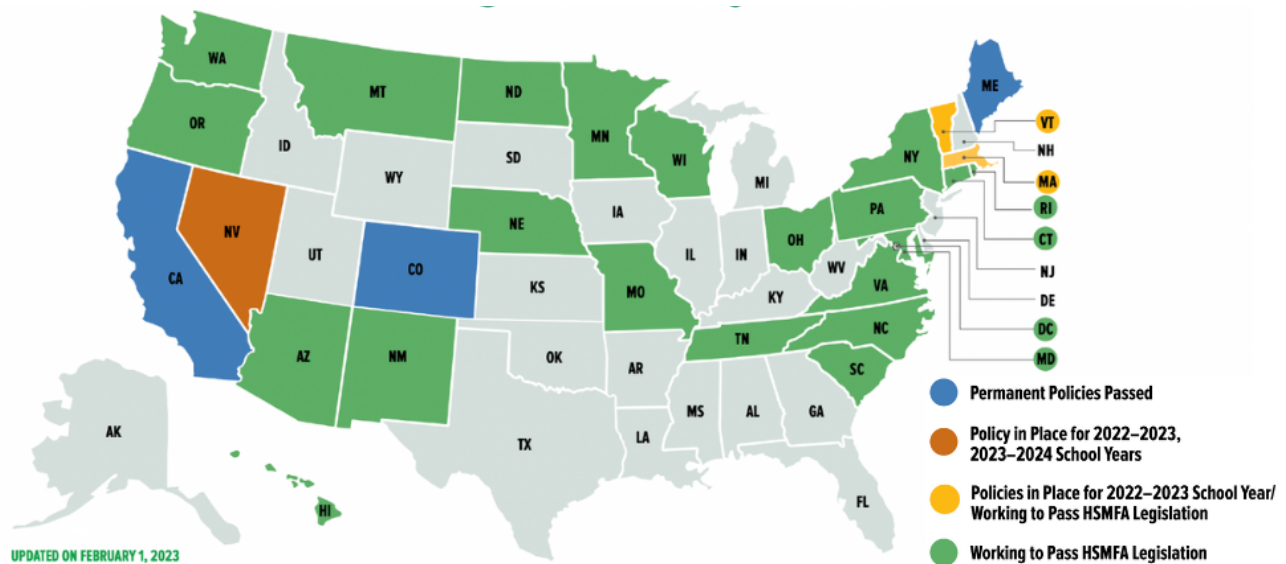


Image courtesy of the [Food Research & Action Center](#)

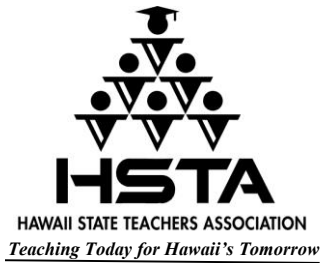
Estimated State Costs⁴

	Pre-pandemic participation rates ⁵	Projected participation rates ⁶
Breakfast only	\$1,504,764.00	\$1,686,840.44
Lunch only	\$17,750,687.40	\$18,957,734.14
Breakfast & lunch	\$19,255,451.40	\$20,644,574.59

⁴ Lost revenue from co-pays only. Does not take into account any changes in administrative costs.

⁵ Assumes SY 2018-19 average daily participation rates and SY2020-21 eligibility data for reduced price and paid students for all public and charter schools.

⁶ 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).



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

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Executive Director

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: SB 154 SD1- RELATING TO EDUCATION

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2023

OSA TUI, JR., PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association **supports SB 154 SD1**, relating to education. This bill requires the Department of Education to develop and implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, subject to income eligibility and appropriate funds.

Student success demands a nourished body and mind. Too often, our children come to school hungry or without access to quality medical care, leaving them lurching through the school day, rather than learning instructional content.

In Hawai'i, food insecurity is one of the most pressing manifestations of overall socioeconomic inequality. Over 70,000 public school students eat free or reduced-price meals in our state, though only 40 percent eat school breakfasts. Hawai'i ranks 47th in school breakfast participation rates among qualifying students.

