

**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
H.B. NO. 439, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

BEFORE THE:
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 **TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 309

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi or Randall M. Wat, Deputy Attorneys General

Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

The bill requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders, and establishes criteria for obtaining an international teacher license.

Section 2 of this bill proposes to amend section 302A-802(c), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), to add a new paragraph (7) that requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish the international teacher license. In the new paragraph (7), the word "educators" is used twice, but "educators" is not a defined term in chapter 302A, HRS. The Department recommends that a synonymous word, "teacher," defined in section 302A-101, HRS, be used instead. We recommend replacing "educators" with "teachers" on page 6, lines 9 and 12.

We also recommend replacing "school" with "schools" to read "or public charter schools" on page 6, line 10.

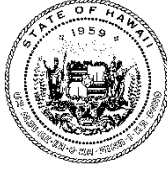
The Department further notes that new paragraph (7) combines two concepts, establishing the license and setting forth conditions for the issuance of the renewable license, which may be confusing. Moreover, the bill does not discuss any conditions that may be necessary for renewing the license. To address these concerns, the Department recommends separating the two concepts and adding wording to address

requirements for the renewal of the license. The Department suggests that the new paragraph (7), on page 6, line 6, through page 7, line 5, of the bill be amended as follows:

- (7) Establish a visiting international teacher license to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries. The international teacher license shall provide ~~[educators]~~ **teachers** hired by the department or public charter ~~[school]~~ **schools** the ability to teach all subjects and grade levels that the teacher is qualified to teach~~[-];~~ **provided that:**
- (A)** International ~~[educators]~~ **teachers** hired by the department or public charter schools ~~[with an appropriate visa]~~ **as part of a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State** shall be issued a renewable visiting international teacher license upon receipt of the following:
- (i) A valid and current J-1 visa;**
- ~~[(A)]~~ **(ii)** The equivalent of a United States bachelor's degree or higher;
- ~~[(B)]~~ **(iii)** Completion of an equivalent United States teacher preparation program that verifies basic skills and content knowledge;
- ~~[(C)]~~ **(iv)** A valid ~~[and active international teacher]~~ **teaching** license~~[-];~~ **in the teacher's home country;** and
- ~~[(D)]~~ **(v)** Verification of three years of employment at a public or private school in a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve setting~~[-];~~ **and**
- (B) Renewal of a visiting international teacher license is conditioned on the existence of a valid and current J-1 visa and participation in a designated exchange visitor program of the United States Department of State.**

(Suggested changes Ramseyered against the wording in the bill and in bold.)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this bill.



STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD

650 IWILEI ROAD, SUITE 268
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

PERSON TESTIFYING: Felicia Villalobos, Executive Director, on behalf of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board

DATE: February 4, 2025

TIME: 2:00 pm

LOCATION: Conference Room 309 and Video Conference

TITLE OF BILL: HB439, RELATING TO EDUCATION

PURPOSE OF BILL: Requires HTSB to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Establishes criteria for obtaining an international license.

POSITION: Opposes

Chair Woodson, and Members of the Committee;

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) opposes HB439, relating education.

Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board does not have any of its teaching licenses based on where an applicant is applying. International applicants are already able to apply and received all the types of permits or licenses offered, according to the license requirements on each application that are already set in place. Setting the criteria for the requirements of each license is what the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board does, and why it is an attached agency to the Hawaii Department of Education, not part of it. This allows the HTSB to decide these criteria for license weighing in what is best to provide high quality teachers for our schools in Hawaii, without a conflict of interest. By state law, our Board makes the rules for licensure as defined by the Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) for HTSB.

HTSB knows this bill was good intentioned, but it is not the answer to the problem. What we all should be concerned with is how J1 visa holders are being taken advantage of by loan sharks who are offering them high interest loans to move to the U.S. with super high-interest loans (around 50% interest!) to pay for their flights, moving expenses to move to the U.S. to work, relocation fees, flights, etc. licensing, etc. to become a teacher in the U.S. At the National Conference for State Legislatures (NCSL) a few years back, there was a labor session and a resolution that specifically dealt the protecting those with J1 Visas. **They decided to add language to the NCSL resolution to protect J1 teachers from 3rd party "coyote" companies offering J1 Visa holders these high-interest loans.** They even charged them a licensing fee even when states, such as ours, **has no licensing fee.** They have had major problems in many other states before we even heard about it in Hawaii, so they were letting us know. NCSL Passed this resolution with those protections for J1 teachers. This is how our J1 visa holders should be protected. They need to be protected from these loan sharks.

Here are links to documents that explain more that were shared at NCSL. AFL-CIO [Use and Abuse of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Teacher Program — Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO](#) Note: Make sure you check out the articles they cite as well at the bottom of this report. Here is also a report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) [Importing Educators: Causes and Consequences of International Teacher](#)

[Recruitment](#) who is more aware of this problem as it hit them first. [Start on page 17 to see the fraud and the 'coyote' recruiting tactics that are being used.]

At HTSB we only have 5 Licensing Specialists that license everyone. Our licensing is free to all who apply, since we are now funded by the legislature for our operations. HTSB used to rely on licensing fees, but now we have ZERO licensing fees, since being funded by the legislature.

Some principals have been paying for the Praxis tests for some J1 teachers, as well as other teachers who may need to take the Praxis tests, which is good. (They may use Title II funds). The Praxis Core is \$150, PLT is \$156, and content is \$130-\$180 depending on the test they take- so for a total of lower than \$500.

And again, HTSB does NOT charge licensing fees, so they do not have to pay that in addition to test fees. Other states, like Alaska, mentioned in the preamble do charge a licensing fee (About \$200), Nevada, and North Carolina.

In their last bargaining session, HSTA already increased the pay for Emergency Hires in their last contract (for 2024-2027). Salaries for those with Emergency Hire Permits was at \$ \$45,593 per year, prior to this new contract, and now their salary was increased to \$50,325 per year for the 2023-2024, then \$51,835 per year for this school year 2024-25, then it will be \$53,649 for the 2026-27 SY. Through negotiations, HSTA has already bargained for those with Emergency Hire Permits to earn \$6,242 more this year (2024-2025) and even more next year. **However, once applicants pass the Praxis tests, they may gain their full license and be on the HDOE Licensed Teacher pay level that starts at \$53,390 per year 2024-25 SY, and then \$55, 250 per year in the 2026-27 SY.**

HTSB requires teachers who went through out-of-state programs, including international teachers, even those with international licenses, to take three Praxis tests to gain licensure. We want to make sure that international teachers understand the content they will be teaching, as well as the grade level span they will be teaching, in the field and grade level span they have a degree in, which is important for our teachers in our classrooms to meet the needs of our students. Remember, special education laws are different in the U.S. than in the other countries too. We have been told from J1 teachers that in the Philippines corporal punishment is allowed, but it is NOT allowed in our state, and that is only one issue.

Someone in the last few years actually presented the idea of what this bill would do to our board in one of their committees, and committee members said, no, they want our international teachers to complete the three Praxis required, just as HTSB requires with others who gain a teaching degree from out-of-state, even if they are in the U.S. HTSB is the state teacher licensing agency, and as such, know what is happening in the licensing world, and what ensures quality teachers, and what doesn't. HTSB is also aware of fraud cases, and bad actors in this area, so we work hard to prevent our teachers, our licensing agency, or our state, from being taken advantage of. This is why we have the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board. To decide and set these licensing requirements as we have them in our Hawaii Administrative Rules.

Lastly, there are for-profit companies out there, even in the U.S., offering "International Teacher degrees", and some of them are BAD actors.

This bill is unnecessary, and we want to be able to license, renew licenses, and add-fields to licenses, at our agency, but this bill would make us a license mill for international agencies who are bad actors in all of this.

We already license teachers from other countries, and we do require three tests for quality assurance from applicants with degrees from somewhere else in the U.S. or internationally. Even most in-state Educator Preparation Programs require Praxis tests, so it is not unusual at all.

Therefore, we humbly ask this committee to **oppose** this bill.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 02/04/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0439 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Establishes criteria for obtaining an international teacher license.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) strongly supports HB 439 which creates an international visiting teacher license and is committed to working with the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) should this bill pass.

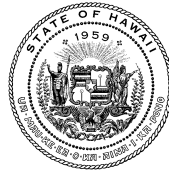
The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators work in 55 schools across Hawai'i, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Nā'ālehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide Hawai'i students the highest quality education while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 2025-2026, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international educators, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439 ensures qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating a more inclusive and equitable licensing system, the State can fully leverage international educators' skills, knowledge, and experience and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
Kainalu Elementary School
165 Kaiholu Street
Kailua, Hawaii 96734

LATE

February 3, 2025

The Honorable Justin Woodson
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Strong Support for HB439 - Filipino Caucus; HTSB; International Teacher License; Criteria; Establishment

Dear Representative Woodson,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB439, which proposes the establishment of an international teacher license in Hawaii. As Principal at Kainalu Elementary School, I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact that international teachers, particularly those from the Philippines, have on our students, school community, and campus climate.

Our J-1 teacher, Raymart-Jason Fundal, has become invaluable members of our school. He brings a diverse perspective, enriches our classrooms and broadens our students' understanding of the world. I want to specifically highlight the exceptional contributions of Raymart, our Special Education preschool teacher. Raymart is a tremendous asset to Kainalu. He is a true team player, always willing to collaborate with colleagues and contribute to a positive and supportive work environment. His dedication to his students is remarkable. He builds strong, caring relationships with each child and their families, fostering a sense of trust and partnership. Raymart's enthusiasm is contagious, and his "can-do" attitude inspires everyone around him. He consistently goes above and beyond to meet the individual needs of his students, demonstrating creativity and resourcefulness in his teaching methods. He embodies the values of Kainalu – kindness, excellence, and service – in all that he does. Raymart's positive attitude and

willingness to help have made him a valued member of our school community. He readily participates in school events and activities, further enriching our campus culture.

HB439 is crucial because it addresses several key issues. Allowing these dedicated educators like Raymart to stay in Hawaii for up to five years if licensed provides stability for both the teachers and our schools. The continuity they provide is essential for our students' success. Furthermore, ensuring equal pay for equal work, including access to differentials upon licensure, is a matter of fairness and equity. These teachers bring internationally recognized foreign credentials as highly qualified and experienced educators, and this bill rightly acknowledges their expertise.

Eliminating the need for burdensome and expensive Praxis exams, when they already possess international licenses and degrees, is a sensible and efficient approach. It allows these teachers to focus on what they do best: supporting our students, enriching our school community, and contributing their valuable skills and experience. Instead of navigating complex testing requirements, they can dedicate their time and energy to the students who need them.

I urge you to support HB439. It is a vital piece of legislation that will benefit our students, our schools, and the entire state of Hawaii.

Me ka ha'aha'a (With Humility),

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Resha Ramolete', written in a cursive style.

Resha Ramolete
Principal
808-305-0300
resha.ramolete@k12.hi.us

Norman Arancon

Professor, University of Hawai'i at Hilo
President, Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators
21 Alani St, Hilo Hawaii 96720; Arancon.2@gmail.com

To:

Hawaii State Legislature
House Committee on Education
Hawaii State Capitol
Honolulu, HI

Subject: Support for HB439 – Establishing an International Teacher License

Dear Esteemed Members of the House Committee on Education,

As a **professor at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo** and the **President of the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators (HAFE)**, I am writing to express my strong support for **HB439**, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for J-1 visa holders in the state of Hawaii. This critical legislation addresses the ongoing teacher shortage while enriching our educational system through cultural diversity and exchange.

The J-1 visa program has been instrumental in bringing qualified educators to Hawaii's schools, particularly from the Philippines and Kenya. These educators not only provide high-quality instruction but also serve as inspiring role models for our diverse student population. However, the current licensure barriers impose significant challenges, limiting their contributions and making it difficult to attract and retain these valuable teachers.

By establishing a **provisional international teacher license**, HB439 will recognize the credentials of international educators and ensure they are fairly compensated for their work. This bill brings Hawaii in line with other states that have streamlined the licensing process for international educators, promoting equity and enhancing the quality of education.

As President of the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators, I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact Filipino educators have on our students. The presence of educators who share cultural and linguistic backgrounds with their students fosters a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, encouraging students to excel academically and consider careers in education.

Moreover, as a professor dedicated to advancing education and fostering global perspectives, I understand the importance of creating a **globally competent** and **locally committed** educational system. HB439 supports this vision by ensuring that our classrooms reflect the rich diversity of our community and the global society.

I respectfully urge the legislature to **pass HB439** and eliminate unnecessary obstacles for international teachers who bring essential skills and perspectives to our schools. Thank you for

your attention to this important matter. Please feel free to reach out if I can provide further information or testimony in support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Norman Arancon, PhD
Professor, University of Hawai'i at Hilo
President, Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators (HAFE)

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 5:03:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
amy agbayani	hawai'i friends of civil rights	Support	In Person

Comments:

Testimony in support submitted by

Amy Agbayani and Pat McManaman, co-chairs Hawa'i Friends of Civil Rights.

We strongly support hb439 requiring the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teachers license for J-1 visa holders and establishes criteria for obtaining international teachers license. The bill will help Hawai'i address teacher shortages by providing competent teachers particularly in geographic and disciplines. In addition, J-1 visa holders with cultural and linguistic skills can work with students from these backgrounds. The Department of Education currently has over 200 J-1 visa teachers from the Philippines and my personal contact with some of the individual teachers and comments from my community contacts makes me confident that these teachers and the students are well-served.

These J-1 visa teachers can serve at any of the public schools, including schools with high proportion of local and immigrant Filipino students. As noted, Filipino students are the largest ethnic group in the public schools and immigrants from the Philippines represent the largest country of origin group, making up nearly half—or 45.8 percent—of all immigrants in Hawai'i. Currently there are 32,044 (10%) English language students in the public schools. These students are native speakers of languages other than English and need assistance to learn English.

We support this bill as it will benefit our schools and teachers by having international licenses for these teachers.



**OAHU FILIPINO COMMUNITY COUNCIL
Honolulu, Hawaii**

February 4, 2025

Testimony in Support of HB439: RELATING TO EDUCATION

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

The Oahu Filipino Community Council strongly supports HB439, which mandates the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders and sets criteria for obtaining this license. This initiative is crucial for addressing the teacher shortage in Hawaii and ensuring that our students receive a high-quality education.

By establishing an international teacher license, we can attract qualified educators from around the world to fill critical teaching positions in our schools. This will not only help alleviate the teacher shortage but also bring diverse perspectives and teaching methods to our classrooms, enriching the educational experience for our students.

Moreover, this initiative will provide a pathway for international teachers to contribute to our education system, fostering cultural exchange and promoting global understanding. It will also support the professional development of these teachers, ensuring that they meet the high standards required to teach in Hawaii.

In conclusion, we urge you to support HB439 and help establish this important international teacher license. This initiative will benefit our students, our schools, and our community by addressing the teacher shortage and promoting a diverse and inclusive education system.

Mahalo for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Melodie Aduja
Chair, Social Action Committee
Director, Oahu Filipino Community Council

February 1, 2025

Aloha,

I am submitting my strong testimony in support of HB439, which would establish an international visiting teacher license. This legislation is necessary to address the ongoing teacher shortage in our state, particularly in rural areas and underserved communities.

As an educator working at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, a former president and current secretary of the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators (HAFE), and former Vice President of the Fil-Am Community of East Hawaii (FACEH), I have had the privilege of working closely with J-1 teachers and witnessing their invaluable contributions to our schools and communities. Through the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators (HAFE), we have been actively assisting J-1 teachers in navigating the challenges they face, and I can personally attest to the transformative impact they have on our educational system and beyond.

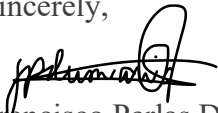
Hiring highly qualified teachers from the Philippines through the J-1 visa program has been a game changer for many schools in Hawaii. These teachers bring not only their expertise and dedication but also a deep commitment to their students and communities.

I can attest that the J-1 teachers have made significant contributions to community events and activities. They have been instrumental in organizing and participating in celebrations such as Filipino American History Month, HAFE events, and the Sakada Day Celebration. Their involvement enriches these cultural events, fosters community connections, and highlights the importance of diversity and inclusion in Hawaii.

Supporting HB439 is not only the right thing to do rather it is the pono thing to do. This legislation will benefit our schools, our students, and the dedicated J-1 teachers who have become integral members of our educational and community life. It will also streamline the process of hiring and retaining these highly qualified professionals, ensuring that Hawaii's keiki receive the education they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Francisco Perlas Dumanig, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, University of Hawaii at Hilo

Former President and Current Secretary, Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators (HAFE)

Former Vice President, Fil-Am Community of East Hawaii (FACEH)



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Statement of
Melody Calisay, Ph.D.
President

Filipino Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii
before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

4 February 2025
2 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 309

In Consideration of
HB439
RELATING TO EDUCATION

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica and members of the Committee, the Filipino Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii (FCCH) supports **HB439** which requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Further, this bill establishes criteria for obtaining an international teacher license.

This bill addresses Hawaii's chronic teacher shortage by creating a **Visiting International Teacher License** for participants in the J-1 visa program. Filipino educators play a key role in Hawaii's public schools, where 22.4% of the student population identifies as Filipino, but only 7.4% of teachers share this background.

Additionally, this bill streamlines licensing for international educators, ensuring equitable recognition of their qualifications and enabling them to serve as role models for Filipino students while enriching classroom diversity. Equitable recognition of their qualifications mean that Hawaii acknowledges their internationally recognized foreign credentials as highly qualified and experienced educators. If licensed, passage of this bill allows J-1 teachers to stay in Hawaii for five years.

Since arriving from the Philippines, these J-1 Teachers have positively impacted the student community and overall campus climate.

I urge you to support this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 9:44:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ligaya avenida	Foreign Cultural Exchange Consultants LLC	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Honorable Woodson , Honorable Lachica, Members of the House Education Committee

Good morning! My name is Dr. Ligaya Avenida, President of Foreign Cultural Exchange Consultants, and a retired educator from San Francisco Unified School District. Four years ago my company and Alliance Abroad, a visa sponsor company were awarded the bid from Hawaii Public Schools to recruit international teachers in Math, Science, and Special education. My company brought 78 highly qualified teachers to your school district and to this date over 90% of them are still teaching your children. During the past 3 years, we again brought over 200 teachers, and as far as I know, they are staying and working very hard to teach your children.

All of these teachers possess undergraduate and Master or doctorate degrees in their subject areas, are licensed in their country, and, have taught for more than 5 to 10 years

When they began teaching in Hawaii their college degrees were subjected to an evaluation for equivalency by an agency approved by the Dept of Education and all their degrees were deemed equivalent to a US education. In summary, the foreign teachers you hired for the past 4 years have the same educational degrees as any other American teacher in your schools.

These teachers assumed the same duties and responsibilities as any other teacher, in their school, they are required to report to work at the same time as any other teacher., they teach the same number of students as everyone else and sometimes more, and they are under t the same evaluation process as any other teacher, and they face the same challenges of teaching a diverse student population every single day.

These teachers are caring and passionate about their work, share their culture and language with your students and they have made a very positive impact in your schools.

Unfortunately, their salary is not the same as any other teacher in Hawaii, and their academic degrees are not aligned to Hawaii la Hawaii license. HB439 is being proposed to correct this misalignment. We support HB439 and we urge the members of the Education Committee to vote unanimously on this resolution that will create an International Visiting Teacher license for all teachers.

Thank you,

Dr. Ligaya Avenida, President/CEO

Foreign Cultural Exchange Consultants

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 12:41:02 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kevin McNamara	Kings Church	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We support HB439, we have five J-1 teachers that are a part of our congregation. They have enriched our city, our church and the public school. They frequently volunteer in community events making our city and school a better place to live. They deserve they same benefits and pay as other public teachers.

Thank You,

Pastor Kevin McNamara

Kings Church Lanai

1001 Fraser Av. Lanai City, HI 96763

808-783-5950

ALLIANCE ABROAD

Aloha,

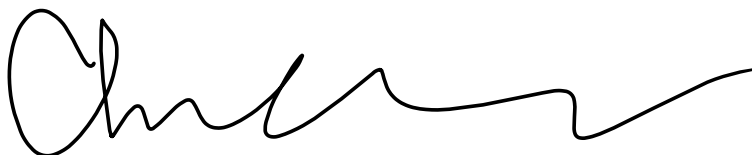
My name is Chr  Davis, and I am the outreach coordinator the J1 teachers in Hawaii who are under visa sponsorship with Alliance Abroad Group. In this capacity, I have had the privilege to meet with many of our teachers and hear first-hand about how their experience has impacted them. Our teachers in Hawaii have a unique opportunity to share their cultures with students and facilitate cross-cultural dialogues with students in other countries. Teachers also learn about the US educational system and can bring new ideas to their home countries when their program ends.

In my work, I also hear from teachers when the current Hawaii certification process creates barriers to continuing their program or necessitates a relocation to be able to continue their program in a different state where international teacher certification, causing overwhelming pressure and economic challenge. Teachers have already completed certification exams and requirements in their home country and have at least 2 years of experience. Most of our teachers come with even more than 2 years of experience and additional degrees from their home country.

With the passing of proposed HB439, international teachers will be able to share their educational background and experience, as well as enrich the cultural community of their schools, without interruption or the necessity to relocate to other states that already have reciprocity for international teachers. Teachers will be able to continue their program in Hawaii for three years, with the potential to extend an additional 2 years, leading to lower teacher turnover and a richer cultural exchange.

Thank you for your consideration in creating a visiting international teaching certification for international teachers in the state of Hawaii. The international teaching certification in Hawaii, like other states, can alleviate unnecessary emotional and economic stress, leading to greater educational outcomes, stronger schools, and greater cross-cultural dialogue and exchange of ideas between our cultures.

Sincerely,
Chr  M. Davis
J1 Teacher Outreach Coordinator
Alliance Abroad Group



ALLIANCE ABROAD

Dear Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Crystal Bunts, and I am the Vice President of Programs at Alliance Abroad Group. Alliance Abroad is a visa sponsor for several J-1 programs, including the J-1 Teach Program. We have sponsored the program since 2009, and during the past 15 years have brought thousands of international teachers into the country to share their culture and teaching methodologies with students in K-12 schools. We have partnered with the Department of Education in Hawaii since 2019, sponsoring over 200 teachers into the state, with another 100 hired for the 2025-2026 school year.

When I visited our teachers in Hawaii last May I was able to travel to several schools across islands to meet our international teachers, domestic teachers, principals, students, and community members. Overwhelmingly the feedback on the impact of the program was positive and covered an improvement in school culture, students seeing themselves and their culture in their teachers, and dedication to succeeding in the classroom. We want to see that positive impact continue; therefore we ask for your support on passing HB 439. This bill creates an international visiting teacher license that honors former reciprocity agreements as well as the significant experience with which the international teachers come.

The current licensing process is cumbersome and creates barriers for international teachers to obtain certification. Those barriers are varied and include the stress of passing exams and of covering the associated costs. Additionally, until the teachers do pass these exams, they are not eligible for the salary differentials that others receive for being hired in a hard-to-staff location. In other words, the teachers are not appropriately paid for their experience or the location in which they are hired.

We have seen visiting international teaching licenses work well in numerous states. The most notable example we have is in the State of Texas, which is where our office is located. Similarly to Hawaii, the Texas Education Agency realized that the path to licensure was cumbersome and costly for their international teachers. The Texas Education Agency launched the VIT, allowing visa sponsors and districts to apply to sponsor and host international teachers on the program. Upon evidence that the sponsor is meeting Department of State eligibility requirements for their teachers, TEA approves the sponsor. Since Alliance Abroad is an approved sponsor, our teachers are able to apply for the VIT with a nominal application fee; this allows them to teach for the first three years. They can then apply for an extension for the additional two years once that extension is approved by the Department of State, allowing them to continue teaching for the district up to five years total.

ALLIANCE ABROAD

Without the passing of this bill, I must impress upon you the difficulty we as the visa sponsor will face. Already we have teachers who choose to leave Hawaii and move to another state that offers an easier licensure path. Without a change to the current licensure situation, we will have no choice but to re-evaluate our ability to sponsor the number of teachers we currently do in Hawaii, quite possibly determining we cannot sponsor any additional teachers at all.

I ask you to please vote in favor of HB439. A yes vote allows international teachers to continue coming to Hawaii on the J-1 visa and positively impacting students and communities. A yes vote allows teachers who are acclimating to a new home and a new culture to remove the worry of passing exams and paying for the associated costs. A yes vote allows equal pay for equal work by activating access to the differentials not currently available to international teachers prior to licensure. A yes vote for the international teachers is a yes vote for your communities and your children.

I would be happy to offer further information and support if you would like. You can reach me at the details below.

Warmly,

Crystal Bunts

Crystal Bunts

Vice President of Programs

Alliance Abroad Group, Inc.

512-904-1134

cbunts@allianceabroad.com

Testimony in Support of HB439
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025
Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee on Education,

My name is Vince Patrick Pastor, and I am a first-year J-1 teacher at Chiefess Kamakahahei Middle School in Kauai. I am writing in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish a fair and streamlined licensing process for international educators like myself.

Moving to Hawaii to teach has been an incredible opportunity, both professionally and personally. I came here with years of experience in education, eager to share my knowledge while learning from my students and colleagues. However, the current licensing system classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires," requiring additional exams that are costly and time-consuming. These requirements not only add financial stress but also take away valuable time that could be spent focusing on student learning, preparing lessons, and engaging with families.

Despite these challenges, I see the positive impact that international teachers bring to Hawaii's classrooms every day. Representation matters—students benefit from seeing educators who share similar backgrounds and experiences. It inspires them to dream bigger and recognize the value of diversity in education.

HB439 is an important step in ensuring fairness and equity for international teachers who are already contributing so much to Hawaii's schools. By creating a visiting international teacher license, the state will remove unnecessary barriers and allow us to fully dedicate ourselves to the success of our students.

I respectfully urge you to pass this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Vince Patrick Pastor
J-1 Teacher, Chiefess Kamakahahei Middle School
sir.vincepastor@gmail.com
808-779-8493

Testimony in Support of HB 439

My name is Marlene Leary, and I serve as the principal at Kaua'i High School. I want to express my strong support for HB 439, which mandates that the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders.

In our school, we have faced significant challenges in filling critical teaching positions specifically in mathematics and the sciences with highly qualified teachers. This year, we had the privilege of welcoming five new teachers from the Philippines, and our experience with them has been overwhelmingly positive. These educators come with graduate-level expertise in their subject areas and possess exceptional teaching skills. Moreover, they have demonstrated a genuine willingness to embrace Hawai'i culture and engage fully with our school's initiatives and community.

Our district and school-level supporters have played an essential role in their successful integration into our community. Additionally, the Filipino community has provided invaluable assistance to our J-1 visa teachers, particularly given the challenges posed by the high cost of living and low housing inventory on Kaua'i. This collaborative support has been crucial in helping these teachers adjust and thrive in our unique environment.

By establishing a special teacher's license for qualified, knowledgeable, and respected educators from abroad, HB 439 will not only address the pressing need for subject area experts in our schools, but it will also reinforce our commitment to high-quality education for all students. This initiative will ensure that we continue to benefit from the talents of international educators, enriching our community and bolstering the educational experience for our students.

I urge the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board and our legislators to support HB 439. It is a necessary and forward-thinking step that will help us attract and retain exceptional educators, ultimately benefiting our students, our schools, and our entire community.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marlene Leary
Principal, Kaua'i High School

marlene.leary@k12.hi.us

(808) 977-9710

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 3:46:25 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ELVIN BEJERANO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Elvin Valero Bejerano**, and I am a **4th-grade teacher at Kihei Elementary School**. I am writing today to express my strong support for **HB 439**, which would create an International Visiting Teacher License.

My wife, **Arlene M. Bejerano**, and I both teach here in Hawaii as **J-1 teachers**, bringing years of experience and passion for education to our students. We both hold **professional teaching licenses in the Philippines**, and I also have **out-of-state teaching licenses from Nevada and New Mexico**. I applied for reciprocity in Hawaii, hoping that my credentials would be fully recognized, but instead, I was only granted a **reduction in the number of PRAXIS exams** required. Even though I have already proven my qualifications, I still cannot obtain a full Hawaii license without additional testing.

This has placed a significant **financial strain** on our family. Despite both of us working as full-time teachers, we **struggle to keep up with the high cost of living in Hawaii**. Since we are classified as **emergency hire teachers**, we receive lower salaries than fully licensed teachers. **Housing costs alone take up a huge portion of our income, and with two sons to support here with us, making ends meet has been a constant challenge.**

HB 439 would change everything. If passed, this bill would:

- Grant international teachers a full teaching license**, eliminating unnecessary exams.
- Ensure we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers**, allowing us to support our families.
- Extend our stay for five years**, giving our students consistency in their learning and allowing us to fully invest in our schools and communities.

Hawaii is in urgent need of qualified teachers, and **international teachers are already here, working hard every day to fill these gaps**. We are dedicated, passionate, and committed to the success of Hawaii’s keiki, but we need stability to continue making a difference.

I respectfully urge you to pass **HB 439** so that international teachers can continue serving Hawaii's students without unnecessary barriers.

Mahalo for your time and support.

Elvin Valero Bejerano

4th Grade Teacher, Kihei Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 4:08:45 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arlene Macotocruz Bejerano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License Hearing Date:

February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Aloha!

My name is Arlene Macotocruz Bejerano, and I’m a 3rd-grade teacher at Kihei Elementary School. I’m writing to share my strong support for HB 439, a bill that would create an International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii. I hold a master’s degree in Elementary Education and have completed 42 units in Doctor of Education in Educational Supervision. Over the years, I’ve had the privilege of teaching students from various backgrounds, gaining valuable experience in supporting multilingual learners and promoting cultural awareness. Since arriving in Hawaii through the J-1 cultural exchange program, I have worked hard to provide engaging, high-quality instruction and contribute to the school community. Despite both my husband, Elvin Valero Bejerano, and I teaching here in Hawaii, we still struggle financially due to the high cost of living. We have our two sons with us, and meeting our daily needs is a constant challenge. If this bill passes, it will increase our pay and help alleviate some of the financial strain, allowing us to better support our family and continue our work without added worry. This bill is incredibly important for international teachers like me. If passed, it would:

- Provide stability – A five-year license would help us continue teaching without the stress of excessive exams and licensing hurdles.
- Recognize our qualifications – Many of us have advanced degrees and years of experience, but we’re often held back by unnecessary limitations that prevent us from being fully recognized.
- Address Hawaii’s teacher shortage – International teachers play a critical role in filling gaps and making sure students get the education they deserve.
- Support retention – Removing barriers and offering differentials will help us stay in Hawaii longer and fully invest in our students’ success. The growth I’ve seen in my students is so rewarding, and I’m committed to continuing to make a difference in their lives. However, we need policies that truly support us and recognize the contributions we make to Hawaii’s

education system. Passing HB 439 would not only support teachers but ensure that Hawaii's keiki receive consistent, high-quality education. I ask you please consider passing this bill and helping us continue our work in Hawaii's classrooms. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Arlene Macotocruz Bejerano

3rd Grade Teacher,

Kihei Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 4:11:54 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
DeAnne Shibaoka	HIDOE Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Urgent Plea for HB439: Investing in Our Keiki and Our Future

Dear Esteemed Legislators,

I write to you today with a heart full of passion and a deep conviction regarding the critical importance of HB439. As Vice Principal of Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary, I've witnessed firsthand the transformative power of the J1 Teacher Exchange Program, and I implore you to consider our urgent need to strengthen and expand it.

This year, we are blessed to have two exceptional J1 teachers, one from Kenya and one from the Philippines. These educators are not simply filling positions; they are enriching our entire school community. Experienced teachers in their home countries, they bring a wealth of diverse perspectives, innovative teaching strategies, and a vibrant energy that ignites a spark in our classrooms. For our military families, particularly those originally from the Philippines and Kenya, these teachers offer a vital connection to their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening the bonds between our school and the wider community.

However, the current two-year limit on J1 visas severely constrains the program's potential. The initial years are often spent navigating the complexities of the HIDOE system and acclimating to a new culture. A five-year extension, as proposed in HB439, would be transformative. It would allow these dedicated professionals to truly flourish, deepen their impact on our students, and become fully integrated members of our educational ohana.

I must emphasize the exceptional caliber of our J1 teachers. Both hold Master's degrees in their respective fields, credentials that placed them far above many other applicants we considered this year. These individuals make immense sacrifices to come to Hawaii, often uprooting their lives and families to serve our keiki. They arrive without established support systems and face the daunting challenge of living in one of the most expensive regions in the nation. We must offer them competitive salaries commensurate with their qualifications and experience to ensure we can attract and retain these invaluable educators. It is simply a matter of fairness and a crucial investment in our children's future.

Furthermore, I strongly advocate for granting "highly qualified" status to J1 teachers who hold equivalent credentials in their home countries. Requiring them to undergo expensive and often redundant testing imposes an unnecessary financial burden and creates a significant barrier to

entry. These funds are far better spent on classroom resources and supporting their professional development.

These are not simply teachers but beacons of knowledge, cultural ambassadors, and dedicated professionals who pour their hearts into nurturing our students. They deserve our support, and our children deserve their continued dedication. I implore you, members of the legislature, to champion HB439. Invest in our international teachers, invest in our schools, and invest in the future of Hawaii.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration.

DeAnne Shibaoka

Vice Principal

Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary

Testimony: Support of Establishing a Provisional Licensing Pathway for Visiting International Teachers

Dear Members of the Legislature,

My name is Mark Vincent Espiritu, and I am a J-1 teacher at Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School, where I teach 8th grade English Language Arts and Social Studies Inclusion Class. Kalama Intermediate is home to over 800 students, serving grades 6 through 8, with students coming from diverse communities spanning Huelo to Kipahulu. I am honored to be part of this vibrant learning environment, where I contribute to student success while engaging in meaningful professional growth.

The J-1 visa program has provided me with the opportunity to bring my expertise, cultural perspective, and passion for education to Hawaii's public schools. My foreign-evaluated transcripts and licensure from the Philippines reflect my years of training and experience—qualifications that align with global teaching standards. However, despite these credentials, Hawaii's current licensing structure presents challenges for J-1 educators. The additional testing requirements, which can cost over \$1,000, create unnecessary financial and logistical barriers. This process detracts from the time and focus that should be dedicated to analyzing formative assessments, collaborating with families, and planning effective instruction.

Despite these challenges, my experience at Kalama Intermediate has been deeply fulfilling, thanks to the unwavering support of the department head, administrators, teachers, and the school-wide community. From the moment I joined the faculty, I was welcomed with open arms and provided with the necessary guidance to transition smoothly into my role. The mentorship and collaboration I have received have allowed me to not only contribute to student learning but also grow professionally.

Furthermore, my presence in the classroom has had a profound impact on students, particularly those of Filipino heritage. Representation in education matters—when students see teachers who share their background, they gain confidence, motivation, and a stronger sense of belonging. Beyond academic benefits, diverse educator representation fosters cultural appreciation, empathy, and global-mindedness among all students.

By establishing a provisional licensing pathway for visiting international teachers, Hawaii can fully recognize and leverage the talents of educators who are already making significant contributions to student learning. Streamlining this process will ensure equity in hiring and compensation, attract more highly qualified teachers to serve in hard-to-fill positions, and reinforce Hawaii's commitment to a globally competitive and locally committed education system.

I wholeheartedly support the creation of this provisional licensing pathway and urge the Legislature to take this important step toward recognizing the value of international educators. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Vincent Espiritu
J-1 Inclusion Teacher, 8th Grade ELA & Social Studies

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 4:29:06 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eloisa Micah Guabes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Eloisa Micah Guabes, and I am an English Language Arts teacher and the Journalism Club adviser at Waimea Canyon Middle School on Kaua‘i. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of **HB439**, which seeks to establish an **international teacher license for qualified visa holders**.

As an educator, I have dedicated my career to shaping young minds and ensuring that my students receive high-quality education. Since joining Waimea Canyon Middle School, I have worked tirelessly to provide engaging and effective instruction, contribute to the school community, and support my students in their academic and personal growth.

Beyond my role as an ELA teacher, I am also the adviser for the school’s first-ever Journalism Club—a new and exciting opportunity for our students. Through this initiative, I have discovered that our students possess incredible talents in writing, photojournalism, and crafting a student-led magazine. This platform has given them the confidence and voice to share their perspectives, tell meaningful stories, and develop essential skills in communication and media literacy.

Despite my extensive experience and contributions, obtaining full licensure in Hawai‘i remains a challenge due to the financial and logistical burdens of the Praxis exams. These exams are expensive and not readily available across the islands, often requiring travel to O‘ahu, which further increases costs. These obstacles do not reflect the expertise, years of training, and foreign credentials that international teachers like myself have already earned. This bill acknowledges the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience we bring from our home countries and provides a fair and reasonable pathway for us to continue making a meaningful impact in Hawai‘i’s schools.

Hawai‘i, like many states, faces an ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved communities. The establishment of an international teacher license would help address this shortage by recognizing the qualifications of dedicated, highly skilled educators who are already contributing to the state’s education system. By passing this bill, Hawai‘i will be honoring diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent, ensuring that our keiki continue to receive the best possible education.

I urge you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Eloisa Micah Guabes

English Language Arts Teacher & Journalism Club Adviser
Waimea Canyon Middle School, Kaua'i

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 4:51:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ryan Macadangdang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Ryan Taeza Macadangdang, and I am a dedicated 6th-grade teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Teacher License. This legislation is essential in recognizing the contributions of experienced international educators and ensuring they can continue to serve Hawai‘i’s students effectively.

For nearly a decade, I have been devoted to shaping young minds and fostering a passion for learning. Prior to teaching in Hawai‘i, I taught in the Philippines and earned an out-of-state teaching license in Illinois. Through years of training and professional experience, I have developed and implemented effective teaching strategies that enhance student learning and achievement.

At Lokelani Intermediate, I strive to create an engaging and inclusive learning environment where all students feel supported and motivated to succeed. Working with a diverse student population, I provide high-quality instruction tailored to their individual needs. As an international educator, I also bring unique cultural perspectives into the classroom, broadening students’ understanding of the world and enriching their educational experience.

Despite my extensive qualifications, obtaining a full teaching license in Hawai‘i has been a challenge. Although I applied for reciprocity, my credentials were not fully recognized, and I was still required to take multiple PRAXIS exams. This additional testing requirement imposes both financial and logistical burdens, despite my proven experience and prior licensure.

This has had a direct impact on my ability to support myself. As an international teacher classified as an emergency hire, I receive a lower salary than fully licensed educators. The high cost of living in Hawai‘i, including housing and daily expenses, makes it challenging to make ends meet while dedicating myself to my students.

Hawai‘i is facing a critical teacher shortage, and international educators are already here, filling these essential roles with dedication and expertise. We are committed to the success of Hawai‘i’s keiki, but we need stability and support to continue making a meaningful impact in our schools and communities.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, removing unnecessary barriers and enabling highly qualified international teachers to contribute fully to Hawai'i's education system. Mahalo for your time and support.

Respectfully,

Ryan Taeza Macadangdang
Grade Teacher, Lokelani Intermediate School

6th

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 5:07:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aina Mae Ranises	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo,

Please allow me to introduce first myself. I'm Aina Mae Ranises, a Special Education Teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I've been teaching for 15 years in one of the public schools in the Philippines before I applied as a J1 Teacher in Hawaii.

At first, I was hesitant to apply for some reasons. First, I need to leave my teaching position in my home country in fact I already had a stable job. Then, I'm very far to my family and living in a foreign land is not easy. Lastly, the expenses that I need to spend just to get through of the application. Honestly, my passion is to teach the children because I want to be an agent of change. I don't want to teach only their minds but I want also to touch their hearts and transform their lives. That's why I decided to push my through my application regardless of the hindrances/hesistancies that I'll face in the future.

When I arrived in Maui, I was amazed by the place as well as the environment and I even told myself if given the opportunity, I want to work here a little bit longer before I go back to my home country. A funny thing also is even my first name is a Hawaiian word so I think I'm destined in this place.

In terms of the school community that I'm part now, I really like to work even if sometimes we are short staffed because I love what I'm doing and I want to support the kids in school. Teaching the students with different special needs, different nationalities are quite challenging but I want to be part of their success to live in the community independently that they belong. Although there are some challenges but I always think that an easy task becomes difficult if you do it with reluctant. Thankfully, I was able to surpass some of the challenges with the help and support of our school administrators, department head, colleagues, and most of all my strong faith with God.

Lastly, I'm knocking each one of you to please hear our side and please give us the chance to spend more years in your country so that we will be able to finish our program successfully. We will be able to do this, if you are going to pass the bill for HB439 which would create an International Visiting Teacher License and for the exemption of the Praxis Exam. There are a lot of things to be considered in taking the exam such as the exam fees, readiness to take the exam, etc. To have a teaching license here in Hawaii is one of the keys that we will be able to finish our

program successfully and I still prefer to teach here compared to the other states if I'm given a chance. Thank you and more power.

Mahalo,

Aina Mae Ranises

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 5:07:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ivy Macawili	Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Ivy Macawili, and I am a SPED Elementary Teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School. As an international teacher on a J-1 visa, I am honored to serve the students of Hawaii, bringing years of experience and internationally recognized credentials to my classroom. However, like many other J-1 teachers, I face challenges that hinder my ability to fully contribute to my students and school community. HB 439 is a critical step in addressing these issues and ensuring that highly qualified international educators can continue making a difference in Hawaii’s schools.

This bill allows J-1 teachers to stay in Hawaii for five years, providing much-needed stability for students who thrive under our guidance. Special education, in particular, requires strong relationships and consistency—our students depend on the trust and routines we build with them. By extending our stay, we can continue to support their academic and social-emotional growth without the disruption of frequent turnover.

HB 439 also recognizes the rigorous qualifications we hold. Many J-1 teachers have extensive experience and international teaching licenses that meet or exceed global standards. Requiring us to take costly, redundant Praxis exams places an unnecessary financial and emotional burden on educators who have already proven their expertise. Instead of creating barriers, Hawaii should embrace the knowledge and skills we bring into the classroom.

Equal pay for equal work is essential. Despite being highly qualified, many J-1 teachers are excluded from receiving salary differentials simply because our international credentials are not fully recognized. This inequity not only affects our financial stability but also discourages talented educators from staying in Hawaii. By granting us access to these differentials, the state acknowledges our contributions and commitment to Hawaii’s keiki.

The impact of J-1 teachers extends beyond the classroom. We bring cultural diversity, new teaching strategies, and a global perspective that enriches the entire school community. At Lanai High and Elementary School, my presence has helped foster inclusivity, collaboration, and innovative approaches to special education. My students have shown significant progress, gaining confidence in their abilities and achieving academic milestones. The relationships I have built with colleagues, parents, and the broader community have strengthened our school’s support system, creating a more positive and nurturing learning environment.

Passing HB 439 is not just about supporting international teachers—it is about strengthening

Hawaii's education system. By recognizing and fairly compensating J-1 educators, the state can continue to attract and retain experienced teachers who are dedicated to serving Hawaii's students.

I urge you to support HB 439 and help create a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable teaching environment in Hawaii.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Ivy Macawili
SPED Elementary Teacher, Lanai High and Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 5:10:35 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherry Uy	Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Sherry Uy, and I am a J-1 Math middle school teacher at Lanai High and Elementary. I am here to express my strong support for HB439, which proposes the creation of an international visiting teacher license. This legislation will allow J-1 teachers like myself to remain in Hawaii for up to five years if licensed, and I believe it will significantly benefit our students, school community, and the overall educational environment in our beautiful state.

The presence of J-1 teachers has had a profoundly positive impact on our students. Our diverse backgrounds and international experiences enrich the classroom environment, fostering cultural understanding and global perspectives. We bring innovative teaching methods and fresh ideas that engage students, inspire curiosity, and foster a love for learning. This diversity not only enhances the educational experience but also prepares our students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. In addition to enriching the curriculum, J-1 teachers contribute to a positive campus climate. We actively engage with the community, participate in school events, and collaborate with our colleagues to create inclusive spaces for all students. By supporting the social and emotional needs of our students, we help build a cohesive and supportive school culture.

It is crucial that J-1 teachers receive equal pay for equal work. Our commitment to education and the dedication we demonstrate in our roles should be recognized and compensated fairly. Furthermore, access to differentials for being licensed would reflect the value of our international credentials and experience, allowing us to contribute even more effectively to our schools.

Many J-1 teachers possess internationally recognized foreign credentials that demonstrate our qualifications as highly skilled educators. We have undergone extensive training and have a wealth of experience in our respective fields. It is essential that this expertise is acknowledged, and that we are not subjected to burdensome and expensive Praxis exams, especially when we already hold valid international licenses and degrees. This will allow us to focus on what truly matters—supporting our students and the school community.

By creating an international visiting teacher license, we can ensure that J-1 teachers can continue to make a meaningful impact in Hawaii’s classrooms without unnecessary barriers. Together, we can strengthen our educational system, foster diversity, and provide our students with the best possible learning experiences.

Mahalo for your support!

Aloha Chairperson, Vice-Chair, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I am Berly Ann G. Cular, a J-1 Cultural Exchange Teacher currently teaching 7th Grade Math at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. I am honored to testify in strong support of the International Visiting Teacher License Bill, which would provide much-needed recognition and stability for international educators like myself, who are dedicated to serving Hawaii's students.

I have been teaching for 18 years, with extensive experience in mathematics education in the Philippines. Through rigorous training, professional development, and classroom practice, I have developed effective teaching strategies that not only enhance students' mathematical skills but also foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and a growth mindset. Since arriving in Hawaii, I have worked hard to bridge learning gaps, build students' confidence in math, and create an inclusive, culturally responsive learning environment.

While I am fully willing to take the Praxis exam, I firmly believe that my credentials, training, and years of experience should also be valued. International teachers like me have already met high standards in our home countries, and we continue to demonstrate excellence in our teaching practices here in Hawaii. By supporting this bill, you acknowledge the contributions we bring and provide us with the opportunity to continue making a difference in our students' lives.

Additionally, extending the teaching period to a maximum of five years is a crucial step in supporting international educators. The impact we make does not happen overnight—it takes time to build relationships, adapt to the educational system, and contribute meaningfully to student learning. Allowing us to stay for up to five years means we can further strengthen our teaching, mentor students effectively, and contribute to the long-term success of Hawaii's schools.

Hawaii faces an ongoing teacher shortage, and international educators help fill this gap with dedicated, highly trained professionals who bring valuable perspectives to the classroom. By passing this bill, you are not only recognizing our commitment but also ensuring that students continue to receive high-quality instruction from passionate and experienced educators.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony. I urge you to support this bill, as it will not only benefit international teachers but also strengthen the entire education system in Hawaii. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,^[L]_[SEP]

BERLY ANN G. CULAR^[L]_[SEP]

Math 7 Teacher

Kalama Intermediate School

Maui, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 5:23:37 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laryson F Bagumbay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Hawai‘i State Legislature,

I am writing in strong support of HB 439 as an international teacher currently serving in Hawai‘i. This bill is crucial in providing a clear and fair pathway for international educators like myself to obtain licensure and continue contributing to our schools. Many of us came here to help address the teacher shortage, bringing valuable experience and dedication to our students. However, the current licensing process presents challenges that make it difficult for international teachers to secure long-term positions. Establishing an international teacher license with clear criteria will ensure that qualified educators can continue to serve Hawai‘i’s students without unnecessary barriers.

As a teacher, I have witnessed how international educators positively impact student learning and school communities. We are deeply committed to our roles and have embraced the culture and values of Hawai‘i’s education system. By passing HB 439, the Legislature will not only support international teachers but also ensure stability and quality education for Hawai‘i’s keiki. I urge you to approve this bill and recognize the important contributions of international teachers in shaping the future of our students.

