

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:** 02/11/2025

**Time:** 02:01 PM

**Location:** 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**Committee:** House Education

**Department:** Education

**Person Testifying:** Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

**Bill Title:** HB 1075 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

**Purpose of Bill:** Amends the law to reduce the amount the Department of Education is required to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools.

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support on HB 1075.

The current statute in section 302A-405(a), Hawaii Revised Statutes, would force the Department to increase school meal prices to meet the existing language in the statute that mandates charging half of the cost of preparing the meals. Reducing this amount to one-quarter would prevent the Department from increasing the price of school meals on parents. The Department recognizes fee increases would place additional financial burdens on families and could cause less students to purchase school meals, and is balancing that with the fiscal responsibilities of running a statewide school meals program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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President

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Executive Director

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## TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Item: HB 1075 – Relating to School Meals**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 2:01 pm, Room 309**

**Submitter: Osa Tui, Jr., President - Hawai'i State Teachers Association**

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and members of the committee,

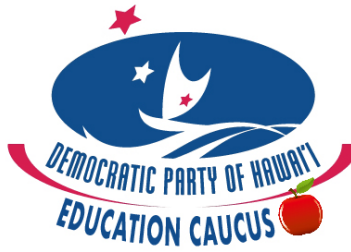
The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) **supports** HB 1075 which amends the law to reduce the amount the Department of Education is required to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools. We believe that access to nutritious meals is essential for students' academic success and overall well-being.

However, we also believe that a universal free school meals program would be the better solution. Such a program would eliminate the financial burden on families and ensure that all students have access to healthy food, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

We understand that there are concerns about the cost of a universal free school meals program. However, we believe that the benefits of such a program would outweigh the costs. Studies have shown that universal free school meals can lead to improved academic performance, reduced absenteeism, and better health outcomes for students.

We recommend passage of HB 1075 as a step toward a universal free school meals program. We believe that this would be a wise investment in the future of Hawai'i's keiki.

Mahalo.



## HOUSE BILL 1075, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

FEBRUARY 11, 2025 · EDN HEARING

**POSITION:** Support.

**RATIONALE:** The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports HB 1075, relating to school meals, which amends the law to reduce the amount the Department of Education is required to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools.

Hungry children can't learn.

Currently, under HRS §302A-405, the DOE is required to set school meal prices at an amount that covers half of total student meal costs. This led the department to propose significant increases in student meal prices earlier this year (along with proposals to increase a range of other student fees). HIDOE requested approval from the Board of Education to nearly double the cost of school meals over the next four years. School lunches would have increased from \$2.50 for elementary and middle school students and \$2.75 for high school students to \$4.75 and \$5.00 by the 2028-2029 school year. This would be tremendously harmful for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and

housing costs. **As we repeal the statutory provision that compels the DOE to raise student meal prices, we should also support free school meals for all, which would expand access to food security for children who may not otherwise be able to eat.** Two out of three families that are struggling with Hawai'i's cost of living are currently ineligible for free school meals through the federal free lunch program. Studies have shown that schools that implement free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

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." School meals cost less per student when more students participate in a free meal program. An article 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.

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

**Contact: [educationcaucusdph@gmail.com](mailto:educationcaucusdph@gmail.com)**



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1075, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 11, 2025

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Education Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS** HB1075, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS. Pursuant to the State Convention Resolution 2024-26 of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, the Party supports providing free school meals to all public school students in Hawai'i to ensure equal opportunities for academic success and to reduce food insecurity. HB1075 makes an effort towards free school meals to all public school students by lowering the portion of a meal's cost for public students who pay full price for their meals from not less than one-half of the preparation cost to not less than one-quarter of the preparation cost.

One out of five children in Hawai'i are food insecure. Adequate nutrition is essential for the cognitive and physical development of children and those who are hungry or malnourished are likely to face difficulties in concentration and academic performance. Food insecure students face significantly higher risks of depression, stress and lifelong chronic disease. With the cost of living continuing to escalate, many families face financial hardships, making it difficult to provide nutritious meals for their children and it is especially true that many low-income families earn too much to qualify for free school meals but not enough to afford the cost of living. The availability of free school meals can reduce the stigma associated with receiving food assistance and promote an inclusive school environment.

Providing free school meals can help ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed academically regardless of their socioeconomic status. Schools that have adopted free school meals have seen 15% increases in test scores.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1075, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at [legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org](mailto:legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org).

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

PO Box 2041 • Honolulu, HI 96805 • [www.hawaiidemocrats.org](http://www.hawaiidemocrats.org)

To: House Committee on Education  
Re: **HB 1075 – Relating to School Meals**  
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference  
February 11, 2025, 2:01 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 1075**. This bill amends the law to reduce the amount the Department of Education (DOE) is required to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools.

Hawai'i public schools provide students with nutritious meals through the federal National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Currently, students qualify for free school meals 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.

Many of the families who have to pay the full price for school meals struggle to make ends meet. For example, **a family of four that makes \$67,000 per year doesn't qualify for free or reduced-price school meals**,<sup>1</sup> while the ALICE household survival budget to be able to afford the "bare-minimum costs of basic necessities" for that same family nearly \$108,000.<sup>2</sup> If that family has two students eating breakfast and lunch at school, they currently pay about \$1,300 per year for those meals.