As noted in the bill, the Department of Education estimates that as many as 15,000 students each year are considered gap come from gap families who do not qualify for the National School Lunch Program, but struggle with food insecurity nonetheless. This bill seeks to help those gap students by providing a financial subsidy to help cover the cost of school lunches.

Cases of chronic hunger can lead to achievement gaps, concentration loss, illness, increased absenteeism, behavioral problems, depression, and misdiagnosed learning disabilities. Thus, providing a decent meal for our impoverished children is a moral and educational imperative.

For the sake of our students' wellness, the Hawaii State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.



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: SB 154, SD1 - Relating to Education
Hawai'i State Capitol and Via Videoconference
March 16, 2023, 2:00 PM

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of SB 154, SD1**. This bill requires the Department of Education to develop and implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, subject to income eligibility.

Currently, students qualify for free lunch in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) if their families earn up to 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and for reduced-price lunch if their income is between 130% and 185% of the FPL.

HCAN Speaks! Board of Directors

Liza Ryan Gill
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Erica Yamauchi

Many families that pay the full price for school meals can't make ends meet. For example, a family of four that makes \$60,000 per year doesn't qualify for free or reduced-price lunch,¹ while the "bare-minimum costs of basic necessities" for that same family is more than \$100,000.² If that family has two students eating breakfast and lunch at school, they must pay about \$1,300 per year for those meals.

The case for universal free school meals is strong.³ Schools benefit from reduced administrative burdens because they no longer need to collect meal payments. Students see better academic performance and nutrition. Currently 92 DOE schools and 14 charter schools already provide universal free meals,⁴ and during the pandemic all schools provided free meals, thanks to federal COVID funding.

If this program were to provide **free breakfast and lunch to all students**, and there was no increase in meal participation, we estimate it would cost about **\$19.2 million per year**. If it were 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 year⁵ and the current school meal prices.

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

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

1

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

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

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

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

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



House Committee on Education

Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA) Supports: SB154 SD1

Thursday, March 16, 2023 2 p.m. Conference Room 309

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten and Members of the Committee,

HAPA supports SB154 SD1 which requires the Department of Education to develop and implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, subject to income eligibility.

The department of education estimates that up to fifteen thousand children each year do not qualify for the National School Lunch Program, oftentimes resulting in a school day without lunch. This bill requires the DOE to develop and implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program.

Feeding the next generation should be a top priority of all of us and supporting families that are food insecure is critical to shaping the future.

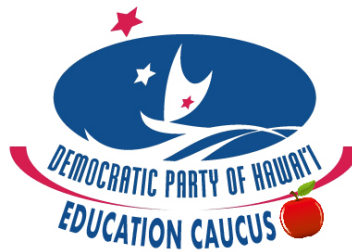
Please support SB154 SD1.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Frederick', written in a cursive style.

Anne Frederick
Executive Director



SENATE BILL 154, SD1, RELATING TO EDUCATION

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

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** SB 154, SD1, relating to education, which requires the Department of Education to implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program.

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.

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

HAWAII
**HUNGER
ACTION**
NETWORK

Aloha Harvest

County of Hawai'i

Hawai'i Alliance for
Community-Based Economic
Development

Hawai'i Appleseed

Hawai'i Children's Action
Network

Hawai'i Food Bank

Hawai'i Good Food Alliance

Hawai'i Public Health Institute

Kōkua Kalihi Valley
Comprehensive Health Center

Lanakila Pacific

Malama Kaua'i

Maui Food Bank

The Hawai'i Hunger Action Network is composed of advocates statewide dedicated to connecting communities and taking action to ensure all people in Hawai'i have enough food to live healthy, dignified, productive lives.

House Committee on Education

Thursday March 16, 2023 – 2:00 p.m.
In Support: S.B. 154– Relating to Education

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT** of S.B. 154 – Relating to Education, which would require the Department of Education to develop and implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program.

School meals are one of the government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children.

Ensuring all students have equal access to nutritious meals is one of the best ways to promote their educational and emotional development, reduce behavioral problems in the classroom, and increase positive academic outcomes in our schools. The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are the two largest child nutrition programs and a recent study found that U.S. children receive their healthiest meals at school through these programs.