Mahalo,

Kumu Laryson Bagumbay

Kealekehe Intermediate School

Kailua Kona, Hawai‘i Big Island

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 5:24:27 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
HAZEL T. DAMIAN	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

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

My name is Hazel T Damian Special Inclusion Teacher of 10th -11th Grade at King Kekaulike High School and I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of HB 439, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License. As a Special Inclusion Teacher here in Hawaii, I have dedicated my career to creating an inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment for students with diverse needs. In my role, I work closely with students who require specialized instruction and accommodations to succeed. I ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, receive the individualized support they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Through differentiated instruction, behavioral support, and collaborative teaching strategies, I strive to make learning accessible and meaningful for every student. My training in Special Education has equipped me with essential skills to support students with disabilities effectively. I have experience conducting Individualized Inclusive Education Plan (IIEP) meetings, collaborating with parents, general education teachers, and support staff to develop personalized learning plans that align with students’ strengths and challenges. Additionally, my experience in handling special education students has deepened my understanding of their unique needs, including behavior management techniques, assistive technology integration, and fostering independence in learning.

The passage of HB 439 will have a profound impact on my professional growth and ability to continue serving Hawaii’s students effectively. With this license, I will have access to more training opportunities, advanced strategies, and innovative approaches to Special Education, ultimately enhancing my ability to provide high-quality instruction. Moreover, obtaining this license will allow me to earn a higher salary, which is critical for supporting my daughter and managing the rising cost of living in Maui, particularly the high rental prices.

By supporting HB 439, you are not only recognizing the valuable contributions of international teachers but also ensuring that Hawaii’s students receive the best possible education from well-trained, dedicated professionals. I am committed to continuing my work as a Special Inclusion Teacher and making a lasting impact on my students and the broader school community..

If passed, HB 439 would be a transformative step for international teachers and Hawaii’s education system. This bill would:

✔ Provide international teachers with a full teaching license, removing unnecessary barriers and allowing us to focus on what truly matters—educating our students.

✔ Ensure fair compensation, including salary and differentials equal to licensed teachers, empowering us to better support our families and contribute to the local economy.

✔ Extend our stay for five years, fostering stability for students, strengthening school communities, and enabling us to fully dedicate ourselves to the success of Hawaii’s education system.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439

Hazel T Damian Special Inclusion Teacher

KKHS

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 5:32:48 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Geralyn E. Nabaysa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairperson, Vice-Chair, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I am Geralyn E. Nabaysa, a J-1 Cultural Exchange Teacher currently teaching 7th-grade Reading Workshop at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. I am honored to testify in support of the International Visiting Teacher License Bill, which would provide a much-needed pathway for international educators like me to continue making a meaningful impact in Hawaii’s schools.

As a teacher with 13 years of experience in the Philippines, I have dedicated my career to literacy, research, and cultural preservation. I previously taught Reading and Writing in Senior High School and worked closely with cultural masters in my community to develop learning resources that helped students enhance their language skills and connect with their heritage. That same passion for education and cultural awareness is what I now bring to my students in Hawaii. Moreover, I have gained professional education units from the Philippines and had submitted my Foreign Credential Evaluation.

Since arriving at Kalama Intermediate, I have embraced the responsibility of not only teaching reading skills but also fostering a culturally responsive learning environment. I integrate Hawaiian values such as Nā Hopena A‘o (HĀ) into my lessons, helping students develop a sense of belonging, responsibility, and excellence. Through project-based learning and ‘āina-based education, I guide students in exploring texts that connect to their identities, traditions, and real-world experiences. Currently, I am working with my Kuku Pilina PD3 course that gives me the opportunity to implement this project in my school titled, "Reviving Traditions: A Community-Based Storytelling Initiative," aims to preserve Native Hawaiian culture and empower young readers by engaging them in oral storytelling sessions conducted by Hawaiian elders. My other initiatives—such as the "A Word a Day Boosts the Aloha Spirit" vocabulary project and the STARrific Jar positive behavior system—motivate students to improve both their literacy skills and personal growth.

While I take great pride in the contributions I make to my school and students, the challenges I face as an international teacher are undeniable. The current licensing system does not fully accommodate visiting teachers, limiting our ability to fully integrate into the profession and continue our service beyond our initial program period. By establishing an International Visiting Teacher License, this bill would provide greater stability and professional recognition, allowing us to focus on what truly matters—educating and empowering students.

Hawaii, like many states, faces a shortage of qualified educators. International teachers help bridge that gap, bringing diverse perspectives, specialized training, and cross-cultural experiences that enrich students' learning. By supporting this bill, you are not only recognizing the contributions of international teachers but also ensuring that Hawaii's students continue to benefit from high-quality, culturally responsive education.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share my testimony. I urge you to pass this bill, as it will not only support international educators but also strengthen the educational landscape of Hawaii. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Geraldyn E. Nabaysa
7th Grade Reading Workshop Teacher
Kalama Intermediate School, Maui, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 5:39:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ROSELYN B. DELA CRUZ	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is *Roselyn Dela Cruz*, and I am a *4th-grade teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School*. I am writing to express my *strong support for HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License*. I hold a *professional teaching license in the Philippines* and have earned *a four-year bachelor's degree with master's units*. However, I am requesting that the *State of Hawai'i reciprocate our credentials by granting us a Hawai'i teaching license*. The financial burden of obtaining a license here has been overwhelming. I am still repaying the expenses incurred to process my J-1 visa to become a Hawai'i public school teacher. Additionally, I must take multiple exams, each requiring significant fees, adding to the financial strain—especially as we continue to support our families in our home country.

The high cost of living in Hawai'i makes it even more difficult to manage financially. As an emergency hire teacher, I earn a lower salary than fully licensed teachers. On Lanai, a hard-to-staff area, financial challenges are even more pronounced due to the limited availability of resources. We often need to travel to other islands just to access essential supplies. Housing costs alone consume a significant portion of my income, and I also have family in the Philippines who rely on my support.

HB 439 has the potential to transform Hawai'i's education system by addressing the ongoing teacher shortage and ensuring international teachers receive the support they deserve. I kindly request that you consider passing HB 439 to support international teachers, allowing them to continue their valuable work with Hawai'i's students without facing unnecessary obstacles. This legislation will help ensure that our educators can focus on what truly matters—providing quality education and making a positive impact on our students' lives.

Warm regards,

Roselyn Dela Cruz

Testimony in Support of HB 439 Relating to Education

To Whom It May Concern,

I am Maria Glenda Ventura ko'u inoa, an 11th-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher and a 9th-grade adviser at King Kekaulike High School. I have been serving within the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) for the past seven months and am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the academic success of my students and the community.

Since my arrival, I have had the privilege to learn and share cultural knowledge, which had a positive impact on the school environment and the surrounding community. My students, in particular, have expressed their respect and appreciation for my participation in the Cultural Exchange Program. The program has allowed me to not only teach but also to actively engage in fostering cultural awareness, promoting diversity, and enhancing the global perspective within the classroom.

Moreover, I am a Professional Licensure for Teachers (PLT) passer from the Philippines, and my credentials have been verified and approved by the Foreign Credential Evaluation. I have attended numerous professional development training sessions, which have further enriched my teaching strategies and have helped me better cater to the needs of a diverse, multi-racial student body in Hawaii. These experiences have underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusion, enabling me to connect with my students on a deeper level and create an environment where all students feel valued and heard.

HB 439, which seeks to provide reciprocity for teacher licensure between the Philippines and Hawaii, is a critical step forward for educators like myself. This bill will not only allow me to strengthen my professional status here in Hawaii but, will also present a unique opportunity to share the rich cultural diversity of my home country with my students, their families, and the broader community.

The benefits of this bill extend beyond the recognition of our credentials—it opens doors for teachers to bring more diverse teaching strategies, cultural knowledge, and global perspectives into Hawaiian classrooms. For students, it broadens their understanding of the world around them and increases their appreciation for cultural differences, fostering a learning environment that truly reflects the diversity of the 21st century. Also, it will enhance the professional growth of international educators and will provide significant benefits for the students, parents, and the community at large.

I fully and strongly support HB 439 and am hopeful for its passage. Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Glenda Ventura

ELA 11th Grade Teacher & 9th Grade Adviser

King Kekaulike High School

Hawaii Department of Education

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 6:26:37 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sunshine Celest Dandurand	Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Esteemed Legislators,

I am writing to you today with a sense of urgency and deep concern regarding the critical importance of HB439. As Principal of Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary, a public school within the Hawaii Department of Education, I directly witness the profound impact of the J1 Teacher Exchange Program, and I strongly urge you to support its enhancement and expansion. My responsibilities include the annual recruitment and hiring of qualified teachers, and I recognize the invaluable contributions that educators from diverse cultural backgrounds bring to our learning environment.

At Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary, we are committed to providing a rich and culturally responsive education for all our students. This year, we are privileged to have two exceptional J1 teachers, one from Kenya and one from the Philippines. These educators are not simply filling vacancies; they are enriching our entire school community. As experienced teachers in their home countries, they bring a wealth of diverse perspectives, innovative teaching strategies, and a vibrant energy that invigorates our classrooms. For our significant population of military families, particularly those with roots in the Philippines and Kenya, these teachers offer a vital connection to their cultural heritage, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and strengthening the critical partnership between our school and the wider community. This cross-cultural exchange benefits all our students, broadening their global awareness and preparing them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. Research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of culturally responsive teaching on student achievement.

However, the current two-year limit on J1 visas severely restricts the program's potential. The initial years are frequently spent navigating the complexities of the HIDOE system and acclimating to a new culture. A five-year extension, as proposed in HB439, would be transformative. It would provide the necessary stability for these dedicated professionals to truly flourish, deepen their impact on our students, and become fully integrated members of our educational `ohana. This continuity is essential for building strong teacher-student relationships, a cornerstone of effective instruction.

I must underscore the exceptional caliber of our J1 teachers. Both hold Master's degrees—credentials that placed them above many other applicants. These individuals make significant sacrifices to come to Hawaii, often uprooting their families to serve our keiki. They arrive without established support systems and face the considerable challenge of living in one of the

most expensive regions in the nation. We must offer them competitive salaries commensurate with their qualifications and experience to ensure we can attract and retain these invaluable educators. This is not only a matter of fairness but also a crucial investment in our children's future. As a principal responsible for staffing, I know firsthand the difficulty of recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, and losing these talented individuals after only two years creates a significant disruption to our educational program.

Furthermore, I strongly advocate for granting "highly qualified" status to J1 teachers who hold equivalent credentials in their home countries. Requiring them to undergo expensive and often redundant testing imposes an unnecessary financial burden and creates a significant barrier to entry. These funds are far better allocated to classroom resources and supporting their ongoing professional development. Streamlining this process will enable us to attract the most qualified candidates and reduce the administrative burden on schools. This will also ensure that these teachers can focus on what matters most: teaching our keiki.

These educators are not simply teachers; they are beacons of knowledge, cultural ambassadors, and dedicated professionals who invest their time and energy in nurturing our students. They deserve our support, and our children deserve their continued dedication. I respectfully urge you, members of the legislature, to champion HB439. Invest in our international teachers, invest in our schools, and invest in the future of Hawaii.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration.

Sunshine Celest Dandurand

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 6:31:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gretchen Cacao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Gretchen Cacao, and I am a Science Teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which would allow international visiting teachers to be licensed in Hawaii.

As a dedicated educator, I strive to provide quality science education, drawing on years of experience from my home country. My goal is to inspire curiosity, critical thinking, and a love for learning, ensuring my students gain a strong foundation in science to prepare them for the future.

Despite my qualifications and dedication, licensing requirements pose challenges. The costly Praxis exams are not easily accessible on my island, requiring travel to Oahu and additional expenses. This creates a financial burden for international teachers already committed to supporting Hawaii's schools.

Without a Hawaii teaching license, I earn a lower salary than my licensed colleagues, creating financial challenges for my family of four despite both my husband and me working. Licensure would recognize my education and experience, ensure fair compensation, and allow me to better support my family while serving my students effectively.

HB 439 is a step in the right direction. It recognizes the qualifications and contributions of international teachers and ensures that we are given a fair opportunity to thrive in Hawaii's education system. Its passage would not only support educators like myself but also strengthen Hawaii's education system by ensuring that highly qualified and committed teachers can continue making a meaningful impact in the classroom.

I sincerely encourage your support for the passage of HB 439. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

**Sincerely,
Gretchen Cacao
Science Teacher, Waimea Canyon Middle School**

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 7:01:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mayvelyn Estacio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Favor of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License

Mayvelyn R. Estacio

General Education Teacher/ Kihei Elementary

1/31/2025

Chairperson and Committee Members,

I am privileged to present my testimony in favor of HB 439, which aims to create an international Visiting Teacher License. As an exchange teacher, I have had the honor of working with students in Hawai'i, in particular at Kihei Elementary, making a significant impact not only in the classroom but also in the wider community.

In my capacity as a general education teacher, I also commit time tutoring students in our After-School Program, providing them with essential academic support to help them thrive. This experience has allowed me to witness the remarkable influence that committed and highly qualified educators can have on student's lives.

Throughout my years teaching here, I have been actively involved in professional development training to refine my skills in accordance with the standards established by the Hawai'i Department of Education. However, the financial challenges associated with certification pose difficulties for international teachers like me, hindering our ability to continue contributing to the education system. HB 439 would create a pathway to acknowledge my experience, qualifications and commitment while recognizing the vital role that international educators play in addressing teacher shortages,

The demand for qualified teachers in Hawai'i is pressing. Should this bill fail to pass, educators like myself may have to leave, which would disrupt student's learning and worsen the current teacher shortage. Furthermore, as a parent supporting my child's education, the uncertainty of leaving after my three years here weighs on me and may have an adverse effect on my child's enthusiasm in learning. Enacting HB 439 will not only help retain enthusiastic educators but also ensure that students continue to benefit from a variety of perspectives and high quality instruction.

I sincerely urge you to support HB 439 and offer international educators like me the chance to keep serving the students and communities in Hawai'i.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Mayvelyn R. Estacio

Kihei Elementary/BKKM

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 7:06:06 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenelyn Atienza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439- International Visiting Teacher License

I'm Jenelyn Atienza 8th Grade Math and Science Inclusion Teacher at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. As a J-1 teacher at Kalama Intermediate School, I have been privileged to teach 8th grade math and science, as well as work with special education students. My significant contribution alongside my diverse experience as math and special education teacher. This opportunity has not only allowed me to share my knowledge but has also enriched my life in ways I never could have imagined. My time here has been filled with unforgettable moments, strong connections with students and school staff, and appreciation for the diverse culture and diversity of Maui.

My role as a special education teacher has been particularly fulfilling. I have witnessed the incredible progress of my students, who often face unique challenges. By using inclusive teaching strategies, I aim to create a supportive environment where every student feels valued and capable of achieving their goals. The smiles on their faces when they succeed, no matter how small the achievement, remind me of the importance of patience and encouragement in the learning process. It is a privilege to help them unlock their potential and witness their growth.

The experience I have as a J-1 teacher at Kalama Intermediate School has been nothing short of transformative. The great moments shared with my students and the support of the school admin and staff have made this journey a memorable one. I am deeply appreciative of the culture and diversity that Maui offers, which has enriched my teaching practice and personal growth. I look forward to continuing my journey here in Maui, making lasting connections and memories with the wonderful community of Kalama Intermediate School.

I express my heartfelt gratitude and strong support for HB 439 – the International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is essential for us diverse educators from around the world, enriching our classrooms with diverse perspectives and teaching methodologies. My experience in the classroom has shown me the positive impact that international teachers have on student engagement and cultural appreciation. By passing this legislation, we can ensure that our schools continue to benefit from the expertise of qualified educators, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for all students. Thank you for considering this vital bill.

Testimony in Support of HB 439

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dean Patrick R. Espiritu, and I am a special education (SPED) teacher at Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School. I am submitting this testimony to express my strong support for HB 439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As a SPED teacher, my role is dedicated to meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities, ensuring they receive a high-quality education tailored to their individual strengths and challenges. Being part of this J-1 visa program brings the opportunity to learn from various education backgrounds to provide academic and cultural exchange to our diverse students.

This is my first year teaching at Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School, I am still getting used to the culture and practices of my workplace. However, the warm welcome from the school and the Special Education Department has made me feel supported and well-accommodated. This support motivates me to work hard, create engaging lessons, and help my students both academic and personal growth.

Because we are considered emergency hire teachers, we earn lower salaries than fully licensed teachers. We must take the PRAXIS exam and pass it to become fully licensed. However, obtaining such a license can be difficult and costly. I need to pass all the different exams to become a fully licensed teacher. Also, I am struggling to keep up with my expenses. Aside from my housing bills and other expenses, as a father I have to support my family. It is really hard to start but if HB 439 is approved this will help us a lot.

Hawaii is in urgent need of qualified teachers, and international teachers are already here, working hard every day to fill these gaps. We are dedicated and passionate about the success of our students, but we need stability to continue making a difference. I urge you to support HB 439 and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure. It will grant international teachers a full teaching license, eliminating unnecessary exams. Also, it ensures us receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, allowing us to support our families. And it extends our stay for five years, giving our students consistency in their learning and allowing us to fully invest in our schools and communities. Thank you for your time and support.

Respectfully,

Dean Patrick R. Espiritu
Special Education Teacher
Samuel E. Kalama Intermediate School

January 31, 2025

My name is Monica L. Paragas, and I am a Science/Computer Science teacher at Kohala Middle School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish a clear and accessible path to licensure for international teachers.

As an educator with eight years of teaching experience, a Master's degree in Science Education, and experience mentoring local and international (ASEAN) teaching interns in Science and Math, I have dedicated my career to fostering student success. Since arriving in Hawai'i, I have worked to create engaging, hands-on learning experiences that empower students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

International teachers bring valuable expertise that enriches students, schools, and the broader community. By acknowledging the internationally recognized credentials of highly qualified educators, this bill ensures that J-1 teachers can continue making a meaningful impact. A streamlined licensure process allows them to focus on supporting student learning, collaborating with colleagues, and strengthening school initiatives.

HB439 also allows licensed J-1 teachers to remain in Hawai'i for the full five-year duration of their program, providing students with consistency and stability in their learning environment. This benefits not only the teachers but also the school communities that rely on their dedication and expertise.

By supporting this bill, Hawai'i invests in student success, school growth, and a thriving educational community. I urge you to support HB439 to create a strong and sustainable pathway for international teachers who are committed to serving Hawai'i's keiki. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Monica L. Paragas
Science/Computer Science Teacher
Kohala Middle School

January 31, 2025

My name is Janemay S. Nueva, and I am a Special Education Teacher at Eleele School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish a clear and accessible path to licensure for international teachers.

As an educator with 13 years of teaching experience teaching interns in preschool and Kindergarten, I have dedicated my career to fostering student success. Since arriving in Hawai'i, I have worked to create engaging, hands-on learning experiences that empower students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

International teachers bring valuable expertise that enriches students, schools, and the broader community. By acknowledging the internationally recognized credentials of highly qualified educators, this bill ensures that J-1 teachers can continue making a meaningful impact. A streamlined licensure process allows them to focus on supporting student learning, collaborating with colleagues, and strengthening school initiatives.

HB439 also allows licensed J-1 teachers to remain in Hawai'i for the full five-year duration of their program, providing students with consistency and stability in their learning environment. This benefits not only the teachers but also the school communities that rely on their dedication and expertise.

By supporting this bill, Hawai'i invests in student success, school growth, and a thriving educational community. I urge you to support HB439 to create a strong and sustainable pathway for international teachers who are committed to serving Hawai'i's keiki. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Janemay Nueva

Janemay S. Nueva
Special Education Teacher
Ele'ele Elementary

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee

I am Ligaya R. de Vera, and I am an Inclusion Teacher of Math, Grade 7 and 8 at Lokelani Intermediate School, I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 439 which seeks to create an international teacher license for qualified visa holder. My time as a J-1 teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School has been an incredibly rewarding experience. I've been consistently impressed by the dedication of the staff, the resilience of the students, and the supportive atmosphere within the school community. I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this positive learning environment. This exchange has broadened my understanding of education and has allowed me to develop more culturally responsive teaching practices. I have seen how exposure to different cultures and viewpoints can spark curiosity, promote empathy, and prepare students to thrive in an increasingly globalized society.

And from the day 1, I felt welcomed and supported by the faculty and staff, fostering a collaborative environment that encourages growth and innovation.

As an educator, I have dedicated my career to nurturing young minds and ensuring that each of my students receives a high-quality education tailored to their needs. Whether it's helping a student grasp a challenging concept, witnessing their confidence grow as they master a new skill, or simply providing a supportive presence during a difficult day, I strive to make a positive difference in their lives. I've focused on creating a classroom where every student feels safe, respected, and empowered to learn. It's truly inspiring to witness their growth, both academically and personally.

Our training and experience as J-1 teachers have provided us with a solid foundation for this work. We've been equipped with valuable strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom management, and building positive relationships with students. We've learned how to adapt our teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of our learners, recognizing that each student has unique strengths and challenges. This training has been essential in helping us create an inclusive and engaging learning environment for all. Furthermore, the collaborative environment at Lokelani has allowed us to learn from experienced educators and share best practices, further enhancing our skills and knowledge.

Beyond the classroom, I've actively engaged with the school and wider Filipino community. This has included participating in events like cultural festivals, community center events, church gatherings like the Feast of Sto. Niño. I've enjoyed contributing to extracurricular activities, including a J1 teacher cultural dance group and the church choir. These experiences have provided valuable opportunities for cultural exchange, allowing me to share my heritage while immersing myself in the local traditions. I firmly believe that a thriving school community is crucial, and I'm dedicated to contributing to that sense of belonging and support.

In conclusion, my time at Lokelani Intermediate School has been a mutually experience. I'm confident that the work we're doing is making a lasting impact on our students, preparing them for success in high school and beyond. This experience has been invaluable, both professionally and personally, and I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow alongside the students and staff at Lokelani.

My experiences and involvement within the Hawaiian educational system have highlighted the challenges faced by international teachers. As a dedicated teacher licensed in the Philippines, I've witnessed firsthand the struggles in navigating the Praxis examination requirements. While I appreciate the value of standardized assessments like the Praxis, many Filipino teachers, myself included, encounter significant hurdles in meeting these requirements. These challenges create both a financial and emotional burden, adding stress and complexity to the process of obtaining licensure in Hawaii.

I believe that HB439 is a vital step towards strengthening Hawaii's educational system and ensuring that all students have access to high-quality teachers. It will create a more inclusive and diverse teaching workforce, which will ultimately benefit our learners and our communities. I urge you to support HB439 and help bring this important legislation to reality.

Sincerely,

LIGAYA R. DE VERA
Inclusion Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School
Kihei, Hawaii

Aloha,

My name is Ligaya R. de Vera, I am writing in strong support of HB439, which proposes establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders in Hawaii. As a J-1 visiting teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School, I have experienced firsthand the value and contributions that international educators bring to our classrooms and communities.

My time at Lokelani Intermediate School has been incredibly rewarding. I have had the opportunity to share my [mention your area of expertise or cultural background] with my students, enriching their learning experience and exposing them to diverse perspectives. I've also learned so much from my colleagues and the local community about Hawaiian culture and educational practices. This cultural exchange has been invaluable, broadening my understanding of teaching and fostering a deeper appreciation for the diverse backgrounds of our students.

However, the current process for international teachers seeking licensure can be challenging and complex. HB439 offers a crucial solution by creating a clear, accessible, and fair pathway for qualified visa holders to obtain licensure in Hawaii. This will not only benefit international teachers like me, but also, more importantly, it will benefit our students.

By streamlining the licensure process, HB439 will make it easier for Hawaii's schools to attract and retain qualified international teachers. These teachers bring unique skills, experiences, and perspectives that enhance the quality of education for all students. They can fill critical teaching shortages, particularly in specialized subjects or underserved areas. Moreover, they serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting global understanding and preparing our students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

I believe that HB439 is a vital step towards strengthening Hawaii's educational system and ensuring that all students have access to high-quality teachers. It will create a more inclusive and diverse teaching workforce, which will ultimately benefit our learners and our communities. I urge you to support HB439 and help bring this important legislation to fruition.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ligaya R. de Vera
J-1 Visiting Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School

January 31, 2025

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I Arnel Dayame a Math Teacher in Kulanihako'i High School, formally writing a request the recognition of my teaching credentials as a license educator in the Philippines for the purpose of applying for a teaching license within the State of Hawaii.

I am a licensed professional teacher in the Philippines, holding the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Mathematics and Master of Arts in Education major in Mathematics from University of the Visayas, main campus, Colon Street, Cebu City, Philippines and have successfully passed the Philippine Licensure Examination for Teachers(LET). I have been teaching at University of the Visayas, College students for 4 years, specializing in Research and Mathematics and also in Ocana National High School, senior high school level for 3 years specializing research and Mathematics.

Throughout my career, I have demonstrated a commitment to fostering student growth and achieving academic success. I have continually adhered to professional standards, participated in ongoing professional development, and maintained strong connections with students, parents, and colleagues. Furthermore, I have been involved in research presentations and coach for different Math competitions. I have two international Research publications about enhancing students academic performances in Mathematics. I have been also dedicated to creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment that encourage students to embrace diversity and explore global perspectives. I have successfully implemented the Interactive Math Garden: Outdoor Classroom to Enhance Student's Math Academic Performance (IMG:OCTESMAP) project that promote cultural awareness and appreciation among students.

My enthusiastic interest in participating the cross-cultural exchange program as international teacher as an educator is deeply committed to fostering cross-cultural understanding and enriching educational experiences. I am excited about the opportunity to contribute to this esteemed program. Currently I am teaching Algebra 1 and Statistics and Probability in Kulanihako'i High School, 9th, 10th and 11th grade students. I am eager to immerse myself in a new cultural environment. I firmly believe that engaging with diverse community not only enhances my teaching abilities but also broaden my perspective, enriching the learning experiences of both myself and my students. I also proposed the same project in my current school which is the Interactive Math Garden: Outdoor Classroom to Enhance Student's Math Academic Performance (IMG:OCTESMAP) to successfully helps students math academic performance here in Hawaii.

The prospect of collaborating with educators from different cultural backgrounds excites me as it aligns with my belief in the transformative power of cultural exchange in education. I am confident that my experiences, combine with my adaptability and eagerness to learn will enable me to contribute meaningfully to the Hawaii state educational program. I am committed to leveraging this opportunity to not only

enhance my teaching skills but also to foster meaningful connections with students, educators, and the community in Hawaii.

As a Filipino teacher in Hawaii, I believe in the power of community and the importance of giving back. Outside of the classroom, I am honored to volunteer as a Liturgical Master of Ceremony at our local Catholic church. This role allows me to serve the community by assisting in the smooth flow of religious services, fostering a sense of reverence, and helping parishioners connect spiritually.

Through this volunteer work, I've been able to deepen my own faith while also bringing a sense of cultural richness to the church, especially as a Filipino. The values of service, compassion, and community are central to both my heritage and the teaching of the church, guide my approach to teaching and involvement in the community. Being engaged in this way allows me to connect with my students and their families on a deeper level, offering them a space where faith, culture, and education can intersect. It's an experience that has enriched my life and has strengthened the bonds between myself, my students, and the wider Hawaii community.

Being a Filipino teacher in Hawaii has been a deeply rewarding experience, especially because of the strong sense of community here. As an educator, I believe that teaching extends beyond the classroom, it is about making meaningful connections and supporting the diverse cultural fabric that shapes Hawaii.

Ultimately, being a Filipino teacher here in Hawaii has reinforced the idea that education is not just about imparting knowledge, it is about connecting, building relationships, and making a positive impact within the community.

As above mentioned experiences and involvement in Hawaii Educational System and community, as a dedicated Filipino teacher who has earned my teaching license in the Philippines, I would like to share some of my struggles we face when attempting to gain certification in Hawaii, particularly with the Praxis exam.

While I understand the importance of standardized assessments like the Praxis, many Filipino teachers, including myself, face significant challenges when trying to meet the requirements set by Hawaii. Our professional training, teaching experience, and licensure from the Philippines are not always fully acknowledged, which often places us at a disadvantage compared to other local teachers.

The process of preparing for and taking the Praxis exam can be financially and emotionally burdensome especially for teachers who have already spent years in the classroom. It is particularly disheartening when our qualifications and experiences, which are recognized in the Philippines, are not immediately accepted in Hawaii, despite the fact that we are trained in the same core principles of effective learning.

I respectfully urge you to consider the possibility of recognizing our Philippines teaching license as equivalent to Hawaii teaching license. Many of us are passionate about continuing our careers in education and contributing to Hawaii's diverse and vibrant community, but we are hindered by these regulatory challenges.

By recognizing the value of our teaching experiences and credentials, we can more effectively serve Hawaii's students and bring unique cultural perspective to the classroom.

Respectfully yours,

Arnel Dayame
Grade 9 Adviser
Math, Teacher
Kulanihako'i High School
Kihie, Maui, Hawaii

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Aloha!

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

A story of J1 Filipino teacher's journey in Hawaii
(My success, challenges and hope)
by *Melvin T. Osorno*

I am Melvin T. Osorno, a J1 Filipino teacher from Cebu City, Philippines and a Grade 10 Biology Science teacher of Maui High School. I graduated Cum Laude in 2008 with a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education, focusing on General Science, from Cebu Normal University. This institution is recognized as a leading university for teacher education in the Philippines, known for producing many top performers in the country's teacher board examinations. It is a world-class institution committed to human transformation, creating globally competitive, efficient, and effective educators who positively impact lives around the world, particularly in the United States. I have also completed the required 30 academic units for my Master of Arts in Education, with a major in Science Education, and I am currently working on my thesis for graduation.

I have passionately devoted 15 impactful years to the field of education. Graduating with top honors in March 2008, I was fortunate to secure a teaching position just two months later. My journey began at San Roque College de Cebu (formerly San Roque Child Development School Montessori), a prestigious private institution in Cordova, Cebu, Philippines, where I spent six transformative years. There, I served as the Academic Coordinator for four years and the High School Coordinator for one year, delivering instruction in various Science subjects to students in Grades 4 to 10, along with Social Studies and Computer Education in Grade 7. My role extended beyond the classroom, as I took on the responsibilities of an event host and choreographer for numerous institutional activities.

In 2014, I embraced a new challenge at Talamban National High School, a large, esteemed integrated school nestled in the heart of Cebu City. Known for producing globally competitive graduates and excelling in regional and national educational contests, this institution allowed me to teach Science in the Junior High School department for nine years, while also serving as the Special Science Class Coordinator for four years. My active participation in event hosting and significant contributions to various institutional activities underscored my commitment to fostering academic, professional, social, and cultural growth in our teaching environment.

My proudest achievement came during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. I took the initiative to create, compile, and author the Grade 7 Earth and Environmental Science learning modules. These comprehensive resources were employed by numerous schools across the Division of Cebu City, enabling effective distance learning during this critical time. My modules not only met the immediate educational needs but also underwent rigorous quality assurance procedures by Master Teachers in Science at the Division Office, ensuring their excellence and reliability.

In December 2023, my father underwent a major gastrectomy, a surgical procedure to remove part of his stomach. This event deeply affected our family and inspired me to pursue my American dream of becoming a teacher abroad. Prior to this, it had always been my aspiration to teach in the USA. This challenging experience motivated me to leave my teaching career in the Philippines and do everything possible to achieve my goal and support my family.

Through prayer, enthusiasm, and hard work, I am given the opportunity to teach at Maui High School as a Biology teacher teaching essential concepts with real-world applications while considering students' learning interests and styles without compromising the Next Generations Science Standards and its learning competencies. I have done my best to create an inclusive, student-centered learning environment that fosters curiosity, critical thinking and a love for learning. Beyond my responsibilities as a science teacher, I also serve as one of the advisers for the Filipino Cultural Club, which aims to promote Filipino culture among students at our school. We accomplish this through various activities, such as teaching traditional dances, integrating Filipino folktales into our lessons and encouraging students to share their personal stories about their heritage. Students can learn more about their roots and share their knowledge with others. Through this program, I have discovered that many students at Maui High School are Filipinos, particularly Ilocanos.

With my academic credentials, accomplishments, and 15 years of teaching experience in the Philippines, as well as a year-long position as a science teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School in Kihei, Maui, I am currently a Biology teacher at Maui High School in Kahului, Maui. I feel honored and grateful to have served with commitment and dedication in both my home country, the Philippines, and the United States of America.

I am writing this testimony to strongly advocate for the passage of HB 439. This bill stands to make a profound and positive difference for Filipino teachers who aspire to join the Cross-Cultural Exchange Program for five years here in Hawaii. By facilitating their participation, it not only enhances educational exchange but also ensures that these dedicated teachers can secure equivalent international teaching licenses, similar to those obtained by Filipino teachers in states like Nevada and New Mexico.

These teachers have already demonstrated their capability by successfully acquiring their equivalent teaching licenses through authenticated Philippine teaching

licenses issued by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), as well as their undergraduate and master's Transcripts of Records (TORs) and Foreign Credential Evaluation (FCE) documents from reputable and reliable foreign credential evaluators such as WES, SpanTran, CAREE, and others. HB 439 will remove barriers and create opportunities, allowing these educators to flourish in a global environment and contribute even more richly to the educational landscape.

Despite possessing the necessary credentials, accomplishments, and teaching experiences essential for professional growth and development, achieving full licensure in Hawai'i by passing all five learning areas—major and core subjects—poses significant challenges. These challenges stem from factors such as inadequate preparation time, the complexity of test content, and cultural considerations. Furthermore, the process is not only costly but also inequitable, highlighting the urgent need for reform in the licensure system.

Before I received my job offer to teach in America, I diligently submitted a range of essential documents to demonstrate my qualifications and capabilities. These included my Philippine teaching license with comprehensive test scores from the examination for teachers conducted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), as well as my undergraduate and master's degree transcripts (TOR) from a prestigious university in the Philippines. Additionally, I provided foreign credential evaluation (FCE) documents from an internationally recognized evaluator which specializes in verifying academic and professional credentials and converting them into their U.S. equivalents based on established guidelines. Based solely on these authenticated documents, I firmly believe I am fully deserving of an equivalent U.S. teaching license. If teachers in states like Nevada and New Mexico have successfully obtained their equivalent teaching licenses as J-1 Filipino educators, then I am hopeful that the same opportunity exists for me here in Hawaii. It is crucial to recognize that teachers across these states, including Hawaii, share a common background. We all come from the Philippines, have taken the same rigorous teaching examination administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), and possess diverse teaching experiences and credentials. Furthermore, we submitted identical documentation, which was meticulously verified by the same reputable credential evaluator, and we underwent the same rigorous screening processes, including interviews and teaching demonstrations. In light of these facts, I passionately advocate for my peers and myself, who are equally qualified, to be granted equivalent teaching licenses here in Hawaii. It is not just a matter of fairness; it is about recognizing the dedication and expertise of educators who have committed to teaching and shaping the futures of students, regardless of where they come from.

As I delved into the relevant literature on the impacts of international examinations required for placement, I discovered a wealth of insights that underscore their significance and implications. I have encountered and realized something and that is cultural considerations. Cultural considerations play a significant, though often overlooked, role in the success of test-takers in international examinations like the Praxis. These considerations encompass a broad range of factors that can create

systematic disadvantages for individuals whose cultural backgrounds differ from the dominant culture assumed by the test. Here's a breakdown of these factors:

1. Language and Communication Styles:

- **Language Proficiency:** Even if the test is offered in multiple languages, nuances in language can pose challenges. Test questions often use complex sentence structures, idioms, and vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to non-native speakers, even those who are otherwise proficient. Translation inaccuracies can also occur.
- **Communication Styles:** Different cultures have different communication norms. Some cultures are more direct, while others are more indirect. Test questions may assume a specific communication style, potentially confusing test-takers from cultures that favor a different approach. For example, a question might require inferential reasoning that is not commonly used in some educational settings.
- **Test-Wiseness:** Test-wiseness refers to strategies for approaching and answering test questions. These strategies are often culturally specific and may not be universally understood. Test-takers from some cultures may be less familiar with multiple-choice formats, time management strategies for standardized tests, or the process of eliminating incorrect answers.

2. Educational Background and Pedagogical Approaches:

- **Curriculum Alignment:** International test-takers may have studied different curricula that do not align perfectly with the content covered by the Praxis. Even if the core concepts are similar, the specific examples, applications, and emphasis may differ, putting some test-takers at a disadvantage.
- **Teaching Styles:** Educational systems vary significantly across cultures. Some cultures emphasize rote memorization, while others focus on critical thinking and problem-solving. If the Praxis emphasizes skills that are not emphasized in a test-taker's educational background, they may struggle, even if they possess the underlying knowledge.
- **Test Familiarity:** Test-takers who are unfamiliar with standardized testing formats may experience anxiety and perform poorly, even if they are well-prepared in terms of content knowledge. This is particularly relevant for individuals from cultures where standardized testing is less common.

3. Cultural Values and Beliefs:

- **Time Orientation:** Different cultures have different perceptions of time. Some cultures are more punctual and time-conscious, while others are more flexible. Test-takers from cultures with a more flexible approach to time may struggle with the time constraints of the Praxis, even if they know the material.
- **Individualism vs. Collectivism:** Some cultures emphasize individual achievement, while others prioritize group harmony. Test-takers from collectivist cultures may be less accustomed to the competitive nature of standardized testing and may feel uncomfortable with the focus on individual performance.
- **Test Anxiety:** Test anxiety can be exacerbated by cultural factors. For example, in some cultures, failure on a high-stakes exam can be seen as a reflection on the entire family, leading to increased pressure and anxiety.

4. Socioeconomic Factors:

- **Access to Resources:** Test preparation resources, such as study guides, practice tests, and tutoring, may not be equally accessible to all test-takers. Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be at a disadvantage due to limited access to these resources.
- **Test Fees:** The cost of taking the Praxis can be a barrier for some individuals, particularly those from developing countries.
- **Environmental Factors:** Factors such as noise levels, temperature, and access to a quiet study space can impact test performance. These factors may be more challenging for individuals from certain cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds.

5. Cultural Bias in Test Content:

- **Contextual Relevance:** Test questions may use examples, scenarios, or references that are more familiar to individuals from certain cultural backgrounds. This can inadvertently create bias against test-takers from other cultures.
- **Stereotypes:** While efforts are made to avoid stereotypes, they can sometimes unintentionally creep into test questions or answer choices, potentially disadvantaging certain groups.

Addressing Cultural Considerations:

Addressing these cultural considerations requires a multi-faceted approach:

- **Sensitivity Review:** Thorough review of test content by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds to identify and eliminate potential biases.
- **Test Preparation Resources:** Development of culturally sensitive test preparation materials that address the specific needs of diverse test-takers.
- **Accommodations:** Consideration of appropriate accommodations for test-takers with diverse needs, such as extended time or the use of assistive technologies.
- **Research:** Ongoing research to identify and address cultural factors that may be impacting test performance.
- **Educator Training:** Training educators to be aware of cultural considerations in testing and to provide appropriate support to their students.

The Praxis exam is a standardized test used by many states to assess the knowledge and skills of aspiring educators. While it can provide valuable information about a test-taker's readiness for the classroom, it's important to understand that it offers a limited snapshot of an individual's overall capability as an educator. Here's a breakdown of what the Praxis can and cannot tell you:

What the Praxis CANNOT show:

- **Classroom Management Skills:** The Praxis cannot directly assess your ability to manage a classroom, build relationships with students, or create a positive learning environment. These skills are best demonstrated through real-world teaching experience.
- **Instructional Creativity:** The Praxis primarily focuses on assessing knowledge and understanding. It does not fully capture your ability to be creative and innovative in your teaching methods.
- **Adaptability:** The Praxis cannot measure your ability to adapt your teaching to meet the diverse needs of all learners, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students from different cultural backgrounds.

- **Passion and Dedication:** The Praxis cannot quantify your passion for teaching, your commitment to student success, or your ability to inspire and motivate students. These qualities are crucial for effective teaching but are not easily measured by a standardized test.
- **Experience:** The Praxis is a test of knowledge and skills, not experience. It cannot replace the valuable learning and growth that comes from actual teaching experience in a classroom setting.

(Sources: <https://tinyurl.com/w3ct3zs7>, <https://tinyurl.com/jmm2kuh5>, and <https://tinyurl.com/bdf69hrv>)

The Praxis exam can be a useful tool for evaluating a prospective teacher's foundational knowledge and skills. It can help ensure that individuals entering the teaching profession have a solid understanding of their subject matter and basic teaching principles. However, it's crucial to recognize that the Praxis is just one measure of a teacher's potential. Many other factors, such as classroom management skills, instructional creativity, adaptability, passion, and experience, play a significant role in determining a teacher's overall effectiveness.

Therefore, while a good score on the Praxis can be a positive indicator, it should not be the sole factor used to evaluate a person's capability as an educator. It's essential to consider a range of factors, including observations of teaching, student feedback, and other measures of professional growth, to get a more complete picture of an individual's potential as an educator.

(Source: <https://tinyurl.com/yckbtt97>)

The high cost of living in Hawaii presents an enormous challenge to me. As an emergency hire teacher, my salary falls significantly short of what fully licensed teachers earn, and this disparity exacerbates our financial struggles. With housing costs skyrocketing, a substantial portion of our income is consumed, leaving me with scant resources to support myself during the program. I find myself constantly grappling with the obligation to provide for my family while striving for a stable future.

House Bill 439 has the potential to revolutionize our education system. If passed, this critical legislation would grant international teachers full teaching licenses, thereby eliminating the restrictive exam requirements that currently impede our ability to serve our students effectively. It would ensure that we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, allowing us to properly support our families and uplift our communities. Furthermore, it would extend our work permits for five years, offering essential stability for our students' learning and enabling us to commit fully to our schools. This change is not just an improvement for educators; it's a vital investment in the future of our students and the entire educational landscape.

Hawaii truly needs highly proficient, efficient, and effective teachers. I am immensely grateful that I am here in Hawaii fueled by passion, commitment, and dedication to create positive and lasting impacts on the lives of our keikis, preparing them for a constantly changing world. I sincerely pray and hope that you will support the passage of HB 439, which encourages and motivates our J1 Filipino teachers to contribute positively to the educational success of diverse learners in Hawaii.

"Mahalo nui loa no kou manawa a me kou no'ono'o".

Melvin T. Osorno

Grade 10 Biology teacher

Maui High School

"Those who love to learn must never cease to learn,"

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 10:03:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeremiah Brown	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chairperson Woodson and Members of the Committee on Education,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which will establish a visiting international teacher license in Hawai‘i, ensuring that international educators can contribute meaningfully to our schools while receiving equitable recognition for their qualifications and experience.

Hawai‘i is facing a chronic teacher shortage, particularly in hard-to-fill subject areas and geographically isolated schools. The BridgeUSA J-1 visa program has played a crucial role in addressing this shortage by bringing in highly qualified international teachers to serve in our public schools. These educators not only help alleviate staffing shortages and enhance classroom diversity and bring valuable global perspectives to Hawai‘i’s students. Approximately 25% of DOE students are of Filipino ancestry, but only 7% of DOE teachers are. If students see themselves reflected in their teachers, they will have better educational outcomes and may even be inspired to pursue a career in education..

Despite their significant contributions, J-1 visa teachers in Hawai‘i currently face unnecessary barriers to full licensure. Unlike other states, Hawai‘i classifies these teachers as "emergency hires", requiring them to undergo costly and time-consuming licensure exams. This burden takes valuable time away from lesson planning, student engagement, and professional development. Additionally, these teachers are ineligible for extra compensation provided to those in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same duties.

This bill aligns with the DOE’s commitment to being "globally competitive and locally committed." By streamlining the licensure process, we can attract and retain diverse, high-quality educators who enrich our schools and inspire students—especially those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 439.

**Sincerely,
Jeremiah Brown
Waipahu High School**

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 10:44:38 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heriel Jhon Sarmiento Bravo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB439 – International Visiting Teachers License

Honorable members of the committee,

I am Heriel Jhon S. Bravo, teaching as 5th Grade Teacher at Konawaena Elementary School. I've been at Konawaena ES for only 6 months, but this is already my 2nd year in the program. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to teach and be part of the Konawaena Elementary School family. Being welcomed into this community has been an incredibly rewarding experience, and I am thankful for the support, collaboration, and encouragement that surround me every day. It's a privilege to contribute to the growth and development of such bright and talented young minds, and I look forward to continuing this amazing journey with the Konawaena family.

That is why I, Heriel Jhon S. Bravo, one of the International Teachers, stand before you today in strong support of HB439, the International Visiting Teachers License. As a visiting teacher, I am deeply committed to providing the best possible education for my students, yet I face a significant challenge when it comes to obtaining the proper licensure to do so.

The process of earning a teaching license in this state is not only time-consuming but also financially burdensome. Many of us international teachers are already highly trained and experienced in our home countries, and we bring valuable perspectives and expertise to the classroom. However, in order to teach here, we must navigate a complex system of exams, fees, and documentation. These requirements often do not consider our unique qualifications, and the cost of taking multiple exams just to qualify is prohibitively expensive. These fees add up quickly, with no guarantee of success, and they place an enormous financial strain on teachers who are already contributing to the community in meaningful ways.

By supporting HB439, you would be providing us with a streamlined process that recognizes our expertise while ensuring that we meet the necessary standards to teach effectively. This license would allow us to focus on our primary goal: educating and inspiring students. The current system creates unnecessary obstacles, and the financial burden on teachers like myself can often outweigh the benefits of continuing to pursue a license. With the passage of this bill, we would be able to focus more on our students and less on the financial and bureaucratic hurdles.

I ask that you please consider the immense value that international teachers bring to our classrooms, and the challenges we face in obtaining licensure. HB439 represents a fair and sensible solution to this issue, and I urge you to support its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 10:49:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Fermainne Antonio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Fermainne Antonio, and I am a J-1 teacher currently teaching 3rd grade at Lāna‘i High & Elementary School. I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is crucial in acknowledging the significant contributions of international educators like myself and ensuring that we can continue to serve Hawai‘i’s students effectively.

Since arriving in Hawai‘i, I have been deeply committed to my students, not only guiding them academically but also fostering their personal growth. As a 3rd-grade teacher, I have witnessed firsthand how my presence has enriched my students’ learning experiences—not just in mastering academic concepts but also in broadening their perspectives and appreciation of different cultures. International teachers bring diverse teaching methods and global perspectives that enhance student engagement and create a more dynamic and inclusive school environment.

HB 439 would allow international teachers to remain in Hawai‘i for up to five years if licensed, providing much-needed continuity for students and stability for schools. More importantly, it upholds fairness by ensuring that international educators receive equal pay for equal work, including access to differentials that recognize our qualifications and experience. Many of us hold highly respected foreign credentials and have undergone years of rigorous teacher training. However, we are still required to take costly and unnecessary Praxis exams—exams that do not accurately measure our abilities and create unnecessary barriers for skilled educators.

Despite my years of experience, obtaining full licensure in Hawai‘i remains a challenge due to the financial and logistical burdens of the Praxis exams. These exams are not only expensive but also difficult to access, especially for teachers on neighbor islands who must travel to O‘ahu or Maui to take them. Even with online options, technical difficulties such as slow internet connections can disrupt the process, making it an unreliable and frustrating requirement. These challenges do not reflect my qualifications or my ability to teach effectively. This bill recognizes the high standards of education and training that international teachers already possess and provides a fair pathway for us to continue serving Hawai‘i’s schools.