This bill addresses **a problematic provision in current state law that the DOE cited to justify raising school meal prices even higher** at a Board of Education meeting last month,<sup>3</sup> to levels that would put Hawai'i at or above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of school meal prices in the nation.<sup>4</sup>

There is NO federal mandate about the full price level for school meals, yet current state law sets that level at not less than one half of the cost of preparing the meals. **Rather than further burden students and their families with higher school meal prices, it makes sense to simply lower or remove the state price mandate altogether.**

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

Thank you,  
Nicole Woo  
Director of Research and Economic Policy

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<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.auw.org/about/alice-initiative/alice-reports/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/01/hawai%ca%bbi-families-could-face-big-price-hike-for-school-meals/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-Trends-Report.pdf>



## HIPHI Board

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## 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 Network

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 10, 2025

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

RE: Support for HB 1075, Relating to School Meals

Hrg: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 2:01 PM, Conference Room 309

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Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)<sup>1</sup> and the Healthy Eating, Active Living<sup>2</sup> (HEAL) Coalition **supports HB 1075**, which reduces the amount the Department of Education is required to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools.

One in three families in Hawai'i face food insecurity, leaving many students to go hungry throughout the school day. One in ten keiki in Hawai'i skip meals due to food insecurity. Hawai'i can ensure all students are able to eat by removing this provision and providing free school meals for all students.

### Meal Revenues Make Up Only a Tiny Fraction of the Education Budget

The Department of Education has an annual budget of over \$2 billion, with meal revenues totaling around \$20 million per year, or just 1% of the overall budget. Collecting meal prices from students is not necessary to keep the Department of Education functioning. Students receive free education regardless of income level and the nutrition they need to learn should be free too.

### Half of Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the

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<sup>1</sup> Hawai'i Public Health Institute's mission is to advance health and wellness for the people and islands of Hawai'i. We do this through expanding our understanding of what creates health of people and place, fostering partnerships, and cultivating programs to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

<sup>2</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.





FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.

This large assistance gap leaves behind many ALICE families who are struggling to make ends meet. As a result, countless students go hungry throughout the school day, impacting their health, well-being, and ability to learn.

### **Health Risks**

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease. By failing to ensure they have access to meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success. Removing the cost provision will expand access to nutritious meals, helping students receive the nourishment they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

Please support HB 1075 and pave the way for free school meals for all keiki.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nate Hix".

Nate Hix  
Director of Policy and Advocacy



February 11, 2025

RE: Support for HB 1075 Relating to Education

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the committee,

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for HB 1075 Relating to School Meals. This amends the law to reduce the amount the Department of Education is required to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools.

Food insecurity is a growing crisis in Hawai'i. The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i report, released by Hawai'i Foodbank in May 2024, found that in 2023, 29% of households with children had one or multiple children facing food insecurity. Among these households with children, 9% had children skipping meals because there was not enough food. At the most extreme, 6% of these households had a child or children go a whole day without food because of a lack of money. Further, in households with children, food insecurity among adults was especially high at 38%, and those with young children found themselves most susceptible — indicative that parents and caregivers will sacrifice their own food security before letting their children go without food.

As the state's largest hunger-relief organization, Hawai'i Foodbank has been committed to ensuring no one in Hawai'i goes hungry since 1983. Last year, we worked with over 225 agency partners on O'ahu and Kaua'i to provide food for 17.7 million meals and serve an average of more than 150,000 people each month. As part of that work, we provide food to school pantries in every school on Kaua'i and Ni'ihau, as well as 38 schools on O'ahu, giving us a firsthand view of the challenges many families are facing to feed their children.

There are well-documented links between food insecurity and poor child health and behavioral outcomes, including physical, developmental, and cognitive impairments. Keeping costs low for families, particularly the 40% of Hawai'i's households that are at the asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) threshold or below is critical to helping to ensure these families can continue to feed their keiki. These households live paycheck to paycheck, and nearly half of those below the ALICE threshold face food insecurity.

Keeping the costs of school meals as low as possible is an important step in our collective effort to address food insecurity and care for our most vulnerable keiki. We urge you to consider this important measure.

Mahalo for your consideration.

With aloha,

Amy Miller  
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank



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# HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

**LATE**

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice  
Support for HB 1075 – Relating to School Meals  
House Committee on Education  
Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 2:01pm

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Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on HB 1075. This bill would change the requirement that the Department of Education set school meal prices from at least half the meal preparation cost to one-quarter.

While we wholeheartedly support any measure that would expand access to free school meals, this bill does not adequately address the statutory limitation in section 302A-405(a), Hawaii Revised Statutes. This bill only reduces the required percentage of meal costs required by parents. If our eventual goal is to make free meals available to all students—or even to have more flexibility in parent co-pay prices, it would make more sense to eliminate this statute entirely.

Instead, we would like to encourage that the committee consider two other bills being heard in today’s hearing, HB 1500, and HB 757, both of which would entirely eliminate this statutory barrier, clearing the way for universal free school meals for all students.

In Hawai‘i, three in ten households with children face food insecurity.<sup>1</sup> While some of these children qualify for free meals, any family of four that makes at least \$47,000 does not,<sup>2</sup> leaving two-thirds of the families over this threshold still struggling to cover their food costs.<sup>3</sup> For some Hawai‘i children, school meals are the only balanced, nutritious meals they receive in a day. The last thing Hawai‘i needs right now is a statute that requires passing any portion of costs on to struggling families.

We are pleased that the Hawai‘i legislature is acknowledging this important issue and hope that the committee will weigh this bill next to the other, bolder proposals being considered today. Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Hawai‘i Foodbank, “The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai‘i,” 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Hawai‘i State Department of Education, “Free and Reduced Price Meals Program,” 2025.

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

<sup>3</sup> United for ALICE, “ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship in Hawai‘i,” 2024.