Universal free school meals are a lifeline to Hawai'i's struggling families.

For children specifically, Hawai'i had the second highest-food insecurity rate in the nation in 2021, at about 25%. Offering universal free school meals is a lifeline to Hawai'i's struggling families that make more than the income eligibility limit, but not enough to afford school meal prices. Federal eligibility requirements dictate that only students from households earning below 130% of the federal poverty level (\$44,850 annually for a family of four in 2023) are eligible for free school meals in Hawai'i. Yet, a household survival budget for a family of four is more than \$90,000.

A universal free school meals program is cost efficient and effective.

Implementing universal free school meals:

- Alleviates a significant financial and administration burden for school nutrition staff which allows for more time to focus on preparing and serving healthy meals to students; and
- Means that schools no longer have to collect unpaid meal fees from families and no child is denied a meal based on the ability to pay.

Conservative estimates done by local advocacy organizations place the cost of universal free school meals (i.e. eliminating 100% of the cost for free and reduced priced breakfast and lunch for families) at \$20.6M annually.

We support the intent of S.B 154 and propose a few amendments to ensure that the impact and reach of the bill is as significant as intended:

1. **Amend section 2(b) to read:** *“The school meal subsidy program shall target children whose families are not otherwise eligible for free breakfast and lunch under the free and reduced price breakfast and lunch programs administered by...”*

Breakfast is an essential meal and provides the strong start needed for keiki to learn in the classroom. To streamline the administration of the subsidy program and increase food access, we encourage the inclusion of breakfast in the subsidy program.

2. **Amend section 2(b) to read:** *The school meal subsidy program shall target children whose families are not otherwise eligible for free lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program administered by the department of education's ~~school food services branch~~ Hawaii Child Nutrition Program and that meet the income eligibility participation requirements...”*

Administration by HCNP would allow both DOE public school students and public charter school students to have access to the subsidy program.

3. **Amend section 2(C) to read:** *“...including but not limited to eligibility participation requirements, ~~and maximum amount of the subsidy offered by the program.~~ The subsidy amount offered by the program shall cover 100% of the cost of a meal.”*

No child in Hawaii should continue to be denied a meal due to inability to pay. This language supports a universal free school meals program.

4. **Add section 2(d) to read:** *The Department shall maximize access to and receipt of federal funds and any other opportunities for non-state funds with the intent to draw down the maximum amount of federal funds for the cost of operating school meal programs; and conduct an annual analysis for eligibility under the federal Community Eligibility Provision.*

This would reduce the cost to the state for the subsidy program and ensure the maximum amount of federal funds are being requested by the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President

Anabella Bruch
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
Treasurer

Chapter Presidents

Madeline Ross
Kohala, Hawaii

Odysseus Yacalis
East Hawaii

Puna, Hawaii

Andrea Drayer
Ka'u, Hawaii

Chantal Chung
Kona, Hawaii

Fawn Helekahi-Burns
Hana, Maui

Reba Lopez
Haleakala, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahalawai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Rufina Kaauwai
Molokai

Negus Manna
Lana'i

Brynn Foster
North Shore, O'ahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, O'ahu

Ted Radovich
Waimanalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Ray Maki
Kauai

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

The Hawaii Farmers Union United (HFUU) is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFUU supports SB154.**

This bill will help to ensure that all Hawaii's children have access to healthy, nutritious meals in school regardless of their family's financial background or ability to access the current federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program. School meal programs are key in providing healthy meals to students so that they can obtain the necessary nutrients for their learning development.

Furthermore, this bill would help to support Hawaii's local farmers by providing an avenue for their products to be purchased for school meal programs. Supporting local farmers is vital to the state's economy, and this bill would provide an opportunity to do so. Additionally, local foods reduce food miles, reducing our state's carbon footprint. The Hawaii Farmers Union United strongly believes that the passage of this bill is an opportunity to create an environment of increased equity and access to healthy meals while also supporting the local agriculture industry.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Kaipo Kekona, President HFUU/HFUF

LATE

SB-154-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2023 9:00:52 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/16/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Fox	Malama Kaua'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in SUPPORT of S.B. 154 – Relating to Education, which would require the Department of Education to develop and implement a School Meal Subsidy Program to provide school lunch subsidies to children whose families do not otherwise qualify for free lunch under the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program.