Hawai‘i, like many states, faces an ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved communities. International teachers are already filling these critical gaps, dedicating themselves to their students and school communities. By establishing an international teacher

license, Hawai‘i would not only address the teacher shortage but also affirm its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Recognizing and retaining highly qualified international educators will help ensure that Hawai‘i’s keiki receive the high-quality education they deserve.

By passing HB 439, you will allow us to focus on what truly matters—our students, our schools, and the communities we serve. I urge you to support this bill as a step toward valuing and retaining the dedicated international educators who are making a lasting impact in Hawai‘i’s classrooms.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Fermainne Antonio
3rd Grade Teacher
Lāna‘i High & Elementary School

My name is Richel Taturan, and I am a 6th Grade Social Studies Teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School in Kauai, Hawaii. Before coming to Hawaii, I dedicated 10 years to teaching English in the Philippines, where I developed strong skills in classroom management, student-centered learning, and cross-cultural education. Now, as a Social Studies teacher, I am passionate about helping students understand history, cultures, and perspectives that shape the world around them.

In my classroom, I strive to create an engaging learning environment where students connect past events to present realities. Using inquiry-based instruction and interactive discussions, I encourage critical thinking and meaningful conversations. I am grateful to be part of a school that values collaboration among students, teachers, administration, and families, fostering a supportive community for learning.

I hold a Professional Teaching License from the Philippines, and my credentials have been evaluated for international teaching. Beyond academics, I am eager to embrace Hawaii's rich cultural diversity, sharing my Filipino heritage while learning from the local traditions and values of the islands. I believe that education is not just about knowledge but also about building connections and understanding between cultures.

Hawaii is currently experiencing a teacher shortage, and HB439 presents a vital opportunity by establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders. This initiative would enable teachers like me to continue making a meaningful impact in schools across the state.

However, to remain in my position, I must pass the Praxis exam—a costly requirement that also demands travel from Kauai to Oahu. Despite these challenges, I am determined to obtain my teaching license and continue serving my students and school community.

I strongly support HB439, as it would not only provide relief for international teachers but also help address the urgent need for educators in Hawaii. Teaching is my passion, and I am committed to growing as an educator and cultural bridge for my students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Richel Taturan
6th Grade Social Studies Teacher
Waimea Canyon Middle School, Kauai, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 11:38:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
MARK ANTHONY T. DOMINGO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Mark Anthony T. Domingo and I am an English Language Arts teacher at Maui Waena Intermediate School. I am submitting this testimony in solid backing of HB439, which seeks to establish an international license for qualified visa holders.

To begin, I am writing to express my profound gratitude for the privilege of serving as a J-1 English Language Arts teacher at Maui Waena Intermediate School. My stay here has been exceptionally rewarding, both professionally and personally, and I have been a direct witness to the overwhelmingly positive impact this program has on our students, our school community, and our campus climate. However, this indispensable program, and the invaluable benefits it confers, is in jeopardy. Therefore, I earnestly implore you to champion the measures necessary to ensure its preservation.

From my initial arrival, I was embraced by a welcoming and supportive faculty and staff. The pervasive spirit of collaboration and unwavering dedication to student success are truly commendable. I have been particularly impressed by the profound impact the teachers at Maui Waena have on our students. Their commitment to differentiated instruction, innovative pedagogical methods, and genuine care for each student's well-being cultivates a nurturing and stimulating learning environment. I have gained invaluable insights from my colleagues and have been inspired by their fervent passion for education. This level of commitment is precisely what our students deserve, and the J-1 program is instrumental in making it a reality.

My personal mission as an English Language Arts teacher has been to ignite a lifelong love of reading and writing in my students. I have endeavored to create a classroom where students feel empowered to express themselves, explore diverse perspectives, and cultivate their critical thinking skills. I have observed remarkable growth in my students' literacy proficiencies and, more importantly, in their self-assurance as learners. I attribute this, in part, to the supportive and collaborative milieu fostered at Maui Waena. The school community's active engagement in student learning has also been pivotal to their success. The support extended by parents and community partners has enabled us to create enriching learning experiences that transcend the traditional classroom setting. This demonstrable growth, this burgeoning of potential, is inextricably linked to the stability and expertise that J-1 teachers provide.

The J-1 teacher program has been fundamental to my ability to contribute to Maui Waena. The opportunity to reside in Hawaii for up to five years, contingent upon licensure, provides much-needed stability for both the school and the teacher. This stability is paramount. It allows us to

forge deeper, more meaningful relationships with our students – relationships that are indispensable for effective teaching and mentorship. It allows us to become an integrated member of the community, understanding its unique needs and contributing to its advancement. Without this stability, our students are disadvantaged. The principle of equal pay for equal work, including access to differentials for licensed teachers, is essential and demonstrates a genuine respect for the value and expertise that J-1 teachers bring. We are not merely filling a vacancy; we are contributing our honed skills and extensive experience to enrich the educational landscape.

Furthermore, the recognition of our internationally recognized foreign credentials as highly qualified and experienced educators is profoundly validating. It acknowledges the rigorous training and specialized expertise we have acquired. The exemption from burdensome and costly Praxis exams, given our existing international licenses and degrees, allows us to concentrate on what truly matters: supporting our students, our school, and our community. This streamlined process obviates unnecessary bureaucracy and allows us to dedicate our time and energy to the students who need us most. Imagine the potential squandered if these highly qualified teachers were encumbered by superfluous testing.

My experience at Maui Waena has been transformative. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with such dedicated educators and to be an integral part of this vibrant school community. I firmly believe that the J-1 teacher program is an invaluable asset to Maui Waena and to the state of Hawaii. It provides stability, specialized expertise, and a diverse perspective that enriches the educational experience for our students. Therefore, I wholeheartedly implore you to champion this program and ensure its continued vitality. The future of our students depends on it.

In closing, I believe HB439 is crucial for the well-being of our students, our schools, and our entire community. Allowing us to stay for five years, ensuring us receive equal pay for equal work, recognizing our existing qualifications, and removing unnecessary testing burdens will allow us to focus on what truly matters: nurturing our learners and enriching our educational environment. I urge you to support HB439 and invest in the future of Hawaii's students.

Respectfully,

Mark Anthony Domingo

English Language Arts Teacher

Maui Waena Intermediate School

Maui District

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 12:07:17 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lanie Masicat	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Lanie Masicat a participant in the J1 Teacher Program in Hawaii. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

I am incredibly grateful for my experience as a J1 teacher here in Hawaii, where I've been able to grow professionally and personally while contributing positively to both the students and the broader school community. The unique opportunities that come with this program have allowed me to focus on what truly matters: supporting my students, strengthening our school community, and fostering a positive campus climate.

First and foremost, the school community in Hawaii has been incredibly welcoming, and I've witnessed firsthand in James Campbell High School how the teachers here positively impact our students. The collaborative spirit of my colleagues has made me a stronger educator. Teachers at Campbell High are passionate, and this energy has inspired me to bring my own best efforts into my classroom every day. By working together, we create an environment where our students feel encouraged and motivated to succeed, regardless of their background or challenges. This positive, inclusive atmosphere is something I believe is vital in shaping our students' future success.

The ability to stay in Hawaii for up to five years with the J1 Teacher program—provided that I become licensed—has been an incredible incentive and a sign of commitment from the state to international educators like myself. The pathway to becoming licensed here will allow me to integrate into the teaching community with stability and long-term growth opportunities. I truly appreciate if Hawaii will recognize my international credentials and views them as highly qualified and valuable. This acknowledgment will not only boost my confidence but also reassures me that my expertise is respected, despite coming from abroad.

One of the aspects I will greatly appreciate about working as a J1 teacher here in Hawaii is the commitment to equal pay for equal work. I have access to differentials for my licensure status, which ensures that my compensation aligns with the experience and education I bring to the table. This is a testament to the state's commitment to fairly compensating teachers, no matter where they are from.

Additionally, the absence of burdensome and expensive exams, such as the Praxis, for teachers who already hold international licenses, has been a huge relief. It will allow me to focus on what

I do best: teaching and supporting my students. There's no need to spend time or money on redundant testing when my credentials are already internationally recognized. This streamlined approach makes the entire process of becoming an educator in Hawaii much more accessible and less stressful for foreign teachers.

In conclusion, the J1 Teacher Program has provided me with a remarkable opportunity to make a meaningful impact in the classroom and beyond. It has allowed me to build stronger relationships with my students, collaborate with dedicated colleagues, and contribute to a school climate that encourages growth, inclusion, and academic success. I am proud to be part of a community that values and supports its educators, and I look forward to continuing to make a difference in Hawaii for years to come.

Respectfully,

Lanie Masicat

Math Teacher

James Campbell High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 2:04:34 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dianne Cabrera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB439 (International Visiting Teacher License)

My name is Dianne Cabrera, and I am a 2nd grade teacher at Kahakai Elementary School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439 which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As an educator, my philosophy of teaching centers around fostering the holistic development of children in terms of academically, socially, emotionally, and morally. I believe that education should not merely be about imparting knowledge but should focus on shaping well rounded individuals. My goal is to create an environment where each child can thrive, feel valued, and develop the skills necessary for lifelong success. I intentionally provide engaging and effective instruction that was learner centered for each day. The HB439 bill acknowledge the qualifications and experience we bring from our home countries, and it provides a fair pathway for us to continuously making a significant impact in Hawaii DOE Schools.

I strongly urge you to support this bill, which will provide international teachers like myself with a fair path to licensure and extend our stay for five years. This extension will allow us to continue contributing the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring that students benefit from diverse, experienced educators. By supporting this bill, we can help foster a more inclusive and effective educational environment for all.

Respectfully,

Dianne A. Cabrera

Second Grade Teacher

Kahakai Elementary School

Kailua Kona, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 8:46:50 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rose Cruz Churma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The J-1 teachers from the Philippines have positively impacted the education of our children and youth in the public schools, accepting positions that are difficult to fill. It is just right and fair for them to get equal pay for equal work and acknowledge their internationally recognized foreign credentials. Without the need for taking the expensive Praxis exams, they can focus on supporting their schools and students and utilize their income to find decent housing and afford the high cost of living in Hawaii.

I am Marcel C. Suniga, a Second Grade Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As a Gen Ed teacher, I am passionate about my career shaping young ones and ensuring my kids that they receive a quality education. I have worked tirelessly to provide differentiated instructions to my students with various backgrounds, abilities and needs. I always design and implement various teaching strategies that cater my student's needs. As their teacher, I want each of my students to receive the support and encouragement that will reach their full potential.

Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom, I actively engage in collaborating with my colleagues, in the school community, with our parents and stakeholders to foster a culture of excellence. I participated also in various community programs wherein I was able to showcase Filipino cultures and traditions.

Despite my experiences and contributions, obtaining full Licensure in Hawai'i remains a challenge due to financial and logistical burdens of the Praxis Exam. These exams are expensive and not readily available within the island.

HB 439 would change everything. By passing this bill, international teachers will be having full teaching licenses, and extending our stay for five years, giving our students consistency in their learning.

Hawaii faces teacher shortage just like other states. Having international teachers who are dedicated, passionate, committed and continuing making a huge difference in teaching our students, would greatly help to fill these gaps.

I, as an international teacher in the island of Hawai'i, respectfully urge to pass HB 439 so that I can continue serving Hawaii's Keiki.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Marcel C. Suniga
2nd Grade Teacher
Kahakai Elementary School
Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

Testimony in Support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jennifer A. Raval, and I am a special education teacher. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439 that acknowledges the dedication and contributions of educators like myself.

As an educator, I have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to my students' academic and personal growth. I create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where every child feels valued and empowered to succeed. My ability to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students is commendable, ensuring that each learner receives the necessary support and encouragement to reach their full potential. Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom, I actively engage in the school community, collaborating with colleagues, parents, and stakeholders to foster a culture of excellence. I consistently go above and beyond to develop innovative teaching strategies, integrate technology into instruction, and provide meaningful learning experiences tailored to my students' abilities.

Despite the challenges that come with being a special education teacher, I remain dedicated and passionate about my profession. My resilience, adaptability, and genuine care for my students set me apart as an educator. The impact of my work extends beyond academics—I nurture confidence, instill values, and prepare my students for lifelong success.

Recognizing educators like myself is essential in promoting quality education and acknowledging the invaluable contributions of dedicated teachers. I strongly support any initiative that ensures teachers like me receive the recognition, resources, and opportunities we deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jennifer A. Raval

SPED Teacher

Holualoa Elementary School

Big Island, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 10:16:08 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Liza Resurrecion	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee,

My name is Liza Resurrecion, and I am a 6th-grade math teacher at Kalama Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

I hold a professional teaching license in the Philippines and hope that our credentials will be recognized, just as they are in other states. Despite having proven my qualifications, I am still unable to obtain a full Hawaii teaching license without additional testing.

The high cost of living, especially housing, takes up a significant portion of my income. In addition, I send financial support to my children back home, making it a constant challenge to make ends meet. The cost of Praxis exams and review materials adds another financial burden, making the path to full licensure even more difficult.

If passed, this bill would grant international teachers a full teaching license, removing unnecessary testing requirements. It would also allow us to extend our stay for five years, providing students with stability in their education while allowing us to fully invest in our schools and communities.

Filipinos have long been an integral part of Hawaii's culture, demonstrating dedication and excellence in everything we do. I am truly grateful for the warm welcome I have received in Hawaii, and I hope that by passing HB 439, international teachers like myself can continue to serve Hawaii's keiki and communities.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Liza Resurrecion
6th Grade Math Teacher, Kalama Intermediate School

Dear members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my fullest support for the House Bill 439 that upgrades the State's policies on licensure reciprocity, particularly affecting J1 teachers like myself. As a proud educator from the Philippines, I have dedicated my life to helping students learning and am eager to share my knowledge and skills gained through my educational upbringing.

I attained my teaching license in the Philippines and also possessed a teaching license from State of Florida for J1 teachers. Worked for years cultivating an environment within the classroom to foster students with unique talents and perspectives. Yet, upon arriving in Hawaii, I was faced with various obstacles to overcome in having international qualifications recognized.

Our students deserve to be exposed to educators who bring diverse perspectives, and we, as a J1 teachers, would have so much to offer: knowledge to cultural differences, methodologies, teaching-learning approaches. They are also deserved equal opportunities to interact with educators of diverse backgrounds and who are enthusiastically interested in the growth and development of the youth.

The proposed HB439 will support and establish a more inclusive system for recognizing international qualifications. By supporting this legislation, we can work to create a more equitable educational setting in which all teacher regardless of their country origin- can be afforded complete opportunities toward ensuring students' success. Furthermore, it is also essential to take proactive steps to address the teacher shortages in State of Hawaii.

Much appreciated for taking into consideration and endorsing this significant House Bill.

Sincerely,

EMELYN BARBA
J1 Teacher
Lihikai School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 10:49:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aisa Mingaracal	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 1, 2025

Subject: Recognizing the Valuable Contributions of J-1 Teachers in Hawaii's Schools

Dear Sir/Ma'am;

As an English Language Arts teacher at H.P. Baldwin High School, I, Aisa Teresa Mingaracal, have seen firsthand the need for qualified teachers. Therefore, I strongly support HB439, which aims to address this need by establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

This letter highlights the significant positive impact we J-1 teachers have on students, schools, and communities in Hawaii, and underscores the importance of policies that support our success. I believe that recognizing the international credentials and streamlining the licensing process are crucial for maximizing our contributions, and specifically, allowing us J-1 teachers to stay in Hawaii for five years is a key factor in our positive impact.

The ability for J-1 teachers to remain in Hawaii for five years, provides crucial stability for our educational system. This extended stay fosters deeper relationships between teachers, students, and the community, leading to more meaningful learning experiences and stronger connections. It also allows schools to benefit from the consistent presence of qualified educators, reducing the disruption caused by frequent teacher turnover.

Beyond providing stability, J-1 teachers bring diverse perspectives, enriching the learning experience for our students and fostering global awareness. We often introduce unique teaching methods and knowledge, expanding students' horizons and preparing them for an interconnected world. Furthermore, we play a vital role in addressing teacher shortages, ensuring that the students have access to qualified educators, particularly in critical areas.

J-1 teachers also contribute significantly to the school community. We serve as cultural ambassadors, promoting cross-cultural understanding and respect. Our presence enhances the campus climate by increasing diversity and fostering a global perspective. We often become active members of the school community, participating in extracurricular activities and cultural events, strengthening the sense of belonging for all.

To fully realize the benefits, we J-1 teachers offer, kindly, advocate for policies that acknowledge our internationally recognized foreign credentials as evidence of our qualifications and experience. Eliminating burdensome and expensive Praxis exams, when we already possess international licenses and degrees, is essential. This not only save us valuable time and resources but also allows us to focus on what matters most: supporting our students, enriching our schools, and engaging with our communities. Streamlining the licensing process also enables us to begin contributing to our educational system more quickly. Providing equal pay for equal work and access to differentials for being licensed demonstrates respect for our qualifications and helps attract and retain highly qualified teachers.

By valuing and supporting J-1 teachers, particularly by allowing us to remain in Hawaii for five years, we invest in a more vibrant, diverse, and globally-minded learning environment for all students in Hawaii. We urge you to consider these points and support policies that facilitate our success.

Sincerely,

Aisa Teresa Mingaracal

ELA Teacher

H.P. Baldwin High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 11:15:39 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glorie Ann Cabaluna	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is **Glorie Ann Cabaluna**, and I have been a teacher for seven years. Teaching is not just a profession to me it is a mission and a vocation. Educating children is like building a home; if we are not there to effectively guide and impart knowledge, the foundation of their learning may weaken.

Since arriving in Hawai‘i, I have experienced an incredible sense of fulfillment in my work. The rich culture, the close-knit school community, and the opportunity to positively impact my students’ lives have reinforced my dedication to this profession. However, as a foreign teacher, I have also faced significant challenges. Despite being fully licensed in my home country and holding advanced degrees, I am classified only as an emergency hire in Hawai‘i. This classification limits my professional standing, affects my access to fair compensation, and places unnecessary obstacles in my path, challenges that my colleagues in states like Virginia, Florida, and Texas do not have to endure.

I have no intention of comparing, but I cannot ignore that my fellow foreign teachers in these states are granted full licensure based on their qualifications, allowing them to work with confidence and stability. Some of them have even encouraged me to apply in their states, knowing the benefits they receive. However, my heart belongs to Hawai‘i. I chose to be here because I believe in serving this community, supporting my students, and making a lasting impact in their lives.

The current system does not recognize the extensive qualifications, credentials, and years of experience that international teachers bring. Additionally, the requirement to pass costly and burdensome Praxis exams—despite already being licensed educators only adds to the hardship. These barriers do not determine our capability or effectiveness in the classroom. Rather, they discourage passionate and highly skilled teachers from continuing their work in Hawai‘i at a time when the state is facing an ongoing teacher shortage.

HB439 provides a necessary and fair solution. By establishing an international teacher license, this bill ensures that experienced educators can continue to serve Hawai‘i’s students, contribute meaningfully to our school communities, and focus on what truly matters—supporting and inspiring the next generation. More importantly, it allows us to stay for the full five years of our visa term, providing stability for both teachers and students.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB439 so that international teachers can continue serving Hawai'i's students without unnecessary barriers.

Mahalo for your time and support.

January 31, 2025

House of Representatives
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Bertania Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Committee on Education
Rep. Trisha La Chica, Vice Chair & Members

Dear Chair Woodson and Members,
RE: HB439

Aloha! My name is Randall Francisco. I am writing in support of this legislation that recognizes J-1 educators who have the qualifications and experiences to be considered in this pathway towards an international teacher license. On Kauai, during the past few years, 30+ J-1 teachers have demonstrated that can indeed make a difference in the education of our youth from Pre-K -12. I have had the opportunity to get to know many of these Philippine trained teachers especially, at the middle and high school levels. They not only have the experience, knowledge and high degree of professionalism, they are also very dedicated to their craft of educating our future members, professionals and contributors of our island and statewide communities.

What strikes me most is not only their commitment but their extra efforts in order to insure students' success such as helping students after school, devoting extra time in their classrooms or at home to continue to focus on their students' success. They have also served as the bill states to be excellent role models and, especially, understand Filipino students who are able to culturally connect with them.

The criteria to provide the pathway towards an international license like its contemporaries in the states of Alaska, Nevada and North Carolina will also help to incentivize more foreign trained teachers to strongly consider Hawaii as a place where they can successfully continue their profession and contribute to the communities that they live, work, and contribute.

Mahalo for your consideration and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Aloha and Selamat Po,



Randall Francisco
Former President/CEO, Kauai Chamber of Commerce
Former President, Kauai Filipino Chamber of Commerce
Former Dean, University of Hawaii Community College System

My name is **Alvin Montealto**, and I am writing in strong support of **HB 439** that seeks to honor the credentials and experience of Filipino teachers by establishing criteria for obtaining an international teacher license. As a dedicated educator who has been teaching in Hawaii, I have firsthand experience with the challenges foreign teacher face when trying to continue our careers here. This is a significant step forward for countless talented educators who have dedicated their lives to nurturing and shaping the minds of young students in the Philippines.

Many of us have completed extensive training, obtained advanced degrees and earned teaching license in our home countries, all of which have been evaluated and recognized by the foreign credential evaluation agencies. Despite this, we are still required to take additional certification exams, which present unnecessary financial and logistical barriers.

Since arriving in Kauai, I have had privilege of teaching Middle School Mathematics at Chiefess Kamakaha Middle School. My own journey as a Filipino educator in Hawaii has been incredibly rewarding. I decided to continue my career here in this beautiful state with a passion for teaching, bringing with me not only my credentials but also a wealth of cultural knowledge and experiences that enrich the classroom environment. I have worked tirelessly to support my students, many of whom face unique challenges. In my school, I have sought to create an inclusive and dynamic learning atmosphere where students feel validated in their backgrounds while being challenged academically. My students not only acquire knowledge but also develop an appreciation for cultural diversity, which ultimately prepares them for success in a global society. My colleagues and administrators have recognized my commitment and effectiveness, yet I, like many other foreign teachers, still face barriers that prevent us from continuing our careers seamlessly.

The unique perspectives and methodologies that Filipino teachers bring have contributed to a more comprehensive educational approach. Our diverse pedagogical strategies encourage students to think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively—skills they will carry with them long after they leave the classroom.

The exclusionary test requirements currently in place serve as a barrier for many capable Filipino teachers who desire to contribute to Hawaii's educational system. Exempting them from unnecessary testing will lead to greater workforce diversity and improved educational outcomes.

By recognizing the credentials, we have already earned and eliminating redundant testing requirements, Hawaii will create a more inclusive, efficient and fair process for dedicated teachers who want to continue serving students.

In conclusion, my testimony serves as a passionate plea for the passing of the bill to honor and recognize Philippine teaching licenses in Hawaii. By valuing and validating the contributions of Filipino teachers, we underpin a commitment to diversity and excellence in education. Together, we can forge a brighter future, nurturing the hearts and minds of students across Hawaii, and equipping them for a world ever in need of compassionate, capable, and innovative leaders.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 11:48:13 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vernadeth Salas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM**

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Vernadeth Salas, and I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is essential for teachers like me, who have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines but face additional barriers, such as the Praxis tests, to continue serving students in the Hawai‘i Department of Education.

As international teachers, we are committed to providing the best education possible for our students. However, balancing our teaching responsibilities while preparing for multiple licensure exams creates unnecessary stress and takes valuable time away from lesson planning and student engagement. While I understand the importance of demonstrating subject knowledge, I believe that our experience, qualifications, and dedication should be recognized without having to go through multiple standardized tests that add financial and emotional strain.

Additionally, the limited duration of our visas—ranging from three to five years—adds another layer of uncertainty. I have also heard that extending our stay to the full five years is contingent upon obtaining licensure, which further compounds the pressure we face. The high cost of Praxis exams, along with the limited time we have, makes it challenging to focus entirely on what truly matters—our students.

I truly love Hawai‘i—its people, its culture, and the school community that has welcomed me with open arms. My goal is to continue inspiring and supporting students without the burden of excessive testing requirements. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439 to ensure that international teachers can focus on what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawai‘i’s students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Vernadeth Salas

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 11:52:47 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rowella Angeles	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Honorable Members of the Legislature,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the establishment of the International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii. As a Math teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School in Kauai, I have dedicated my professional career to fostering a passion for mathematics in my students, helping them build critical thinking skills, and equipping them with the tools they need to succeed academically and in life. This bill represents a significant step toward recognizing the contributions that international teachers like myself make to the educational community, while also addressing the barriers we face in obtaining full licensure.

I earned my teaching credentials in Philippines, where I underwent rigorous training in pedagogical practices and mathematics instruction. Over the years, I have worked diligently to adapt and refine my approach to teaching, ensuring that I meet the diverse needs of my students. At Waimea Canyon Middle School, I strive to make Math both accessible and engaging. I recognize that for many students, Math can be a challenging subject, so I focus on creating a classroom environment that encourages collaboration, problem-solving, and perseverance. I work tirelessly to develop lessons that not only cover the content thoroughly but also ignite curiosity and allow students to see the relevance of Math in their everyday lives.

However, as much as I am committed to my students' learning, I face significant challenges in pursuing licensure here in Hawaii. The exams required to obtain full certification are both financially burdensome and difficult to access. The time needed to prepare for these exams takes away from the time I could be spending creating meaningful, well-planned lessons for my students. The exams are demanding, requiring an in-depth review of material that I already know through my international experience. Instead of spending that time developing engaging lessons and assessments, I am compelled to dedicate significant time and energy to preparing for exams that, while important, do not always reflect the practical skills and expertise I have developed through years of teaching and international experience.

Moreover, the logistical challenges of taking these exams—such as the need to travel to Oahu for testing—add unnecessary strain. This process is exhausting, both mentally and financially. As a dedicated teacher, I would much rather invest the time I spend on preparing for exams into my classroom, where I can actively contribute to the academic growth and success of my students. This bill will alleviate these obstacles and provide an opportunity for teachers like me to focus more on the classroom and less on the complexities of the licensing process.

The International Visiting Teacher License will offer a much-needed pathway for teachers with international qualifications and experience to continue their work without unnecessary delays. It would recognize the knowledge and skills we bring to the table—skills that are the result of years of professional development and hands-on teaching experience. Rather than being consumed by the requirements of expensive, time-consuming exams, we would be empowered to channel our energy into lesson planning and innovative teaching strategies that benefit the students we serve.

At Waimea Canyon Middle School, my goal as a Math teacher is not just to teach concepts but to help students develop a deep understanding and appreciation of mathematics. I encourage my students to approach problems with confidence, to collaborate with peers, and to approach challenges with resilience. The ability to focus on these aspects of teaching—rather than the administrative hurdles tied to licensure—would enable me to make an even greater impact on my students' lives.

I firmly believe that passing the International Visiting Teacher License bill will not only support international teachers in navigating the licensing process but will also benefit students across Hawaii. The education system will be strengthened by the continued contributions of educators who bring diverse perspectives, innovative teaching methods, and a passion for student success. This bill will honor our qualifications, enhance our ability to teach effectively, and ultimately create a better learning environment for all students in Hawaii.

I respectfully urge you to consider the positive impact this legislation will have on teachers, students, and the broader community. Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Rowella J. Angeles

Teacher/Waimea Canyon Middle School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 12:27:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JOMAR MAESTRE MENDEZABAL	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jomar Mendezabal, and I am a Special Education teacher at Samuel Enoka Kalama Intermediate School handling English Language Arts and Social Studies in an inclusive setting and resource class. I am writing this testimony to support the proposal of HB439 establishing an international Teacher License for certain visa holders in Hawaii.

As Hawai'i continues to embrace cultural diversity and address the growing demand for qualified educators, implementing an International Teacher License is essential. This initiative will provide schools access to a broader pool of skilled and experienced teachers.

Allowing qualified international educators to obtain a recognized teaching license will help Hawai'i effectively address teacher shortages, particularly in critical subject areas and underserved communities.

International teachers bring diverse experiences and teaching methodologies that enhance the learning environment for students. Exposure to various cultures and global perspectives fosters inclusivity and prepares students for success in an interconnected world.

Many schools in Hawai'i face challenges in filling teaching positions, especially in rural areas. Facilitating the licensure of qualified international teachers will assist the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) in helping schools meet staffing needs while maintaining educational excellence.

I respectfully advocate for the progression of HB 439, acknowledging the considerable positive influence that international teachers can have on students, educational institutions, and the wider educational community.

Sincerely,

Jomar Mendezabal
Samuel Enoka Kalama Intermediate School
808-758-4117
February 1, 2025

My name is Rizza Verina, and I am an 8th Grade Math and Algebra teacher at Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School (CKMS) in the Kaua'i District. This is my second-year teaching in the United States – my first year was in Florida, where J1 teachers were exempted from additional licensure exams. At CKMS, I am one of three 8th-grade math teachers, two of whom are J1 teachers. In total, there are nine J-1 teachers at our school. I am writing in strong support of HB439, which create an International Visiting Teacher License and help retain qualified international teachers in Hawaii.

Hawaii, like many states, faces teacher shortages, particularly in specialized subjects such as math and science. International teachers like me help fill this gap, bringing diverse perspectives and global teaching experiences into the classroom. Our teaching licenses have already been evaluated for equivalency, demonstrating that we meet the necessary standards to teach effectively. However, the requirement to take additional Praxis exams creates unnecessary barriers that limit our ability to focus entirely on student learning. The cost, availability, and time commitment of these exams place financial and emotional strain on teachers who are already adjusting to a new education system and culture.

Furthermore, our ability to stay for the full five years of our program is often contingent on meeting these licensure requirements. This uncertainty makes it difficult for international teachers to plan for long-term contributions to Hawaii's education system. Removing these barriers, as other states have done, would not only support international teachers but also ensure continuity and stability for students and schools.

I chose to teach in Hawaii because of its strong sense of community and the warmth of its people. The students here are eager to learn, and the support from colleagues, administrators, and families makes teaching here incredibly rewarding. I want to continue making a positive impact in my students' lives without the burden of unnecessary testing requirements.

HB is a step in the right direction to ensure that qualified international teachers can focus on teaching, mentoring, and contributing to the success of Hawaii's students. I respectfully urge to pass this bill to support both educators and students we serve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Rizza Verina
J1 Teacher
Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School

**Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM**

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lynette Fernandez, and I am a first-grade teacher at Naalehu Elementary School in Naalehu, Hawai'i (Big Island). I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, which proposes the creation of an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As an educator, my career has been centered around shaping young minds and ensuring my students receive a high-quality education. Since becoming part of the Naalehu Elementary School community, I have been dedicated to providing meaningful instruction, fostering a positive school environment, and supporting the academic and personal development of my students.

Despite my extensive experience and dedication, obtaining full license in Hawai'i has been a significant challenge due to the financial and logistical barriers posed by the Praxis exams. These exams are not only costly, but they are also difficult to access across the islands, often requiring travel to O'ahu, which adds even more financial strain. In addition, while we are able to take exams online, it's still challenging for people like me to take tests by simply looking at a screen. I prefer the experience of a traditional paper exam. These obstacles fail to recognize the years of training, expertise, and foreign credentials that international teachers like myself already bring. HB439 acknowledges our qualifications and provides a fair, accessible path to licensure.

Hawai'i is currently facing a teacher shortage, particularly in rural and under served areas. By creating an international teacher license, this bill will help address the shortage by recognizing the qualifications of talented, committed educators who are already contributing to the state's educational system. Passing this bill would demonstrate Hawai'i's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and the recognition of international talent, ensuring our students continue to receive a quality education.

I strongly encourage you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, equitable, and reasonable pathway to licensure.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lynette Fernandez
First Grade Teacher
Naalehu Elementary School

Big Island, Hawai'i

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 3:17:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LIZA V. CADANO	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Team.

Esteemed legislators, educators, coordinators and other people who can made this Bill HB 439 an act to creates an international visiting teacher license for teachers made possible. I am writing your good office in support of this bill.

I am Liza V. Cadano social studies teacher of Lokelani Intermediate School. I am holding a Philippines Licensure for teachers as per J1 Policy requirement. Aside from the license I also an advocate for continued education. I am an experienced teacher for seven years in my home country. While working I also make sure and send myself to school studying Masters of Arts in Education major in social sciences and currently working on completing my Masters of Arts in Education major in Special Education.

My first year as a social studies teacher in the school gave me an opportunity to help the students by providing differentiated instructions, giving individual support to students according to their needs and most importantly building connections by using Choose love courses and all the way applying it in the instructions both inside and outside the classroom.

I even reached out parents to further support my students. Our school utilizes PLC time efficiently and department meetings to support our success. I am so happy to hear that my colleagues who have been in the school would definitely agree that we made a positive impact in the school and community. Furthermore, I am also happy to hear remarks from my students that they learned a lot from me and the lesson.

Social studies needs in depth reading and cross analyzing information to make sure to deliver the best information to the students. I made my own lesson plans that cater individual needs to the students and also worksheets and projects. My study time for the subject content and the study time for the praxis exam hinders me to do alot of things for my students.

I hope this testimony could help the bill to push through.

Thank you.

Very respectfully yours,

LIZA V. CADANO

Social Studies Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School

Testimony in Support of HB 439

Honorable Members of the Legislature,

I strongly support HB 439, which will help international teachers like me receive proper licensing in Hawaii. As a **Filipino J-1 teacher** at **Wailuku Elementary School**, I have seen firsthand how my presence benefits students, especially my Filipino learners. Many of them feel a deep sense of connection when they have a teacher who understands their culture, language, and traditions. This representation boosts their confidence, engagement, and academic success.

However, the current licensing process creates unnecessary barriers for J-1 teachers. The **costly and time-consuming exams** take away valuable time and resources that could be better used in the classroom. Instead of focusing on teaching and supporting students, we are burdened with additional requirements that do not always reflect our skills and experience. Other states have streamlined their licensing processes for international teachers, and Hawaii should do the same to retain highly qualified educators.

By passing **HB 439**, Hawaii will recognize the **important role of international teachers** and ensure students continue to benefit from diverse and culturally responsive educators. This bill will help strengthen the education system, support teachers, and create a more inclusive learning environment for all students. I urge you to support **HB 439** for the future of Hawaii's schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

MANUEL JAYJAY D. ASUNCION III

Filipino J-1 Teacher

To the Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Vicdona Reyes, and I am a J-1 teacher and a 2nd-grade teacher in an inclusion class at Mauka Lani Elementary. I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Teaching in an inclusion classroom has allowed me to work closely with diverse learners, ensuring that every child, regardless of ability, receives the education, support, and encouragement they need to succeed. My experience in Hawaii has been deeply fulfilling, and my passion for teaching is fueled by my compassion as both an educator and a mother. I strive every day to create a nurturing environment where my students feel valued, capable, and inspired to learn.

However, the current licensing restrictions pose challenges for international teachers like myself, despite our qualifications, dedication, and the critical need for educators in Hawaii. Passing HB 439 would not only recognize the contributions of international teachers but also help address the ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in high-need areas like special education and inclusion classrooms. Stability in the classroom is crucial for student success, and allowing experienced international teachers to continue serving Hawaii's schools ensures that students receive consistent, high-quality instruction.

I have seen firsthand the positive impact that international teachers bring to Hawaii's education system, from enriching classroom diversity to fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. I urge you to support and pass HB 439 to ensure that passionate educators like myself can continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of Hawaii's keiki. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

VICDONA REYES

Grade 2, Inclusion Teacher
Mauka Lani Elementary
91-1300 Panana St.,
Kapolei Hi, 96707

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 3:33:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Debbie Manuel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HB 439
International Visiting Teacher License

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

My name is Debbie, and I am a proud member of the Lāna‘i community. I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which would create an International Visiting Teacher License. As someone who deeply values the well-being and education of our keiki, I have seen firsthand how international teachers have enriched our schools and community.

The international teachers who come to our island bring fresh perspectives, diverse cultural experiences, and a deep commitment to their students. Their passion for teaching goes beyond academics—they nurture curiosity, respect, and a broader worldview in our children. They help students develop not only strong foundational skills in reading, writing, and math but also a sense of global citizenship. Their presence strengthens our schools, making learning more engaging and meaningful.

HB 439 is crucial in ensuring that these dedicated educators can continue to serve in Hawai‘i for up to five years if licensed. Stability in the classroom is vital for student success, and retaining experienced teachers who have already built relationships with their students, parents, and fellow educators is essential.

This bill also promotes fairness by recognizing international teachers' credentials and expertise. These educators have undergone rigorous training and hold internationally recognized qualifications, yet they are still required to take expensive and often inaccessible Praxis exams to continue teaching. Many of these teachers work in rural communities like Lāna‘i, where resources and access to testing centers are limited. Removing this unnecessary burden will allow them to focus entirely on what matters most—educating and supporting our keiki.

Hawai‘i is already facing a severe teacher shortage, and losing these skilled educators due to bureaucratic red tape would be a great loss to our schools and community. By passing HB 439, we acknowledge the value these teachers bring and show our commitment to keeping high-quality educators in our classrooms.

As a community member, I see the impact these international teachers have every day—not just within the school, but in the broader community as well. They engage with families, participate in cultural events, and help shape the next generation of leaders. We should be doing everything we can to support and retain them.

I urge you to pass HB 439 and help ensure that our keiki continue to benefit from the knowledge, dedication, and cultural richness that international educators bring to our schools and communities.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Debbie Manuel
Community Member, Lānaʻi

February 01, 2025

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee,

I am writing this testimony to express my deep support for passing the HB439.

I am a new Filipino teacher here in Hawaii and have been teaching for seven years in the Philippines. I obtained my out-of-country teaching license way back in 2017 and have practiced my skills in multiple grade levels. This, somehow, made me confident to take a leap of opportunity to be part of Hawaii's public schools. Little did I know that I still needed to exert time, financial resources, and effort to pass all three or five PRAXIS examinations to establish my professional qualification in the state.

Zooming out, HB439 offers a practical solution by streamlining the process for qualified international teachers to join Hawaii educators' ranks. Currently, the barriers for international educators are significant. Beyond the already rigorous requirements for licensure, the costs associated with fulfilling certain requirements, like the PRAXIS exams, are substantial and can be a major deterrent. These exams, while valuable, represent a significant financial burden, especially for teachers coming from the Philippines. HB439 offers a pathway that acknowledges the qualifications and experiences that teachers like us bring while ensuring we meet our state's high standards.

Here in my school in Kahului, we are working hard to create a positive impact. We are dedicated to our keiki and committed to providing them with the best possible learning environment. We are doing our best to enrich our schools with diverse perspectives and experiences that directly benefit all our students. These diverse perspectives broaden our students' understanding of the world and create a more inclusive and culturally rich learning environment.

This bill is a good-sense measure that will enhance the quality of education for all of Hawaii's students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rick Jasper A. Carvajal
Middle school science teacher

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 3:45:14 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Joy Fernandez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am Elizabeth Joy Fernandez, an 8th-grade SPED teacher at Kalama Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

I hold a professional teaching license in the Philippines and hope that our credentials will be reciprocated, allowing us to obtain a Hawai'i teaching license without the need to take the Praxis test.

Serving the Department of Education for five years would be mutually beneficial. I would be able to continue my service, having fully adapted to the norms and school culture, while the department would retain experienced educators without the need to train new teachers to fill our positions.

If passed, this bill would grant international teachers a full teaching license, eliminating unnecessary testing requirements. It would also extend our stay for five years, giving us more time to demonstrate our passion and dedication to teaching Hawai'i's keiki.

I urge you to support this bill and provide international teachers like myself with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Joy Fernandez
8th Grade SPED Teacher, Kalama Intermediate School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 4:04:35 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sandy Ma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in support of HB439, requiring the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders and establishing criteria for obtaining an international teacher license. Hawai‘i has a severe teacher shortage, which was helped by teachers from the Philippines! <https://www.civilbeat.org/2024/08/hawaiis-teacher-shortage-is-finally-improving-will-it-last/> (retrieved Feb. 1, 2025).

HB439 will provide an avenue for more qualified international teachers to come to Hawai‘i to help alleviate the teacher shortage and ensure that Hawai‘i students are properly, fully educated.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB439 and I urge you to pass HB439 out of your Committee.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 4:07:16 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
June Kenneth G. Roska	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License Hearing Date: February 4, 2025 at 2:00PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is June Kenneth G. Roska and I am writing in a strong support of HB 439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is essential for us teachers like me, who have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines but face additional barriers, such as Praxis test, to continue serving students in the Hawai'i Department of Education.

As an international teachers, we possesses a strong academic background, having earned degrees and masters in education back in the Philippines and the ability to deliver complex content in an engaging, clear, and accessible manner has earned us the respect of students, parents, and colleagues alike. Because of the preparation for different praxis exams it creates a anxiety for us teachers and stress which takes our precious time away for planning our lessons and student engagement. It only adds a financial and emotional strain for us.

In addition, our limited time with our Visas is uncertain, we can only render our service for 3 years and it can only be extended to 5 years when we pass the praxis and have our license despite the challenge of the entire process of obtaining the said matter. Also, we are worried since we only have an emergency hire permit everything for us are temporary.

I am supporting this bill for all the teachers in a clear and fair treatment of the entire system for passing an International License.

Respectfully Yours:

June Kenneth G. Roska

Mathematics Teacher

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 4:53:42 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennelyn Soriano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Members of the Committee,

My name is Jennelyn Tampoc Soriano and I am writing in strong support of HB 439, that aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License.

As a educator, I have 11 years of experience, I dedicated my career in shaping the young minds and ensuring that my students receive high-quality education. I work at King Kamehameha III Elementary School located at 100 Akahahele st. Lahaina Hawaii and I live in Kahului, so I travel everyday almost two hours by riding a bus back and forth, just to make sure that my students learn something from me because education for me is very important. We all known that Lahaina community was truly affected by the devastating fire. So, I am here to support and teach them as much I can. I have worked tirelessly to provide engaging and effective instruction, contribute to the school community and support my students in their academic and personal growth.

Despite the challenges that come being a fully self-contained teacher. I remain dedicated and passionate about my profession. I love the perlople of Hawaii, the culture and the community. I feel like I'm home even if it is far from the Philippines and from my own family. I choose to be here to teach and mold the minds of younger kids.

Thank you so much and I am still hoping to your kind consideration regarding this matter.

Respectfully yours,

Jennelyn Soriano

J1 teacher

HB439 Testimony

Dear Members of the Committee,

I'm Emy Lacson, an international teacher from the Philippines. I teach mathematics to ninth graders at Kauai High School. I'm writing this testimony to firmly support HB439, which aims to grant qualified visa holders an international teaching license.

I have made it my mission, as a teacher to provide high-quality education to learners and support their holistic development. I also strive to give back to the community through volunteering in different activities and sharing my time and expertise. After several months of teaching here in Kauai, I have developed a deep love and connection with the students, the people, and the community. This motivated me to go on and provide the best version of myself as a teacher and as an individual not just for a year but for the whole duration of my program.

But in order to do so, one additional requirement from us international teachers here in Hawaii is to pass sets of Praxis exams. These exams incur certain costs and challenges. Praxis testing centers are not readily available on the island of Kauai and often require us to travel to O'ahu, which further increases costs. These obstacles do not reflect the expertise, years of training, and foreign credentials that international teachers like me have already earned. This bill recognizes the education, qualifications, and expertise we bring from our home nations and offers a fair and reasonable method for us to continue making a meaningful contribution in Hawai'i's schools.

The creation of an international teacher license will acknowledge the credentials of committed, accomplished teachers who are already making contributions to the state's educational system, so assisting in addressing this deficit. To ensure that our keiki continue to receive the greatest education possible, Hawai'i will be celebrating diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent by passing this law. I urge you to support this bill and give international teachers like me an equitable, transparent, and easily accessible route to certification.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Emy Lacson
Mathematics Teacher
Kauai High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 6:00:18 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
DARNEL Q. COLOMA	Hawaii-Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony In Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher Licensure

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 pm

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Darnel Coloma, and I am originally from the Philippines. I am honored to share my support for HB 439, which addresses the important issue of licensure for international visiting teachers. As an educator who has had the privilege of teaching in the United States, I've seen firsthand the invaluable impact that diverse teaching perspectives can have on students. I am passionate about the role that international teachers play in enriching the educational experience for students here in America, and I strongly believe that HB 439 will help further this important work.

Teaching math, a subject that can often be challenging for students, requires not only a strong knowledge of the content but also the ability to adapt to various learning styles. Through the trainings provided by the DOE and individualized support, I've been able to make complex concepts more accessible to my students. I've seen students who once struggled with math develop a genuine interest and even excel in the subject. Beyond test scores, it's been incredibly rewarding to witness my students gain critical thinking skills, improve their problem-solving abilities, and recognize the real-world applications of math in their daily lives.

However, as someone who has transitioned from teaching in the Philippines to teaching in the U.S., I understand the challenges international teachers face when navigating the licensure process. For many of us, one of the most difficult and expensive hurdles is the requirement to take the Praxis exam, which can be a significant financial burden. The costs associated with preparing for and taking the exam, including registration fees, study materials, and travel expenses, can be prohibitively high, especially for teachers like me. These costs are a serious barrier that limits access to the profession for many qualified and passionate educators from abroad. Allowing international teachers to easily transition into the U.S. education system, this bill will help bridge gaps in teacher shortages, foster cultural exchange, and bring new perspectives to classrooms across the nation.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support the approval of HB 439. This legislation will make a meaningful difference in ensuring that all students have access to high-quality, diverse teaching experiences, particularly in essential subjects like math.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

DARNEL COLOMA

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 6:30:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
CHRISTOPHER M KANYI	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Committee: [Insert Committee Name]

Submitted by: Christopher Kanyi, 6th Grade Special Education Teacher, Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christopher Kanyi, and I am a 6th-grade Special Education teacher at Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School. I submit this testimony in strong support of HB 439, a bill that proposes to establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

I am currently employed as a J-1 exchange visitor teacher, serving the students of Hawai‘i with my experience and dedication to education. I hold a professional teaching license from Kenya and an initial teaching license from the State of Hawai‘i. Upon applying for licensure reciprocity in Hawai‘i, I was granted a reduction in the number of required PRAXIS examinations. Despite possessing demonstrable qualifications and experience, I am precluded from obtaining a full Hawai‘i teaching license without further testing.

This requirement imposes a significant financial hardship. My current compensation, initially as an emergency hire teacher and now as a provisionally licensed teacher, is less than that of fully licensed teachers. Coupled with the high cost of living in Hawai‘i, particularly housing expenses, and the responsibility of supporting four children, this disparity in compensation creates a substantial and ongoing financial strain.

HB 439 offers a crucial remedy to this situation. Specifically, this bill would:

1. Grant qualified international teachers a full teaching license, thereby eliminating the current requirement for redundant and financially burdensome examinations.
2. Ensure that international teachers receive the same salary and applicable differentials as fully licensed teachers, enabling them to adequately support their families and contribute to the local economy.

3. Extend the permissible duration of stay for international teachers to five years, fostering continuity in education for our students and allowing teachers to become fully integrated members of their schools and communities.

The State of Hawai'i faces a critical shortage of qualified teachers. International teachers are presently serving in our classrooms, addressing this urgent need. We are dedicated, passionate, and committed to the success of Hawai'i's keiki. However, the current licensing structure creates unnecessary barriers that impede our ability to fully contribute.

I respectfully urge the Committee to favorably consider and pass HB 439. This legislation will allow international teachers to continue serving Hawai'i's students without encountering unnecessary obstacles, ultimately benefiting the educational system and the keiki of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Kanyi 6th Grade Special Education Teacher Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 6:49:49 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carlby Lou U. Singson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

e-Testimony in Support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025 @ 2:00 PM

Aloha to all the Members of the Committee,

My name is Carlby Lou Singson, a licensed professional teacher in the Philippines with over 8 years of teaching experience in a secondary public school and now teaching in a public high school in Oau, Hawaii through the BridgeUSA J-1 Visa Program or the Teacher Cultural Exchange Program. I am writing in strong support to the International Visiting Teacher License to promote cultural and educational exchange between the State and other countries like the Philippines.

