

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:** 02/10/2023

**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 0603 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Allows students who experienced educational disruption to graduate high school through enrollment in an accepted alternative education program and participation in certain activities approved by the department of education.

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) offers comments on SB 603.

The bill strives to provide differentiated opportunities for students in vulnerable populations to successfully complete high school despite educational disruption and barriers caused by unstable housing or other similar circumstances. The Department appreciates the Legislature's support in exploring pathways to graduation for students who experience educational disruption.

Prior to any proposed statutory amendments to Chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, the Department requests a working group be convened for the purposes of analyzing data associated with students who are experiencing educational disruption, identifying and exploring existing pathways for students on non-traditional pathways toward graduation, soliciting input and feedback of relevant subject-matter experts and assessing the capacity within and outside the Department. Finally, the outcomes and proposals generated by this working group should be provided to the Hawaii State Board of Education, a critical stakeholder in this conversation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 0603.



Representative Michelle Kidani, Chair  
Representative Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair  
Committee on Education  
Re: SB 603

February 10, 2023

**In support of SB 603**

Aloha Chair Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Donna Mercado Kim, and Members of the Committee on Education,

My name is Samantha Yee, and I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Thompson School of Social Work and Public Health. I graduated with my Bachelor of Social Work in May of 2022. I currently work full-time in the position of Education Liaison at a non-profit organization based in Kalihi.

**I am testifying in favor of SB 603** in allowing high school students to graduate through Department of Education-approved alternative education.

I have worked with youth of all ages for over a decade. **Truancy and lack of educational opportunities remain at the forefront of concerns for this population.** Working in Kalihi, I have witnessed countless cases of youth dropping out of school. Oftentimes, it starts with the increase of students’ tardiness. They slowly but surely get to school later, miss more classes throughout the day, and arrive at chronic absenteeism.

The reasons behind students dropping out of school are many. Youth living in poverty, which is pervasive in the Kalihi area, may lack educational support at home. They may fall into harmful social environments for the sake of companionship and connection. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, I have seen students’ levels of social anxiety increase. One student reported that he continues to be tardy to school because “there are too many people around early in the day”. I have seen cases of sexual abuse render students hopeless and with little energy to attend school regularly. These youth do not lack the desire to receive education, which they know would only increase their likelihood of living successful lives; they **lack opportunity amidst trying times.**

Students need educational spaces that are empathetic and diverse. Alternative education and learning provide them. My organization offers a distance learning program. It is largely effective in allowing individuals to obtain their GEDs in a manner that is self-directed and manageable. However, stigma and lack of infrastructure remain barriers. SB 603 addresses these issues by **mainstreaming alternative education** and implementing the usage of academic coaches to **maximize support of students** with the involvement of the DOE.

**I urge the Committee to pass SB 603.** Mahalo nui for reviewing my testimony.

Sincerely,  
Samantha Yee