School meals are one of the government's most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children.

Ensuring all students have equal access to nutritious meals is one of the best ways to promote their educational and emotional development, reduce behavioral problems in the classroom, and increase positive academic outcomes in our schools. The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are the two largest child nutrition programs and a recent study found that U.S. children receive their healthiest meals at school through these programs.

Universal free school meals are a lifeline to Hawai'i's struggling families.

For children specifically, Hawai'i had the second highest-food insecurity rate in the nation in 2021, at about 25%. Offering universal free school meals is a lifeline to Hawai'i's struggling families that make more than the income eligibility limit, but not enough to afford school meal prices. Federal eligibility requirements dictate that only students from households earning below 130% of the federal poverty level (\$44,850 annually for a family of four in 2023) are eligible for free school meals in Hawai'i. Yet, a household survival budget for a family of four is more than \$90,000.

A universal free school meals program is cost efficient and effective.

Implementing universal free school meals:

- Alleviates a significant financial and administration burden for school nutrition staff which allows for more time to focus on preparing and serving healthy meals to students; and
- Means that schools no longer have to collect unpaid meal fees from families and no child is denied a meal based on the ability to pay.

Conservative estimates done by local advocacy organizations place the cost of universal free school meals (i.e. eliminating 100% of the cost for free and reduced priced breakfast and lunch for families) at \$20.6M annually.

We support the intent of S.B 154 and propose a few amendments to ensure that the impact and reach of the bill is as significant as intended:

1. Amend section 2(b) to read: “The school meal subsidy program shall target children whose families are not otherwise eligible for free breakfast and lunch under the free and reduced price breakfast and lunch programs administered by...”
Breakfast is an essential meal and provides the strong start needed for keiki to learn in the classroom. To streamline the administration of the subsidy program and increase food access, we encourage the inclusion of breakfast in the subsidy program.
2. Amend section 2(b) to read: The school meal subsidy program shall target children whose families are not otherwise eligible for free lunch under the free and reduced price lunch program administered by the department of education's school food services branch Hawaii Child Nutrition Program and that meet the income eligibility participation requirements...”

Administration by HCNP would allow both DOE public school students and public charter school students to have access to the subsidy program.

1. Amend section 2(C) to read: “...including but not limited to eligibility participation requirements. and maximum amount of the subsidy offered by the program. The subsidy amount offered by the program shall cover 100% of the cost of a meal.”
No child in Hawaii should continue to be denied a meal due to inability to pay. This language supports a universal free school meals program.

2. Add section 2(d) to read: The Department shall maximize access to and receipt of federal funds and any other opportunities for non-state funds with the intent to draw down the maximum amount of federal funds for the cost of operating school meal programs; and conduct an annual analysis for eligibility under the federal Community Eligibility Provision.

This would reduce the cost to the state for the subsidy program and ensure the maximum amount of federal funds are being requested by the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify

SB-154-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2023 3:18:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/16/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Labrie	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

My name is James Labrie. I have been in foster care for the past 27 years, and I am in support of SB154, to provide subsidized lunches at schools, because when I was in school I was told that I didn't have money in my account to eat lunch so I wasn't able to get my lunch. I would not like this generation to have to go hungry and be without food-- being without food is a very terrible feeling to deal with. I want you to know that it is so important to feed the hungry because for them to be without food daily could cause further health issues such as ulcers. When you get ulcers it can lead to a terrible sickness which could even result in hospitalization.

Please consider this bill to be passed so that kids in school are able to get affordable lunches and will not have to worry about going without food.

SB-154-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2023 12:18:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/16/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cards Pintor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this bill.

Mahalo nui,

Cards Pintor

SB-154-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2023 12:49:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/16/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
cheryl B.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I SUPPORT this bill and would like to ask that it be amended to ALL children who attend public schools will receive free lunch and breakfast. The Federal guidelines are oppressive and often work against the very children we should be helping.