I believe that the knowledge and skills I acquire from my professional teaching experiences and the professional teacher license from the Philippines are more than enough to qualify me as a public secondary teacher in Hawaii. And I don't need to get another teaching license in Hawaii but shall be given an equivalent international teaching license after having fulfilled the requirements for conversion of the license. Our stay in Hawaii is just 3-5 years which is not enough to compensate us in our service and dedication in addressing the teacher shortage in Hawaii. As we all know the first year or year and a half are for us to pay all our debts in the Philippines that we used in coming to Hawaii. The remaining years is for saving a little. If we would be spending almost \$500 for the license that would be a very huge loss for us. So, it would be of great help for the many sacrificing Filipino teacher like me to save money from not taking anymore the Praxis Test or any Hawaii Teaching License and just convert our Philippine Teacher License into an International Visiting Teacher License. It will be a win-win situation for both parties.

Also, it is known to many that Filipino teachers excel in any field of expertise. And that they are very dedicated and passionate in teaching diverse students. Their patience and utmost understanding to children help them give the quality of education the learners deserved. I definitely support the passing of HB439 to acknowledge the internationally recognized foreign credentials as highly qualified and experienced educators so that we can focus on supporting the school, students and community as a whole.

Mahalo nui,

Carlbhy Lou Singson
Secondary Mathematics Teacher
Roosevelt High School
1120 Nehoa St. Honolulu, HI 96822

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 6:51:09 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennelyn Cornelio	J-1 Teachers	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

February 2, 2025

Honorable members of the committee, I am Jennelyn G. Cornelio, a High School teacher at HP Baldwin in Maui, Hawai‘i, representing international teachers, and I am here today to express my **strong support for exempting J-1 visa teachers from state-mandated standardized testing (Praxis) requirements to continue serving the students in Hawai‘i Department of Education for 5 consecutive years.** Before being a qualified international teacher, we have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines and did an equivalent evaluation of our Transcript of Records (TOR) to identify if we are qualified to teach in the United States of America.

I would say that the state of Hawai‘i benefits immensely from the presence of J-1 teachers in our classrooms. We bring diverse cultural perspectives, enrich our students' understanding of the world, and often fill critical teaching shortages, particularly in STEM fields, foreign languages, and special education. We, as dedicated educators, invest our time, energy, and passion in shaping the minds of our future generations.

However, requiring us, J-1 teachers, to undergo state standardized testing within our initial years of service places an unnecessary burden on and, ultimately, on our schools and students. The following are the key factors that contribute to this:

1. **Cultural and linguistic differences:** Many of us are J-1 teachers coming from different educational backgrounds, with different pedagogical approaches. While we do possess strong English proficiency to qualify for the program, nuances in standardized testing often focused on specific state curriculum frameworks can be hard to navigate in our initial years. Not to mention the added pressures brought on by adjusting to a new culture, a different school system, and often an unfamiliar language environment.
2. **Center Everything on Classroom Instructions:** As a J-1 teacher, I want to give my very best of my ability, concentrate on instructing and building relationships with students in a personal relationship. Those time consumed in preparing for and administering standardized tests could better be used in focusing on our core duties in

planning classroom lessons and helping the students-and even professional development that benefits our student populations.

3. **Recruitment and Retention Issues:** This will create a strong deterrent for qualified international teachers to teach in the state of Hawai‘i. It adds another layer of complexity and cost to an already hard and costly process, thus making it even more difficult for the schools to recruit and retain valuable, experienced, and most importantly, adjusted teachers. This further exasperates the shortages that already exist in the teaching profession and limits the possibilities for our students to learn from diverse perspectives.
4. **The Program Alignment:** Standardized testing that is focused on specific state curricular standards also does not fit the broader goal of the program, which focuses on cultural exchange and enhanced mutual understanding. By requiring it, an unnecessary barrier is being established that ultimately has a negative effect on the J-1 Visa Program.
5. **Five-Year Exemption as a Reasonable Timeframe:** A five-year exemption would provide us, J-1 teachers, with sufficient time to get acquainted with the state's curriculum framework, to adjust our teaching methods, and to settle into the school community. We can have our energies concentrated on what is most important - teaching our children. After this period of time, we would be expected to take the testing like everyone else.

This exemption will indeed not affect the educational quality in Hawai‘i State. We, J-1 visa holders, in this country are thoroughly screened during the visa processing for English competency and qualifications that make us good fits for hiring in different teaching areas. We, J-1 visa holders, are similarly obligated for evaluation through regular activities set by school and district authority for accountability to standards.

Quite frankly, exempting J-1 teachers from state testing for the first five years of service in Hawai‘i sends a clear message that you value our contributions, are supportive of our professional growth, and believe that we should focus on what is important: educating our students. I urge the committee to view this proposal favorably.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 7:13:03 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann Mabel R. Allegado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

e-Testimony in Support of HB 439- Internaional Visiting Teacher License Hearing Date: February 4, 2025 @2:00 PM

Dear Members of the Committe,

Aloha!

This is Ann Mabel R. Allegado, a J1 visa holder teacher participating the Bridge USA Cultural Exchange Program. I am writing my testimony to express my strong support of the bill HB 439 otherwise known as the Internation Visiting Teacher License.

I am participating this program to widen my experience as a teacher both in personal and professional growth, learn the unique culture of USA specifically here in Hawaii and not only to share my culture from my homeland but also use my teaching experience back home for 13 years for the students here in Hawaii. I have been thought that I will focus my main role here which is to teach effectively and promote high performance of the students' progress but not realizing that I have to face a burden of such focus because I need to take the praxis test. It gives me a challenge both financially and time constraints just to take the test.

The fact that we have to pass the test to extend our stay here up to five years, it already creates a stress for us teachers here who participates the said program. I am already licensed teacher back home and have been teaching for so many years, I think that is more than enough that our license will be recognized internationally. In addition, the different professional developments that I have attended back home and here at school where I am currently teaching, already strengthens my capability to teach here in the US and to focus providing a postive impact to my students. I believe that I have extended my work fully and deserves an equal pay as well.

For just a few months stay here in Hawaii, I love my job even more and I have already love all my students by creating strong relationship with them. I learned a lot of the culture here and have been sharing my cultures too. I would like to extend my stay here and continue being an inspiration to my students.

Thank you for hearing our voices and hoping to have a positive result of the bill.

Sincerely,

Ann Mabel R. Allegado

Here is a written testimony in support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License bill as Ma. Arriesa B. Tejano, 5th Grade Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School:

Testimony in Support of HB 439: International Visiting Teacher License Bill

To the Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I, Ma. Arriesa B. Tejano, 5th Grade Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School, am writing to express my wholehearted support for HB 439, the International Visiting Teacher License bill. As an educator in Hawaii, I have seen firsthand the benefits that international visiting teachers bring to our classrooms and our students.

The current requirements for international visiting teachers to obtain a teaching license in Hawaii can be a significant barrier to entry, resulting in unnecessary exams and paperwork that can be daunting. HB 439 seeks to eliminate these unnecessary hurdles, allowing international visiting teachers like myself to focus on what matters most: providing high-quality education to our students.

By granting international visiting teachers a full teaching license, we can ensure that our students receive consistent and high-quality instruction from experienced educators who are passionate about teaching. This is especially important for our students who may not have the same access to educational resources or opportunities as their peers in other parts of the world.

Furthermore, extending the stay of international visiting teachers for 5 years will provide our students with the consistency and stability they need to thrive academically. It will also allow us to build stronger relationships with our students and their families, leading to better academic outcomes and a more positive school culture.

I urge you to pass HB 439, which will not only benefit international visiting teachers but also our students, schools, and communities. By supporting this bill, we can attract and retain top-notch educators from around the world, providing our students with the best possible education and setting them up for success in an increasingly globalized world.

Mahalo for considering my testimony. I look forward to working with you to make HB 439 a reality.

Sincerely,

Ma. Arriesa B. Tejano
5th Grade Teacher
Kahakai Elementary School
Kailua-Kona, Big Island, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 7:55:29 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Adrian Ardiente	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am Adrian Ardiente, a J-1 teacher holding a Hawaii teaching license for Grades 6–12. I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of HB 439, a bill that seeks to establish an international visiting teacher license.

In 2021, I was granted the opportunity to teach at Waimea Canyon Middle School, where I continue to serve today. I was among the first international teachers given the privilege to work in Hawaii public schools and was the sole J-1 educator in the Kauai district from 2021 to 2023. Being an international teacher comes with unique challenges—being far from home and family, adjusting to a new education system, and navigating cultural differences. However, I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support from my school administrators and colleagues, who have guided me throughout my transition and continue to equip me with the necessary tools for success in my classroom.

The Department of Education (DOE) Kauai District has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to ensuring that J-1 teachers are well-supported. Through various professional development initiatives at both the school and district levels, I have gained invaluable training in classroom management, teaching strategies, and understanding the Hawaii public school system. This school year, a specialized, ongoing professional development program tailored specifically for J-1 Filipino teachers has been implemented, further strengthening our capacity to contribute effectively to our students' education.

Through the J-1 program, I have had the privilege not only to teach but also to share and learn new cultural perspectives within my school and the broader community. I take great pride in serving students of Filipino heritage, as Filipinos represent one of the largest ethnic groups in Hawaii. Beyond the classroom, I actively engage in school and community initiatives. I am a member of the Waimea Canyon Middle School Community Council (SCC), an integral leadership body that collaborates with administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members to enhance student achievement. Additionally, I serve as a board member of the Kauai Visayan Club Organization, a distinguished nonprofit dedicated to preserving and promoting Visayan cultural heritage through educational programs and cultural exchanges.

On October 26, 2024, I had the honor of chairing the International Costume Ball, themed "Investing in Tomorrow's Leaders." This fundraising event supported Kumu's Cupboard, a

nonprofit organization in Kauai that provides free school supplies to students and teachers. Through such initiatives, I have been able to give back to the community that has warmly welcomed me.

The passage of HB 439 would be a transformative milestone for my fellow J-1 educators. This bill would not only extend their stay for up to five years but also provide them with the same invaluable opportunities I have experienced. By alleviating the burden of passing the Praxis exam, international teachers could focus entirely on delivering meaningful and impactful learning experiences for their students.

I am just one of many J-1 teachers striving to make a difference in Hawaii's public schools—one lesson, one student, and one day at a time. My journey in Hawaii, both within the classroom and in the community, has been deeply enriching, fostering my personal and professional growth. As cliché as it may sound, Kauai has truly become my home away from home.

Mahalo for your time and consideration. I sincerely hope for your support in passing HB 439, which will empower more international educators to contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's schools and communities.

With gratitude,

Adrian Ardiente

My name is **Roxanne M. Tano**, and I am an 8th Grade Science Teacher at **Waimea Canyon Middle School** in Kauai, Hawaii. I have been teaching for **13 years** in the Philippines, where I gained extensive experience in science education. In my current role, I teach using the Open SciEd Curriculum, which fosters hands-on scientific inquiry and critical thinking. I am proud to be part of a school where collaboration between students, colleagues, administration, and parents creates a supportive environment for student success.

I hold a Professional License from the Philippines, and my credentials have been evaluated through foreign transcripts. With my experience and passion for teaching, I am committed to making a meaningful impact on my students here in Hawaii. Beyond teaching, I also have a sincere interest in participating in Hawaii's cultural exchange programs, sharing my Filipino heritage, and learning from the unique culture of the islands. I believe that education goes beyond the classroom, and building cross-cultural understanding will enrich both my personal growth and the students I teach.

Hawaii is currently facing a teacher shortage, and **HB439** offers a solution by establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders. This would enable teachers like me to contribute more effectively and help fill critical teaching positions in schools across the state.

However, to continue teaching here, I need to pass the Praxis exam. This is a costly exam, and living on Kauai requires me to travel to Oahu, adding further financial strain. Despite these challenges, I am determined to obtain my license and continue supporting my students and school community.

I strongly support **HB439**, as it would not only help teachers like myself but also contribute to addressing Hawaii's teacher shortage. I am deeply committed to the success of my students and eager to continue growing as both an educator and a cultural ambassador. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Roxanne M. Tano

8th Grade Science Teacher

Waimea Canyon Middle School, Kauai, Hawaii

To the Honorable Members of the Legislative Body-Hawaii

I am Ely Boy B. Antofina, currently a part of the Cultural Teaching Exchange Program of the United States of America. I have personally witnessed the shortage and demand of educators of many of the schools in the United States specifically here in Hawaii, and I believe coming here to teach and serve the State's educational sector is a huge addition to the teaching force whose main goal is shaping the future of the young generation. Hence, I am writing this, to ask favorable support from this respected body to support HB 439 "International Visiting License" that would enable our Philippine Teaching License equivalent to the Hawaii State Standard Teaching License.

As an educator, I committed myself into helping students' reach their full self, by providing varied learning experiences that caters their individual differences, engaging them in a learning environment where everyone is given the equal opportunity to showcase their skill while guiding them to acquire knowledge and skills applicable in the real world. I also make sure that kids are provided with the needed learning supports through the integration of different multi-media to teaching and implementing innovative teaching strategies where student thinking skills are challenged helping them become a critical thinker and problem solver person.

Moreover, I also selflessly engage and work with my colleagues, stakeholders and parents on programs that would improve the academic performance of the students' and on related activities that will help them grow and develop into a person that can be a contributing asset to the community where they live and to their country at large. I know that far beyond the lessons that I taught are many lives that I touched and changed, perspectives that were redirected. My sincere care for my kids nurtured them to believe what they are capable of and the difference that they can make.

We respect, that each state and or country has standard that they hold to maintain excellence; Yes, we are trying to meet this standard, however taking Praxis to acquire a full license here seems a very big challenge due to several constraints financial to mention one. This also gives us additional load instead of focusing most of our time figuring out best strategies that would help our students. It is divided into thinking of approaches to past the test.

And with HB 439 being passed and approved, we believe that we can be best exert our effort in providing the best and quality education to the amazing and talented kids of Hawaii. We know that the technical know-how, teaching experiences, rigorous education, and the teaching license that we have with us from our country can be of equivalent qualification for us to be considered as Highly Qualified Educator. Approving our "International Visiting License" will lessen the load that we are carrying every day, hence assuring that we are doing our best in teaching and shaping the future of the Hawaii's future generation.

Anticipates, positive action for the passage and approval of HB 439 "International Visiting License"

Thank you Very Much!

Long Live Hawaii!

Ely Boy B. Antofina
Math Teacher and Class of 2028 CO-Adviser
Aiea High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 8:23:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherrie Lou Mendoza	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to wholeheartedly support House Bill 439, which proposes the International Visiting Teacher License. As a second-grade teacher at Kahului Elementary School, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges of staffing shortages in our schools.

Having previously taught in Florida, I have seen the benefits of providing international teachers with the same benefits as certified and tenured teachers. This not only helps to attract and retain top talent but also enriches our schools with diverse perspectives and experiences.

However, I strongly believe that requiring international teachers like myself to take the Praxis exam creates an undue burden. Preparing for the exam takes away valuable time that I could be using to prepare engaging lessons for my students. Furthermore, the cost of taking the exam is prohibitively expensive.

As international teachers, our visas are only valid for 3 to 5 years. This creates uncertainty and stress, making it difficult for us to plan for our future. Despite this, I have fallen in love with Hawai'i and its people. I want to continue serving this beautiful state and its students for as long as I am needed.

By supporting HB 439, you can help international teachers like myself make a long-term commitment to Hawai'i's schools. You can provide us with the recognition and support we deserve, and help address the staffing shortages that plague our schools.

I urge you to consider the benefits that international teachers can bring to our schools and communities. By supporting HB 439, you can help promote diversity and inclusion, and provide international teachers with a clearer path to continuing our important work in Hawai'i's schools.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cherrie Lou Mendoza
Second-Grade Teacher, Kahului Elementary School

Testimony in Support of HB 439 International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 pm

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee;

My name is Aloha Mae E. Tamulac, and I wholeheartedly support HB 439, the International Visiting Teacher License bill. This legislation is crucial for teachers like myself, who are already licensed in the Philippines but face obstacles like the Praxis exam, preventing us from continuing to teach in Hawaii. I taught for 12 years in the Philippines, graduated with my master's in teaching in 2022, and have had my transcript of record evaluated by SpanTran, confirming my qualifications to teach here in Hawaii.

International teachers are dedicated to providing their students with a top-notch education and preparing them for the future. As one such teacher, I am passionate about sharing my expertise with young minds. I hope to stay for five years, immersing myself in the culture and learning diverse teaching strategies that will enhance my professional skills. This will be possible if this bill passes. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that Hawaii has one of the highest costs of living in the United States. To ensure we can cope with these significant expenses, it is essential that we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, enabling us to support our families.

We believe that eliminating a burden like the Praxis test, which requires both time and money, will allow us to focus more on ensuring that our daily teaching is fruitful and meaningful for our students. We are dedicated, committed, and qualified, with exceptional experience both in our home country and here in Hawaii, where we give our best to Hawaii's keiki.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439 to help us, International Teachers, continue serving Hawaii's keiki and the community.

Aloha Mae E. Tamulac
Pre-K Teacher
Naalehu Elementary School

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Submitted by: Joana Marie G. Anonuevo

7th Grade Science Teacher, Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School, Kauai

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joana Marie G. Anonuevo, and I am a 7th-grade Science teacher at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School on the beautiful island of Kauai. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, the bill that proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License, which would honor the experience and qualifications of teachers like myself who have earned teaching credentials in our home countries.

As a J1 teacher from abroad, I've had the privilege of teaching for nine years, and I am confident that my experience, skill set, and dedication to my students are what truly define my ability to provide quality education. However, I am also faced with significant challenges as I strive to meet the licensing requirements here in Hawaii, most notably the Praxis exams.

The cost of the Praxis exams is an ongoing burden. With fees totaling hundreds of dollars per exam, it places a financial strain on teachers like me who are already adjusting to a new culture and working hard to provide our students with the best education possible. Furthermore, access to these exams is not readily available. In some cases, I have to travel all the way to Oahu to take the exams, which not only involves additional costs but also time away from my classroom and students. These logistical and financial challenges make it even harder to focus on what truly matters: teaching and supporting my students.

In my nine years of experience, I have continually refined my craft, and I am certain that the knowledge and skills I bring to my classroom make me more than equipped to provide my students in Kauai with the high-quality education they deserve. I am fully committed to my students' growth and success, ensuring that they meet the necessary standards before advancing to the next grade level.

In addition to my teaching, I have also been fortunate to contribute to our community here in Kauai. I had the opportunity to perform with other J1 teachers at the Visayan Club Organization's fundraising event, which helped raise funds for Kumu's Cupboard, a nonprofit organization that provides free supplies to both students and teachers. This is just one example of how, as international educators, we bring more than our teaching expertise to the table—we bring our passion for community involvement and our commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of those we teach and work with.

I absolutely love teaching here in Hawaii. The connection I have with my students, the joy I feel when they grasp complex concepts, and the relationships I've built within the school and community are incredibly rewarding. The professional development opportunities we receive through monthly seminars and PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) have been

invaluable, and I am continuously growing as an educator. These opportunities help me improve my practice, but they also make me feel supported and valued as a teacher.

It is my belief that HB 439 will be an important step forward in allowing teachers like me to focus on what we do best—teaching. The requirements to pass the Praxis exams should not be an obstacle that prevents us from continuing our work, especially when we have already demonstrated a high level of competence and professionalism in our home countries. The International Visiting Teacher License will acknowledge the strengths we bring to our schools and communities, and will allow us to focus on our students and on our ongoing growth as educators, rather than spending excessive time and money on exams that do not truly reflect our abilities or our dedication.

I wholeheartedly support HB 439 and urge you to consider the positive impact this bill will have on both teachers and students across Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joana Marie G. Anonuevo

7th Grade Science Teacher, Chiefess Kamakahahelei Middle School, Kauai

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:00:10 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JERIC SABADO GALDICAN	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Jeric S. Galdican, a science teacher at Henry Perrine Baldwin High School.

I'm here today to testify in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders. J1 teachers like me are incredibly passionate about teaching the children of Hawai'i, bringing diverse perspectives and a deep commitment to enriching their educational experience. However, the current licensing requirements, specifically the Praxis exam, create significant obstacles, hindering our contributions and exacerbating the teacher shortage. I believe HB439 offers a vital solution, and here are six key reasons why:

1. The Praxis exam is prohibitively expensive: As J1 visa holders, we face financial constraints. The Praxis, study materials, and retake fees create a substantial burden, stretching limited resources and discouraging qualified international teachers.
2. The Praxis exam negatively impacts teacher mental health: The pressure to pass adds stress to demanding jobs. Studying while managing a classroom is overwhelming, and the fear of failure takes a toll on our well-being.
3. The Praxis exam contributes to Hawai'i's teacher shortage: Hawai'i already faces a critical shortage. Requiring the Praxis limits the pool of available educators, forcing some J1 teachers to leave and depriving children of dedicated professionals.
4. Licensure without the Praxis exam would lead to better compensation: Licensure qualifies us for higher salaries. The high cost of living makes it difficult for J1 teachers to make ends meet, and increased compensation would ease burdens.
5. Licensure without the Praxis exam would provide job security: J1 teachers face uncertainty about future employment. An international license would offer security, allowing us to invest long-term in our schools and communities.
6. The Praxis requirement forces us to consider leaving Hawai'i: We love Hawai'i, but the Praxis pushes us to consider other states. Other states offer easier licensure pathways, allowing us to stay longer and contribute to their schools.

These challenges posed by the Praxis exam not only affect individual teachers but also have a direct impact on the quality of education our children receive. HB439 offers a pathway to

address these issues, allowing Hawai'i to tap into a valuable pool of qualified educators eager to contribute their skills and passion. By supporting this bill, you are not only supporting international teachers; you are investing in the future of our children. I urge you to vote in favor of HB439 and help ensure that every child has access to a dedicated and qualified teacher. Mahalo.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:06:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Analyn Yonzon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To all the esteemed members of the Committe who are the voice of equality and equity and to whom the Bill HB 439 be heard.

As an advocate of change and strong cultural support. I Analyn B. Yonzon currently assigned as J1 teacher in one of the hard to fill areas of the Leeward district of Hawaii Department of Education specifically at Waianae Intermediate School profoundly express my plea to all of you esteemed members to pass and support and finalized the bill as affirmative and be favored to us Filipino teachers.

Being part of this cultural program extending my love and passion to teaching to all of these middle schoolers have paved my deep connection and support to the Aloha spirit put into action from the start of my stay up to present.

The complex have had strongly supported us J1 teachers by immersing us into the culture of the community in all forms of programs and exposures from the start and up until now; I am truly welcomed and appreciative of the Ohana spirit from the complex to the admin down to all the staff of WIS is really alive through their efforts and in all so many ways.

As a teacher in the Philippines for more than 2 decades, It has been a challenging endeavour for me to take another stress and focus for the PRAXIS exams which would take a lot of time from me preparing for the quality lesson planning and classroom engagement which for me is the most important thing to which all of my efforts should be directed into. It is my passion and commitment to bring out the best in every student I have been handling; impacting change and empowering them as productive members of the society.

I strongly believe that our experience, educational qualifications and other related trainings we have had manifest how qualified we are and be considered qualified to benefit this HB 439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License.

May this be heard and favored.

All the best,

Mrs. Analyn B. Yonzon (WIS SS G7 teacher)

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:13:04 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maria Joy Menesses	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am Maria Joy Menesses, a 5th-grade teacher at Princess Nahienaena Elementary School and an international visiting teacher from the Philippines. I am writing to advocate for the recognition of our Philippine teaching licenses and credentials as equivalent qualifications for licensure in Hawaii, eliminating the need for us to take the Praxis exam.

Filipino teachers who come to Hawaii have already met rigorous standards for teaching in our home country. We hold professional teaching licenses from the Philippine Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), which requires us to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET)—a comprehensive test that assesses subject mastery, pedagogy, and educational competence. This examination ensures that we are fully prepared and qualified to teach.

Requiring internationally licensed teachers to take the Praxis exam creates unnecessary redundancy and financial burdens. Many of us arrive in Hawaii already possessing years of teaching experience, strong pedagogical skills, and a deep commitment to education. The additional requirement of Praxis does not necessarily reflect our ability to teach effectively in a real classroom setting, as our professional credentials and teaching experience already demonstrate our qualifications.

Furthermore, waiving the Praxis requirement for Filipino teachers would help address Hawaii's ongoing teacher shortage by streamlining the process for experienced international educators to contribute to the local education system without unnecessary delays. By recognizing our existing credentials, the state can ensure that schools have access to well-qualified, passionate educators who are ready to serve students immediately.

I respectfully urge the committee to consider policies that acknowledge the qualifications of internationally licensed teachers, particularly those from the Philippines, and allow us to obtain Hawaii teaching licenses without requiring Praxis exams. This policy change would benefit not only international teachers but also Hawaii's schools and students by ensuring a steady and qualified workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to improving education in Hawaii and would be happy to provide further information if needed.

Mahalo,

Maria Joy Menesses

5th Grade Teacher

Princess Nahienaena Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:16:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jerome Menesses	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jerome Menesses, and I am a middle school Science Teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, a bill that would create an International Visiting Teacher License.

Both my wife, Maria Joy Menesses and I are J-1 teachers here in Hawaii, bringing years of teaching experience and a passion for education. We both hold professional teaching licenses from the Philippines, and I also have out-of-state licenses from New Zealand. I applied for reciprocity in Hawaii, hoping my credentials would be fully recognized, but I was only granted a reduction in the number of PRAXIS exams required. Despite having proven my qualifications, I still cannot obtain a full Hawaii teaching license without taking more exams. I know that this is part of HTSB rules to hire globally competitive teachers but I also heard that some of the out of state license are just being converted to Hawaii Teaching License and not taking PRAXIS Exams. I feel being discriminated by this rules.

This has placed a heavy financial burden on our family. Even though we both work as full-time teachers, the high cost of living in Hawaii makes it difficult to make ends meet. As emergency hire teachers, we earn less than fully licensed teachers, and with housing costs taking up a large portion of our income, supporting our two sons has been an ongoing challenge.

HB 439 would make a huge difference. If passed, this bill would:

- Grant international teachers a full teaching license, eliminating the need for additional exams.
- Ensure we receive the same salary and benefits as licensed teachers, helping us better support our families. Extend our stay for five years, providing our students with consistent learning and allowing us to fully invest in our schools and communities.

Hawaii is in desperate need of qualified teachers, and international teachers are already here, working hard every day to meet this need. We are dedicated and committed to the success of Hawaii's students, but we need stability to continue making a difference in the classroom.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, so international teachers can continue to serve Hawaii's students without unnecessary barriers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Jerome Menesses
Middle School Science Teacher

Lahaina Intermediate School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:23:04 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherie Mae Pablo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Cherie Mae D. Pablo, and I am a licensed teacher from the Philippines, currently working as a J-1 teacher in Hawaii. I am writing to express my strong support for HB439, a bill that would create an international teacher license and recognize the qualifications we bring with us.

Since coming to Hawaii, I have had the privilege of teaching wonderful students, and I am dedicated to contributing to their growth and success. However, as a J-1 teacher, I face a challenge: although I hold a valid teaching license and degree from my home country, I am still required to take costly exams like the Praxis. These exams are unnecessary given the qualifications we already have, and the financial burden they create makes it difficult to continue focusing on what we do best—teaching.

HB439 would eliminate these unnecessary requirements, allowing teachers like me to continue contributing to our schools and communities without facing these additional barriers. This bill would also extend our stay for up to 5 years, providing much-needed stability and allowing us to make a lasting impact on our students.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB439 to help teachers like me continue making a difference in Hawaii’s schools, while recognizing our qualifications and ensuring we can stay long enough to contribute meaningfully to the education of our students.

Mahalo.

Sincerely,
Cherie Mae D. Pablo
J-1 Teacher (Konawaena Middle School)

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:23:32 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rica Gilbuena	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! I am Rica Gilbuena, a J-1 visa holder and a 2nd grade teacher in Maui. As a visiting international teacher, I have experienced firsthand the joy and privilege of working with students here in Hawai'i. Every day, I see the spark of curiosity in the eyes of my students and the potential within each of them. I strive to bring not only my subject matter to life, but also a broader understanding of the world and different cultures. I have built strong connections with my students, becoming a mentor and a guide, and I have seen them grow and develop a love for learning. These relationships are incredibly precious to me.

However, the current licensing requirements in the state of Hawai'i create a significant hurdle to us, visiting international teachers. While I hold a valid teaching license in my home country, the process of obtaining a new license here is a substantial burden, not just financially, but also in terms of time. The cost of the exams alone is a significant challenge, but even more so is the time commitment required for preparation. Instead of spending precious time planning engaging lessons, collaborating with colleagues, or simply being with my family, I have to divert countless hours to studying for these exams. This takes away from the time I could be dedicating to my students and my own well-being. More importantly, it puts my ability to continue teaching here and support my students at risk. This proposed bill would be a game-changer. It would allow me, and other international teachers like me, to focus on what truly matters: our students. It would remove the unnecessary financial and time strain and ensure that we can continue to provide stability and enrichment in the classroom. Passing this bill would not only benefit visiting international teachers, but it would also greatly benefit the students who rely on us. It would allow us to continue nurturing their growth and inspiring their potential for years to come.

Mahalo!

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:26:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carla Angelica Acoba	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good day! My name is Carla Angelica Acoba, a J1 teacher in Maui, Hawaii. Being chosen as one of the J1 teachers to teach here is something I am very grateful for. Hawaii itself is a beautiful place with a rich culture and with diverse, intelligent kids. Teaching here started off as a huge challenge because of the difference in school culture from the Philippines but as I grew in the past 5 months, I am gradually becoming the teacher that can help students grow. I learned how to better involve the kids in class and to help them discover their skills and untapped potentials. Students show enthusiasm in entering my class and a lot of them show excitement in learning more. Students in my class are not afraid to make mistakes because they are allowed to have failures and are given the chance to problem solve. They are also not afraid and not hesitant in asking for help or guidance from me. They are comfortable in asking for assistance whenever they have difficulties. In my class, I make sure that no one is inferior and that everybody is equal. I always encourage them to express themselves in their own way and I always told them to appreciate what everyone can do.

My heart is full everytime students thank me because of the positive effect my class have in their day. That alone is a huge compensation.

Teaching here has been challenging and fun at the same time. However, as J1 teachers, our time here is limited. We can only stay for a maximum of 5 years, 3 years if we are not able to pass the Praxis Exam.

This is the main reason why I fully support HB439. I want to maximize our time here as J1 teachers to help the kids realize their full potentials. As you know, without a license, we cannot stay for 5 years and might end up going to another state or even go home.

I truly love Hawaii, its culture, the kids, the community, everything. I want to be of service here for as long as I can. And that can only be possible through HB439.

Thank you very much!

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:34:03 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kurstin Charisse L. Mendevil	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Kurstin Charisse L. Mendevil, and I am a 5th-grade teacher at Naalehu Elementary School. I am writing to offer my full support for HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

I currently teach in Hawaii on a J-1 visa, bringing with me extensive experience and a true passion for educating students. I hold a professional teaching license from the Philippines and applied for reciprocity here in Hawaii, hoping that my credentials would be fully acknowledged. However, I was only issued an emergency hire permit, even though I've already demonstrated my qualifications. Sadly, I am still unable to obtain a full teaching license in Hawaii without taking additional exams.

This situation has placed a significant financial burden on my family. The cost of living in Hawaii is high, making it a challenge to cover basic expenses. As emergency hire teachers, we earn less than fully licensed teachers, and housing costs alone consume a large portion of our income. With one child to support, it has become increasingly difficult to make ends meet.

HB 439 would greatly improve our situation. If passed, this bill would:

- Provide international teachers with a full teaching license, eliminating the need for extra exams.
- Ensure that we receive the same pay and benefits as fully licensed educators, enabling us to better support our families.
- Extend our stay for an additional five years, ensuring stability for our students and allowing us to make a deeper commitment to our schools and communities.

We are dedicated, motivated, and wholeheartedly invested in the success of Hawaii's keiki. However, in order to continue our work effectively, we need the stability that a full teaching license would provide.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, so international teachers can continue to serve Hawaii's students without unnecessary obstacles.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kurstin Charisse L. Mendevil
5th Grade Teacher, Naalehu Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:52:16 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LORALIE N BAGASBAS	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Loralie Bagasbas, and I am an international educator currently serving in the Hawai‘i Department of Education as a 2nd Grade Teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of HB 439, legislation that seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As a dedicated educator from the Philippines, I arrived in Hawai‘i with a deep commitment to sharing my expertise and passion for teaching. However, despite holding a valid teaching license from my home country and possessing extensive classroom experience, I have encountered significant challenges in obtaining licensure in Hawai‘i. One of the most pressing obstacles is the Praxis exam requirement, which not only imposes a financial burden but also adds undue stress, diverting valuable time and energy away from my students.

International educators, including myself, have undergone rigorous training and met high teaching standards in our respective countries. We bring extensive professional experience to the classroom, yet we are required to complete additional standardized assessments that do not always serve as an accurate measure of our competencies. Furthermore, the temporary nature of our visas, typically ranging from three to five years, further complicates our situation, as securing an extension is often contingent upon passing these examinations. This uncertainty not only places additional strain on educators but also disrupts the stability and continuity of education for the students and schools that depend on our dedication and expertise.

Hawai‘i has welcomed me with open arms, and I remain deeply committed to my students and the local community. However, without reforms like HB 439, many qualified and passionate international teachers may find it increasingly difficult to continue their work here. By passing this bill, the state of Hawai‘i can remove unnecessary barriers and ensure that international educators remain focused on what truly matters delivering high-quality education and shaping the future of Hawai‘i’s students.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support and pass HB 439 to provide international teachers with the opportunity to continue making a meaningful impact on Hawai'i's education system.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,
Loralie Bagasbas
2nd Grade Teacher, Kahului Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:53:09 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Norven Badillo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Norven P. Badillo, a STEM teacher at Kahakai Elementary School, and I am honored to be part of this vibrant educational community here in Hawaii. As a new J1 teacher in the United States, particularly in Hawaii, the experience has been a transformative journey. Coming from the Philippines, I've faced various challenges as I adapted to the differences in lifestyle, teaching methodologies, and cultural norms. While daunting at times, these changes have provided me with invaluable opportunities for growth both as an educator and as an individual. The adjustment to the American education system, the diverse learning styles of my students, and the dynamics of working with new colleagues have required patience, resilience, and an open heart. However, one of the most rewarding aspects of this experience has been the chance to contribute my passion for teaching and learning to a new community. The Filipino teachers here, including myself, bring with us not only a wealth of knowledge but also an intrinsic love for teaching and nurturing young minds. This passion, combined with our unique perspectives and experiences, allows us to build meaningful connections with our students and their families, making the journey of teaching in this new environment much more fulfilling. As a STEM teacher at Kahakai Elementary, I am dedicated to bringing innovative and cutting-edge knowledge to our students. In particular, I focus on coding and programming, subjects that are increasingly relevant in today's technology-driven world. By equipping our students with the foundational skills of coding, I aim to empower them with the critical thinking and problem-solving abilities that are essential for success in the 21st century. Seeing the excitement and curiosity in their eyes as they begin to grasp the concepts of coding has been one of the highlights of my teaching career. One of the most significant milestones I've had so far was hosting our STEM Night, an event that I can proudly say was a huge success for our school community. This event wasn't just a celebration of STEM learning, but also an opportunity for our students' families to engage in the learning process alongside their children. It was heartwarming to see families come together to explore the fascinating world of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and to witness the bond that formed between the students, their families, and the school. The enthusiasm and participation of everyone involved demonstrated the power of collaboration and community, reinforcing the idea that learning doesn't stop at the classroom door. It continues in the home, in the community, and throughout life. Overall, while the transition to a new country and a new teaching environment presented its challenges, I firmly believe that the work we do as educators—especially as STEM teachers—is making a significant impact. We are not just teaching our students about coding or problem-solving, but also helping them build the confidence and curiosity they need to succeed in the future. The journey may have its hurdles, but the rewards are incredibly fulfilling, and I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the growth and development of the next generation of learners here in Hawaii. I strongly encourage

you to support this bill (HB439) which will ensure that international teachers like us can continue our goal to our students in Hawaii.

Norven P. Badillo

STEM Teacher at Kahakai Elementary School

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Aloha, my name is Anna Marie A. Monares, currently teaching in Wailuku Elementary School as a 4th grade teacher. I'm writing today in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to create an International Visiting Teacher License. As a current J1 teacher in Hawaii, I had the incredible privilege of contributing to the education of students from diverse backgrounds, and I can personally speak to the profound impact that international teachers can have on our schools and communities.

I saw the value of having a culturally diverse and globally-minded teaching staff. The students I worked with, whether local or international, benefited from the different perspectives and teaching methods we brought into the classroom. As international teachers, we adapt quickly, are creative in our approaches, and are eager to invest in the success of our students. The challenges we face, however, when it comes to transitioning from an emergency hired teacher to a regular teaching position are significant, particularly in the area of license.

While I fully support the creation of a specific pathway for international teachers through HB 439, I would also like to respectfully request that the Praxis exam requirement be reconsidered for those of us who already have substantial teaching experience and have demonstrated our ability to manage diverse classrooms.

As it stands, international teachers who wish to transition to regular license in Hawaii are required to take the Praxis exams. For some of us, this includes multiple sub tests—often more than five—each testing different aspects of education and requiring extensive preparation. While I understand the importance of ensuring that teachers are highly qualified, I believe that the Praxis exam, in its current form, places an undue burden on teachers who already have experience in the classroom and who have demonstrated the ability to teach effectively, especially in culturally diverse settings.

For many of us, especially those from countries with different teaching systems, the Praxis exams are not an accurate reflection of our teaching capabilities. The structure of the exam doesn't take into account the unique experience we have, nor does it address the ways in which we've already successfully adapted to the needs of our students in Hawaii.

In my case, I came to Hawaii with a strong background in education, a proven track record in the classroom, and a passion for working with students. However, preparing for the Praxis exams—especially with multiple sub tests—was an overwhelming and time-consuming process, especially while managing the day-to-day demands of teaching. Additionally, many international teachers may not have had the same exposure to the types of standardized testing that are emphasized in the U.S., making this process even more challenging.

I respectfully ask that HB439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders push through to allow for a more flexible pathway to have license that

takes into account the real-world teaching experience of international teachers. I strongly believe that the requirements for the license, particularly with regard to the Praxis exams, should be reconsidered for those who have already proven their ability to teach and contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's classrooms.

Removing or reducing the Praxis exam requirements for international teachers would not only allow us to continue contributing to Hawaii's educational system but also ensure that we are able to stay and grow within the profession without being burdened by additional barriers that do not accurately reflect our qualifications or experience.

In closing, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have worked with Hawaii's students, and I hope you will consider supporting this bill to make it easier for international teachers to continue making a positive impact. Thank you for your time and for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

ANNA MARIE MONARES

4th Grade Teacher

Wailuku Elementary School

annamarie.monares0204@gmail.com

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:55:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Franchette Alodia Ferrer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Franchette Alodia Ferrer, Special Education teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License. As a special education teacher, I have seen firsthand the challenges that schools in Hawaii face in recruiting and retaining qualified educators, particularly in specialized fields like special education. This bill provides an important solution to address our critical teacher shortages while enriching our education system with diverse, highly skilled professionals.

As a special education teacher, I bring patience, adaptability, and a deep commitment to individualized instruction to ensure that every student reaches their full potential. My role requires strong problem-solving skills, collaboration with families and other professionals, and the ability to differentiate instruction to meet diverse learning needs. I work with students who require specialized support, helping them develop academic, social, and life skills in a nurturing and structured environment. These same qualities—dedication, compassion, and resilience—are shared by many international educators who are eager to contribute to our schools and state.

Many educators in Hawaii struggle with housing affordability, high transportation costs, and the overall expenses of living in the state. These financial burdens contribute to frequent teacher turnover and unfilled positions, which directly impact student learning. Additionally, the Praxis exam poses another significant barrier for many potential educators, including myself. While subject-matter expertise and teaching experience are critical, standardized tests do not always accurately measure a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom. Many talented educators who have years of experience and specialized training struggle with the financial and logistical challenges of the Praxis exam. Providing alternative pathways for international educators through HB 439 would help address this issue while maintaining high teaching standards.

I strongly urge you to support HB 439. Addressing our teacher shortages, particularly in special education, is crucial for the success of Hawaii's keiki and the future of education in Hawaii. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:56:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
MARIA CHRISTINE	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Maria Christine L. Espina**, and I am a **J-1 teacher from the Philippines** as well as a **wildfire survivor in Lahaina**. I am writing in **strong support of HB 439**, which seeks to create an **International Visiting Teacher License**.

This bill is essential for teachers like me who have already **earned a teaching license in the Philippines** but face additional barriers, such as completing the **Praxis exam**, to continue serving students in the **Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE)**.

Before coming to Hawai'i, I was **trained and experienced in working with diverse students**. I have completed my **Master's degree**, authored **published books** that support student learning, and provided **teacher training** to strengthen education in the Philippines. I brought these **teaching strategies** with me to Hawai'i, enriching my students' learning experience and sharing my knowledge with my colleagues.

At Princess Nahienaena Elementary School, I have **introduced and led a school newspaper initiative**, where I **taught elementary students journalism**—an achievement that makes our school one of the first to have a student-published newspaper.

As a **Special Education (SPED) teacher**, I am deeply committed to **providing accommodations and individualized support** to ensure that every student, regardless of their abilities, has the opportunity to thrive. I work closely with my students to help them build confidence, develop essential skills, and overcome challenges. The impact of **specialized instruction and differentiated teaching** is vital, and I take great pride in making a difference in their lives.

Experiencing the **Lahaina wildfire** firsthand, I witnessed how the **community came together with love and support**. It reaffirmed my **purpose and dedication to this place**. I want to continue serving the students and families of Lahaina and contributing to the school community.

I urge you to **allow J-1 teachers to stay in Hawai'i for five years**, ensure **equal pay for equal work**, and grant **access to differentials** for being licensed. The **cost of living has significantly increased**, especially after the wildfire, making these provisions even more critical.

Lastly, I ask for the recognition of our foreign credentials, acknowledging us as **highly qualified and experienced educators** so that we can **focus on supporting our schools, students, and the community**.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Maria Christine L. Espina

J-1 Teacher | Princess Nahienaena Elementary School

Wildfire Survivor | Special Education Teacher

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 9:58:45 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JEANET TABOR PAURA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Jeanet Tabor Paura, and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is essential for international educators like me, who have already earned teaching licenses in our home countries but must overcome additional barriers—such as the Praxis exams—before we can continue serving Hawaii’s students.

As dedicated educators, our priority is providing the best education possible. However, the requirement to pass multiple standardized tests while managing full-time teaching responsibilities creates unnecessary stress and limits the time we can devote to lesson preparation and student engagement. While I recognize the importance of assessing teachers’ subject knowledge, our years of experience and professional qualifications should be taken into account without excessive testing requirements that impose financial and emotional burdens.

Additionally, our visas are temporary, typically lasting three to five years, and I understand that extending our stay to the full five years depends on obtaining licensure. This creates additional pressure, making it even more difficult to navigate the costly and time-consuming licensing process while focusing on our students’ learning and well-being.

Hawaii has become a home to me, and I am deeply grateful for the warm welcome I have received from my school community. My greatest desire is to continue educating, mentoring, and supporting my students without unnecessary barriers. I urge you to pass HB 439 so that international teachers can dedicate their time and energy to what truly matters—helping Hawaii’s students succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeanet Tabor Paura

A Testimony in Support to HB 439
The Creation of International Visiting Teacher License

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am LOIDA S. CORPUZ, , a dedicated and passionate J1 teacher currently working as Mathematics Teacher at James Campbell High School, Leeward District, Hawaii. I am writing to highly and strongly support Bill HB439, which aims to create an international visiting license for J1 teachers like me.

Teaching in Hawaii is a dream come true. A dream which I am enjoying now. Learning about American culture while sharing my teaching expertise in this diverse educational landscape of the State of Hawaii are something I consider milestones of my teaching career and personal experiences. However I am facing significant challenges in obtaining a Hawaii teaching license, which is required for my continued participation in the J1 Program. The cost and the preparation for the licensing examination requires a considerate investment of money, time and effort which may affect my primary responsibility and that is to provide high-quality education to my students.

Bill HB 439 offers a practical and sensible solution to my predicament. Creating an international visiting license would enable J1 teachers like me to continue contributing to Hawaii's educational community as well as to enjoy the promises of its culture. I urge each and everyone of you Honorable Members of the Committee to support this bill which would not only benefit us J1 teachers but also to enrich the learning journey and some other educational acquaintances for our students as they share international culture and experiences with us. This bill would foster a more inclusive and diverse educational environment aligning with the values of aloha and ohana that Hawaii embodies.

Mahalo! I look forward to having a longer teaching journey in Hawaii and contributing to the educational growth and success of my students.

Sincerely,



LOIDA S. CORPUZ
Mathematics Teacher

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rodney Barba, and I teach Physics, AP Physics, and Physical Science at Radford High School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which aims to establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As a J-1 educator in Hawaii, I bring years of experience and dedication to my students. With 18 years of teaching experience and professional licenses from the Philippines, I had hoped my credentials would be fully recognized. However, because I was hired as an emergency hire, I am required to pass multiple PRAXIS exams before obtaining a full teaching license in Hawaii.

This situation has placed a significant financial strain on my family and me. Despite both my spouse and I working overseas, the rising cost of living makes it difficult to make ends meet. As an emergency hire, I earn less than fully licensed teachers, and much of my salary goes toward housing, my mother's medical care, and my daughter's education.

HB 439 would be a game-changer. If enacted, this bill would grant international teachers full teaching licenses, eliminating unnecessary testing requirements. It would also ensure fair compensation, including salaries and differentials equal to those of licensed teachers, and extend our stay for five years—providing stability for both educators and students.

Hawaii has an urgent need for skilled, dedicated teachers, and international educators are already here, filling these critical roles. We are deeply committed to helping Hawaii's keiki succeed, but to continue making a meaningful impact, we need stability and support.

I wholeheartedly urge you to pass HB 439, allowing international teachers to contribute to Hawaii's education system without undue obstacles.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Rodney L. Barba
AP Physics, Physics, and Physical Science Teacher
Radford High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 10:21:53 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eva P. Dapin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair

Members of the Committee,

My name is Eva P. Dapin, and I am a kindergarten teacher at Naalehu Elementary School. I am writing this letter to express my support for HB439, a bill that would create an International Visiting Teacher License.

This bill is essential for teachers who have earned their teaching licenses in other countries and who are willing to commit to teaching here in Hawai'i, but face difficulties in maintaining their status. This would benefit students in Hawai'i by allowing teachers to stay longer, which would provide more time for meaningful interaction between teachers and students.

We would be able to remain at the school longer, fostering trust and confidence with the students. Additionally, the extended time would allow students to better apply the skills and knowledge they have learned.

I strongly support this bill because this not only boost teachers' confidence but also because it positively impact students' performance,

Thank you for giving us time and considerstion.

Respectfully,

Eva P. Dapin

Kindergarten Teacher Naalehu Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 10:29:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Virginia Jean Sumagit	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HB 439 International Visiting Teacher License

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

My name is Virginia Jean Sumagit, and I am a proud member of the Lana'i community. Before moving to Hawaii, I was a teacher in the Philippines, so I understand firsthand the dedication, hard work, and the passion it takes to be an educator, I am writing in strong support of HB 439 because I have seen the incredible impact that international teachers have had on our students, our schools and our community.

Lana'i is a small tight-knit island, and our schools play crucial role in shaping the future of our Keiki. The J-1 teachers who have come to teach here bring not only their expertise but also their love for education and deep commitment to student success. They introduce new perspectives, creating teaching strategies and cultural diversity that enrich the learning environment. Many of them have left their families behind to serve our children, and they give their all- inside and outside the classroom.

HB 439 would allow these teachers to stay in Hawai'i for up to five years if licensed, giving our students much needed stability. Consistency is key in education, and losing dedicated teachers simply because of licensing barriers hurts both students and the school community. This bill would also ensure that international teachers receive fair compensation for their work, including access to differentials that recognize their skills and experience.

As a former teacher, I know the challenges of earning a degree, getting licensed and proving oneself in the classroom. The international teachers we have in Hawai'i already hold internationally recognized credentials and have years of teaching experience, Requiring them to take expensive, unnecessary Praxis exams in an unfair and burdensome obstacles. These exams do not measure their ability to teach effectively, yet they create financial and logistical hardships that discourage them from staying.

Hawai'i is facing a teacher shortage and our schools - especially in rural communities like Lana'i - need passionate, highly qualified educators now more than ever. The international teachers in our schools have stepped up to fill these gaps, and they have become part of our island 'ohana. Losing them would not just be a loss for our schools but for the entire community.

By passing GB 439, Hawai'i will show that it values diversity, fairness, and the contributions of international educators that our Keiki continue receiving a high-quality education from teachers who are fully committed to their success. I strongly urge you to support this bill for the benefit of our students, our schools, and our entire community.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Virginia Jean Sumagi

Lanai Community Member

Former Teacher in the Philippines

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 10:50:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grace Marie Hatton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! I am Grace Marie B. Hatton, a Special Education Teacher at Kahului Elementary School, Maui, Hawaii. I am writing in support of HB 439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License.

My journey as a teacher in Hawaii has been one of immense growth, both professionally and personally. Teaching in this paradise has been a dream, but it is not without its challenges. Although Hawaii is beautiful, the high cost of living is a significant challenge. Housing, groceries, and utilities are expensive.

Despite the challenges, being a teacher in Hawaii is an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. The joy of seeing my students succeed, the kindness and warmth of the community, and the opportunity to immerse myself in Hawaii's culture make it all worthwhile. Teaching here has taught me resilience, adaptability, and the importance of building meaningful connections.

I have 8 years of experience teaching and hold a professional teaching license in the Philippines. I learned that each country—and even each U.S. state—has its own requirements for teachers. Hawaii is no exception. I felt hesitant at first. After all, I have already proven my skills. I am hoping our licenses will be acknowledged here in Hawaii. I truly hope that this bill will pass because it represents more than just eliminating an exam—it's a step toward recognizing the value of international educators who bring unique perspectives and experiences to the classroom. By removing this hurdle, it will allow us to focus on what matters most: teaching and inspiring students.

To those involved in this decision, I urge you to consider the dedication, skills, and passion that we foreign-trained teachers bring to the table. Passing this bill would not only benefit educators but also enrich the learning experiences of students across Hawaii. Let us break down barriers and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone in education.

I am hoping and advocating for this positive change. And with everyone's help, we can create a future in which educators, regardless of their backgrounds or where they came from, are empowered to share their knowledge and change the world.

Thank you for your consideration!

GRACE MARIE B. HATTON

Kahului Elementary School

Maui, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 11:10:47 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jocelle Ale	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Jocelle Cina Ale, and I am writing to strongly support the HB 439 that aims to create an international Visiting Teacher License. and I am currently employed as a Math and Math Work Shop Teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School in Maui District. I hold a Bachelor of Secondary Education and also Master’s Degree in Teaching Mathematics in the Philippines and I have 11 years of teaching experience in Philippines and this year in Mau, Hawaii USA. During this time, I have had the privilege of working in diverse educational systems and have developed a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and educational exchange.

As an international educator, I am dedicated to offering the highest quality education to my students. I have devoted my career to shape their minds and ensuring they receive an exceptional learning experience. As a middle school Math and Math Workshop teacher, preparing five lessons a day with differentiated instruction was exhausting, but it never discouraged me. My passion for providing the best education for my students kept me going. I strongly believe that education should be inclusive, engaging, and adaptable to the needs of each student, and I consistently strive to create a learning environment that reflects these values.

Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom I offer a free tutorial in Math to some of my students after school to further practice their learning in Math. I actively engage in the school community, working together with colleagues, parents, and stakeholders to cultivate a culture of excellence.

My role as an international teacher has allowed me to broaden my professional knowledge and teaching skills. However, balancing my teaching duties and preparing for the PRAXIS exams creates unnecessary stress and takes precious time away from lesson planning and engaging with my students. I believe that our qualifications, experience and dedication should be acknowledged without the need for multiple standardized tests, which place both financial and emotional strain on teachers, especially those who manage five or more subjects in a day. The impact of my work goes beyond academics; I instill values, build self- confidence, and prepare my students for lifelong success. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439 to allow me and other international teachers to focus on what we do best—teaching and nurturing our Hawaii students, not just academically, but to help them reach their fullest potential.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jocelle Cina Ale

Math and Math Work Shop Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School

Maui District

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 11:44:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angelie Mae Galario	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Angelie Mae Galario, and I am a Special Education (SPED) teacher in a fully self-contained class at Barbers Point Elementary School. I am writing to express my strong support for HB439, which aims to establish an international teacher license for specific visa holders.

Teaching is more than just a job; it is a mission that empowers students from all walks of life. As a SPED teacher, I understand the profound impact that quality education can have on individuals with diverse needs. It is essential that we recognize and honor the credentials and training that educators like myself bring from our home countries while also pursuing an international teaching license. In Hawai'i, I have dedicated myself to meeting the needs of my diverse students, despite holding a license not recognized here. My local training and the teaching license I earned in my home country have provided me with invaluable skills in effective teaching strategies and behavioral management. These skills have been pivotal in nurturing an inclusive and supportive learning environment—something every student deserves.

However, the added burden of obtaining an international teaching license by taking the PRAXIS exam continues to weigh heavily on educators like myself. The financial and emotional toll of this process is significant, especially given that we must pay for the exam each time we attempt it.

By approving this bill, we can remove this obstacle and allow dedicated educators to focus on what truly matters—the success of our students. Integrating our diverse qualifications and rich experiences will enable us to create dynamic and inclusive classrooms that celebrate the unique backgrounds of every student. I urge you to consider the positive impact this legislation will have on countless educators and, most importantly, the students we serve. Together, we can foster an educational environment that empowers all learners.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Angelie Mae Galario

February 01, 2025

To: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Graciela Esguerra

Position: Science Teacher

Institution: Henry Perrine Baldwin High School

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB439

To the Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education and the Hawaii State Legislature:

I am writing this testimony in strong support of HB439. This bill will significantly benefit Hawaii's educators and students.

As a J-1 teacher on Maui, I am committed to fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment. I am passionate about providing a high-quality education for our keiki.

While I hold a Professional Teacher License from the Philippines, I am required to take the Praxis exams for Hawaii licensure. These costly tests are often only offered on Oahu, requiring expensive inter-island travel and leave time, as they are not available on weekends. Aside from that, as an "Emergency Hire" teacher, my salary is lower than fully licensed teachers. I am also responsible for my own housing, which consumes a significant portion of my income.

Hawaii urgently needs qualified teachers, and J-1 teachers are dedicated to serving our students and the community of these beautiful islands. However, we need stability to continue this service.

I urge you to support this bill, HB439, to ensure Hawaii's students and educators receive the necessary support. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo for all that you do!

Respectfully,

Graciela Esguerra

Science Teacher (Grade 9)

H.P. Baldwin High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 11:57:49 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glysa Cadano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Glysa Cadano, a J-1 teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School, and I strongly support HB 439. This bill will allow international teachers like me to continue serving Hawaii's keiki while helping to address the ongoing teacher shortage.

As J-1 teachers, we bring valuable skills, new perspectives, and cultural diversity that enrich students' learning. Beyond academics, we nurture personal growth, helping students become more globally aware and prepared for the future. Our qualifications including teaching licenses from our home countries and advanced degrees such as bachelor's and master's in education ensure that we provide quality instruction and make meaningful contributions to Hawaii's schools.

We respectfully ask for your support in passing this bill so we can continue serving Hawaii's keiki with dedication and a happy heart.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Glysa Cadano

J-1 Teacher, Lanai High and Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 11:59:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Armida Baltero	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha all,

I am writing this testimony as a support to our Filipino teachers working in our school, Lanai High and Elementary. As a parent and as office staff working with them at the same school, I can say that they are globally competitive and highly qualified to the positions that they are right now. They are contributing a positive impact into our students' education and also in our community. Their dedication and commitment to giving our students the quality of education they needed, made me decide to support them and giving my testimony. Their hard work, discipline, and perseverance are some of the qualities teachers possess for our students. Please consider my testimony as a proof of my sincere trust and belief for our Filipino teachers.

Mahalo and respectfully yours,

Armida Baltero

My name is Emelito Ortillo, and I am a Special Education Teacher at Kalama Intermediate School in the Maui District. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 439, which proposes the establishment of an International Teacher License.

This bill would significantly benefit Filipino teachers who have relocated from the Philippines by allowing them to obtain licensure in Hawaii without the necessity of passing the Praxis exam as a major requirement. The burden of taking this test can be substantial, as it not only incurs a considerable financial cost but also demands extensive study time in preparation for the exam. I firmly believe that the licensure we hold from our home country, the Philippines, should suffice for obtaining a teaching license in another country or state. Our educational qualifications include degrees that are equivalent to U.S. standards, as evidenced by our transcripts of records. Furthermore, we have successfully passed the board examination, which qualifies us for an international license with U.S. equivalency. In addition, we have engaged in various training sessions and workshops aimed at enhancing our effectiveness and efficiency as educators. These experiences have equipped us to be not only competent teachers but also globally competitive professionals. Consequently, we are recognized as international teachers with foreign credentials, and we possess the qualifications and experience necessary to excel in our roles.

Being an international teacher empowers me to be a globally competitive educator, dedicated to fostering a rich learning environment for all students. I believe that my role as an international teacher profoundly impacts my students by enriching their understanding of the world beyond their immediate surroundings. By employing various teaching strategies and sharing experiences from different cultures, I promote personal growth while cultivating a deeper appreciation for diversity.

Through sharing my experiences, students gain valuable insights into the cultures and traditions of various countries. My cross-cultural exchange and experience equip my students with the skills necessary to thrive in a multicultural and interconnected world, enabling them to discover the unique values and perspectives of people across the globe. By exploring and learning about different cultures and traditions, students are better prepared for success in various aspects of life, including becoming responsible and responsive citizens of the United States of America.

Thank you for considering this important matter. I urge you to support HB 439 for the betterment of our educational community and the recognition of the contributions of Filipino educators.

Sincerely and with respect,

EMELITO ORTILLO
SPED Teacher / J1 Teacher
Kalama Intermediate School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 5:47:28 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shayne Greenland	Ilima Intermediate School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Chair, Justin H. Woodson; Vice Chair, Trish La Chica and Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed legislation HB439 to license all J-1 teachers based on their existing foreign credentials. As a dedicated educator and community member in Ewa Beach, I believe this measure is essential for addressing our ongoing teacher shortage and enriching the educational experiences of our students.

J-1 teachers have had a profoundly positive impact on my students, our school community, and the overall campus climate. At Ilima Intermediate, where we serve a diverse student population, these educators bring a wealth of knowledge, cultural diversity, and global perspectives that deeply enrich our classrooms. Their ability to share international best practices fosters cross-cultural understanding and prepares students for success in an increasingly interconnected world. Their presence not only enhances academic outcomes but also strengthens our students' social-emotional growth by exposing them to different viewpoints and experiences.

This legislation is critical because it allows J-1 teachers to remain in Hawai‘i for up to five years if licensed, providing much-needed stability for our schools and students. Additionally, it ensures equal pay for equal work—granting them access to differentials that come with being licensed educators. These teachers are highly qualified professionals with internationally recognized credentials, extensive teaching experience, and advanced degrees. They should not be subjected to burdensome and expensive Praxis exams when they have already proven their expertise through their foreign licensure and qualifications.

By removing unnecessary barriers, we enable J-1 teachers to focus on what truly matters: supporting their schools, students, and communities. Their dedication and contributions help fill critical gaps in our education system, ensuring that all students receive high-quality instruction despite ongoing staffing shortages.

I urge you to advocate for the passage of this measure. Recognizing and valuing the skills of J-1 teachers is not only fair but also essential to strengthening education in Hawai‘i. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter, and for your continued commitment to improving our schools.

Sincerely,
Shayne Greenland

Principal
Ilima Intermediate School

As part of the International Teachers here in Hawaii, my compatriots and I wholeheartedly serve our work as teachers to our students knowing that we share not only knowledge but love as second parents to them while they are at school, However, the need to prepare for multiple licensure exams while managing our teaching responsibilities places unnecessary stress on us and takes valuable time away from lesson planning and student engagement. As a teacher of young people with special needs, there are many subjects they must learn, especially the life skills that are important for them so that they can use them in their future life and so that they can have their own lives and abilities that expect nothing else but to be able to stand on their own feet, We teachers, although we teach a different race, our love for our work has not changed and our love for the students we teach is also there. We are also open to learning from our schoolmates as part of the Cultural Exchange Program and we are also ready to help as much as we can and learn the different methods and cultures that exist in the country of Hawaii. In my teaching now although it will take three to five years, I can say that my dedication to teaching will remain there no matter where I go not only the ability to share knowledge but to love my work, students and co-workers. My students today I can see, and I can tell that there is a change in them when it comes to cognitive, sociability, love for others and their readiness to stand on their own feet using their own abilities. I love my job, I love my School, students and coworkers and most of all I love Hawaii so I hope the law about HB439 is pass for our teachers who want to continue our teaching here in Hawaii as far as possible of our ability and we can continue teaching and shaping the students.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:07:43 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Evelyn Demavivas Basnillo	Kauai Visayan Club	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 1, 2025

Aloha and greetings!

My name is Evelyn D. Basnillo, and I am the President of the Kauai Visayan Club. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, a bill that seeks to establish an international visiting teacher license for J-1 teachers.

The Kauai Visayan Club is dedicated to preserving and celebrating Visayan cultural heritage, as well as fostering community engagement through educational and cultural initiatives. One of the most impactful ways we serve our community is through collaboration with J-1 teachers, who bring invaluable expertise and cultural perspectives to our schools and students. Their contributions extend far beyond the classroom, enriching the educational experience and strengthening our community.

J-1 teachers play an essential role in shaping the future of our youth. They not only provide high-quality education but also serve as cultural ambassadors, bridging communities and promoting greater understanding among students from diverse backgrounds. Their presence in Hawaii's schools has positively influenced student achievement, enhanced cultural awareness, and created a more inclusive campus environment. These educators bring innovative teaching methodologies, fresh perspectives, and a strong commitment to fostering both the academic and personal growth of students.

Passing HB 439 would significantly support our J-1 teachers and ensure they can continue their important work without unnecessary obstacles. Specifically, this bill would:

- Allow J-1 teachers to stay in Hawaii for up to five years if licensed, providing much-needed stability for both educators and students.
- Ensure equal pay for equal work by allowing J-1 teachers to access pay differentials available to licensed teachers.
- Acknowledge their internationally recognized foreign credentials, validating their qualifications and expertise.
- Eliminate the need for expensive and burdensome Praxis exams by recognizing their international credentials as sufficient proof of their qualifications.

- Allow teachers to focus on supporting schools, students, and our community without unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles.

Supporting HB 439 is an investment not only in our teachers but also in the future of Hawaii's education system. Our J-1 educators have shown exceptional dedication, resilience, and passion for teaching, and they deserve the opportunity to continue contributing to our schools, students, and our community without facing unnecessary barriers. I strongly urge you to pass this bill to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for our international teachers, who have already proven to be invaluable members of our educational community.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Evelyn D. Basnillo
President

Kauai Visayan Club

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:28:55 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Damo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Mark Damo, and I strongly support HB439, a bill that I believe is essential for addressing Hawaii's critical teacher shortage and enriching our classrooms with diverse perspectives. This bill, requiring the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders, is a crucial step towards streamlining the licensing process and recognizing the valuable contributions of international educators. As a teacher from the Philippines and currently working in Hawaii on a J-1 visa, I have experienced firsthand the challenges and frustrations of navigating the current licensing system. I hold a Master's degree in Education and have been a certified teacher in my home country for eight (8) years. I came to Hawaii eager to share my passion for teaching and my expertise in science with local students. However, I was disheartened to discover that despite my qualifications and experience, I am required to take the Praxis in Hawaii, even though I have already passed rigorous teacher certification exams in my home country. This requirement feels redundant and creates an unnecessary barrier to my ability to fully contribute to Hawaii's educational community. I know many other qualified international teachers on J-1 visas who face the same frustrating situation. We are ready and willing to teach, but the current system often prevents us from doing so efficiently.

HB439 offers a solution by mandating the creation of an international teacher license. This license, as envisioned by the bill, should recognize the existing credentials of international educators, streamlining the process and eliminating the need for redundant testing like the Praxis. This bill will not only alleviate the burden on international teachers but also significantly benefit Hawaii's public schools. It will provide a more efficient pathway for qualified international educators to enter the workforce, filling critical vacancies, particularly in high-need areas and specialized subjects. Moreover, it will bring diverse cultural perspectives, language skills, and teaching methodologies into our classrooms, enriching the learning experience for all Keiki and preparing them for success in a globalized world. I urge the committee to support this bill. It is a practical and much-needed measure that will benefit our students, our schools, and our community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:55:59 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julia Diegmann	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB439

Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Julia Diegmann, and I am a parent at Waimea Canyon Middle School on Kaua'i. I strongly support HB439. I see firsthand the profoundly positive impact J-1 teachers have on our students, school, and community. They bring diverse perspectives and a passion for teaching that enriches our rural learning environment. They go above and beyond, supporting school events and actively engaging with families.

HB439 is crucial for retaining these valuable educators. Allowing J-1 teachers to stay for five years if licensed provides much-needed stability, preventing disruptive turnover. Equal pay and access to differentials are essential for fairness. Recognizing their international credentials streamlines the licensing process.

HB439 allows J-1 teachers to focus on supporting our students, enriching classrooms, and engaging our families. Retaining these qualified educators is an investment in our children and our school, especially vital in our rural community.

Mahalo!

Julia Diegmann

HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

Aloha!

My name is Daisy Fabalina, a newly hired Preschool Teacher at Eleele Elementary School, District of Kauai. I am a seasoned teacher in the Philippines with a 5-year private Preschool teaching experience and have been in public school for more than 16 years, backed up with two Completed Academic requirements in a graduate studies and have various training and seminar-workshops primarily related to pedagogies of teaching and learning in elementary classrooms settings with full of compassion and dedication to helping young generations in my country to be globally equipped and be ready for the work force of every government department and to be productive citizens. I am bringing that passion here in the United States to exercise the same vision in my heart. With my three months of teaching experience as a pre-k teacher, I found myself easily adapted to the teaching strategies and environment considering the capacity, ability and behavior of my learners. In connection with this, I and all the other qualified and licensed Filipino J1 teachers here in Hawaii are fully supporting this Bill. We believe and are fully convinced that we can also do what the American teachers can do when it comes to the pedagogies and the spectrum of teaching styles. Furthermore, taking Praxis is another burden in our parts, it is not that we can not pass the test, but because we have limited time to review. In addition to, the cost of examination fee is high, and lastly, we are only given a period of time indicated in our visa to exercise our profession here. But in spite of these, we continue to heed and support other rules and policies set before us by the Department of education of Hawaii and promise to excel in our call.

Thank you for your consideration and approval.

Sincerely,
Daisy Fabalina

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 10:39:47 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leojun Martus	Hawaii State Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a Filipino educator on Hawaii Island, I have always been committed to both my students' growth and the celebration of our Filipino culture. I've had the privilege of organizing and participating in numerous Filipino cultural events, sharing the rich traditions of our community with people from all backgrounds. These experiences have given me the opportunity to showcase my skills and talents, such as when I had the honor of doing makeup for news anchor Chelsea Davis. This moment, along with many others, has fueled my passion for educating students while embracing my heritage. However, as a Filipino teacher, I face significant challenges in securing a fair teaching license, which hinders my ability to fully contribute to the educational landscape in Hawaii.

The current situation, where Filipino teachers like myself are required to undergo unnecessary exams despite holding an international teaching license, has become a barrier to effectively teaching and contributing to the local community. We have proven our dedication, skills, and cultural awareness, yet the constant need for additional testing is an obstacle that keeps us from being recognized as equal to other licensed educators. I strongly believe that the bill to grant our international teaching license and eliminate these unnecessary exams is crucial in ensuring that Filipino teachers receive the same recognition and opportunities as our counterparts, including the same salary as licensed teachers.

It is also important to extend our stay for an additional five years. This extension will allow us to continue making a positive impact in Hawaii's classrooms, sharing our unique cultural perspectives, and enriching students' education. I urge the legislature to approve this bill, as it will not only support Filipino teachers but will also ensure that our contributions to the educational system are valued and fairly compensated.

Leojun Martus
Science Teacher - Konawaena Middle School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 10:46:16 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aljhon Tamondong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 pm

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Aljhon King Tamondong, a third grade teacher at Wailuku Elementary School. Today, I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As an educator, I have demonstrated unwavering dedication to my students' academic success and personal growth. Teaching in a diverse and multicultural environment has strengthened my passion for inclusive education, cultural exchange, and student-centered learning.

I am committed to nurturing a supportive classroom environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to achieve their full potential. By integrating innovative teaching strategies, technology, and culturally relevant materials, I ensure that learning is both engaging and meaningful.

Beyond the classroom, I actively participate in school events, mentorship programs, and cultural activities that foster cross-cultural understanding between my home country, the Philippines, and my Hawaiian community. I take pride in sharing my Filipino heritage while embracing the rich traditions of Hawaii, strengthening the bond between our cultures.

Despite challenges such as financial adjustments and being away from family, my dedication to my students keeps me motivated. I believe that education is a powerful tool for transforming lives, and I am grateful for the opportunity to make a lasting impact on my students and school community.

It is essential to recognize educators like myself to promote quality education and acknowledge the Invaluable contributions of dedicated J1 teachers. I respectfully encourage you to support HB 439, allowing us to persist in our crucial roles of teaching, mentoring, and inspiring learners throughout Hawaii. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Aljhon King Tamondong
3rd Grade Teacher
Wailuku Elementary School, Maui

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:11:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mahina Anguay	Waimea High School Principal, HIDOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am submitting testimony in strong support of HB439, which would establish an international visiting teacher license.

As the principal of Waimea High School on Kauai, I struggle to find highly qualified teachers willing to relocate to a rural neighbor island. In fact, I struggle to find teachers at all.

For the past two years, hiring highly qualified science teachers from the Philippines has been a game changer for our school. We currently have three J-1 teachers, and their impact has been outstanding. In just one year, our Biology teacher doubled our 9th graders' end-of-course exam scores. All three teachers actively mentor students, support clubs, and fully engage in school and district professional development. They even travel off-island with our faculty to receive training aligned with HIDOE initiatives. Their work ethic is remarkable—they are often the first to arrive and the last to leave.

Despite their extensive education and experience from the Philippines, my J-1 teachers must undergo costly PRAXIS exams to qualify for rehiring. Yet, they perform the same work and meet the same standards as our Hawaii-certified teachers. They deserve fair compensation.

Supporting HB439 is the **pono** thing to do—for our schools, our students, and our J-1 teachers.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:14:52 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Benny S. Gavino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

ALOHA

I, Benny S. Gavino, a teacher from Ele'ele Elementary School here in Kauai island. I am currently teaching here in the island for almost 5 months. First. I would like to address my stand in HB439. Having a license in our country is not easy including my masters and ongoing doctorate course that I am trying to pursue as my professional growth and my decade of teaching ranging the average of 40-60 students in class. From these experiences, it was quite harder but I'm trying to make it to the fullest just to give the best for my students and to my future students. I'm Hoping that HB439 will be possible here in this state. It was a great chance for us as a Foreign teachers who work here in Hawai'i because it will help us to bring and use our credentials as our step to bring out what the best for students. I strongly believe that if we work together and be together in one goal our state will be more progressive and will have a great impact not only today but by in the near future to come. In, all May this testimony brings us a hope that nothing is too hard if we do it together.

#PasstheHB439

MAHALO

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:28:00 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jerusana G. Divino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

After completing my master's degree in Educational Management, I envisioned myself better equipped to help students achieve their dreams. However, this vision seemed to fade when I realized that a degree alone wasn't enough. I discovered that to truly make a difference, I needed to continue growing both professionally and personally. Through self-reflection, I recognized that becoming an exceptional educator requires more than academic credentials – it demands emotional intelligence, adaptability, and a deep understanding of diverse student needs. This journey of self-improvement would not only enhance my ability to serve my students through innovative teaching methods and personalized guidance but would also help me evolve as an individual. By pursuing continuous professional development, staying current with educational trends, and honing my leadership skills, I aim to become not just a better educator, but also a more effective mentor and provider for those who depend on me. Building upon my commitment to professional growth and student success, I made the bold decision to join the Teacher's Cultural Exchange Program in the District of Hawaii. I was drawn by the unique opportunity to immerse myself in a new educational system, embrace a different culture, and work with diverse students – all experiences that align with my vision of becoming a more effective educator following my master's degree in educational management.

However, upon arrival, I faced unexpected challenges. Despite the convenience of living within walking distance of my school, the high cost of living in Hawaii, particularly housing costs, has made it difficult to manage expenses both here and in the Philippines. The situation became more complex when we were required to take the Praxis exam to extend our service. This requirement affected me deeply, because of the financial burden, and it seemed to overlook the value of my Philippine teaching license and my 21 years of dedicated teaching experience in molding young minds.

My teaching license represents more than just a credential – it embodies decades of classroom expertise, countless hours of professional development, and an unwavering commitment to educational excellence. While I understand the need for standardization, the Praxis exam alone cannot fully capture the depth of my teaching experience, my proven ability to connect with students, or my dedication to fostering their growth and development. The genuine need for committed and passionate educators like myself and other Filipino J1 teachers and other international teachers should be recognized, as we bring valuable international perspectives and proven teaching methodologies that enrich Hawaii's educational landscape.

I am, Jerusana G. Divino, I stand among the dedicated J1 Filipino teachers who have devoted our lives to education and are now deeply invested in the future of Hawaii's students. We bring not only our professional expertise but also our cultural richness and diverse teaching approaches that can transform the educational experience of students in Hawaii. Through our years of experience and dedication to continuous improvement, we have demonstrated our ability to adapt and excel in any educational setting. I respectfully urge the passage of HB 439, which would enable international teachers to continue their valuable contributions with dignity and pride, ultimately creating a more inclusive, dynamic, and effective learning environment that benefits both the students and the entire Department of Education community.

Jerusana G. Divino

Previously, Grade 5 teacher and now, handling Grade 3, 4, and 5 RTI (Reading-Phonics/Fluency)

Kahului Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:31:30 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Doris Ruiz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

My name is DORIS M. RUIZ and I am expressing my testimony in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As an educator, it’s not just about teaching facts, but about nurturing the whole child – intellectually, socially, emotionally, and ethically. It is my privilege to be a part of their journey, celebrating their successes and supporting them through challenges. Also, I am consistent in building a harmonious relationship in the school community, collaborating with colleagues, and parents as well to foster a healthy environment for both academic and culture excellence. However, obtaining a teacher state license remains a challenge on my part due to the financial and emotional strains of the numerous Praxis exams. These barrier do not reflect the expertise, years of training, and foreign credentials that international teachers like me have already earned. This bill acknowledges the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience we bring from our home countries and provides a just and reasonable pathway for us towards a meaningful impact in Hawai‘i’s schools. Hawai‘i, like many states, faces an ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved communities. The establishment of an international teacher license would help address this shortage by recognizing the qualifications of dedicated educators who are already contributing to the state’s educational landscape.

I humbly urge you to pass HB 439 to ensure that international teachers can focus on what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii’s students. By passing this bill, Hawai‘i will be honoring diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent, ensuring that our children continue to receive the best possible education. Together, we create a brighter future!

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Doris M. Ruiz

Lihikai Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:32:25 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andemar Jamon	HIDOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am honored to share my professional testimony regarding my enriching experiences as an educator in Hawaii. Teaching here has not only allowed me to grow personally and professionally, but it has also deepened my connection to a unique and culturally rich community.

The school where I have had the privilege to teach has played a significant role in shaping my approach to education. The institution has created a supportive environment where students are encouraged to thrive academically while respecting their cultural heritage. The emphasis on inclusivity and the development of critical thinking skills has been deeply inspiring. It is a place where diverse learning styles are celebrated, and teachers are consistently supported with ongoing professional development opportunities.

As part of the training provided, I have gained valuable insight into how to incorporate Hawaiian cultural values into the classroom. This focus on cultural sensitivity and awareness has not only enhanced my teaching practice but has also contributed significantly to my personal growth as an educator. Understanding the importance of ‘ohana (family), mālama (care), and kuleana (responsibility) has allowed me to connect with students in a more meaningful way, fostering a nurturing and respectful learning environment.

However, it is important to note that becoming fully licensed to teach in Hawaii comes with challenges. The cost of the required exams is a significant barrier. Additionally, the availability of these exams is limited, often requiring candidates to travel to Oahu to take them, further adding to the financial burden. These obstacles can be discouraging, especially for educators who already bring a wealth of experience and dedication to the classroom.

This bill stands as a recognition of the exceptional qualifications and experiences that educators like myself bring to Hawaii’s educational system. My foreign-evaluated transcripts and teaching license earned in my home country reflect the skills and knowledge I have cultivated over years of professional development. I believe that by honoring these qualifications, the state acknowledges the diverse expertise that international educators contribute to the classroom and supports the continued success of our students.

In conclusion, my teaching journey in Hawaii has been transformative, both professionally and personally. The school’s commitment to excellence in education, combined with the profound impact of Hawaiian culture, has deeply shaped my teaching philosophy. I am proud to contribute

to the success of my students and look forward to continuing my work here, knowing that this bill will support educators like me in overcoming the challenges we face in pursuing our calling.

Mahalo and God bless us all!

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:37:19 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
RODRIGO DOMINGO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rodrigo T. Domingo, and I am a Science and AVID teacher at Henry Perrine Baldwin High School. I also serve as the adviser of the Bayanihan Club (Filipino Club) and the choreographer and Dance Director of Maui’s first-ever Naragsak Dance Troupe—a group dedicated to preserving and promoting Filipino culture among young Filipinos born and raised in Hawai‘i. Our dance troupe includes retired educators who share a passion for cultural education and community engagement.

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, a bill that would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As a J-1 teacher, I bring years of teaching experience and a deep commitment to student success. In addition to my qualifications, I hold professional teaching licenses from the Philippines and passed the TESOL and qualified for SIQ. However, despite my expertise and dedication, teaching in Hawai‘i comes with significant challenges.

While I consider it a privilege to educate Hawai‘i’s students, it has also been a sacrifice. The high cost of living—particularly housing expenses—makes it difficult to sustain a livelihood. As emergency hire teachers, we earn lower salaries than fully licensed educators, despite fulfilling the same responsibilities.

HB 439 would be a game-changer. If passed, this bill would:

- ✔ Grant international teachers a full teaching license, removing unnecessary testing barriers.
- ✔ Ensure we receive equal pay and differentials comparable to licensed teachers, allowing us to provide for our families.
- ✔ Extend our stay for five years, offering students the consistency they deserve and allowing us to invest more fully in our schools and communities.

Hawai‘i is facing a severe teacher shortage, and international educators are already stepping in to help. We work hard every day to fill critical gaps in the education system, and we are deeply committed to the success and well-being of Hawai‘i’s keiki. However, without the stability and recognition this bill would provide, it is challenging to continue making a meaningful impact.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439 and support international teachers in their mission to educate and uplift Hawai‘i’s students.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

RODRIGO T. DOMINGO

Science & AVID Teacher | Henry Perrine Baldwin High School, Wailuku, Maui

Bayanihan Club Adviser | Choreographer & Dance Director, Naragsak Dance Troupe

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 12:06:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JEOHANA PEARL JAMON	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an educator who has had the privilege of teaching in Hawaii, I can confidently say that this experience has been professionally and personally transformative. The school where I teach has provided an exceptional environment that emphasizes academic excellence and cultural appreciation, creating an atmosphere that fosters holistic learning for students and educators alike. The diverse student population, enriched by the beautiful Hawaiian culture, has allowed me to grow as an educator while deeply connecting with the community.

The training provided by the school has been invaluable in ensuring that I am equipped with the best tools and methods to serve my students. The continuous professional development opportunities, especially those focused on cultural competency, have significantly enhanced my teaching. I have gained a greater understanding of how to weave Hawaiian culture, values, and traditions into my curriculum, making learning more meaningful for students while respecting their cultural heritage.

Personally, the immersion in Hawaiian culture has been one of the most enriching aspects of my experience here. From the Aloha spirit to the deep respect for 'ohana (family) and community, this cultural foundation has greatly influenced my approach to teaching. It has encouraged me to approach each student as a unique individual with their own story, creating an inclusive and supportive environment that promotes growth.

However, there are challenges to teaching in Hawaii, particularly with the costs associated with certification and exams. The expense of the exams and the logistical difficulties - such as having to travel to another island particularly to Oahu to take certain exams because of the limited schedule given here at Maui - are significant barriers for many educators. The high costs and limited access to exam sites can be an overwhelming obstacle, especially for those of us who earned our credentials in the Philippines.

This bill, which recognizes the qualifications I earned in my home country, is an important step toward addressing these challenges. By acknowledging the foreign-evaluated transcripts and licenses that reflect my expertise, this bill not only validates my experience and qualifications but also alleviates some of the financial burdens and logistical challenges associated with obtaining necessary certifications.

Overall, my time teaching in Hawaii has been incredibly rewarding. The school, the students, and the cultural richness of the island have all played pivotal roles in shaping my growth as an

educator. I am grateful for the opportunity to teach here and for the steps being taken to support educators like myself in continuing to contribute positively to the state's educational landscape

To allow J1 teachers to concentrate on what we do best- teaching, mentoring, and influencing the future of Hawaii's Keiki, I humbly ask that you pass HB439. Thank you for your time and consideration

Mahalo,

Jeohana Pearl Jamon

SPED Teacher, Kihei Elementary School.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 12:44:54 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arien Potenciano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good day! Sending my Testimony on HB439.

Mahalo!

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 12:58:48 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deonel R Advincula	Hawaii DOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, esteemed members of the Hawai‘i State Legislature,

My name is Deonel R. Advincula, and I am a Filipino teacher currently serving in Hawai‘i under the J-1 visa program. I humbly share my story today in support of HB 439, a bill that would allow for the reciprocation of out-of-state and international teaching licenses in Hawai‘i. This measure is not just a legal adjustment; it represents an opportunity for dedicated international educators like me to continue making a positive impact on the lives of Hawai‘i’s students, schools, and communities.

Since arriving in Hawai‘i, I have devoted myself wholeheartedly to my students. Teaching is more than a profession for me—it is a calling. I have seen my students grow academically, socially, and emotionally through the lessons I impart, and I am grateful for the chance to contribute to their future. The presence of international teachers enriches Hawai‘i’s classrooms by introducing diverse perspectives, fostering cultural understanding, and helping to address the persistent teacher shortage.

However, the journey of an international teacher is not without struggles. As a father of two young daughters who remain in the Philippines, I carry the deep responsibility of providing for their future. The financial burden of obtaining a Hawai‘i teaching license is overwhelming. The required Praxis exams alone are extremely costly, and in my case, I must pass eight subtests despite already being a certified teacher in the Philippines. This creates an unnecessary hardship, particularly since my credentials have already been rigorously evaluated and approved for foreign equivalency before I was granted a teaching position in Hawai‘i.

With only a limited time to teach under my current visa, the licensing barriers make it difficult for me and many others to continue our service beyond our initial term. If HB 439 does not pass, I may be forced to leave Hawai‘i after my second year to find a state that recognizes my qualifications. This would not only disrupt my life and my ability to support my daughters, but it would also mean leaving behind the students and school community I have grown to love.

HB 439 offers a solution that benefits everyone. By allowing the reciprocation of out-of-state and international teaching licenses, Hawai‘i can retain highly qualified, passionate educators who have already proven their dedication. This bill acknowledges the contributions of international teachers and ensures that we can continue to serve where we are needed most.

Passing this bill is not just about helping teachers like me—it is about securing a strong, stable, and diverse education system for Hawai‘i’s keiki.

I humbly ask for your support of HB 439. By breaking down these barriers, you will be giving committed educators like me the opportunity to continue our mission, provide for our families, and help shape the future of Hawai‘i’s children.

Mahalo for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Truly Yours,

Mr. Advincula

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Ruel M. Cabasa, and I strongly support HB 439, creating an International Visiting Teacher License. As a teacher licensed in the Philippines, I'm dedicated to serving Hawaii's students, but the current Praxis testing requirements create unnecessary obstacles. While I understand the need to demonstrate competency, these tests place a significant burden on international teachers. For example, each Praxis exam costs approximately \$150, and I need to take three exams amounting to \$450. This financial strain, coupled with the significant time commitment required for test preparation – often 10-15 hours a week – directly takes away from the time I can spend developing engaging lessons and providing individualized support for my students. Just last week, I had to postpone working with a struggling student because I needed to study for an upcoming exam. This is the kind of impact these requirements have. In addition it diverts valuable time and energy away from lesson planning, student engagement, and professional development. I spend countless hours studying for these exams, time that could be better spent collaborating with colleagues, creating innovative learning experiences, and addressing the individual needs of my students.

Our limited visas, typically three to five years, add further pressure. Extending our stay is often contingent on obtaining licensure, compounding the stress. I love Hawaii, its people, and my school community. I want to focus on what I do best: teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students. I urge you to vote in favor of HB 439, allowing us to prioritize our students, not excessive testing.

I am committed to providing the best possible education for my students here in Hawaii, a place I have come to love. Passing HB 439 will allow international teachers like myself to focus on our passion: teaching. I respectfully urge you to support this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ruel M. Cabasa

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 1:44:01 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kimiko Shuster	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439

To: Hawaii State Legislature

Re: HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Date: [Insert Date]

From: Kimiko Shuster, Parent and Community Member

Location: Lanai, Hawaii

Aloha, Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to create an international visiting teacher license, allowing highly qualified international educators to continue making a profound impact on our students and community.

As a parent of a student at Lanai High and Elementary School, I have personally witnessed the dedication, expertise, and positive influence that J-1 teachers bring to our children’s education. These teachers not only provide high-quality instruction, but they also introduce diverse perspectives and enrich our students’ learning experiences in ways that are invaluable.

My child has greatly benefited from the knowledge, care, and passion of J-1 educators. They go above and beyond in fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment, helping students develop academically, socially, and culturally. Their presence in our school system ensures that students receive a well-rounded education that prepares them for success in an increasingly globalized world.

Beyond the classroom, J-1 teachers have made a significant impact on our Lanai community. They participate in extracurricular activities, cultural events, and community outreach, building strong relationships that extend far beyond the school campus. Their commitment to both education and community involvement is something we deeply value and appreciate.

Recognizing the international credentials of these educators through the passage of HB 439 would allow us to continue benefiting from their skills and dedication. It would also provide them with the stability they deserve, ensuring that Hawaii remains a welcoming place for talented international teachers who contribute so much to our keiki and our future.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 439 to uphold the quality and diversity of education in our schools.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Kimiko Shuster

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 1:55:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Corazon Calilao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I was one among those who personally "welcomed" these 10 young Filipino teachers from the Philippines. It was in July, 2023 when they first landed on the island of Lāna'i. The school and community was amazed of their arrival. Multiple parties were held hosted by different families and organizations to welcome them. There were lots of fun, food from different cultures were served and enjoyed together by everyone. During that time, these teachers have shown and shared their talents like singing and dancing, and the spirit of Aloha was shown, too. It is a great honor and privilege for the Lāna'i High and Elementary School to have these J-1 teachers be added in the teaching staff. Meaning, shortage of teachers at the school has been resolved.

I work as a school custodian (substitute) and they have shown equitable impartition of their knowledge, skills, and have highly acceptable moral values to the students and faculty. They have shown their empathy, love, and care to their students. Being respectful towards their supervisors, colleagues, and staff, accepting positive and negative criticism have shown them to grow in their field of profession.

Lastly, as their contract nears its end, I write to you as a concerned resident and dedicated member of Lāna'i community to consider give extension for our J-1 teachers. They have been invaluable in shaping the young minds of our children - our future leaders- through their dedication and passion for education. Their contributions have greatly enriched our school and community, and their continued presence would be a tremendous benefit to our children's growth and learning.

I sincerely hope for you kind consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Corazon Calilao

Community Member, Lāna'i

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 2:06:43 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annie Baltazar	DOE - Lanai High and Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB439 - International Visiting teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025 at 2:00pm

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Annie Baltazar, a second grade teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School. I am writing today to express my strong support for HB439, which would create an International Visiting Teacher License. Teaching for the past two years in Lanai City, Hawaii, has been an incredibly fulfilling journey, shaping young minds and making a lasting impact on my second-grade students. My passion for education has always been to nurture and inspire my students, and I have witnessed firsthand how my dedication has helped them grow academically, socially, and emotionally. Seeing my students develop confidence in their abilities, learn new concepts, and become active participants in the learning process has been my greatest reward.

Beyond the classroom, my colleagues and I have worked together to create a positive impact within our school and the greater community. We have fostered an environment where students feel safe, valued, and empowered to learn. Through school activities, events, and community outreach programs, we continue to instill values of responsibility, respect, and kindness in our students. Our combined efforts have strengthened the bond between the school and the Lanai City community, creating a collaborative network that supports student success.

In addition to my contributions within the school, I have been actively engaged in community service and church activities. My role as an educator extends beyond the classroom, as I take part in programs that benefit families, provide educational support, and contribute to church initiatives that uplift and support those in need. These experiences have allowed me to grow as an individual while reinforcing the values I aim to instill in my students.

My teaching journey has been significantly shaped by my training and experiences in the Philippines. The rigorous education and hands-on experiences I received there have equipped me with strong pedagogical skills, classroom management strategies, and a deep understanding of diverse student needs. These foundations have been instrumental in my ability to adapt and thrive in a different educational setting here in Hawaii. My Philippine teaching license is a testament to my qualifications, and it continues to serve as a strong foundation for my current and future teaching endeavors in the United States.

One of the challenges I have faced in my teaching career here in Hawaii is the need to travel by boat or plane to take my Praxis exams. The journey is not only physically demanding but also financially burdensome. Despite these obstacles, I remain committed to meeting the requirements necessary to continue my profession as an educator. The high cost and logistical challenges of taking these exams highlight the dedication and sacrifices required to pursue a teaching career away from home.

Through all the challenges and triumphs, my passion for teaching remains unwavering. The impact I make in my students' lives, the contributions I bring to my school and community, and the lessons I have learned from my journey are all part of my commitment to shaping the future generation. I am grateful for the opportunity to teach in Lanai City, Hawaii, and I look forward to continuing my mission of inspiring and educating young minds.

Mahalo for your time and support!

Respectfully,

Annie Canlas Baltazar, 2nd Grade Teacher of LHES

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 2:16:10 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Clarissa G. Santiago	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Sir/Madam

This is Teacher Clarissa G. Santiago.I am currently teaching now in Maui Hawaii as a Mathematics Teacher in Grade 9 (Algebra 1).

Before I arrived here to teach it took more than 1 year it's because there are lots of process and screening in order to make sure that I will be one of the qualified teachers to teach the student here in Hawaii and share my culture and learning process that we have in the Philippines.

I experienced a lot of things here ,first was suffering from homesick ,cultural adjustment and the learning process that they have here,but being a passionate teacher I overcome everything and give everything that can help the students here to achieve there goals in life.As a teacher I am happy to be part of success of my students.For me all of the students deserve to receive an excellent education even if you're not came from the same country and the same with teachers we should also need and have a the same treatment and opportunities to help more students in the future.Thank you for the chance to hear/know my testimony.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 2:29:13 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Spencer Margaret Saragena	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for HB439 RELATING TO EDUCATION, which seeks to allow J-1 visa holders who are teaching in Hawaii to obtain a teaching license in the state. As we know, Hawaii’s educational system faces ongoing challenges in securing qualified and diverse educators. This bill would significantly enhance the pool of potential teachers, improve educational outcomes for students, and contribute to the overall strength and diversity of Hawaii’s workforce.

Hawaii’s student population is diverse, representing a unique blend of ethnicities, cultures, and traditions. The benefits of having a diverse teaching workforce cannot be overstated. J-1 visa teachers bring a wealth of international experience and cultural perspectives that enrich the classroom and foster an environment of global understanding. By allowing these educators to become licensed, Hawaii can better reflect its cultural diversity and provide students with a broader, more inclusive educational experience.

Hawaii, like many states, has faced persistent teacher shortages, particularly in specialized areas like science, mathematics, special education, and foreign languages. The J-1 teacher exchange program has served as an essential tool for attracting talented individuals from around the world to fill these gaps. However, without the ability to earn a full teaching license, these educators are often limited in their professional opportunities. Allowing J-1 teachers to obtain teaching licenses will provide Hawaii’s schools with a steady and skilled workforce, addressing both the teacher shortage and the need for greater expertise in critical subject areas.

Many J-1 teachers come to Hawaii with advanced degrees, teaching credentials from their home countries, and years of experience in their respective fields. However, current licensing restrictions often prevent them from fully utilizing their qualifications. By creating a pathway for J-1 teachers to obtain licensure, we can ensure that highly qualified educators who are already in our schools can continue to contribute to the academic success of Hawaii’s students. This bill would streamline the process and provide a clear, fair path for these educators to achieve full licensure based on their experience and education.

In a rapidly changing educational landscape, stability is key. Allowing J-1 teachers to obtain teaching licenses would enhance the continuity of education for Hawaii’s students. Teachers with J-1 visas who have spent time in Hawaii’s classrooms and built relationships with students are uniquely positioned to provide long-term educational consistency. By creating a system that

recognizes the value and experience of these educators, we can avoid disruptions in the classroom and better serve the needs of our students.

Passing this bill is a practical and impactful step toward addressing Hawaii's teacher shortage, enhancing diversity in the classroom, and supporting the professional growth of qualified educators.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Spencer Margaret D. Saragena

8th grade Co-Math, Chiefess Kamakahahei Middle School

margaretsaragena@gmail.com/ 808 378 8489

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 2:37:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sannylee Ermac	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sannylee Ermac, an English Language Arts teacher at Maui Waena Intermediate School. My educational mission is to guide and inspire students toward a high-quality education. For more than a decade in education, I've focused on building a strong school community, and supporting student growth...and that's what I'm doing in my present school. However, despite my experience and license from the Philippines, I still need to take and pass the Praxis exams which which adds to my financial burden and preparation stress.

Hence, I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439 which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This legislation is a vital step toward addressing the ongoing teacher shortage and enriching the educational experiences of students across the state. It also acknowledges the extensive training and qualifications international teachers possess, offering a fair pathway to continue our positive impact on Hawaii schools.

I urge your support for HB439, extending our visas for five years to promote stability for our students and enable us to become fully integrated members of our schools and communities, guaranteeing equal pay and benefits to ensure we can adequately support our families, and providing international teachers with full teaching licensure to remove additional testing requirements. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Sannylee Ermac

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 2:54:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samson Bulanandi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

I'm Samson Garingan Bulanandi, an English Language Development teacher at Konawaena Middle School located at 81-1045 Konawaena School Road, Kealakekua, Hawaii, 96750. I'm writing to wholeheartedly support HB439, which proposes establishing an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As a dedicated educator with a proven track record, I've faced unnecessary barriers to obtaining full licensure in Hawai'i due to the Praxis exams. These exams are cost-prohibitive and logistically challenging, requiring travel to O'ahu.

This bill recognizes the value of international teachers like myself, who bring rigorous education, qualifications, and experience from our home countries. It provides a fair and reasonable pathway for us to continue making a meaningful impact in Hawai'i's schools.

By passing this bill, Hawai'i will address its ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in rural and underserved communities. It will also honor diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent, ensuring our keiki receive the best possible education.

I urge you to support this bill, providing international teachers with a clear, accessible, and fair path to licensure.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Samson Garingan Bulanandi

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 3:04:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abegail P Abarquez	J1 Teacher	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my support for HB439, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. My name is Abegail Abarquez, and I am a Special Education teacher at Naalehu Elementary. As a J1 teacher from the Philippines with over 14 years of experience—three years in 6th grade and ten years in special education—I am dedicated to providing quality education to my students here in Hawaii.

While I fully appreciate the importance of demonstrating subject knowledge, the additional requirements, such as multiple licensure exams, create unnecessary stress and detract from my ability to engage with my students. The limited duration of our visas, often contingent upon obtaining licensure, adds further pressure. The high costs of the Praxis exams, combined with our time constraints, make it challenging to focus on what truly matters—our students.

The implementation of the International Visiting Teacher License through HB439 would allow educators like me to continue contributing to Hawaii's educational landscape without the burden of excessive testing. I genuinely love Hawaii, its culture, and the welcoming school community. My goal is to inspire and support students without unnecessary barriers.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB439, enabling international teachers to dedicate themselves fully to teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 3:21:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Kern	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 2, 2025

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

My name is Sarah Kern and I am a resident of Līhu‘e, Kaua‘i and an instructional coach at Chiefess Kamakāhelei Middle School (CKMS). I am testifying in strong support of HB439 to recognize the teaching experiences and qualifications of international teachers who are helping to educate our keiki. CKMS currently has eight teachers who are on a J-1 visa. These teachers make up more than 10% of our faculty and are crucial members of our school’s community. They are team players who are incredibly dedicated to their teaching and can often build relationships with our Filipino students in ways that other teachers cannot.

As a coach, I am often asked to support teachers as they pursue a teaching license in Hawai‘i, and have been shocked to learn that our J-1 visa teachers are having to jump through multiple hoops and take extra Praxis exams in order to earn a Hawai‘i teaching license when they are already licensed to teach in the Philippines. These teachers are already facing challenges upon arriving in Hawai‘i, including finding housing, adapting to a new society and culture, and navigating the ins and outs of teaching at a new school within the Hawai‘i DOE which is a challenge in and of itself. One of our J-1 visa teachers has decades of experience in education and was even a principal in the Philippines. Shouldn’t his credentials be recognized here as well? Instead of forcing these teachers to study and pay for multiple Praxis exams, jumping through extra hoops while helping us fill our vacant positions, let’s support them and allow them to focus on what they came here to do – help to educate our keiki.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Mahalo nui loa,

Sarah Kern

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 3:24:29 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joe Troutman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Joe Troutman and I am the ELL Coordinator for Konawaena Middle School, a position I've had here now for 8 years. With more than 100 students across 3 grade levels, myself and our former EL Coordinator Mina Narita have long been trying to form a good EL team and get help for the many roles we fill for the students we teach. With our school being short-staffed and bringing in new personnel who stay being an issue at our schools, at is in in many other schools on the Big Island, this has been no easy task.

By far the most lasting and capable help we have received during the almost decade we have been working has come in the for of Samson Bulanandi, a Filipino teacher who joined our school last year as part of the J1 Teacher Visa Program. Samson left his wife and 3 daughters to come to our school and teach. I have never had as much help, and by extension our EL program has never been able grow to the extent as before we had Sam. Sam takes and applies feedback from myself and our administrators well and sincerely, and this has helped him tremendously as he made the transition between two very different teaching styles and school environments.

With our school being short-staffed and not having many available substitutes, Sam also probably subs 3 classes which are not his own every week, with as many as 5 or 6 weekly last year when our shortage was more severe. His attendance is among the best at our school, with only 3 days taken off 2 years into teaching.

With all of this, dealing with the many requirements and paperwork of his visa program has been another challenge which Sam has had to face. It was only a few months ago he was even able to pay off his visa and travel fees and begin to start saving money for himself and his family. The yearly praxis tests he is required to take are more stringent than any other sort of teacher new to the HODOE, and since he is on Big Island he would need to fly to Oahu or Maui just to take this test.

As our state continues to confront long-term teacher shortage and affordability issues, it is important we do what we can to retain good teachers, and by passing this bill, it can go a long way towards both keeping these J1 teachers and also attracting more qualified international

professionals to these visa programs, all with the end goal of providing foundational and impactful public education for the future of our communities and our land,

Sincerely,

Joe Troutman

Konawaena Middle School - ELL Coordinator

Testimony in Support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

February 2, 2025

Good day, members of the committee. My name is John Paulo Rivera, and I'm a high school teacher at H.P. Baldwin High School on Maui. I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of international teachers here in Hawaii. I'm here to respectfully advocate for an exemption from the state's standardized testing requirements, specifically the Praxis exam, for J-1 visa teachers who are committed to serving Hawaii Department of Education students for five consecutive years. We recognize the importance of ensuring qualified educators, and I want to emphasize that prior to coming to the U.S., we have all earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines. Our academic credentials, including our Transcripts of Records, have also undergone thorough evaluation to confirm their equivalency and ensure we meet the standards for teaching in the United States.

The state of Hawaii has been incredibly welcoming to J-1 teachers, and we deeply appreciate the opportunity to contribute to its educational system. We are fortunate to share our diverse cultural perspectives with students, which we hope enriches their understanding of the world. We also understand the importance of filling critical teaching needs, particularly in areas like STEM, foreign languages, and special education, and are grateful to play a role in addressing these shortages. As educators, we are dedicated to investing our time and energy in supporting our students and their growth.

While we deeply value the opportunity to teach in Hawaii and contribute to its educational system, we respectfully suggest that the current requirement for J-1 teachers to undergo state standardized testing within our initial years of service presents some significant challenges, which we believe ultimately impact our schools and students. We understand the importance of ensuring teacher competency, and we are absolutely committed to meeting all necessary requirements. In fact, even during a proposed exemption period, we are dedicated to demonstrating our qualifications and commitment to professional growth in every single year through other means, such as classroom observations, professional development activities, and ongoing evaluations, and we hope the committee will also consider the following factors:

1. **Cultural and Linguistic Nuances:** Many J-1 teachers come from diverse educational backgrounds and pedagogical approaches. While we possess the required English proficiency, navigating the nuances of standardized tests often focused on specific state curriculum frameworks can be particularly challenging during our initial years. This is compounded by the significant adjustments we make to a new culture, school system, and sometimes, a different language environment. We are eager to learn and adapt, but this process takes time.

2. **Focus on Classroom Instruction:** Our primary focus as J-1 teachers is to dedicate our time and energy to our students. We believe that our greatest contribution lies in concentrating on classroom instruction, building strong relationships with students, and engaging in professional development that directly benefits them. Time spent preparing for and administering standardized tests can detract from these core responsibilities. We are willing to fulfill testing requirements, but we believe that prioritizing classroom instruction in our early years, alongside annual demonstrations of our qualifications, would be more beneficial for our students.
3. **Recruitment and Retention:** Adding another layer of complexity and cost to the already challenging process of obtaining a J-1 visa could create a significant deterrent for qualified international teachers seeking to teach in Hawaii. This could exacerbate existing teacher shortages, particularly in critical areas, and limit our students' access to diverse perspectives. We hope to ensure that Hawaii remains an attractive destination for international educators.
4. **Program Alignment:** The J-1 visa program is designed to promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Requiring standardized testing focused on specific state curricular standards may not fully align with this broader goal. We believe a more holistic approach to evaluating teacher effectiveness, including annual demonstrations of competency, would better serve the program's objectives.
5. **Five-Year Exemption as a Reasonable Timeframe:** We propose a five-year exemption from standardized testing for J-1 teachers. This timeframe would allow us to acclimate to the state's curriculum framework, adjust our teaching methods as needed, and become fully integrated into the school community- all while demonstrating our qualifications annually. We could then focus our initial years on what matters most – teaching our students. After this period, we would be prepared and expected to meet the same testing requirements as other teachers. We are confident that with this initial period of adjustment, and with our ongoing commitment to demonstrating our competency each year, we can successfully meet all requirements and contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's educational system.

We firmly believe this proposed exemption will not negatively impact the quality of education in Hawaii. The J-1 visa process itself involves rigorous screening, including thorough evaluation of our English competency and teaching qualifications, ensuring we are well-suited for our respective teaching assignments. Furthermore, we are held to the same accountability standards as all other teachers in Hawaii, subject to regular evaluations through established school and district procedures.

In fact, granting J-1 teachers an exemption from state standardized testing for the first five years would send a powerful message. It would demonstrate that you value our contributions to Hawaii's schools, support our ongoing professional development, and recognize the importance of allowing us to focus on our primary mission: educating our students. We believe this focused

approach during our initial years will ultimately benefit the students of Hawaii. We respectfully urge the committee to give this proposal your favorable consideration.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration.

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: HB439

Chair House- Woodson and Members of the Committee,

My name is PINKY GRACE FRANCISCO. I am a teacher at KEAAU MIDDLE SCHOOL in THE PUNA DISTRICT in HAWAII COUNTY, HAWAII. I am submitting testimony in support of HB 439, which seeks to create an international teacher license.

In 2016, I immigrated to Hawai'i carrying my educational credentials and teaching experience. As part of the licensure process, I had my credentials evaluated by a recognized credentialing entity to determine their U.S. equivalency, which I then submitted to the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB). Based on my qualifications and years of teaching experience, I was granted an HTSB Standard License.

I am currently in my 6th year of teaching, providing professional development to educators statewide, advocating and empowering multilingual students and their families and was even recognized as the 2024 Kau-Keaau-Pahoia Complex Teacher of the Year.

In the Philippines, earning a Bachelor's Degree in Education is a rigorous four-year process, which includes 12 credits of intensive practice teaching or clinical placement. Additionally, Master's Degrees which are earned within four years are only pursued after earning a Bachelor's Degree. Then a Doctor's Degree can be earned after. Furthermore, the J-1 visa program ensures that only highly qualified educators—many holding advanced degrees—are selected to teach in the U.S. Some of whom are even serving as educational specialists, Master Teachers, Head Teachers and school heads in the Philippines before transitioning to J1-teachers. These educators also passed the [Licensure Examination for Teachers](#), the Philippines' equivalent of the Praxis exam, and may hold additional [civil service license](#).

With regards to English proficiency, students in the Philippines start being exposed to English as soon as they enter preschool, and most are polyglots (one Philippine provincial language, Filipino/Tagalog-the national language, and English). According to the 2024 [EF English Proficiency index](#), the Philippines rank 22nd out of 116 countries in the [High English Proficiency category](#) and rank second in Asia.

The educator preparation and training of J-1 teachers ensure their teaching pedagogy meets high standards. Furthermore, the existence of [Philippines Republic Act No. 10912](#), also known as the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Act of 2016 mandates continuous professional growth for all licensed teachers in the Philippines, reinforcing their commitment to lifelong learning.

Currently, J-1 teachers are actively engaged in community service. Those employed in schools across Hawaii County actively participate in local events such as the Barrio Fiesta-Filipino and American Celebration (October 2024), Sakada Day (December 15, 2024), and the Hawaii Association of Filipino Educators Christmas Party and Induction of Officers (December 14, 2025). Like myself, who has contributed significantly to students, families, schools, and the broader community during my

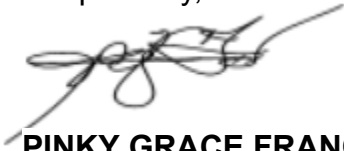
first three years with the Hawaii Department of Education, these international educators bring valuable skills and perspectives. By recognizing their expertise and providing greater opportunities, we can unlock even more impactful initiatives and projects.

This legislation is crucial for addressing Hawai'i's chronic teacher shortage while ensuring equitable recognition of international educators' qualifications and experience. By requiring the HTSB to establish a provisional pathway for visiting international teachers, this bill promotes diversity in our schools—an essential factor linked to improved student outcomes.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Legislature to pass HB439. Doing so will help ensure that Hawai'i's students continue to receive high-quality education from well-prepared and highly qualified teachers while reinforcing the state's commitment to equity and equal opportunity for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pinky Grace Francisco', written in a cursive style.

PINKY GRACE FRANCISCO

English Learner Program Coordinator and EL Teacher
Keaau Middle School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 4:47:04 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherry Lyn Valera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am Cherry Lyn Q. Valera a J1 Biology teacher in Waimea High School of the Island of Kauai. I am writing to support of HB439. Before coming over here as a teacher I have taught the Filipino Children for 7 years. I passed my licensure test in the Philippines and even earn a degree for Masters in Education. Coming over here is indeed a big step for my career as a teacher. However, the experienced and education I have is not yet enough to secure my position as a teacher to render longer service for the Department of Hawai'i Education and for the children. Upon my stay I learned to love the Island the kids and build up a good relationship to the community, which makes me think of not leaving and staying more. I wanted to stay more and help the community to develop young minds to achieve their future career in life. However, my urge to stay is hindered by taking Praxis exam, not that Im scared of taking it or not having the knowledge to take it but the financial burden that I need to go through without any assurance to myself to passing it right away.

Since the Praxis exam is not offered on Kaua'i, I had no choice but to fly to O'ahu to take it. This meant I had to book a round-trip flight, pay for transportation, and sometimes even arrange for overnight lodging depending on test availability. Which cost me a lot of money. I came all the way from the Philippines spending a lot of money just to come and teach over here and I am still paying for that. I took the risk and to tell you honestly I cant barely afford the life here in Hawai'i but this wont stop me to deliver a quality education for Hawai'i Kids.

If these worry of us of not staying longer due to Praxis will be address we are happy to stay and double/tripple our efforts more in our work station. We are doing good now but we can always be in our best if our worries will be out in our mind.

Thank you for hearing us. We all hope for the best..

Mahalo

_ Cherry Lyn Valera _

J1 teacher of Kauai

Testimony of Contribution and Support

As a special education teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School, I am deeply committed to meeting the unique academic and social-emotional needs of my 6th grade students. Through both push-in and pull-out sessions, I provide individualized instruction, creating tailored lessons that address the diverse learning needs of each student. This personalized approach allows my students to make meaningful academic progress, while also building the self-confidence they need to succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

In addition to my direct work with special education students, I collaborate closely with general education teachers, helping to extend support to regular students in the classroom setting. By helping during lessons and providing real-time intervention, I contribute to maximizing learning opportunities for all students. This collaboration ensures that every student, regardless of their learning profile, can engage with the curriculum and receive the support they need to excel.

My contributions are integral to achieving the mission and vision of Lokelani Inter, which seeks to foster an inclusive, nurturing environment where every student can thrive. Through my work, I strive to ensure that all students feel supported and valued as they work toward their educational goals.

Additionally, I would like to express my strong support for HB 439, which proposes the creation of an International Teacher License. This bill would allow teachers from the Philippines, like me, to use our credentials and teaching licenses here in the United States. By recognizing our qualifications as highly experienced and dedicated educators, we would be afforded equal pay for equal work, access to salary differentials, and the opportunity to work without the burden of additional requirements such as the Praxis exam. The Praxis exam poses a significant challenge given the time it demands for preparation, especially when balanced with our already demanding workloads. Moreover, international teachers teaching in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, and few other states enjoy the full benefit of teaching license reciprocity. It is my belief that HB 439 would not only benefit teachers like me but also enhance the overall educational experience for our students by ensuring that highly qualified educators are retained and supported.

Thank you for considering both my contributions to the school community and my support for HB 439, which would help to improve the professional recognition and treatment of international teachers in the U.S.

Sincerely,

MAYLEN M. PATANAO

Special Education Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 5:01:39 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexis Navarro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

I am Alexis C. Navarro, a Science teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School, and I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Teacher Visiting License. As a teacher originally from the Philippines, I am deeply invested in the future of education in Hawaii, and I believe this bill will greatly benefit not only international teachers like myself but also the students and communities we serve here.

I would like to share my personal experience and perspective as a J1 teacher in Hawaii:

1. I have worked tirelessly to earn my degrees, including a master's and doctorate, in the Philippines. With many years of teaching experience, I've had the honor of leading a school as a school head. My educational background and professional journey have prepared me to contribute positively to the school communities I serve.
2. As a J1 teacher here in Hawaii, I am proud to share my knowledge and expertise with students, staff, and parents. The administration has expressed their appreciation for my talents, and I truly value being able to contribute to the educational environment. This kind of mutual respect and recognition motivates me to continue improving and supporting the success of all students.
3. I am dedicated to continually improving as an educator. I actively attend training sessions, conferences, and workshops to learn the most effective teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and other skills to better serve my students. This ongoing commitment to growth is a testament to my passion for teaching and my desire to be an effective educator here in Hawaii.
4. The proposed five-year stay under this bill would provide my family and me the stability we need to establish a strong foundation. The current three-year contract length is insufficient to cover the loans we took out in the Philippines before coming here. A five-year period would offer us the time needed to pay off these financial obligations and build a more secure future.
5. As international teachers, we already face the financial burden of paying for the Praxis exam, which is costly and time-consuming. Additionally, the preparation required for this exam takes away valuable time that could otherwise be spent planning lessons, creating educational innovations, and focusing on our students' needs. The proposed changes in this bill would reduce this burden and allow us to devote more energy to our teaching and professional development.
6. I firmly believe that the educational qualifications I hold, as well as my professional experience, are on par with the standards of teaching here in Hawaii. The reciprocity of our licenses from the Philippines, combined with the real-world experience we bring, ensures that we are equipped to contribute effectively to the local education system. We are fully capable of

meeting Hawaii's teaching standards, and this bill will help validate and streamline our contributions.

I strongly urge the committee to pass HB 439, as it will not only support international teachers but also improve the quality of education in Hawaii. It will foster a more stable, dedicated teaching force and ensure that educators can focus on what truly matters: the success and well-being of our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

ALEXIS C. NAVARRO
Science Teacher
Lahaina Intermediate School
Maui, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 5:12:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arnie Calamaya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

I am writing in support of House Bill 439, which seeks to provide fairness and opportunity to us J-1 teachers in Hawaii. As a first-year J1 teacher in Hawaii, I understand the challenges of navigating a new education system and the uncertainty that comes with it. However, despite these challenges, I am deeply committed to staying and growing as an educator here. I have seen how we J-1 teachers navigate similar transitions, bring invaluable experience, cultural diversity, and global perspectives that enrich the community both inside and outside the schools.

One of the greatest challenges for me as a J-1 teacher is the requirement to take the Praxis exam, despite already holding internationally recognized teaching license and undergraduate or graduate degree. Taking this test is an undue burden, as it either requires me to travel from Kauai to Oahu for an in-person exam, an expensive and time-consuming trip for me and those on other islands, or dealing with the difficulties of the online version , which demands a setup with strict technological and environmental conditions. These obstacles for me not only create unnecessary stress but also divert time and energy away from what truly matters--teaching and supporting students.

Lastly, I strongly urge you to support this bill as it allows me and the other J-1 teachers to stay for five years, ensuring continuity for students and helping the community.

Mahalo nui loa!

Arnie Calamaya

J-1 Teacher

Waimea High School

Testimony in Support of HB 439- International Visiting Teacher License

Chairperson and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

I'm Jamiefel P. Pungtilan, a Math teacher at James Campbell High School. I'm submitting this testimony in support of HB 439 - the bill that seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified J1 visa holders.

As a teacher handling Grade 9 Inclusion class, I'm deeply committed to the success of my students, especially those with diverse learning needs. In our classroom, I'm working closely with students from various backgrounds, including those who have special education needs and accommodations. Together with my co-teacher, we often stay after school to offer additional support to these students. This after-school tutoring is helpful for our inclusion students, as it gives them the extra time and attention they need to grasp key concepts.

As an educator committed to providing quality instruction to my students, particularly those in the inclusion program, I recognize the significant impact this bill could have on addressing the teacher shortages in the schools in Hawaii. One of the most important aspects of this bill is the acknowledgment of the equivalent education that international teachers possess, which meets the standards required in the United States. Many qualified international educators hold degrees and credentials that are fully comparable to those required here. However, despite this equivalent qualification, we international teachers often face numerous financial and logistical barriers.

The current requirement for passing the Praxis exams places a significant burden on us, not only financially but also in terms of the extra time and preparation it demands instead of focusing on the preparation for our lessons. This bill acknowledges the high standards of education, qualifications, and experience we possess from our home countries and creates an equitable pathway for us to continue making a positive and meaningful impact in Hawaii's schools.

By establishing the International Visiting Teacher License, this can remove many of the barriers that we international educators face. This will not only help address teacher shortages but also expose students to diverse teaching methods and global perspectives, which are vital in today's interconnected world. The value international teachers can bring to our classrooms is immense, and by supporting this bill, we are ensuring that students will have access to high-quality, culturally rich educational experiences.

I strongly urge you to support this bill and help create more opportunities for international collaboration in Hawaii's schools. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jamiefel Pungtilan

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 5:26:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia Valdez	J1 Teachers	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Patricia Valdez one of the J1 Teachers here in Hawaii, can attest to the difficulties we encounter in completing the certification tests (Praxis). The J-1 visa program allows many of us to enter the country with the intention of introducing teaching methods to the students. The extra prerequisite of passing the Praxis exam, however is frequently a major obstacle. With our years of classroom experience, advanced degrees, and specific skills that meet the demands of the district we serve, we J-1 teachers are already highly qualified professionals. Making us take Praxis, might result in delays, lost opportunities, and in certain situations, disqualification from teaching up to 5 years.

Additionally, a lot of J-1 teachers contribute cultural knowledge and international viewpoints that enhance students' knowledge. Our students will be exposed to a wider variety of concepts and methods if these teachers are free to carry on teaching without having to worry about the Praxis exams.

I am a Special Education teacher and I have IEP case loads of 10 which a certified teacher is required to handle like the annual IEPs and Re Evaluations as well as giving accommodations to the kids. I must pass all my Praxis exams first in order to receive Special Education pay. My school/ IEP team trusts my skills as a Special Education teacher and with the hope of passing the bill, us teachers will be given opportunities like other certified teachers deserve. Allowing us to support our families in our home country as well as supporting the education system here in Hawaii.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 5:26:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Meriam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Honorable Legislatures!

My name is Meriam, and I am a Filipino exchange teacher currently teaching in Hawai‘i. I am writing to express my strong support for the establishment of an international teacher license for certain visa holders and to advocate for the removal of the Praxis requirement in favor of converting our Philippine teaching license into a recognized teaching certificate in Hawai‘i.

Coming to Hawai‘i as an international teacher is a significant financial and emotional investment. Many of us leave our families behind and spend thousands of dollars on agency fees, relocation costs, and visa processing just to fulfill our dream of teaching here. However, the requirement to take the Praxis exam adds another layer of hardship. The cost of these exams is burdensome, and for many of us, passing them while adjusting to a new educational system and culture is an immense challenge.

The reality is that our stay in Hawai‘i is often limited to three years under the J-1 visa program. This short period is barely enough to recover the financial investment we have made. When faced with the additional cost and stress of Praxis, many international teachers choose to move to states that do not require it, leading to teacher shortages in Hawai‘i.

Filipino teachers come to Hawai‘i with extensive experience and valid teaching licenses from the Philippines. Recognizing our Philippine teaching credentials as equivalent to a state teaching certificate would not only ease our transition but also help retain qualified and passionate educators in Hawai‘i’s schools. We are here because we are committed to serving the students of Hawai‘i, and removing unnecessary barriers would ensure that we can continue to contribute meaningfully to the education system.

I urge you to support this measure to establish an international teacher license and remove the Praxis requirement for Filipino teachers by converting our Philippine licenses into recognized certificates. This change would alleviate financial and professional burdens, promote teacher retention, and strengthen Hawai‘i’s diverse educational workforce.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
[M.B.Alvarez](#)
Highschool Teacher,Baldwin HS

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 5:28:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Joy Selda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am [Mary Joy Selda](#) Science Teacher, holding emergency hire permit to teach in the state of Hawai'i. As a committed and capable teacher, I am giving my heartfelt support to HB439. I understand that HTSB has a process for recognizing and granting licenses to out-of-state educators through reciprocity but why can they not grant international teachers from the Philippines. Given the fact, teachers met the necessary educational and professional standards. I hope HTSB has the same license criteria whether it is local or international just like other states to which I got my Professional Educator License that will last for 5 years. It is a priceless feeling to have validation of educational attainment, experience and rewarded by license from another state. I hope to feel this validation as well in Hawai'i.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 5:33:26 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shanika Mae Isagan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Member of the Committee

My name is Shanika Mae Isagan, a 6th grade teacher at Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School. I wholeheartedly support HB 439, which proposes an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is incredibly important to me, and to teachers like me who have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines. We came to Hawaii with a deep passion for education and a desire to share our knowledge and experience with your children. We've poured our hearts into our training and dedicated ourselves to the profession, yet we face significant hurdles, like the Praxis exams, to continue serving students in the Hawaii Department of Education. It feels like an unnecessary obstacle placed in our path when all we want is to nurture and inspire the young minds in our classrooms.

As international teachers, we are deeply committed to providing the best possible education for our students here in Hawaii. We see their potential and are driven to help them succeed. However, the reality of balancing our teaching responsibilities with the intense pressure of preparing for multiple licensure exams is incredibly challenging. It pulls us away from what we love most – lesson planning, engaging with our students, and creating a positive and supportive learning environment. While I understand the need to demonstrate subject knowledge, I truly believe that our existing qualifications, experience, and the dedication we demonstrate in our classrooms every day should be recognized. Requiring us to take numerous standardized tests adds a financial and emotional strain that ultimately takes away from our students.

The limited duration of our visas, ranging from three to five years, adds another layer of uncertainty and anxiety. It's difficult to fully invest in our students and our communities when we're constantly worried about the future. I've also heard that extending our stay to the full five years is contingent upon obtaining licensure, which only compounds the pressure we face. The high cost of the Praxis exams, combined with the limited time we have, makes it incredibly difficult to focus entirely on what truly matters: our students. We are here to share our love of learning and contribute to the vibrant educational landscape of Hawaii, but these bureaucratic hurdles make our mission so much harder.

I urge you to consider the impact of HB 439 on dedicated teachers like myself. We are not just numbers or statistics; we are individuals with a genuine passion for teaching and a deep desire to make a difference in the lives of Hawaii's children. Passing this bill would not only streamline the licensing process but also show international teachers that their skills and experience are valued and respected. It would allow us to focus on what we do best: inspiring the next generation.

I fell in love with Hawaii the moment I set foot on this beautiful island. I adore the school where I currently teach; it feels like home. I've never felt like I don't belong because the aloha spirit, the 'ohana, is so strong here. Every single day, I wake up before sunrise with one goal in mind: to help my students become the best versions of themselves. That's what drives me, what inspires me, and what makes me excited to face each new day.

My heart is here, with my students, in this community. I wish to continue inspiring and supporting them, nurturing their dreams, and helping them reach their full potential. However, the burden of excessive testing requirements threatens to pull me away from that core mission. It takes time, energy, and focus away from what truly matters: my students.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439. This bill is not just about paperwork and procedures; it's about allowing dedicated teachers like myself to focus on what we do best: teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students. It's about ensuring that the children of Hawaii have access to passionate and qualified educators who are fully present and engaged in their learning. Please, let us focus on our students, on building relationships, and on fostering a love of learning. Please, support HB 439.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill.

Respectfully,
Shanika Mae Isagan
6th Grade Teacher - Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School

TESTIMONY- DAME JUSTINE TUNAC
ELA TEACHER AT LANAI HIGH AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Aloha, my name is Dame Justine Tunac, and I am an English Language Arts teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School. This is my first year teaching here in Hawai'i, and I am deeply committed to honing my skills and providing the best education I can to my students. It is with this dedication to my students and to the field of education that I am proud to support the bill requiring the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders.

This bill is important because it addresses the critical teacher shortages we are facing in Hawai'i, particularly in specialized subjects such as English Language Arts. By creating an international teacher license, we can tap into a global pool of talented educators who are eager to share their knowledge and expertise with students here. This would significantly improve the quality of education and allow schools to offer a wider variety of courses to meet the diverse needs of students.

In addition, establishing clear criteria for obtaining an international teacher license will help streamline the hiring process and ensure that foreign educators meet the same high standards as teachers who are already licensed in Hawai'i. By creating a framework for licensure, we can maintain consistency in teacher qualifications and ensure that every teacher, regardless of their background, is properly prepared to meet the academic and cultural needs of students in our schools.

As a J-1 teacher, I have personally experienced the financial burden of trying to extend my visa for another five years. To qualify for the extension, I must pass five crucial Praxis tests, which are both costly and challenging. This financial strain makes it difficult for teachers like myself to stay in Hawai'i, despite our dedication to teaching. With the passage of this bill, however, the financial burden of these exams would be alleviated, allowing teachers to focus more on their students and their professional growth rather than worrying about the prohibitive costs of testing. This bill also enriches the educational experience for students by introducing diverse perspectives and teaching methodologies. International teachers bring unique insights from different parts of the world, which can enhance students' understanding of global issues and broaden their horizons. It encourages cross-cultural learning and prepares students for a more interconnected and diverse world.

As a first-year teacher myself, I believe this bill is a step in the right direction for improving Hawai'i's educational system. It not only addresses immediate staffing needs but also creates opportunities for students to connect with global ideas and cultures. I fully support this initiative and urge you to consider its potential to positively impact both educators and students in Hawai'i.

DAME JUSTINE A. TUNAC
English Language Arts Teacher
Lanai High and Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 6:11:13 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
KAREN FAYE SOBERANO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Karen Faye Soberano, a SPED Teacher at Solomon Elementary. I've been teaching in Solomon for two years now. For the two years of experienced teaching here in Hawaii I have this testimony of loving the Island, loving the culture, loving the keiki of Hawaii and loving teaching as my profession. That DOE is my ohana- my home away from home.

Education in Hawaii reflects the state's unique cultural, historical, and geographic context. The state's diverse population, the central role of Native Hawaiian culture, and the challenges posed by its island geography make Hawaii's educational system distinctive. This is why my interest in teaching here in Hawaii becomes deeper.

As a teacher, I've seen firsthand how diversity in teaching staff can bring unique perspectives and innovations to the classroom. However, we face significant barriers when it comes to hiring highly qualified teachers, as current licensing requirements are often restrictive or difficult to navigate. The Praxis exam can be a real challenge for me, especially when I am balancing everything else on my plate. It can feel overwhelming because it's not just about knowing the material, but also about how you can best demonstrate your understanding under pressure and the cost of the Praxis exam adds to the stress. The fees for the test, plus the cost of study materials or prep courses, can really add up, especially if I need to retake sections. It's one of those extra barriers that doesn't always feel fair, especially for me who are already managing a lot of responsibilities.

An international teacher license would help alleviate teacher shortages by attracting qualified educators from other countries, ensuring that every student has access to high-quality education, no matter where their teacher is from. It would also help our students develop global awareness and adaptability in an increasingly interconnected world.

For teachers like myself who have gained qualifications abroad, navigating complex and often costly certification processes can be an overwhelming and time-consuming experience. An international license would streamline this process, allowing skilled teachers to enter the workforce sooner, providing more opportunities for professional growth and financial stability.

In conclusion, I fully support this bill because I believe it will create a more inclusive, dynamic, and effective education system for our students. By recognizing the qualifications of international teachers and offering them a streamlined path to licensure, we will not only support educators but also empower the next generation of learners to thrive in a diverse and

interconnected world. In this way, we the J1 teachers could really do our job to be an advocate of cultural exchange and to help our learners to broaden their worldviews.

Aloha!

May I take this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to the Chair of the Board, esteemed members of the committee and/or legislatures for giving us the opportunity to provide testimonies in support of HB 439.

My name is Florante D. Romero a J1-Teacher at Mauka Lani Elementary School, Kapolei. I am submitting this testimony in support to the said Bill. This testimony emphasizes the importance of supporting international teachers, not just for our own benefit, but for the overall improvement of the educational system in the State particularly in Hawaii.

It cannot be denied that we, the J1 teachers, sacrificed our teaching positions in the Philippines to provide enough needs for our own families and of course our 'will' to serve as an international teacher. Of course, as an international teacher, I don't just serve as a teacher but to be an exemplary in all aspects. Being committed to provide the best education possible for our students in my/our utmost priority. However, many of us faces significant barriers such as taking the Praxis tests to continue serving the students. This is so because taking the said test requires time, effort and money especially in the application process. I would say that our qualifications should be recognized without undergoing state's standardized tests, and financial constraints.

May I humbly request the Chair, members of the committee, legislatures and other significant individuals to support this Bill to provide international teachers with a clear and fair path to licensure. With this, it will also create a more inclusive, diverse and effective educational system for all. This bill is not just an investment in international teachers for today's generation but in the future of education itself. Consequently, this Bill is an essential step toward strengthening the quality of education that may benefit the students because international teachers bring unique perspectives, skills, and expertise that enrich the learning environment in the State as a whole.

Thank you for your time and effort in this endeavor.

Mahalo!

Much Aloha,

Florante D. Romero
Elementary Teacher
Mauka Lani Elementary
Kapolei, HI

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 6:27:20 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannel Monel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Shannel Monel, and I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. As educators, we understand the importance of ensuring teachers are qualified and equipped to provide a high-quality education for all students. However, the current Praxis system, with its multiple subtests, imposes an undue burden on teachers, especially those who are already have license in their home country. Teachers are already working long hours, balancing lesson plans, student assessments, parent communications, and other responsibilities. Adding the burden of multiple standardized exams, with costs and preparation time, only detracts from their ability to focus on what matters most—teaching students effectively. If we cannot pass these required tests within the given time, we face an uncertain future. We cannot continue our extensions indefinitely. Which will lead us to go home without the fulfillment of being an international teacher. A fulfillment that comes from the combination of personal growth, professional development, cultural immersion, and the opportunity to make a real difference in student's lives. Thank you for considering this bill, and for your continued dedication to supporting educators. I strongly urge the committee to approve this bill to make positive changes for the international teachers.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 6:38:47 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zenaida P. Guillermo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Zenaida P. Guillermo and I am writing to you in strong support of HB 439, the bill that seeks to create an International Visiting Teacher License. I stand with many of my colleagues who have worked tirelessly in classrooms across Hawaii but face insurmountable barriers due to the requirement to pass the Praxis exams in order to secure full licensure. The time, stress, and financial cost involved in meeting these requirements are not just burdensome—they are overwhelming.

As an educator who has already obtained a teaching license in my home country, I can attest to the high level of dedication, training, and expertise that we bring to the classroom. However, the additional requirement to pass multiple exams—often at great financial expense—places an unnecessary and unfair strain on international teachers. The financial burden of exam fees alone is substantial, and this does not even account for the cost of test preparation materials, travel expenses, and the time spent away from students. Every moment spent studying for a standardized test is time taken away from lesson planning, student engagement, and community involvement—three critical aspects of teaching that cannot be measured by an exam.

What is even more challenging is the stress of balancing the rigorous demands of teaching with the pressure of securing licensure in a limited time frame. Many of us have visas that last only three to five years, and the requirement to obtain licensure in order to extend our stay adds yet another layer of anxiety. We are constantly faced with the uncertainty of whether we will be able to continue our work here, despite the fact that we are already dedicated to the success of our students and the broader educational community.

We are not asking for special treatment; we simply ask for fairness and recognition of our qualifications and experience. The high cost and stress associated with the current licensure requirements only distract from what should be our focus: the students we teach, the relationships we build, and the future we help shape. HB 439 represents an opportunity to remove these unnecessary barriers and allow international teachers to continue contributing to Hawaii’s education system without the additional burden of costly and time-consuming exams.

I urge you to support HB 439 and help ensure that international teachers can continue doing what we do best: teaching, mentoring, and inspiring the next generation of learners in Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Zenaida P. Guillermo

Special Education Inclusion Teacher

King Kekaulike High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 6:48:16 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abigail L Cayabyab	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support to HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am ABIGAIL LUMANLAN CAYABYAB, and I am a 3rd grade teacher at Kahului Elementary School. I am writing this testimony to express my strong support to HB 439, which would create an International Visiting Teacher License.

I am a J1 teacher here in Hawaii, bringing years of experience and passion for education to my students. I hold professional teaching license in the Philippines. I was hoping that my credentials would be fully recognized, but instead, I was just classified as an emergency hired teacher, we receive lower salaries than fully licensed teachers. Housing costs alone take up a huge portion of my salary. HB 439 would change everything. If passed, this bill would:

- Grant international teachers a full teaching license, eliminating unnecessary exams.
- Ensure that we receive the same salary and differentials as licensed teachers, allowing us to support our families.
- Extend our stay for five years, giving our students consistency in their learning.

Hawaii is in urgent need of qualified teachers, and international teachers are already here, working hard every day to fill these gaps. We are dedicated, passionate, and committed to the success of Hawaii’s keiki, but we need stability to continue making a difference. I truly love Hawaii—its people, its culture, and especially the school community that has given me a very warm welcome. I have these very supporting colleagues who always feel me that I belong. My goal is to continue inspiring and supporting students without the burden of excessive testing requirements.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439 so that international teachers can continue serving Hawaii’s students without unnecessary barriers,
Mahalo for your time and support.

Abigail Lumanlan Cayabyab
3rd Grade Teacher
Kahului Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 7:16:54 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Larriza Bercasio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Representatives and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, a bill that would create an international visiting teacher license in Hawaii. As a teacher with 9 years of experience in the Philippines, I believe this legislation is crucial for addressing teacher shortages and enriching our educational system with diverse perspectives.

During my years in the Philippines, I held a valid teaching license specializing in Secondary Education with a concentration in Biology. This license, earned through rigorous academic training and examinations, qualified me to teach students in primary and secondary education and reflects my deep understanding of pedagogy, curriculum development, and student assessment. My Philippine teaching license should be recognized as equivalent to a valid teaching license for the purpose of this international visiting teacher program.

I am currently in Hawaii on a J1 visa as a visiting teacher. While I am eager to contribute my expertise to Hawaii's students, the requirement to take the Praxis exam presents a significant burden to a teacher like me. As a J1 visa holder, my time in the US is limited, and the financial implications of preparing for and taking the Praxis, in addition to the other costs associated with relocating and starting a new position, create an unnecessary obstacle. Furthermore, the content of the Praxis exam may not fully align with the curriculum and teaching methodologies I have been trained in and successfully utilized for many years. My experience and existing licensure should be given due consideration.

HB 439 recognizes the valuable contributions that international teachers can make to our schools. It acknowledges our existing qualifications and experience, streamlining the process for us to share our knowledge and skills with Hawaii's students. This bill is not about lowering standards; it's about recognizing the diverse pathways to becoming a qualified educator and leveraging the global talent pool to benefit our keiki. By creating this international visiting teacher license, Hawaii can attract highly qualified teachers from around the world, filling critical vacancies and providing students with a broader educational experience.

I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of HB 439. This bill offers a practical solution to teacher shortages while enriching our schools with diverse perspectives. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Larriza Bercasio

7th Grade Science Teacher

Ilima Intermediate School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 7:49:33 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Princes Joy Calingangan	Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Princes Joy V. Calingangan, a Special Education Teacher at August Ahrens Elementary School. I strongly support HB439, which would establish an international visiting teacher license for Filipino teachers. This legislation is crucial in addressing the critical teacher shortage, particularly in special education, and offers mutual benefits for both Filipino teachers and American students.

I am Princes Joy V. Calingangan, a Special Education Teacher at August Ahrens Elementary School. I strongly support HB439, which would establish an international visiting teacher license for Filipino teachers. This legislation is crucial in addressing the critical teacher shortage, particularly in special education, and offers mutual benefits for both Filipino teachers and American students.

Teaching in Waipahu, with its strong Filipino community, has been a truly heartwarming experience. The predominantly Filipino student population has created a sense of belonging, making it feel like a home away from home, especially for special education teachers like myself. We've been deeply touched by the appreciation from parents, who often commend our patience and dedication to their children with disabilities. The strong rapport we've built with families here is incredibly rewarding and reinforces the positive impact we're able to make.

This positive experience underscores the eagerness of many qualified Filipino teachers, like myself, to contribute to addressing the critical teacher shortage and ensuring all students have access to a quality education. The establishment of the proposed international visiting teacher license, as outlined in HB439, would streamline the process for us to share our expertise and fill these vital roles.

My time teaching in the US has been invaluable, providing me with the opportunity to immerse myself in a different educational system, explore diverse teaching methodologies, and adapt to new classroom environments. This professional growth has significantly enhanced my skills and broadened my teaching repertoire, ultimately benefiting my students.

In turn, Filipino teachers bring unique skills, knowledge, and perspectives to American classrooms. We offer specialized expertise in various subjects and teaching approaches, enriching the learning experience for all students. Moreover, we foster cross-cultural understanding by sharing our cultural heritage and perspectives, promoting global citizenship and broadening students' worldviews. The interaction between Filipino teachers and American

students creates a rich learning environment that benefits everyone involved. HB439 would facilitate this vital exchange and ensure a more equitable and enriching educational experience for all students.

Princes Joy V. Calingangan

SPED-FSC Teacher

August Ahrens Elementary School

Waipahu, Hawaii

I am Dyan Y. Ferrer of Solomon Elementary School and I am deeply grateful to Hawaii for allowing me to be part of its educational system. Teaching in Hawaii has provided me with numerous opportunities to grow and expand my expertise as an educator. I strongly support HB439 the creation of an International Visiting Teacher. Taking a licensure examination in the state would be a valuable step in our professional development as teachers. However, I would like to inquire whether our teaching licenses from the Philippines, along with our master's and doctoral degrees, could be considered in the certification process. Additionally, many teachers reside far from Honolulu, with the nearest testing center located in the city, making it challenging to travel for the examination. Furthermore, the cost of each test is \$90, and as the primary provider for my family, the total expense of \$450 is a significant financial burden. Given these circumstances, it would be highly beneficial if reciprocity could be considered to support educators like myself. Mahalo and God bless!

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:01:44 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ANNALIZA PIGAO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee,

My name is Annaliza Pigao and I am a Science teacher at Aliamanu Middle School. I am writing in strong support of HB439, a bill that would create an international visiting teacher license in Hawaii. I have witnessed firsthand the incredibly positive impact that international teachers, particularly those on J-1 visas, have had on our students, our school community, and our campus climate.

Our school has benefited greatly from the presence of a J-1 teacher. I brought a wealth of diverse experiences, perspectives, and teaching methodologies that enrich the learning environment for all students. As an international teacher, I don't just teach; I also inspire, broaden horizons, and create a more globally aware and accepting school culture.

Currently, the short-term nature of the J-1 visa program creates instability for our schools and our students. HB439 addresses this critical issue by allowing these highly valued educators to remain in Hawaii for up to five years if we obtain the international visiting teacher license. This extended stay will provide much-needed continuity for our students, allowing them to build strong, lasting relationships with their teachers. It will also allow our schools to invest in teachers like us, knowing that our expertise and dedication will benefit our community for a longer period.

The provisions within HB439 are essential for ensuring fairness and respect for educators. Equal pay for equal work is a fundamental principle, and I applaud the bill's commitment to this. Granting access to differentials for licensed teachers further acknowledges the value and qualification we bring. Recognizing our internationally recognized credentials as equivalent to "highly qualified" status would be a great help. We have already demonstrated our expertise and experience in our home countries, and we should not impose unnecessary burdens, such as expensive and time-consuming Praxis exams, when we already hold international licenses and degrees.

By streamlining the licensing process and removing unnecessary obstacles, HB439 allows us, as international teachers, to focus on what truly matters: supporting our students, enriching our schools, and contributing to our community. It allows us to do what we are best qualified to do and what we came here to do.

I urge the committee to support HB439. It is a win-win for our students, our schools, and our community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:02:27 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bryan Thiel De Leon	J1 Teachers	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Bryan Thiel De Leon, a J1 teacher, submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 439, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As an educator with qualifications from the Philippines, I would like to present the following reasons for why J1 teachers from the Philippines should be exempted from taking another examination here in Hawaii, and have an international Visiting Teacher License instead:

*Internationally Recognized Credentials - Our teaching credentials from the Philippines are recognized internationally. We have been obtained from accredited institutions, ensuring that we are well-prepared to teach in diverse educational settings. This recognition should suffice as evidence of our qualifications.

*Comprehensive Training - The teacher education program we've completed in the Philippines provides a rigorous curriculum that covers essential pedagogical skills and content knowledge, closely aligning with the teaching standards established in Hawaii.

*Significant Teaching Experience - With several years of teaching experience in the Philippine educational system, we have developed effective teaching strategies and classroom management skills that demonstrate our competence and readiness to teach in Hawaii.

*Alignment with Hawaii Standards - The curriculum and teaching approaches in the Philippines incorporate many of the same principles and practices that are utilized in Hawaii. This alignment indicates that we are already equipped with the necessary skills to succeed as an educator in this state.

*Advanced Degree Qualifications - We hold the required degree in education, which reflects my commitment to professional growth and a deep understanding of educational theories and practices. This level of education should exempt us from additional testing requirements.

*Local Agency Discretion - The discretion of local education agencies to evaluate the qualifications of J1 teachers can play a crucial role in determining the necessity of the Praxis exam. A holistic review of our qualifications should suffice for an exemption.

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the relevant authorities in Hawaii to consider these reasons granting international teachers (like us) a full teaching license and eliminating unnecessary exams. The said qualifications and experiences reflect our readiness to contribute positively to the educational community in Hawaii.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Bryan Thiel De
Leon
Teacher
Intermediate School
County, Hawaii

J1
Kalama
Maui

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:21:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noralyn Suniga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Noralyn A. Suniga, and I am a Math Teacher from the Philippines currently teaching at James Campbell High School.

I strongly support the proposed International Visiting Teacher License. This bill would greatly benefit teachers like me, who have earned years of experience and eligibility in our home countries but are still required to undergo the current licensing process.

Since arriving in Hawaii, I have dedicated myself to demonstrating my worth. Equipped with rigorous experiences from my previous school in the Philippines, I volunteer my time after school hours, staying until 5 PM, to provide math tutorials for students needing extra help and enrichment. I also assist in preparing students for math competitions.

My passion for teaching has positively impacted our school community, particularly my students. They have responded well to my care and dedication. In fact, most of my students are male, but surprisingly, some have opened up about their family problems.

In the recent Panorama Education Student Perception Survey, my students rated me highly in key areas: • Teacher-student relationship: 81% (significantly higher than the Hawaii Department of Education's average of 64%) • Pedagogical effectiveness: 74% (higher than the state average of 72%) • Classroom engagement: 47% (surpassing the state average of 45%)

These results reflect my commitment to creating a productive learning environment. However, as international teachers, we face unique challenges. We must prepare for licensure exams, such as the Praxis tests, which add to our financial burdens. Moreover, the uncertainty of visa renewal each year creates instability, making it harder for us to fully commit to our students' long-term success.

A more efficient licensing procedure would provide us with greater job security, allowing us to focus on our teaching roles. This measure is necessary and advantageous, considering Hawaii's persistent teacher shortage. It ensures that schools continue to employ committed and highly skilled teachers.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, enabling skilled, experienced, and driven teachers like myself to continue improving Hawaii's schools without unnecessary obstacles. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

Noralyn A. Suniga

Math Teacher, Campbell High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:24:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Federlie Abejero	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Federlie Sabado-Abejero and I am a SPED/English and World History Inclusion teacher in Kaua'i High School. I am currently handling the Grade 10 class. I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii. This bill is important for teachers like me, who have already earned our teaching license in the Philippines, but experience additional challenges, such as the Praxis tests, in order to keep on serving students in Hawaii.

As an educator with 21 years of teaching experience, I have shown dedication in ensuring the holistic development of my students. Since joining Kaua'i High School in September 2025, I have worked tirelessly to give effective instruction and engaging activities, support my students in their learning and personal growth, and contribute to the success of the school community.

However, despite my full experience and commitment, obtaining full licensure in Hawaii remains a big challenge due to the financial and logistical constraints of the Praxis tests. These tests are expensive and it adds to our struggles as teachers.

Hawai'i is my dream place to teach and now that I am finally here, I can truly say that it is my second home because it is so similar to the Philippines. I love its people, its culture, and the school and the Filipino-American community welcomed me with open arms. My goal is to continue what I love most, to teach and inspire students. I respectfully urge all of you to pass HB 439 to make sure that international teachers can continue enhancing and shaping the young minds of Hawai'i.

Thank you for your time and we are looking forward to a positive response from you.

Respectfully,

Federlie Sabado-Abejero

SPED-English and World History Inclusion Teacher

Kaua'i High School

Lihue, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:27:02 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rosalie Ohayas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Rosalie Ohayas of Wahiawa Middle School, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be part of Hawaii's educational system. Teaching here has allowed me to grow professionally and expand my knowledge as an educator. I fully support HB439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher program. Taking a licensure exam in the state would be an important step for our professional development. However, I would like to know if our teaching licenses from the Philippines, as well as our master's and doctoral degrees, could be taken into account during the certification process. Additionally, many teachers live far from Honolulu, where the nearest testing center is located, making it difficult to travel for the exam. The cost of each test is \$90, and as the primary provider for my family, the total expense of \$450 is a considerable financial burden. Given these challenges, it would be incredibly helpful if reciprocity could be considered to support educators like myself. Mahalo and God bless

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:36:26 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jimel Ryan Mariano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jimel Ryan Mariano, and I am a teacher at Leilehua High School in Wahiawa, Hawai‘i. I am deeply grateful to Hawai‘i for embracing me as part of its educational system. Teaching here has allowed me to grow professionally and refine my expertise as an educator. I fully support HB439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher program. Before coming to Hawai‘i, I spent 10 years teaching in the Philippines, where I earned my teaching license in secondary mathematics. With this extensive experience and certification, I believe my qualifications should be recognized as meeting the requirements for teacher licensure in Hawai‘i. Moreover, many educators, including myself, reside far from Honolulu, where the closest testing center is located. Traveling to take the exam poses a logistical challenge. Additionally, at \$90 per test—amounting to a total of \$450—the financial burden is significant, particularly for those of us who are our families' primary providers. Given these challenges, I respectfully request that reciprocity be considered as a means to support international educators like myself. Mahalo and God bless!

Aloha! My name is NORMAN RUELO MARQUEZ, I am a highly motivated with a strong background in teaching science and other related fields and integrating research into my teaching. I finished my master's degree major in science teaching. Furthermore, I've been in the teaching profession for almost 14 years and this experience allowed me to develop strong skills in communication, teamwork, and problem solving made me passionate and enthusiastic. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, which aims to establish an international teaching license. Professionally speaking, I am demonstrating my loyalty to the institution or district or state by being committed, dedicated, trustworthy, detail-oriented in any given task and ensuring I equip myself up to date teaching strategies that go with the fast-changing trends in the field of science education. I am confident that my skills and experiences align well with the needs of your state, I am eager to bring all of these to contribute to the success of your state or district and of course the students.

Moreover, I am adaptable, flexible, and supportive of the institution I am part of, by sharing my talents as a performer and coach. And I could demonstrate the mission & vision and core values in my teaching methods by considering how to manage the classroom and giving consistent routine procedures to ensure my students reach their full potential.

However, despite my background and experiences, securing full licensure in Hawai'i continues to be a major hurdle due to the financial and logistical challenges posed by the Praxis exams. These tests are expensive and not readily available throughout the islands, often necessitating travel to O'ahu, which further adds to the costs. These obstacles overlook the expertise, training, and international credentials that educators like myself have already acquired. This bill recognizes the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience we bring from our home countries and offers a fair and practical route for us to continue contributing meaningfully to Hawai'i's schools.

Like numerous other states, Hawai'i is experiencing an ongoing shortage of teachers, especially in remote and disadvantaged areas. Implementing an international teacher license would help alleviate this challenge by acknowledging the credentials of qualified and committed educators who are already making a difference in the state's schools. Approving this bill would promote diversity, inclusivity, and the significance of global expertise, ensuring that Hawai'i's students continue to receive a high-quality education.

I earnestly encourage you to endorse this bill and establish an equitable, straightforward route to licensure for international educators. I appreciate your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Norman R. Marquez
Physics Teacher
Kaua'i High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 8:48:43 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JEFFREY C. DEL ROSARIO	Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Embracing each student's individuality has always been important to me as a special education teacher. In Hawaii for over 6 months now, however, I have been learning how important diversity in culture is to forming my teaching style. The rich blend of different cultures influences has given me a new insight into how different cultures affect teaching and learning methods. And the Cultural Exchange Program for Teachers has made me more passionate about engaging learners especially the ones with special needs, school administrators, colleagues, parents and stakeholders.

The Cultural Exchange Program for Teachers has strengthened my conviction in the value of cultural competence in education while also improving my teaching methods. Learning from an environment that values diversity and interacting with educators who share my enthusiasm for helping all learners gave me a newfound sense of purpose and a wider range of resources to help my learners.

Thankfully, August Ahrens Elementary School in Waipahu has been providing me trainings and first-hand experience to better comprehend Inclusive Education, an integral part of the SPED Curriculum. It has been my joy, inspiration and motivation to nurture my learners with disabilities with so much love, care, willingness, and enthusiasm. I want to create an atmosphere where each student here in Hawaii, feels seen, heard, and appreciated for who they are—regardless of their difficulties or skills—is what I believe real inclusion is all about.

Thus, it is my fervent prayer that the wellbeing of the learners here in Hawaii most especially the SPED learners must be a priority. Therefore, I strongly support whatever initiative or move to strengthen this program.

I am Jeffrey C. Del Rosario, Inclusion Teacher (SPED) of August Ahrens Elementary School, a thankful and dedicated J1 Teacher.

My name is Lara Escoto, and I am a J-1 teacher at Kahakai Elementary. I have had the privilege of experiencing firsthand the profound impact that dedicated teachers can have not only on their students but on the entire school community. The support and collaboration from my fellow educators have been invaluable, and together we've cultivated a warm, inclusive, and engaging campus climate. Our shared commitment to student success has created an environment where both students and staff feel empowered to grow, learn, and contribute meaningfully.

One of the most significant benefits of the current system is the opportunity for J-1 teachers like myself to stay in Hawaii for up to five years if we are able to obtain licensure. This stability enables us to form deep, long-lasting relationships with our students and their families, which is essential for creating an effective and supportive learning environment.

However, the process of obtaining a full teaching license can be particularly challenging for teachers with internationally recognized credentials. I am proud of my qualifications and the experience I bring from abroad, yet the additional requirement of passing multiple Praxis exams is a significant burden. While I am deeply committed to my role as a teacher, preparing for and taking eight Praxis exams takes up an immense amount of time and effort. This is especially difficult when I am already dedicating my full focus to lesson planning and ensuring that I am providing the best possible education to my students.

The time and energy spent on preparing for these exams could be better used to enhance classroom instruction and build stronger connections with students. As a teacher, my ultimate goal is to be as effective and efficient as possible in my role. Unfortunately, the demands of the Praxis exams take away from this focus, as I find myself dividing my time between test preparation and lesson planning.

Moreover, ensuring equal pay for equal work is essential to retaining highly qualified teachers. Providing access to differentials for those who are licensed would show a true commitment to the value educators bring to the classroom—particularly those like myself, who bring diverse international perspectives and expertise.

Ultimately, recognizing internationally accredited credentials and simplifying the licensure process would allow teachers like me to dedicate more of our time and energy to supporting our schools, students, and communities—without the added stress of navigating a complex and burdensome exam process.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I am deeply committed to providing the best possible education to my students and look forward to continuing to make a positive impact in our school and community.

Mahalo.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 9:09:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jean Morris	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Hawai'i State Legislature,

My name is Jean Morris and I am a recently retired school administrator with the Hawaii Department of Education, Chiefess Kamakaha Middle School. I am writing to express my strong support for exempting J-1 visa teachers from the Praxis exam requirement within the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE).

The J-1 visa program plays a crucial role in enriching our educational system by bringing qualified international teachers to our classrooms. These educators offer diverse perspectives, cultural understanding, and specialized skills that benefit our students immensely. They often fill critical subject area shortages, particularly in areas like STEM, world languages, and special education, where it can be challenging to find qualified local candidates.

Requiring J-1 visa teachers to take the Praxis exam presents a significant and unnecessary barrier to their participation in this valuable exchange program. Here are several key reasons why this exemption is warranted:

J-1 visa teachers undergo rigorous screening processes by the U.S. Department of State and sponsoring organizations. These processes include thorough reviews of their educational credentials, teaching experience, and English language proficiency. They must already demonstrate qualifications equivalent to U.S. standards to be granted a visa. Adding the Praxis exam creates a redundant layer of assessment.

Financial Burden and Logistical Challenges: The Praxis exam involves fees and often requires travel to testing centers. These costs and logistical hurdles can be particularly burdensome for J-1 visa teachers who are already navigating the complexities of relocating to a new country. Imposing this requirement can discourage qualified candidates from applying to teach in Hawaii.

The primary purpose of the J-1 visa program, particularly in the teacher category, is to foster cultural exchange and provide students with access to specialized knowledge and perspectives. The Praxis exam, while valuable for assessing general teaching knowledge, does not adequately capture the unique contributions that J-1 visa teachers bring in these areas. Their value lies in their cultural competency, language proficiency, and subject-matter expertise, which are often better demonstrated through their existing qualifications and experience.

As mentioned earlier, J-1 visa teachers often fill critical vacancies in high-need areas. Adding the Praxis requirement can exacerbate staffing shortages in these subjects, negatively impacting student learning.

Several other states recognize the rigorous screening process that J-1 visa teachers undergo and have implemented exemptions from state-specific teacher certification exams. Hawaii should consider aligning its policies with these best practices. I urge the Hawai'i State Legislature to consider the significant benefits that J-1 visa teachers bring to our schools and the unnecessary burden that the Praxis exam requirement places upon them.

Exempting these teachers from this requirement will streamline the process, ensure that our students continue to benefit from their expertise, and uphold the spirit of the J-1 visa program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jean Morris

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 9:10:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lanz Arana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in support of HB439 - International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: February 04, 2025 at 2:00PM

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lanz Arana, a Geometry teacher at Kulanihako'i High School. I am honored to write in strong support of HB 439, a bill that seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. As a dedicated educator from the Philippines, I have already earned my teaching license and devoted my career to shaping young minds. However, the additional barriers imposed by standardized tests like the Praxis create unnecessary challenges that hinder my ability to fully focus on what truly matters—my students. Teaching is not just a profession for me; it is a calling. Since arriving in Hawaii, I have poured my heart into ensuring my students receive quality education, cultural enrichment, and unwavering support. Yet, balancing my responsibilities in the classroom while preparing for multiple licensure exams is an overwhelming burden—one that diverts my time and energy away from lesson planning, student engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. While I recognize the need for teacher accountability, I firmly believe that my qualifications, experience, and dedication should speak for themselves. The Praxis exams, aside from being financially and emotionally taxing, do not necessarily measure the passion, adaptability, and commitment that international teachers bring into Hawaii's schools. Additionally, the constraints of our three- to five-year visas make the process even more daunting, as our ability to continue teaching here is often tied to passing these tests within a limited timeframe.

Hawaii has become my second home. I have come to love its people, culture, and the vibrant school community that has welcomed me with open arms. My greatest hope is to continue making a difference in the lives of my students without being held back by excessive testing requirements. By passing HB 439, you would not only be supporting teachers like me but also ensuring that Hawaii's students benefit from passionate, experienced educators who can dedicate themselves fully to their success. I respectfully urge you to consider the profound impact of this bill and to support international teachers who are deeply invested in the future of Hawaii's education system. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Lanz Arana

Geometry Teacher

Kulanihako'i High School, Kihei, Hawaii

Being selected as one of the international exchange teachers is an honor. I, Melvin C. Dumelod, have always believed that teaching is the noblest profession, and I am equipped with passion and dedication to molding each learner.

I've been given the chance to share my expertise, gain knowledge from one of the most notable educational systems, and become fully involved in a kind and diverse community. However, the string of qualifying tests that foreign teachers must take has put us under needless stress and pressure to demonstrate our teaching abilities despite our prior training and experience. Hence, I am writing to present my full support for HB 439.

While I understand the importance of maintaining high educational standards, the multiple exams required for us are overwhelming. Time and effort are diverted from what matters which are our students. This burden is further increased by the monetary expense, psychological toll, and time constraints brought on by visa restrictions. To stay in the classrooms where we are already having an impact, we are compelled to put exam preparation ahead of lesson planning, student engagement, and professional growth.

Staying in Hawaii for the entire four to five years of the exchange program is crucial not only for my personal and professional development but also for the advantage of the students and the broader school community. This duration will enable me to gain a richer understanding of the American educational framework, implement innovative teaching methods, and enhance the cultural and academic diversity within our school.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439 to ensure that international teachers can focus on delivering lessons with utmost excellence. By alleviating the burden of excessive qualifying exams and permitting educators like me to remain for the entire program duration, we can continue to deliver high-quality education while also enhancing our professional skills. Our aim is not just to teach but to make a meaningful difference in our students' lives, and for that, we require the necessary time and opportunities.

Hawaii has embraced me wholeheartedly, and I wish to reciprocate by dedicating my knowledge, passion, and expertise to my students. I aspire to continue this journey, not merely as a visitor, but as an educator who is genuinely committed to shaping the future of Hawaii's students.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 9:28:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JOY HERMOSO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

Aloha!

My name is Joy Hermoso and I am currently J-1 teacher here in Hawaii, I'm writing in a strong support of HB439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. I always have been passionate about education, and having the opportunity to teach in the U.S. It has been a transformative experience for me both professionally and personally.

One of the greatest advantages I have experienced as a J-1 Teacher is the ability to obtain a Hawaii teaching license without going through the rigorous process of taking the State's Licensure Examination. Since I already hold a valid teaching license from my home country and have met the necessary qualifications through my J-1 program. I love teaching here in Hawaii and I learned a lot, keep on learning and exploring more and get out of my shell when I handled my students. It was a priceless experience, imparting student's lives.

My goals is to continue inspiring and supporting students without burden of my requirements. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439 to ensure that international teachers focus on what is best. Teaching, touching lives, mentoring and shaping the future of Hawaii's students.

I appreciate you all. Thank you!

Respectfully,

JOY HERMOSO

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 9:39:39 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherrie Mae Aquino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a J1 teacher supporting HB439 for the following reasons:

First, it is giving us additional financial burden. Most of us, if not all have loaned a huge amount of money just to get here and participate in this cultural exchange program. With that being laid down, our first year as J1 teachers is really a struggle financially knowing that we have debts to pay back in our home country. A hundred plus bucks is not easy to earn. Not to mention that it's not only one examination that we have to undergo, which means more payment. And with the high cost of living in this paradise, we barely can enjoy what we are receiving. Considering the fact that we can't raise the pay using our number of years of experience because this state is limiting to up to 6 years of experience only.

Second, we are not extending our visa to forever. It's just 3 years plus 2 years, so why not just give it to us as easy as the other states? We can't help but compare Hawaii from the other US states which never ask J1 teachers to take some examination in order to be extended to 5 years. There's a lot of them that is not requiring J1 teachers to do PRAXIS and it's kind, and locals and the other nationalities have been so okay with the J1 teachers so far. If they can do it, why can't Hawaii?

Third, we do prepare for our lessons everyday in order to deliver the best that we can for the students. I believe that thinking of undergoing PRAXIS test somehow impairs our preparation and performance in the class for we can't help but worry about it. Somehow we have to prepare for it too so in that case our focus will be divided. We will have to review for the test and at the same time prepare for our lessons. We can't serve two masters at the same time. Although others are managing that, but still it affects the performance.

Fourth, the longer we stay here, the more that we can share. And of course we all share what we do best from the schools of the country that we come from.

There's a lot more reasons why I'm supporting this bill. But for now, I will end my testimony here. I'm crossing my fingers for this bill to be approved without doubts. Hoorah for NO PRAXIS!

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 9:43:29 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
BRYAN DIZON	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice-Chair, and members of the Committee,

My name is Bryan Dizon and I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is critical for teachers like me who have a teaching certificate from the Philippines and wish to teach in the Hawaii Department of Education but are impeded by the Praxis tests and other barriers.

As educators working internationally, we are committed to providing the best possible education for our students. However, balancing our teaching responsibilities with the preparation for multiple licensure exams can create undue pressure and take valuable time away from lesson planning and engaging with learners. While I understand the importance of demonstrating subject knowledge, I firmly believe that our experience, qualifications, and dedication should be acknowledged without the need to pass numerous standardized tests, which contribute to both financial and emotional stress.

I strongly support HB 439. As a J1 teacher, I have witnessed the positive impact of international educators in Hawaii's classrooms. This legislation will provide a more sustainable and effective way to attract and retain these valuable educators, ultimately benefiting Hawaii's keiki and communities. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Bryan Dizon

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License
Hearing Date: February 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Chabilita Meneses and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. As a Social Studies teacher who has earned my teaching certification in the Philippines, I have encountered several barriers to continuing my work in the Hawaii Department of Education, particularly with the requirement to pass the Praxis exams.

While I am fully committed to delivering high-quality education to my students, balancing my teaching responsibilities with the pressure of preparing for multiple licensure exams has proven to be stressful and time-consuming. The time and effort spent preparing for these exams detracts from the time I could be using to engage with my students and plan meaningful lessons. While I understand the need to demonstrate subject mastery, I believe that the experience, skills, and dedication that international teachers bring to the classroom should be recognized without the added burden of additional standardized tests.

Furthermore, the temporary nature of our work visas, typically lasting between three to five years, adds an element of uncertainty. I have learned that extending my stay beyond three years is dependent on obtaining licensure, which creates additional stress, especially considering the financial burden of the Praxis exams.

I have developed a deep appreciation for Hawaii's people, culture, and the school community that has so warmly welcomed me. I am passionate about continuing to inspire and support students, and I believe that HB 439 will help reduce the unnecessary challenges that international teachers face, allowing us to focus on what we do best—teaching, mentoring, and contributing to the growth of Hawaii's students.

I kindly urge you to pass HB 439, so that international teachers can continue to make a positive impact on Hawaii's education system without the added burden of excessive testing requirements.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chabilita Meneses

8th Grade Social Studies Teacher

Lahaina Intermediate School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 10:07:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lyn Nicole Chua	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB Relating to Education

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lyn Nicole M. Chua, one of the J-1 teachers deployed last year and I am a dedicated Science/Special Education teacher with extensive experience in the field of education. I would like to express my strong support for HB 439, which seeks to recognize international teaching licenses—specifically granting equivalency to the Philippine teaching license here in Hawaii to teachers like us.

In the 6 months of stay here in Hawaii, I would like to believe that I have proven that I am capable and highly qualified for the teaching job. I have performed to the best of my abilities to deliver quality education to the learners here, have been an asset to the school and contributed to the community by participating in activities outside the four corners of the classroom. My skills and contribution to the school have been regarded highly by the school and the learners. With all the workload, activities, I have had a burden to carry-like all other J-1 teachers, which is to survive. Survive with the current pay that is lower than entry level since we are not categorized as Highly Qualified Teachers, study and pay for every Praxis test that we have to take and still provide quality education that is expected of us. Hawaii being the most expensive state in the country has become not just expensive for us but as if we almost cannot afford.

As an educator with the necessary credentials, experience, and a deep passion for teaching, I firmly believe that this bill would not only benefit qualified international teachers and alleviate some of the burdens we have but also enrich Hawaii’s diverse educational landscape. Many of us come with years of experience, a strong commitment to student

success, and a genuine love for fostering cross-cultural learning in the classroom. By allowing internationally licensed teachers to contribute to Hawaii's education system, I believe we can help address teacher shortages and bring valuable perspectives that enhance the learning experience for all students.

With all that being said, I believe our presence in the education system supports cultural exchange and global understanding, which are essential in preparing students for an interconnected world. Recognizing the Philippine teaching license would ensure that skilled educators are not hindered by unnecessary barriers but are instead empowered to serve Hawaii's students effectively.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support and pass this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Lyn Nicole Chua

J-1 Teacher

Aiea High School

February 2, 2025

JUSTIN H. WOODSON

Chair

House District 9

Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 405

Aloha,

To the renowned chair and members of the House Committee on Education, my humility and respect. I am Raymond Escoto, one of the cultural exchange teachers who was hired at Konawaena High School, would like to express my strong support for the passing of HB439 which requires the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to reconstruct a licensing pathway for international educators like me.

Filipino educators are known to be passionate and goal-driven professionals. Thus, this is why a lot of countries hire teachers from the Philippines. It is true that the education system and culture here in America is totally different from the Philippines yet because of resilience and willingness to adapt to the new system, I am able to overcome the difficulties and grasp the new environment where I am in.

After fully adapting to the new system, I suddenly feel the "aloha spirit" that they call here in Hawai'i. My students not only the Filipinos but also other races like the Micronesians, Marshallese, Mexicans, and Hondurans show respect and love. I have some students, specifically, Filipinos who have just moved to the island. As they started schooling, they were frightened to move and felt unsafe which resulted in negligence of going to school. However, when one of their teachers introduced me to them, they started to feel comfortable and safe. Now, there are a bunch of students, not only Filipinos, who stay with me during breaktime.

In connection to this, with all humility, I could say that I am making my gains and small wins with my students. These gains happen because they can see the real purpose of me doing the work and the effort that I do for them to understand the lesson. Unfortunately, preparation is not easy. It will take time to fulfill it and make it an interesting yet valuable learning experience for the students.

These are just some of the good things that I observed since I started teaching. However, being required to pass the Praxis exam to be eligible to stay up to 5 years hinder this continued success. As a teacher, it requires a huge amount of planning time and production of instructional materials for all the lessons to achieve its desirable outcome. Having said this, there is no spare time to prepare for this exam which requires a huge amount of money. Moreover, this amount will not be for one time payment only. It must be paid every time you take the test. Instead of focusing on the core mission of why we are here, our attention is being divided to the preparation to pass the praxis exam which did not even exist before.

These are just some of the reasons why I support the passing of the bill and continuously support the future generation of this country within the next 5 years.

Hopefully, this testimony will greatly serve its purpose. Mahalo Nui Loa!

Respectfully yours,
Raymond Escoto
ESOL Teacher
Konawaena High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 10:21:43 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Randal W. Vause	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Mai!

To the esteemed members of the Hawai`I House of Representatives and the Hawai`i Teacher Standards Board,

As a retired educator of the State of Hawai`i Public School System with forty years experience, I strongly support HB439. This initiative will help to continue to help address the ongoing teacher shortage here in Hawai`i. As a veteran teacher, I can honestly state that allowing international teachers to teach in Hawai`i has been positive for enriching the educational experience of our haumana. I strongly support the proposal to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. International Teachers have contributed meaningfully to the learning environment and student achievement in the public schools. Their varied experiences in the many aspects of teaching have enhanced the learning experiences of our students. These valuable teachers should be given the opportunity to be licensed as other teachers are required to do. International Teachers bring a wealth of knowledge to Education and contribute to necessary cultural diversity in our schools as well as a global outlook which is so important in the 21st Century.

I therefore strongly urge the Legislature and Hawai` Teachers Standards Board to move forward with this proposal and establish a necessary and transparent framework to support International Educators who are eager and willing to serve our children. This initiative will go a long way to continue to strengthen our schools and provide our students with diverse and inclusive experiences that will make them well prepared to be responsible and learned members of our community. Our students are our future!

MAHALO NUI!

Respectfully submitted,

Randal W. Vause

Retired Educator with forty years service in the Hawai`i Department of Education.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 10:45:29 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Ann Ureta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am Rachel Ann Ureta currently stationed at Moanalua Middle School and part of the J-1 Cultural Exchange Program for teachers. I am an educator with 13 years of experience teaching in the Philippines and have been teaching in Hawaii for 2 years. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439 which seeks to grant equivalency to the Philippine teaching license in the State of Hawaii and allowing J-1 teachers to stay for 5 years in Hawaii to provide quality education for all and fulfill our cultural exchange program requirements.

As an international teacher, I have come with the proper credentials as stated in my foreign credentials evaluation that conforms to the US Standards, 15 years of professional teaching experience, and an unwavering dedication to shaping young minds. I am eager to contribute to Hawaii's education system—not just by filling critical teaching positions, but by enriching classrooms with diverse perspectives and cultural understanding and contribute positively to the community.

Hawaii is a place of great diversity, and I believe our presence as international educators fosters inclusivity and global awareness among students. By recognizing our teaching qualifications, this bill would provide more opportunities for dedicated teachers like myself to serve the students of Hawaii effectively and more efficiently, without unnecessary barriers like dedicating our valuable time in studying and preparing for the multiple Praxis tests when we could have utilized that time to prepare and produce quality materials and practices for our students and also personally pay for each test. This would definitely alleviate most of the burdens we carry while being expected to perform to the best of our abilities.

I strongly believe that passing this bill would benefit the educators, the students we serve, the community and moreover, the educational system of Hawaii. I respectfully urge you to support this legislation and help ensure that qualified, passionate teachers can continue making a difference in Hawaii's schools and moreover to the world.

Many mahalo!

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 10:48:35 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dioscoro Visto Narciso	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Board,

My name is Dioscoro Visto Narciso, and I am a J-1 teacher from the Philippines with ten years of extensive teaching experience. I hold a valid teaching license in my home country, and my credentials have been thoroughly assessed and accepted in the United States. However, even with my qualifications and commitment to education, I face the obstacle that my teaching license from the Philippines is not recognized or reciprocated in Hawaii. I am reaching out to express my strong endorsement for HB 439, which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher License. This proposed measure would be revolutionary for international educators like me, who arrive in Hawaii with a genuine enthusiasm for teaching and a substantial background yet encounter significant challenges in continuing our work.

One significant challenge we encounter is the necessity of completing PRAXIS tests. Although I recognize the importance of maintaining educational standards, the financial impact of these exams is particularly overwhelming due to the high cost of living in Hawaii. For many teachers from abroad, these costs impose an excessive burden on our already limited financial resources. Approving HB 439 would ease these financial and procedural difficulties, enabling teachers like me to keep making valuable contributions to Hawaii's education system. International educators offer diverse viewpoints, culturally sensitive teaching methods, and a strong dedication to student achievement. Establishing an International Visiting Teacher License would not only benefit these educators but also enrich the educational experience for students in Hawaii.

I kindly request that the Board approve HB 439. This action will eliminate unwarranted obstacles, acknowledge the important roles of international teachers, and reinforce Hawaii's dedication to offering a diverse and globally aware education for its students. I appreciate your time, attention, and commitment to supporting both teachers and learners.

Dioscoro Visto Narciso
J-1 Teacher

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:24:39 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amira Rae Bonifacio	Princess Nahienaena Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Amira Rae R. Bonifacio, and I am a special education teacher at Princess Nahienaena Elementary School in Lahaina, Maui. I am writing to express my strong support for HB439, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders through the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board.

As an educator, I provide individualized instruction to students with learning challenges, equipping them with the skills they need to succeed in reading, writing, and mathematics. My professional training and teaching experience in the Philippines have prepared me to meet diverse student needs, and I am honored to bring my expertise to Hawai‘i’s classrooms. Filipino teachers are highly skilled, dedicated, and well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to the state’s education system.

Beyond my role in the classroom, teaching in Hawai‘i enables me to support my family in the Philippines, reinforcing the broader impact of this opportunity. However, the current licensure process presents significant financial and logistical challenges. The required exams are costly and, in many cases, only available on Oahu, requiring inter-island travel that further increases expenses. These barriers make it difficult for qualified international teachers to obtain the necessary credentials to continue serving Hawai‘i’s students.

Passing HB439 would provide a more equitable and accessible pathway for dedicated international educators. I am especially committed to continuing my service to the students of Lahaina, many of whom have faced immense hardship following the devastating August 2023 wildfire. These children need stability, guidance, and compassionate educators who are committed to their growth and recovery.

I respectfully urge you to support HB439 to ensure that passionate and qualified international teachers can continue making a lasting difference in the lives of Hawai‘i’s keiki. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

Amira Rae R. Bonifacio

Special Education Teacher

Princess Nahienaena Elementary School, Lahaina, Maui

February 02, 2025

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, a bill that recognizes and values the experience and qualifications of teachers like myself, who have earned their credentials internationally and have demonstrated commitment to student success here in Hawaii.

As an educator, I foster academic excellence, support student growth, and create a nurturing environment in my school. Every day, I witness the positive impact I have on my students, helping them reach their full potential and guiding them toward a bright future. My background and training have equipped me with the tools necessary to inspire young minds, implement effective teaching strategies, and contribute meaningfully to my school community.

However, despite my experience and credentials, the current licensure requirements present significant barriers that make it difficult for qualified teachers like myself to continue serving Hawaii's students. The Praxis exams, while intended to standardize teacher qualifications, is costly. The high fees associated with these tests create financial strain. This burden is challenging for teachers like me.

HB 439 is a step in the right direction. By honoring the exceptional experience and qualifications that educators have demonstrated through foreign-evaluated transcripts and international licensure, this bill acknowledges the rigorous training and dedication we bring to our classrooms. Recognizing these qualifications would not only ease the licensure process for experienced educators but also help alleviate Hawaii's ongoing teacher shortage by retaining skilled professionals who are already making a difference in our schools.

Passing HB 439 would demonstrate the state's commitment to valuing and supporting its educators while ensuring that students continue to benefit from highly qualified teachers. I urge you to support this bill and remove unnecessary barriers that prevent dedicated teachers from fully contributing to Hawaii's education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,


Cecé B. Medina

(808) 830 – 9055

Staff (Gen. Education Teacher)

Wailuku Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:49:47 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Neil Christian T. Corales	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chair and respected members of the committee, my name is Neil Christian T. Corales, a J-1 teacher from the Philippines and currently a first-grade generalist teacher at Mokulele Elementary School in the Hawaii State Department of Education. As one of the J-1 visa holders, teaching the children of our dedicated military families stationed on Oahu, I offer my strong support for HB 439. I believe this bill is essential for the future of our public schools and the well-being of our students.

My experience as a J-1 teacher in Hawaii has been deeply rewarding. I've seen firsthand the positive impact we have on our students, schools, and communities. I and other Filipino teachers bring a unique perspective, combining cultural understanding, diverse teaching methods, and a profound commitment to nurturing young minds. We build strong connections with our students, often resonating with local families through shared values of respect, family, and hard work. We contribute to a more diverse and inclusive learning environment, enriching the educational experience for all. Many of us are also actively involved in local cultural and community activities, further strengthening the ties between our schools and families.

HB 439 addresses a critical need - retaining qualified and experienced teachers within the Hawaii State Department of Education. My current J-1 visa limits my time in Hawaii. If this bill will be approved, this will offer a pathway for me and to other J-1 teachers to remain for up to five years by obtaining an international teacher license. This stability is crucial for our students. Consistency in education, particularly in the early grades, is fundamental to their success. The disruption and emotional impact on children when a beloved teacher suddenly departs due to visa restrictions is significant. HB 439 provides a solution, allowing us to maintain these vital student-teacher relationships and contribute to the long-term stability of our schools.

Furthermore, this bill promotes fairness and equity. It ensures "equal pay for equal work" by granting internationally licensed teachers access to the same salary differentials as locally licensed teachers. This recognition of our qualifications is not simply about fair compensation; it acknowledges the expertise and experience we bring to the classroom. We have dedicated years to our education and professional development, earning undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degrees and credentials. This bill recognizes the value of that investment and affirms our status as highly qualified and experienced educators.

Currently, the process of obtaining a local teaching license often requires us to take the Praxis exams, even when we already hold equivalent licenses and degrees from our home countries.

This requirement places an unnecessary financial and logistical burden on teachers, especially those coming from overseas, and doesn't always accurately reflect our teaching abilities or experience. HB 439 offers a more streamlined approach, recognizing the validity of our international credentials and allowing us to focus on what truly matters: supporting our students and contributing to the Hawaii State Department of Education.

This bill is not just about individual teachers; it's about strengthening our entire public school system. It's about ensuring that our keiki have access to the best possible education by retaining qualified and experienced teachers. It's about strengthening our communities by fostering stability and continuity in our schools. It's about acknowledging the valuable contributions of international educators who are dedicated to serving the students and families of Hawaii.

I strongly urge you to support HB 439. It is an investment in our children, our schools, and the future of Hawaii. Mahalo.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 12:50:21 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Fritz Marata	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, esteemed legislators, community members, and fellow educators,

My name is Fritz Marata, and I am privileged to serve as a J-1 international teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School. I came to Hawaii with a heart full of purpose—to share my passion for science, nurture young minds, and contribute to a school community that has faced tremendous challenges, including the aftermath of the Lahaina wildfire.

Since stepping into my classroom, I have dedicated myself to creating an engaging, supportive, and culturally responsive learning environment. My students, many of whom are still navigating the emotional and academic impacts of the wildfire, have found stability and inspiration in our classroom. I have worked tirelessly to make science meaningful to them, fostering curiosity, critical thinking, and resilience. Beyond academics, I have been a mentor, a guide, and a steady presence in their lives.

But my impact extends beyond my students. I have contributed to the broader school climate by organizing cultural exchange activities that celebrate diversity and deepen understanding. I have built relationships with colleagues and families, reinforcing the idea that we—regardless of where we come from—are part of one ‘ohana, committed to the success of our keiki.

However, the reality remains that international teachers like me face immense hurdles to continue this work. HB 439 is more than just a bill; it is a lifeline for J-1 teachers who have proven their dedication to Hawaii’s schools. By creating an international visiting teacher license, this bill recognizes the value we bring—our experience, our international credentials, and our commitment. It allows us to stay for five years, providing much-needed stability in schools facing a chronic teacher shortage. It ensures equal pay for equal work and grants access to differentials, acknowledging that we, too, are qualified and deserving. Most importantly, it removes unnecessary barriers like costly Praxis exams, which disregard the rigorous training and credentials we already hold.

Passing HB 439 means that I and many other international educators can continue to serve the students of Hawaii without the constant uncertainty of our future here. It means we can focus on what truly matters—empowering the next generation.

I urge you to pass HB 439 and take a stand for equity, for quality education, and for the students who deserve experienced, dedicated teachers in their classrooms.

Mahalo for your time and support.

Fritz Marata

8th Grade Science Teacher

Lahaina Intermediate School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 1:07:50 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grezylen O. Lalusin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Grezylen Lalusin, and I am currently a Math Teacher here in Hawaii. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher License. As an international educator, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to teach in Hawaii and to contribute to the academic growth and personal development of my students. However, I am also aware of the significant challenges faced by international teachers under the current licensing requirements, which this bill aims to address.

Teaching is more than a profession for me—it is my calling and my passion. Every day, I strive to help my students not only excel in Mathematics but also develop critical thinking skills, confidence, and a love for learning. I take pride in fostering an environment where students feel supported and encouraged to succeed.

As an international teacher, I bring a unique and valuable perspective to my students. My training and experiences in the Philippines allow me to enrich their learning by exposing them to new ways of thinking and problem-solving. By teaching Mathematics through real-world and globally relevant examples, I help my students develop a broader understanding of the subject while also preparing them to thrive in a multicultural world. This cultural exchange is not only beneficial to students academically but also helps build a classroom environment of mutual respect and diversity.

Despite these contributions, the current licensing process creates unnecessary obstacles for international teachers. While my qualifications and teaching experience have been thoroughly evaluated in my home country, I am still required to pass costly and time-consuming exams. These exams place an additional financial and emotional strain on educators who are already giving their all to support their students.

The International Visiting Teacher License is a fair and practical solution. It acknowledges the professional training, expertise, and dedication of international teachers, allowing us to focus on our primary goal: providing high-quality education for Hawaii’s students. This license would also bring much-needed stability to our roles, ensuring that we can continue contributing to our schools and communities without the looming uncertainty of licensing hurdles.

Without this bill, many of us will face the difficult choice of leaving Hawaii, interrupting the progress and relationships we have built with our students, their families, and our colleagues. The passage of this bill would provide the recognition and support we need to remain in our schools and continue making a difference.

I respectfully urge you to support this HB439 and to recognize the exceptional value that international teachers bring to Hawaii's education system. By removing unnecessary barriers and granting this license, you will be empowering us to dedicate ourselves fully to our students and to help them achieve their fullest potential.

Thank you for your time, attention, and commitment to the future of education in Hawaii.

Sincerely,

Grezylen O. Lalusin

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 5:51:38 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dimna Marie C Mocerro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of House Bill 439

Aloha, my name is Dimna Marie c. Mocerro, and I appreciate the chance to share my experience as an international teacher in beautiful Kauai, Hawaii. My journey began on September 6, 2024, when I joined the wonderful team at Ele'ele Elementary School as a special education teacher.

Moving to Hawaii on a J-1 visa allowed me to fully engage with this amazing community and experience Hawaii's unique education system firsthand. My teaching license is classified as an emergency hire by the state, which means I need to take Praxis exam to meet Hawaii's teaching standards and qualifications. This added responsibility reflects my dedication to providing my students with the best education possible.

I find this new role both fulfilling and humbling. Every day, I work with students who inspire me with their resilience and potential. My transition has been made even more meaningful by the incredible warmth and kindness of the people here. My colleagues have welcomed me with open arms, and families, along with community members, have created a sense of home for me. Living in Kauai has given my journey a deeper purpose, thanks to the strong sense of o'hana.

I am writing this testimony to strongly encourage legislators to support the passage of House Bill 439. This important bill aims to enhance education and increase opportunities for both students and teachers. Specifically, I am advocating for international teachers like myself to be granted a full teaching license, acknowledging the credentials and experience we bring from the Philippines. This change would allow us to receive the same salary as licensed teachers, helping us manage the high cost of living in Hawaii. Lastly, I urge our stay be extended from three to five years, enabling us to fully invest in our schools and communities, ensuring a lasting impact on the students we serve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Dimna Marie C. Mocerro

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 6:11:46 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cristel Key Gapas	Hawaii State Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Cristel Key Gapas, a J-1 teacher from the Philippines and currently a Preschool Special Education Teacher at Alvah Scott Elementary School in the Hawaii State Department of Education. As a J-1 visa holder, I am writing in strong support of HB 439.

My experience as a J-1 teacher in Hawaii has been incredibly enriching and has provided me with the opportunity to make a meaningful, lasting impact on the school, students, and community. By working collaboratively with my colleagues, building positive relationships with students, and becoming involved in the community, I've been able to contribute to a better learning environment.

HB 439 will allow qualified J-1 teachers like myself to remain in Hawaii for up to five more years with an international teacher license. This will provide our students with consistent instruction and support their academic success.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass this bill so that Hawaii's students can continue to benefit from the service of international teachers without unnecessary obstacles.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 6:14:47 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christine Favetta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Christine Favetta, and I'm writing to share my strong support for the continued presence of cultural exchange teachers in our schools. I've seen firsthand the incredible impact these educators have, and I believe their contributions are essential for enriching the educational experience for all students.

As an Instructional Coach at Waimea Canyon Middle School on Kauai, I've had the privilege of working with many J1 teachers. Each individual I've worked with is open to growth and expresses gratitude in doing so, wanting to do their very best while never taking this career opportunity for granted. What strikes me most is their work ethic, passion for teaching, and their unwavering dedication to our students. In Hawai'i specifically, it is culturally a natural fit for them. The students connect with these teachers in ways that no other teacher at the middle school level has before. Our J1 teachers share their expertise with the staff, bring a positive attitude to work everyday, and build strong relationships with our students. You can often find these teachers volunteering their time in their community, participating in family nights on campus, or spending their break time interacting with students.

In short, cultural exchange teachers are not just filling a position; they are enriching our schools and our communities. I urge you to continue supporting programs that bring these valuable educators to our schools. They deserve to be compensated fairly and given the same benefits as other faculty members. Our students, and our society, are better for it.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 7:27:10 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marie Jane B. Agcaoili	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Marie Jane B. agcaoili, a Science teacher and 6th Grade Adviser at Lokelani Intermediate School in Kihei, Maui. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439, which seeks to establish an International teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As an educator, my impact and role extend far beyond the traditional confines of the classroom. I am an instrumental in igniting a passion for learning, shaping personal identities, fostering community values, and cultivating a generation equipped to face the challenges of tomorrow.

Having the opportunity to teach in US, I have worked diligently to provide an engaging and effective instruction, contribute to the school community, and support my students in their academic and personal growth.

Being a homeroom and Science teacher, I am fostering a positive classroom culture, encouraging critical thinking, supporting emotional development and taking on leadership roles, I have sought to leave a lasting impact on my students and the school as a whole. Teaching is not just a profession for me; it's a vocation, and I am committed to continually growing and contributing to the educational community in meaningful ways.

I humbly want to obtain a teacher's license in Hawai'i but it remains a challenge due to the financial and logistical burdens of the Praxis exams. These exams are expensive and not readily available across the islands, often requiring travel to O'ahu, which further increases costs. These challenges do not represent the expertise, extensive training, and international qualifications that teachers like me have already obtained. This bill recognizes the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience we bring from our home countries and offers a fair and reasonable pathway for us to continue making a significant contribution to Hawai'i's schools.

Passing this bill will allow Hawai'i to honor diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent, ensuring that our keiki receive the highest quality education.

I am pleasing you to support this bill and offer International teachers like myself a clear, accessible, and fair pathway to licensure. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Marie Jane B. Agcaoili

Science Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School, Maui

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 7:31:10 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jan Mariae Margaret Labadan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jan Mariae Margaret M. Labadan, and I am a J-1 teacher in Hawaii. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, a bill that will significantly benefit Hawaii's students and schools by addressing the challenges faced by J-1 teachers.

As a J-1 teacher, I have witnessed the great contributions my colleagues make to our educational system. We bring various outlooks, improving classrooms with global experiences and promoting cross-cultural understanding. We introduce creative teaching methodologies, ignite a passion for learning in students, and provide critical support to those with diverse learning needs. My fellow J-1 teachers serve as mentors, actively participate in extracurricular activities, and become deeply integrated members of our school 'ohana. Outside of the classroom, we expand horizons and reinforce community ties by sharing our cultures through storytelling, activities, and culinary adventures. We act as role models by exhibiting fortitude, flexibility, and a strong dedication to education.

Nonetheless, there are a number of difficulties with the existing J-1 visa regime. We are unable to properly invest in our students and the communities we serve because of the ongoing uncertainty caused by the temporary nature of our permits. Our mid-year departures produce disruptions that have a detrimental effect on student learning and deprive schools of committed, experienced teachers. We are also unable to adequately support our schools' long-term objectives and strategic plans because of this volatility.

HB 439 provides an important remedy. It would give teachers and schools much-needed stability if J-1 teachers were allowed to stay in Hawaii for five years after receiving their license. Fundamental justice and a fair assessment of our abilities and knowledge require equal compensation for equal labor, which includes differentials for certified teachers. It shows respect for our professional status and expedites the licensing procedure when we acknowledge our globally recognized credentials as proof of our qualifications and waive the expensive and time-consuming Praxis exams when we already hold international degrees and licenses.

Enacting HB 439 is an investment in the future of Hawaii's educational system, not just a way to help J-1 teachers. It guarantees that we can keep improving our students' lives and adding to Hawaii's dynamic educational environment. This law enables us to concentrate on the things that really count: fostering student development, fortifying our school communities, and creating a welcoming and stimulating learning environment for everyone. With all due respect, I implore the legislature to back HB 439 and give Hawaii's keiki's future top priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Testimony in Support of HB 439 - International Visiting Teacher License

Dera Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439, the International Visiting Teacher License. As a teacher currently serving in the Hawaii public school system, I understand firsthand the challenges we face in recruiting and retaining qualified educators, particularly in specialized areas.

I am originally from the Philippines, where I was a licensed and experienced special education teacher. I am now teaching in Honouliuli Middle School, contributing to easing the teacher shortage in the United States. My background and experience in the Philippines have provided me with a solid foundation in effective teaching practices, which I have been able to apply successfully in my current role. I currently work as a resource and inclusion special education teacher, and I firmly believe I am making a positive impact on the lives of students with special needs. I am passionate about helping these students reach their full potential, and I am dedicated to providing them with the support and resources they need to succeed. My school has been incredibly supportive of my professional development, providing me with opportunities to attend various training sessions. These training sessions have been invaluable in enhancing my skills and knowledge, ultimately benefiting the keiki of Hawaii. I am committed to continuing my professional growth and staying abreast of the latest research and best practices in special education.

While I am deeply committed to teaching in Hawaii and obtaining a Hawaiian teaching license, I must acknowledge the significant challenges involved. The cost of the required examinations and the time needed for adequate review are substantial burdens, especially while working full-time as a teacher. These obstacles can make it difficult for qualified international teachers like myself to fully integrate into the Hawaiian education system.

I believe that HB 439 would be immensely beneficial, not only for teachers like myself but, more importantly, for the students of Hawaii. By streamlining the licensing process for qualified international teachers, this bill would help ensure that our keiki have access to the best possible education. It would allow us to focus on what matters most – our students. This bill would open doors to a wider pool of experienced educators, enriching our schools and providing our students with diverse perspectives and expertise.

Therefore, I urge you to support HB 439. It is a crucial step in addressing the teacher shortage and ensuring a brighter future for Hawaii's children.

Sincerely,

Hazel I. Jordan

(808) 6206415



My name is **SARAH JEAN E. ALEGADO** and I am an international visiting teacher from the Philippines, currently serving as an English Language Development (ELD) Coordinator and Teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School in Maui District. I am here today to express my **strong support for HB 439**, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill will not only **recognize the invaluable contributions of J-1 teachers** but also provide **a pathway to continue addressing the national teacher shortage without additional financial barriers**.

This bill is **a crucial step toward addressing the ongoing teacher shortage in the United States**. As a J-1 teacher, I—along with many other international educators—play a significant role in **filling critical gaps in the education system**, particularly in high-need areas such as English as a Second Language (ESL), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and Special Education. Our presence **ensures that schools have access to highly qualified teachers** who bring global perspectives, diverse teaching methodologies, and a deep commitment to student success.

As an **ELD Coordinator and Teacher**, my role extends far beyond the classroom. I **support multilingual learners**, ensuring they receive the academic and linguistic resources necessary to thrive in an English-speaking environment. I **collaborate with general education teachers**, providing strategies to accommodate diverse language needs. Additionally, I **foster an inclusive school climate** by advocating for equitable opportunities for English learners, creating a culture where language is not a barrier but a bridge to success.

J-1 teachers like myself play **a crucial role in alleviating the teacher shortage** in the U.S. We bring **global perspectives, cultural exchange, and linguistic expertise** that enhance learning experiences for all students. However, one of the most significant challenges we face is **the requirement to pass the Praxis exam**, which comes at a high financial cost. While I understand the importance of assessment, this **financial burden often detracts from my ability to invest in professional growth opportunities**—workshops, certifications, and training that would **directly benefit my students and my school**.

The approval of HB 439 would allow teachers like me to **fully focus on our mission—educating, supporting, and uplifting students—without being hindered by costly licensure exams** that do not always reflect the real-world expertise we bring to our classrooms. This bill is not just about licenses; it is about **valuing and retaining skilled educators who are dedicated to filling the critical gaps in the U.S. education system**.

I urge you to support HB 439, as it represents an **investment in our students, our schools, and the future of education** in the United States. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

SARAH JEAN E. ALEGADO
J-1 Teacher | ELD Coordinator & Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School, Hawaii

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 8:43:30 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Justin Yamagata	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Justin Yamagata, teacher at Waimea Canyon Middle School for the past 20 years. I have had the pleasure of working with J1 teachers for the past 3 years. I have found their contributions to our school to be invaluable. They fill a need that is unable to be met locally and all of the J1 teachers that I have worked with has shown incredible work ethic and commitement to teaching.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 8:50:53 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Enrique Anonuevo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Greetings:

I am Enrique Anonuevo Jr. and I am currently teaching at Kalama Intermediate School as a J1 teacher. I already earned my teaching license last August 2024. I am writing this testimony to support the bill. I believe that the approval/passing of this bill will provide a great impact not only to the J1 teachers but also to the current education system.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 8:52:55 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
NICOLAS JR CRISPO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Nicolas Jr Crispo, a J1 teacher participant who started teaching here in Hawaii last year.

I am writing in support to the HB439, which aims to provide International Visiting Teacher License.

I have been a licensed professional teacher in the Philippines for 13 years. I was able to undergo various trainings and able to obtain my masters degree before coming here in Hawaii, which other J1 teachers also have.

As a person who have passion in teaching, I came here to experience and share other cultures to my students. I am enjoying my stay , I love Hawaii and I am committed to share what I have for my students' academic and personal growth.

Worth mentioning that a large percentage of the students are Filipinos. Having Filipino teachers here also give a Filipino teaching environment to them and let them feel of being home. I actually was able to receive appreciation from a new Filipino student as part of their activity from the other teacher. Thus, I can say that having Filipino teachers in Hawaii gives a welcoming environment to students, more specificaly for Filipino students.

Thus, I am expressing my support to HB439.

Hoping for a positive result.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 9:10:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lori Rogers	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am in support of HB 439 that would establish that International educators hired by the DOE be issued a renewable visiting international teacher liscence upon receipt of the following (7) A,B,C,D.

Mahalo,

Lori Rogers

Special Education Department Chair at Kamakahelei Middle School On the Island of Kauai.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 9:16:25 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
APPLE JANE DONADILLO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

"Good afternoon Members of the Committee, my name is Apple Jane Donadillo, and I'm a Computer Science teacher at Nanakuli High and Intermediate School. I'm a J-1 teacher, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my experiences and speak in support of the proposed measures regarding J-1 teachers in Hawai'i.

Coming to Hawai'i to teach has been an incredible experience. I'm passionate about sharing my expertise with the students at Nanakuli High and Intermediate School and learning from the rich culture and traditions of this beautiful island. I've been so warmly welcomed by the community, my colleagues, and my students. I've seen firsthand the positive impact I can have on my students' lives, both inside and outside the classroom. For example," I've been able to share my knowledge and expertise as a teacher" , "I've been able to help students who were struggling with the lesson by using Project Inquiry Approach. Seeing their confidence grow has been incredibly rewarding."I'm also learning so much from my fellow teachers and contributing to a collaborative and supportive school environment. I enjoy NIT MEETING AND PD: "sharing my own cultural traditions with the students" or "collaborating with other teachers on new curriculum development".

The opportunity to stay in Hawai'i for five years if licensed would be invaluable. The current two-year limit makes it difficult to fully integrate into the community and build lasting relationships with students and colleagues. Knowing I could stay longer would allow me to invest even more deeply in the school and the community, and provide greater stability for my students. Continuity is so important for their learning and well-being.

It's also essential that J-1 teachers receive equal pay for equal work, including access to the same differentials as other licensed teachers. We bring valuable skills and experience to the classroom, and we should be compensated fairly for our contributions. My international credentials represent years of study and dedication to my profession. It would be a great relief to have these credentials fully recognized and to not have to face the added burden of the Praxis exams when I already hold international licenses and degrees. This would allow me to focus on what truly matters: my students.

By supporting these measures, you're not only supporting J-1 teachers like myself, but you're also investing in the future of Hawai'i's keiki. We are dedicated educators who are passionate about making a difference. Thank you for your time and consideration."

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB439, a bill that seeks to grant international teachers a teaching license without unnecessary exams and ensure fair salary and benefits. As a J1 teacher currently teaching 2nd grade SPED/Inclusion at August Ahrens Elementary School in Hawaii, I have dedicated my skills, knowledge, and passion to positively impact my students and the school community.

International teachers play a crucial role in addressing teacher shortages, bringing diversity, expertise, and a global perspective to education. Many of us arrive highly qualified, with years of experience and credentials from our home countries, yet we face additional hurdles, such as redundant licensing exams that do not accurately reflect our abilities or experience. Removing these barriers would allow us to focus on what truly matters—supporting our students' learning and development.

Additionally, it is only fair that international teachers receive the same salary and benefits as our local counterparts. We contribute equally to the success of our schools, work tirelessly to meet the needs of our students, and deserve the same level of professional recognition and financial security. Equal pay and benefits would not only ensure stability for international teachers but also encourage more skilled educators to continue serving in Hawaii's schools.

Passing HB439 will strengthen Hawaii's education system by attracting and retaining highly qualified international educators, ultimately benefiting students and communities. I urge you to support this bill to create a more equitable and inclusive teaching environment for all.

For these reasons, passing HB439 is essential to ensuring fairness and stability for international teachers in Hawaii. By eliminating unnecessary exams, recognizing the validity of our home country licenses through reciprocity, and ensuring equal pay and benefits, this bill will create a more supportive and sustainable pathway for international educators.

Extending the opportunity for international teachers to work for at least five years will help address the ongoing teacher shortage. This stability ensures consistency for students who rely on our dedication and expertise.

Supporting HB439 means investing in the future of Hawaii's education system. It ensures that passionate, skilled international teachers can continue making a meaningful impact on students and communities for years to come. I urge you to stand with us in strengthening the foundation of quality education by passing this bill.

Sincerely,



LOVELLE PRIMELYN R. CAP-ATAN

J1 Teacher, 2nd Grade SPED/Inclusion

August Ahrens Elementary School

Greetings!

I am Eric D. Asuncion, a J1 teacher from the Philippines handling US History/Government subject of freshman students at Maui High Schol. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 439 which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As someone who sees the importance of having an educated mind complemented with an educated heart, I have devoted most of my time impacting change to my students by providing them with quality education to the best of my knowledge. I have offered them a safe space also so they could be themselves and be the catalyst of the change that we wanted to.

Aside from being a History teacher, I am also handling one of the many clubs that our school has, the Filipino Cultural Club wherein we cater the needs of the Filipino students since most of our students our Filipinos. We provide them firsthand experiences of the good things about being a Filipino. We try to create an avenue wherein they could imagine the vibrant side of Filipino life. And with these, I must say my stay here at Maui high School has somehow created a feeling of sense of pride and urgency since there is a transfer of knowledge as well as culture and tradition which are important to the development of everyone.

The presence of Filipino teachers spells a big difference. With the number of years of teaching experience and the exposures we had before, truly our presence is something to be considered knowing that Filipino teachers are passionate and dedicated.

However, we are on the verge right now of uncertainties because the state is looking for someone who is licensed to teach. It's a must for us to take Praxis Exam which is expensive and not that convenient on our end since our focus is on it instead of our students.

With this, may I urge the body to consider us and pass HB 439 so together we can make a difference by doing what's best for everyone.

Sincerely yours,

ERIC D. ASUNCION

Teacher, Maui High School

TESTIMONY

As a current SPED teacher of Kahului Elementary School, Maui, Hawai'i, may I humbly express my strong support for the passage of HB No. 439 – International Visiting Teacher.

I am Rosa Mae Felida Lumbo from the Philippines who had been qualified to be a part of the Teacher Exchange Program of Hawaii.

Generally, I strongly believe that having passed with my fellow foreign teachers, the high qualifications set by the department of Education of Hawaii, we are generally equipped with the skills, competencies and capabilities, acceptable by your international standards. Thus, we are globally competitive.

Personally, with the rich and substantial professional experience that I gained in my country, I would humbly say that I have the attributes of a teacher, specifically a SPED teacher demanded by international standards and guidelines. My exposure as Head of the Values Education Department of one of the biggest public schools in our locality coupled with my degree in the Masteral program major in in Special Education together with my more or less 20 years of teaching experience in the graduate, tertiary and secondary levels of our educational system, and a s Guidance counselor, I am optimistic and confident that I have the international qualifications set by the standards of your educational system.

As a teacher for the past six (6) months in Kahului Elementary School, I am handling young learners with Special Educational Needs. With such limited time that I have handled these kind of learners, I know that I have created, to some extent, an impact in the lives of my learners as evidenced by the various comments, remarks of the parents of my learners during IEP meeting sessions. Parents would overwhelmingly and gratefully tell me that their children have tremendously incurred positive changes through my guidance and competence in dealing, training and responding to

the needs of their children. One major duty that we do as SPED teachers is to prepare IEP. This is the Individualized Educational Plan/Program (IEP) of a certain learner with special educational needs. It is with humility that I say that the IEP's that I prepare are mostly commended by our school vice principal as "well written" and "well prepared." This is reflected further by the positive results on the behavior of our learners as professed by their parents through their open comments. Furthermore, one of my learner has been even awarded as "EAGLE of the month" in our school for the month of January. "EAGLE of the month" is an award given to our learners who exemplifies the THREE (3) core values of our school which are, ALOHA, KULEANA, and 'IMI NA'AUAO. This positive result, I believe, is made possible by applying the appropriate techniques in dealing with my learners that resulted to a consistent and harmonious relationship that I have established with my special learners. Inspired by these feedbacks, I am further motivated to continue with this endeavor in my professional life, that is to continuously touch lives of other people in my own little way. And this could only be done through a longer working relationship that I will forge with my school. One way therefore to establish such working relationship is by allowing us to exercise our profession as SPED teachers without undergoing additional examination administered by your State. Allowing us to continue with our profession without requiring us to undertake an additional examination is a way of nurturing further a strong bond and relationship that we have with our special learners. As special learners, they need, consistency, stability and tranquility in dealing with them. By requiring us to undertake additional examination for us to further qualify to continue as their teachers might distort and stir negatively the already stable orientations we have built with our learners, leading our learners to a more traumatic and adverse behavioral conditions.

Moreover, I believe that such positive results would not also be realized if we are not professionally qualified to handle these kinds of learners in our school.

On the other hand, taking the examination demands additional cost on our part. The examination is expensive, and it is also a fact that we have our respective families that we are supporting back in our home countries. The cost to be incurred, the fees, the transportation going to OAHU and accommodation expenses shall mean a substantial economic burden for us, who have families who are economically depending on us.

With all the foregoing, we beg for your consideration and understanding, we fervently pray that our plight as foreign teachers under this program shall be favorably considered. We vow that we shall continue to render our services with much fervor, and utmost competence and efficiency. May our substantial academic qualifications, robust professional work experience, and positive manifestations of our services as SPED teachers, be sufficient to be considered, for us to be no longer required to hurdle an additional examination. We fervently pray that this bill shall be passed and approved, for us to be able to continuously provide quality and excellent educational service to our learners. The approval of this bill shall be a strong indication of the high standards already set by your State's educational system and a recognition of our substantial qualifications to those high standards.

Again, may we sincerely appeal for your profound consideration and deepest appreciation on this matter.

My Name is Oscar Gatchalian, I was a former principal in the Philippines and now as a J1 teacher here in Hawaii.

Before coming here we have been scrutinized and gone through a lot of assessments in order to qualify for J1. As J1 teachers we have been struggling with finances because of the high cost of living here but with the exemption of taking the praxis exam would mean a lot to me. I got my out of state license back in the Philippines and at the State of New Mexico valid until 2031. I'd applied for probationary status but it says I still have to take praxis. This scenario also causes me to struggle with my finances and logistics, the fact that we do need to pay for it compared to some states that don't require the exam anymore.

Aside from the fact that we have only given our emergency permit and we stay here for about 3 to 5 years. Having one credited license also would allow us to raise our salary. We J1 are only paid a minimum amount and have been struggling a lot. If given the opportunity, the money would be a great help for us to send that to our family back home.

Testimony in Support of HB 439 – International Visiting Teacher License

Aloha, my name is Lyra Bertillo, and I am a 7th-grade Home Economics teacher at Kapaa Middle School on the beautiful island of Kauai, Hawaii. I am here to express my strong support for HB 439, which would provide international teachers like myself with the opportunity to hold a 5-year license here in Hawaii.

This bill is critical for teachers who are on J1 visas, like me, as it eliminates the need to take the PRAXIS exam. For many of us, the PRAXIS exam is a significant financial burden, costing hundreds of dollars, and in some cases, requiring travel to Oahu just to take the test. Given that many international teachers, including myself, hold degrees and professional licenses from our home countries, I believe that the PRAXIS exam is an unnecessary and inadequate measure of our teaching capabilities.

I have been teaching for eleven years and hold a master's degree from the Philippines, in addition to my teaching license from my home country. I am committed to continuously improving my skills, attending seminars, and participating in professional learning communities offered by my school and the Kauai District. I believe my experience and dedication as a teacher should be the focus, rather than a standardized exam that doesn't fully reflect my abilities or the value I bring to my students.

HB 439 will not only benefit international teachers but also the communities we serve. It will allow us to focus on what truly matters—providing quality education to our students. I strongly urge you to support this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Testimony to support HB439

My name is Reynosa Madlangbayan, and I am a Special Education Teacher with 13 years of experience in the field of special education. I am writing in strong support of HB439, which proposes the creation of an International Visiting Teacher. My experience has provided me with comprehensive understanding of the needs of students with diverse learning challenges.

I firmly believe that an International Visiting Teacher License would allow our students to learn firsthand from educators with diverse cultural backgrounds and teaching experiences. This exposure is invaluable in preparing students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. It fosters cultural understanding, empathy and appreciation for different perspectives, enriching the learning environment of the students. Also, addressing critical teacher shortages, like many other states facing on going teacher shortages particularly in Special Education. By supporting HB439 offers a potential solution by providing a streamlined pathway for qualified international teachers to contribute our expertise to our school. We would help fill critical vacancies and ensure that all students have access to high-quality institution. Thus, International teacher like me will bring them a wealth of knowledge and innovative teaching methodologies from our home countries. This exchange of best practices can benefit our existing teaching force, leading to improved instructional strategies and better outcomes for students. It allows us to learn from different educational systems and adopt successful approaches. This can also attract talented teachers from around the world, further enhancing the quality of our educational system and boosting our state's reputation.

I understand that some concerns may exist regarding licensure requirements and ensuring the quality of international teachers. I believe that these concerns can be addressed through carefully crafted regulations and vetting processes, similar to those used for other out-of-state teaching licenses.

I urge the committee to favorably consider HB439. This legislation represents a significant investment in the future of our students and our state. This broadens their horizons, improves the quality of education and helps critical teacher shortages.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Reynosa Madlangbayan
Special Education Teacher
Lihikai Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 11:13:15 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Jane Empalmado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Mary Jane B. Empalmado, a second year J1 teacher here in Hawaii teaching in Solomon Elementary School in both general and special education set up, writing a testimony to strongly support the HB439 Bill which aims to create an International Visiting Teacher license. This bill is essential for teachers like us, who have already earned our teaching license in the Philippines but now facing a hurdle in extending or Emergency Hired-Licensed as I need to pass five (5) Praxis tests. We are global teachers, however, the cultural and curriculum differences of different countries hinders us to sometimes pass and always be anxious to pass the tests.

My dual license helped me be flexible to what grade level; both general and special education). I taught kindergarten class (inclusion) last school year 23-24 and now teaching first grade class. I really enjoy being with the population of students we have in school. Many educators are having a hard time managing students in a military family, but I enjoy nurturing and sharing their skills in both academic and behavioral aspects. The school and school staff are also accommodating during the first year that I much need guidance. Despite the challenges that come with being a teacher , I remain dedicated and passionate about my profession. My resilience, adaptability, and genuine care for my students set me apart as an educator. Hawaii, like other states, faces an ongoing shortage particularly in rural and underserved communities. I urge you to support this bill and provide international teachers with a clear, accessible and fair path to license. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Mary Jane B. Empalmado

Special Education Teacher

Solomon Elementary School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 11:27:50 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Luke Ferda	Kauai School District	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB439. Across the country we have a shortage of quality teachers and this is only amplified on Kaua'i. During my 3 years spent at Waimea Canyon Middle School I have met and worked with 10 or more individuals who were able to teach because of HB439. Without this bill we would have had multiple classes without teachers. It is a difficult time to hire any position and I fear that our schools will be strongly hurt if we were unable to have these individuals work out our school. Mahalo for your time and consideration of this issue.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 11:32:17 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather Morgado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of HB 439, which would establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. As the Curriculum Coordinator at Kauai High School, I have seen firsthand the significant challenges we have faced in filling critical teaching positions, particularly in mathematics and the sciences.

This year, we were fortunate to welcome five new teachers from the Philippines to our school. These educators come with graduate-level expertise in their subject areas and possess exceptional teaching skills. Moreover, they have demonstrated a genuine willingness to embrace our school's culture and community. They have actively participated in professional development, volunteered for various school initiatives, and worked collaboratively with our existing faculty to implement best practices in the classroom.

By establishing a special teacher's license for qualified, knowledgeable, and respected educators from abroad, HB 439 will not only address the pressing need for subject area experts in our schools, but it will also reinforce our commitment to high-quality education for all students. This initiative will ensure that we continue to benefit from the talents of international educators, enriching our community and bolstering the educational experience for our students.

I urge the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board and our legislators to support HB 439. It is a necessary and forward-thinking step that will help us attract and retain exceptional educators, ultimately benefiting our students, our schools, and our entire community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Morgado

Curriculum Coordinator

Kauai High School

heather.morgado@k12.hi.us

808-977-9722

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 11:34:44 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kuulei Pablo	Naalehu Elementary	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Vice Principal Kuulei Pablo from Naalehu Elementary and I am writing to express my strong support for the continued and expanded presence of Filipino teachers in our American schools. I have witnessed firsthand the invaluable contributions these educators make to our students, our school communities, and the overall campus climate. Their dedication, expertise, and cultural insights enrich the learning environment in profound ways.

Specifically, I have observed how Filipino teachers positively impact our students in numerous ways. They bring a unique blend of warmth, patience, and high expectations that fosters a love of learning. They are adept at creating inclusive classrooms where every student feels valued and supported. I've seen them go above and beyond to connect with students, often drawing on their own experiences to build rapport and understanding. All of our J1 teachers have stepped into after school tutoring programs to provide interventions for our most intensive students and one in particular has also implemented a tailored after-school program focuses on SEL through Drama. Their commitment to all students' success is truly inspiring.

Beyond individual student impact, Filipino teachers also contribute significantly to the broader school community. They often become active members of our school families, participating in events, sharing their culture, and building bridges of understanding. Their presence enriches our school's diversity and creates a more welcoming and globally-minded environment. [Give a specific example: "Our school culture has been significantly enhanced by the contributions of our Filipino teachers, who share traditional food, music, and dance with the entire community through school performances as well as staff events.

The opportunity for J-1 visa teachers to stay in Hawaii for five years if licensed is crucial for both the teachers and our schools. This stability allows teachers to fully integrate into the community and develop deep, meaningful relationships with their students and colleagues. It also provides our schools with consistency and reduces the constant turnover that can disrupt the learning process. Knowing that these highly qualified educators can remain for an extended period allows us to invest in their professional development and fully benefit from their expertise.

Furthermore, ensuring equal pay for equal work, including access to differentials for licensed teachers, is essential for attracting and retaining these valuable educators. Recognizing their internationally recognized foreign credentials as evidence of their qualifications and experience is a matter of respect and fairness. Eliminating the need for burdensome and expensive Praxis

exams when they already possess international licenses and degrees streamlines the process and allows them to focus on what they do best: teaching. It's illogical to require them to jump through unnecessary hoops when their existing credentials already demonstrate their competence.

By removing these barriers, we enable Filipino teachers to dedicate their time and energy to supporting our schools, students, and communities. They are a tremendous asset to our educational system, and we must do everything we can to support them and ensure their continued presence in our classrooms. Their contributions are not only valuable; they are essential.

Thank you for considering.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 11:51:13 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Freddie Abulencia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Freddie Abulencia, and this is my second year participating in a cultural exchange program as an international teacher. One of my goals is to promote cross-cultural collaboration with my colleagues and equip students with global perspectives. As a J1 teacher, I strongly support the HB439 bill that recognizes our years of experience and teaching certification from our home country without requiring additional and costly tests. This will help us to complete our 5-year program, maximizing our contributions as international educators. This bill ensures excellent classroom stability and continuity, benefiting learners through more profound cultural exchange and enhanced global awareness. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 12:09:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

My name is James Urbaniak and I work for the Department of Education as a Human Resource Officer. Specifically, I'm a full time recruiter with a focus on recruiting teachers from the continent and from international locations to teach in Hawaii. I'm also a proud public school parent with my children attending our amazing public schools. For me, this work is both personal and professional; I always think about my own children when recruiting and hiring to ensure that all parents have the best educators in front of their kids.

I have the distinct honor of coordinating the J-1 program statewide and know each of our 218 educators. I can attest to their skills, abilities and love for their work because it's not only verified through proper documentation, but also reported upon by our school Principals statewide. I also know many of the J-1 spouses - many of whom also work in our schools on a J-2 Visa as teachers, cafeteria staff, and custodians. Their children attend our schools and these families are very loved in their communities.

In 2019, the Department worked hand-in-hand with the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) to ensure full licensure reciprocity for J-1 teachers. Under the leadership of former Executive Director Lynn Hammonds, international educators - J-1s and others - were provided provisional licenses in Hawaii, not an Emergency Hire Permit, without having to take any additional exams. Like other teachers from the continent who possessed a teaching license, the HTSB granted full licensure reciprocity to international educators who completed a teacher preparation program and had a license from their home country. The HTSB set precedent and determined that international educators were license worthy in our public schools. Many of our original J1 teachers are fully licensed because of this and enjoy the benefits of licensure including greater employment protections like tenure, salary differentials of up to \$18,000 more per year, and the comfort of knowing they can work in our schools for up to 5 years which provides continuity of instruction for our keiki.

I strongly believe that one's country of origin should play no part in any licensing determination. What message does that send to the vast majority of our students who's families who immigrated to Hawaii and the United States? Sadly, such policies currently exist within our state licensing rules and HB439 is needed to correct this injustice. A teacher who was trained outside the United States should be treated identically to a teacher trained within the United States - especially when there exists approved documentation that says both are equally

trained. Our J-1 teachers are making profound impacts in the most needed communities throughout our state and deserve to be fully licensed as they once were.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.

James Urbaniak

Proud Public School Parent

Human Resource Officer, Hawaii State Department of Education

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 12:32:53 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Miranda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a teacher that works in the Hawaii Public School system, I see firsthand the positive effect that J1 teachers have on our school community. They are incredibly hard workers and prioritize the needs of our students. I think our schools would benefit greatly from easier licensure options for this group of people.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 12:47:05 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jill Chow	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a public school teacher for over 30 years. Since last school year and this current school year I have had the pleasure of working with some amazing J1 teachers. They are dependable and very hardworking. I would love to see that they are able to extend their stay in Hawaii to teach without taking licensing exams for certification. Over the years I have seen classrooms filled by individuals that have little to no teaching experience. The J1 teachers are college graduates in their designated core content. An exam does not make a good teacher! The state school system has been in desperate need of teachers for years- they are the solution. Allow them to extend their stay without having them take a test to prove whether or not they can answer questions correctly. Believe me, they show up everyday, they have built relationships with students, they are passionate about what they do for our students. Expecting them to test would also be an added financial burden on them. Please take into consideration my plea for them. Better yet come to my school and see for yourself how amazing and valuable they are.

TO: House Committee on Education
RE: Support for HB439 Relating to Education

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB439, which would establish an international teacher license and create a more equitable pathway for our J-1 visa teachers.

My role as Kauai High School's Academy Director and as a Counselor, I have directly witnessed the impact of our Filipino J-1 teachers. They have become integral members of our school 'ohana, establishing robust communication systems with students, families, and staff while consistently demonstrating openness to feedback and an unwavering commitment to student success.

In coordinating professional development opportunities for these teachers, I've been consistently impressed by their eagerness to adapt their teaching methods to meet our students' unique needs. They actively participate in training sessions, readily incorporating innovative strategies for student engagement and teacher clarity into their practice. Their willingness to refine their approaches while maintaining high academic standards has positively impacted student achievement and enriched our campus culture.

This legislation would address several critical barriers our J-1 teachers currently face. Most importantly, it would acknowledge their international credentials and existing teaching licenses as well as creating a renewable license that would allow qualified J-1 teachers to remain in Hawaii for up to 5 years, providing valuable continuity for students and strengthening school communities.

Removing barriers would allow our international educators to focus entirely on what they do best: supporting students and enriching our educational community. Their dedication to professional growth, combined with their willingness to embrace our local culture while sharing their own, creates meaningful cultural exchanges that benefit all students.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Dawn Taba
Academy Director/Early College Coordinator
Academy of Innovation & Design Counselor
dawn.taba@k12.hi.us
(808) 977-9723

Aloha,

I am the district manager with Alliance Abroad, the visa sponsor for the J1 international teachers in Hawaii. As the district manager, I work with districts hosting J1 teachers throughout the country and am familiar with the different certification requirements for international teachers and how they vary from state to state. What I have noticed is that states with an international teaching certification, like the one described in this bill, tend to have successful J1 Teach programs. While there are many factors that contribute to this, here are some areas to consider.

- It is possible for a J1 teacher to apply to districts throughout the country. Allowing teachers to have an easier path to licensure will help make Hawaii a more desirable destination for teachers who have their choice of where to apply. This can lead to attracting more qualified candidates to the state.
- The teachers who are applying and participating in the program are already certified in their home county. They have completed university, taken tests and exams to earn their teaching credentials. Being able to apply for an international teaching certification can help relieve them of the mental and financial stress that can come with the praxis exams that are currently needed for Hawaii certification.
- If passed, this certification will ensure the teachers can stay in Hawaii for up to five years if their extension requests are approved. This will result in less teacher turnover creating stronger educators for schools throughout the state.

Thank you for your consideration in creating a visiting international teaching certification. I am confident it will have a positive impact on the teachers, students and state's education.

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HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 12:56:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeanelle Manahan Avila	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Legislature,

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for the proposed bill regarding the J-1 visa program, particularly as a current J-1 teacher here on the beautiful island of Kauai, Hawaii. This is my second year teaching 7th grade science at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School, and I have witnessed firsthand the invaluable contributions that international educators make to our schools and students.

The BridgeUSA J-1 visa program has provided me with the opportunity to share my knowledge and passion for science with my students, while also allowing me to engage in meaningful cultural exchange. This program not only addresses the ongoing teacher shortage but also enriches the educational experience for our diverse student population. As the bill highlights, representation matters, and having educators from various backgrounds can significantly impact student learning and aspirations.

Currently, the demographic disparity between our student body and teaching staff is concerning. With 22.4% of public school students identifying as Filipino, yet only 7.4% of educators sharing that background, it is crucial for our educational system to reflect the diversity of our students. The J-1 visa program plays a pivotal role in bridging this gap and promoting cultural understanding in our classrooms.

However, the existing licensing rules for J-1 teachers can be quite challenging and limit our potential. The classification of J-1 teachers as "emergency hires" necessitates navigating a series of costly examinations, which can exceed \$1,000. This not only places a financial burden on international educators but also detracts from our ability to focus on what truly matters—our students and their learning experiences.

I strongly believe that streamlining the licensing process and recognizing the qualifications of international educators would significantly enhance the educational landscape in Hawaii. By establishing a provisional licensing pathway for visiting international teachers, as proposed in this bill, we can ensure equitable compensation and allow us to fully utilize our skills and experiences in the classroom.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to support this bill to create a more inclusive and equitable educational system in Hawaii. The J-1 visa program has proven to be a success, and with your

support, we can continue to inspire and educate our students while fostering a rich cultural exchange.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Jeanelle Avila
J-1 Teacher
Kauai, Hawaii

February 2, 2025

House of Representatives
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Committee on Education
Rep. Trisha La Chica, Vice Chair & Members

Dear Chair Woodson and Members:
RE: HB 439

Aloha! My name is Crystal Valenciano Rowe. I am writing in support of this legislation that recognizes J-1 educators who have the qualifications and experiences to be considered in this pathway towards an international teacher license.

I grew up in the K-12 public schools on Kaua'i, a child of immigrant parents from the Philippines. My father was a welder for Olokele Sugar Plantation and my mother became an LPN after having 6 children. As we attended school, I had no teacher of my ethnicity until I was in the fifth grade. Then up through my high school graduation, there were no other Filipino teachers in my educational program. Many of us with roots from the plantation went on to colleges and became teachers ourselves in all levels of education. For 42 plus years, I served my community on Kaua'i as a Special Education and Transition Teacher from 1977-2021 in K-12 schools with an emphasis in secondary education.

As a classroom teacher and with time spent with registrars and administrators at several schools, I saw how difficult it was to fill positions especially in the middle and high schools in the areas of STEM. Over the years, there was an increasing shortage of teachers in these critical problem solving areas. Principals had to be creative in utilizing their staff to address these subject areas and to build capacity.

The decision made by the Department of Education and legislators to look towards the Philippines for teachers to fill these critical areas was a very innovative way to look "outside the box". I was aware of the first year of the J-1 teachers only as a means of providing transportation and as a fellow educator on the island. However, with the second group of teachers, I was determined to become more involved, especially with two teachers who taught at schools close to my home.

At the orientation event held in July, I was aware of the enthusiasm by the principals of the schools with J-1 teachers. They were impressed at the dedication and commitment of these teachers to do their best and of their strong support of students in their care..

In speaking to the two teachers I chose to mentor, it became apparent to me that these were highly experienced, highly trained, and professional teachers. One had been teaching for 10 years and one had been a principal at three different secondary schools. I mistakenly thought that these were new teachers on their first teaching assignment. No, these are experienced teachers who have spent quality time working with rigorous curriculum, analyzing assessments, and being consistent role models to students.

These teachers are already making a positive impact on our students as many of our Filipino immigrant students can identify with the culture and challenges of these teachers. To see that type of representation does much towards a student's confidence level and awareness of possibilities. They are also making a positive impact on our community as they participate in community events and assist in charitable activities.

This pathway towards an international teaching license would go far in validating the important work they are doing and acknowledging their years of experience and competence. They are here sacrificing their personal lives as many have spouses or children back home.

I strongly support and urge your committee to be like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina and be a leader in developing a pathway towards an international teacher license. What better place than in our very diverse Hawai'i? This will provide an incentive to these teachers that their accomplishments here will lead towards a more global recognition.

Mahalo for your time and attention.

Crystal M. V. Rowe
Retired Special Education/Transition Educator
Kalaheo Elementary, Kapa'a Middle School, Kapa'a High School

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 1:05:09 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jay Gregory	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support HB 439. I am a middle school special education teacher on Kauai. We have had a handful of J1 teachers the last 2 years and all of these teachers have been great with all the students on our campus. These teachers have been dedicated and have contributed to our school in numerous ways. They have made our school better and our children have grown and become better learners through their efforts.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 1:10:53 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Pimentel	Department of Education - Lana'i High & Elementary School Assistant Principal	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of Hawaii Bill 439

To the Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for Hawaii Bill 439, which seeks to address the licensing requirements for J1 visa teachers in our state. My experience working with and mentoring J1 teachers on the island of Lana'i has demonstrated the immense value they bring to our school and community, and I believe this bill is crucial for ensuring we can continue to benefit from their expertise.

Our school currently hosts 12 J1 teachers, instructing students in a wide range of grades, from 1st through 12th, including special education. These teachers come to us with diverse educational backgrounds and a wealth of knowledge, enriching our classrooms and broadening the horizons of our students. They are incredibly hardworking and possess a diverse skill set that allows them to effectively support our students and contribute to our community.

These J1 teachers are committed to a five-year stay in our schools, and it is unreasonable to burden them with additional, costly licensing requirements that are not only unnecessary but also create a significant barrier to their continued service. Our experience with these teachers has been overwhelmingly positive. They have consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to our students and a willingness to go above and beyond in fulfilling their responsibilities.

As a mentor for new teachers, including many J1 teachers, I have witnessed firsthand their dedication to our school and the Lana'i community. They consistently exceed expectations, providing exceptional care and respect to our students and their families. They work diligently to meet all school requirements, demonstrating their right to receive the differential pay offered to their colleagues in our rural and hard-to-staff location. This differential is essential for attracting and retaining qualified teachers in areas like Lana'i, and J1 teachers serving in these locations should be eligible.

We are incredibly thankful to have these J1 teachers as part of our team. Their dedication and the positive impact they have on our students and community are undeniable. They are a vital asset to our school, and we urge you to support Hawaii Bill 439 to ensure we can continue to welcome and benefit from their valuable contributions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo piha,

Jennifer Pimentel

Vice Principal

Lāna'i High and Elementary

2024 NAESP & HEMSAA Hawaii Assistant Principal of the Year.

(808) 999-8900

"I ulu no ka lālā i ke kumu" ~ Mary Kawena Puku'i

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 1:12:38 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April D. Asuncion	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB439 - International Visiting Teacher License

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is April D. Asuncion, a J1 teacher from the Philippines and currently working as a teacher at Haiku Elementary School. I am in my second year now working with diverse teachers and pupils who have contributed to my growth and well-being.

For somebody who has been passionate since I had my job, I have been in search for the best measures to suffice the needs of students for them to grow the way our society would need them, somebody who is well-rounded, ready to face life in its greater heights and become an asset of the society as much as possible.

Since last year, I have been scratching all means to meet the demands of our school of providing quality education to everyone. This was backed up by exposing myself to different seminars and trainings offered by the Department of Education. This, I believed, also helped me bring out the best in my learners as manifested in their achievements.

However, my desire to bring out the best from my learners is being distracted by the demand of having to take the Praxis test which I think should not be since we have license in the Philippines, and we had been teaching there for almost a decade now.

Not to discredit but we have been exposed to experiences which shaped us to what we are right now. Our focus is being diverted to that which bothers us.

With this, may I urge everyone to please consider us so we can still take part in providing the much-needed help and support for everyone.

Thank you so much.

Ver truly yours,
APRIL D. ASUNCION
J1 Teacher

Honorable members of the committee,

I am Marlyn Sotto, and I am writing in support of HB 439 which aims to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This legislation is crucial for teachers like myself, who have obtained rigorous training and teaching licenses in the Philippines but encounter additional challenges such as the Praxis examinations, in order to continue working with students in the Hawaii Department of Education.

J1 teachers contribute to the diversity of teaching and methodologies within schools. Our varied educational background and pedagogical approaches offer students a more comprehensive and enriching learning experience.

As a teacher from the Philippines, I am dedicated to understanding the Hawaii students' culture of learning, thus, offering quality education to my students. While I recognize the necessity of proving subject matter expertise, I feel that our experience, credentials, and commitment be recognized without the requirement of undergoing multiple standardized tests which we already underwent back in the Philippines.

Moreover, recognizing teachers' licenses encourages our professional growth and development. It allows us to fully integrate into the educational system, participate in professional development opportunities, and collaborate with fellow educators. This not only benefits the J1 teachers but also enriches the entire educational community through sharing of best practices and innovative teaching methods.

Hence, J1 teachers are a valuable asset to the United States educational system. By reciprocating and recognizing our home-country teaching licenses, the US Department of Education can ensure that we are able to fully contribute to the academic and cultural development of American students.

Thank you very much for considering this important matter.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 1:22:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Dingus	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have been working in the Dept. of Education for over a decade now. During that time there have been many teachers that move here from the mainland and are gone the next year. There has been a lot of turnover at CKMS on Kauai.

Keeping the J1 teachers for 5 years would give more consistency to schools here in Hawaii. In my experiences with them, they have all been professional.

I write this not only as a teacher. My daughter is an 8th grader attending the school I work at. This year she has 2 J1 teachers. If they were not here, it would be an inconsistent environment with substitutes coming and going daily.

I hope these teachers can stay longer.

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 1:35:25 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mae Lynn Rita	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I want to express my unwavering support for HB 439, which mandates that the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. We have faced significant challenges in filling critical teaching positions, particularly in mathematics and the sciences, with highly qualified teachers. Our district and school-level supporters have been instrumental in successfully integrating educators into our community. By creating a special teacher's license for qualified, knowledgeable, and respected educators from abroad, HB 439 will meet the urgent need for subject-area experts in our schools and strengthen our commitment to high-quality education for every student. I passionately urge the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board and our legislators to support HB 439. This vital and forward-thinking initiative will attract and retain exceptional educators, ultimately enhancing the future of our students, our schools, and our entire community.

Thank you

Mae Lynn Rita

Testimony in Support of HB 439

My name is Marissa Purcell, and I am the Vice Principal at Kaua'i High School. I enthusiastically support HB 439, which mandates the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders.

At Kaua'i High School, we consistently struggle to find qualified teachers, particularly in critical subject areas like mathematics and science. This shortage impacts our ability to provide the high-quality education our students deserve. This year, we were fortunate to welcome several teachers from the Philippines, and their contributions have been invaluable. These educators possess advanced degrees in their respective fields, demonstrate exceptional pedagogical skills, and have seamlessly integrated into our school community. Their commitment to our students and their willingness to embrace our local culture has been truly inspiring.

The support provided by our district and school-level personnel has been instrumental in their successful transition. Furthermore, the warmth and assistance of the local Filipino community have been essential, particularly in navigating the challenges of Kaua'i's high cost of living and limited housing options. This community support network has been crucial to their well-being and professional success.

HB 439 offers a vital solution to our teacher shortage. By creating a specialized license for qualified international educators, we can ensure that our students have access to highly skilled subject matter experts. This will address our immediate staffing needs and enrich our school community with diverse perspectives and experiences. Allowing us to tap into the talent pool of international educators will strengthen our commitment to providing a quality education for all students.

I strongly urge the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board and our legislators to support HB 439. This legislation is crucial to ensuring that Kaua'i High School and schools across the state can attract and retain exceptional teachers. It is an investment in our students, our schools, and the future of our community.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marissa Purcell
Vice Principal, Kaua'i High School
marissa.purcell@k12.hi.us
8089779701

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 2:05:26 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Crystal Rowe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 2, 2025

House of Representatives

Hawaii State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Committee on Education

Rep. Trisha La Chica, Vice Chair & Members

Dear Chair Woodson and Members:

RE: HB 439

Aloha! My name is Crystal Valenciano Rowe. I am writing in support of this legislation that recognizes J-1 educators who have the qualifications and experiences to be considered in this pathway towards an international teacher license.

I grew up in the K-12 public schools on Kaua'i, a child of immigrant parents from the Philippines. My father was a welder for Olokele Sugar Plantation and my mother became an LPN after having 6 children. As we attended school, I had no teacher of my ethnicity until I was in the fifth grade. Then up through my high school graduation, there were no other Filipino teachers in my educational program. Many of us with roots from the

plantation went on to colleges and became teachers ourselves in all levels of education. For 42 plus years, I served my community on Kaua'i as a Special Education and Transition Teacher from 1977-2021 in K-12 schools with an emphasis in secondary education.

As a classroom teacher and with time spent with registrars and administrators at several schools, I saw how difficult it was to fill positions especially in the middle and high schools in the areas of STEM. Over the years, there was an increasing shortage of teachers in these critical problem solving areas. Principals had to be creative in utilizing their staff to address these subject areas and to build capacity.

The decision made by the Department of Education and legislators to look towards the Philippines for teachers to fill these critical areas was a very innovative way to look "outside the box". I was aware of the first year of the J-1 teachers only as a means of providing transportation and as a fellow educator on the island. However, with the second group of teachers, I was determined to become more involved, especially with two teachers who taught at schools close to my home.

At the orientation event held in July, I was aware of the enthusiasm by the principals of the schools with J-1 teachers. They were impressed at the dedication and commitment of these teachers to do their best and of their strong support of students in their care..

In speaking to the two teachers I chose to mentor, it became apparent to me that these were highly experienced, highly trained, and professional teachers. One had been teaching for 10 years and one had been a principal at three different secondary schools. I mistakenly thought that these were new teachers on their first teaching assignment. No, these are experienced teachers who have spent quality time working with rigorous curriculum, analyzing assessments, and being consistent role models to students.

These teachers are already making a positive impact on our students as many of our Filipino immigrant students can identify with the culture and challenges of these teachers. To see that type of representation does much towards a student's confidence level and awareness of possibilities. They are also making a positive impact on our community as they participate in community events and assist in charitable activities.

This pathway towards an international teaching license would go far in validating the important work they are doing and acknowledging their years of experience and competence. They are here sacrificing their personal lives as many have spouses or children back home.

I strongly support and urge your committee to be like Alaska, Nevada, and North Carolina and be a leader in developing a pathway towards an international teacher license. What better place than in our very diverse Hawai'i? This will provide an incentive to these teachers that their accomplishments here will lead towards a more global recognition.

Mahalo for your time and attention.

Crystal M. V. Rowe

Retired Special Education/Transition Educator

Kalaheo Elementary, Kapa'a Middle School, Kapa'a High School

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 2:14:27 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raymart Jayson Fundal	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony Regarding J-1 Visa Extension Exception for Teaching License in Hawai‘i

My name is Raymart Jayson M. Fundal, and I am a Special Education Teacher currently in Hawai‘i on a J-1 visa. I am writing to express my sincere desire to extend my J-1 visa and to respectfully request an exception regarding the teaching license requirement for this extension.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Hawai‘i and have developed a deep love for the islands and the community. This experience has been invaluable, both personally and professionally. I am passionate about making a positive impact on the lives of children with special needs, and I believe I have made significant contributions to the students I serve here in Hawai‘i. I am eager to continue this important work.

My primary motivation for extending my J-1 visa is twofold. First and foremost, I am committed to supporting my family back in the Philippines. The opportunity to work in Hawai‘i allows me to provide much-needed financial assistance to them. Secondly, I am deeply invested in building a legacy of positive change in the lives of the children I teach here in Hawai‘i. I have formed strong bonds with my students and their families, and I am dedicated to continuing to provide them with the high-quality special education they deserve. Extending my visa would allow me to continue nurturing these relationships and further develop my skills as an educator within this unique and diverse environment.

I understand the requirements for extending a J-1 visa, including the teaching license requirement. I am respectfully requesting an exception to this requirement in my specific case. I know what's needed to stay, the teaching license, the rules. But I'm asking, pleading, for a chance, a break. The license...it's just out of reach right now. Too much, too many IEP meetings, too much on my plate at school. I'm drowning, and this deadline is another weight pulling me under.

I am confident that my skills and experience as a Special Education teacher, coupled with my dedication to my students, make me a valuable asset to the Hawaiian educational system. I am a responsible and committed individual, and I am confident that I will continue to uphold the highest professional standards.

Thank you for considering my request. I am hopeful that I will be granted the opportunity to continue my work here in Hawai‘i and contribute to the well-being of its children.

Sincerely,

Raymart Jayson M. Fundal

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 2:19:59 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Milagros Cadang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I'm Milagros R. Cadang, a participant in the J-1 Exchange Program in the USA. Currently, I'm teaching at Kalakaua Middle School. If you gonna asked me if I am okey?, I say I'm perfectly fine and enjoying the program. I'm eager to share this wonderful experience with others back home in the Philippines. However, with only a short time allotted for this program, we need to maximize our efforts to learn as much as possible. Requiring us to take the Hawaii teacher licensure exam adds an extra layer of difficulty. We must prepare for and pass five different subjects, incurring additional expenses. Failing to obtain this license promptly may lead to our current school not rehiring us for the next school year, forcing us to find new positions. What's more, this license won't be valid in our home country. If only J-1 teachers like myself could be exempt from taking the exam, we could devote that time to preparing lessons, attending cultural programs, seminars, and training.

I sincerely hope this bill passes. It would be a huge help for us.

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 2:37:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heidee Kryssel Gudao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the Committee:

I strongly support HB439-International Visiting Teacher License and urge its swift passage. This legislation presents a significant opportunity to:

- **Address Teacher Shortages:**
 - Hawaii faces critical teacher shortages, particularly in high-need areas like STEM, special education, and foreign languages.
 - This bill provides a pathway to recruit qualified international educators to fill these vacancies and enhance the quality of education for our students.
- **Bring Diverse Perspectives to Hawaii Classrooms:**
 - International teachers bring valuable global perspectives, diverse teaching methodologies, and cultural experiences that enrich the learning environment for all students.
 - This exchange fosters cross-cultural understanding and prepares our students for an increasingly interconnected world.
- **Support Professional Development:**
 - The program can serve as a valuable professional development opportunity for both international teachers and Hawaii educators, promoting best practices and fostering a collaborative learning environment.
- **Enhance the Global Reputation of Hawaii's Education System:**
 - Attracting talented international educators will enhance Hawaii's reputation as a desirable destination for educators, showcasing our commitment to innovation and global education.

The bill includes crucial safeguards:

- **Rigorous screening and vetting processes** ensure only highly qualified and experienced educators are eligible.
- **Clear licensure requirements** ensure that international teachers meet Hawaii's professional standards.
- **Mentorship and support systems** will provide guidance and support to international teachers during their tenure in Hawaii.

I urge this committee to recognize the significant benefits of HB439. Passing this legislation will help address teacher shortages, enhance the quality of education for Hawaii's students, and position our state as a leader in international education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heidee Kryssel Gudao, Sped Teacher | Lihikai Elementary School

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 3:02:40 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Micah Calilao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello, my name is Micah Calilao. I grew up in the island of Lanai. I'm very familiar with the education system here in the island. We have 1 school that educates approximately 400+ students. These past few years were difficult due to lack of teachers. Our school would have substitute teachers teaching classes without a degree in teaching. That reflected our students ability to receive quality education.

we were blessed to have J1 teachers from the Philippines come on board. They are highly qualified to educate.

I personally get to work with some of the teachers outside of the school setting. They help in our Sunday school at church. The teachers immersed themselves in our unique community.

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 3:58:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
charlotte e menze	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha to whom they may concern,

I am Charlotte Menze, an Elementary School Counselor for the DOE in Lanai High School. J-1 teachers at Lāna‘i High and Elementary have been a positive benefit to our school and community. Without these teachers, we will not be able to have teachers positions. The result would be students without certified teachers. Here are some reasons why Lanai Elementary and High has benefited from having the J-1 teachers at this school.

- Educated and Intelligent
- Collaborative
- Caring and empathic about Lana'i students
- Great energy and positive
- our students are 80% Filipino; the J1 teacher relate to the students and their culture
- Hard-working and supportive
- Participate in school activities
- support and are present in the HSTA union

I am so glad they are a part of our school community they have improved your school community and helped to create a positive school culture.

Charlotte Menze MSW

Elementary School Counselor

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 4:39:33 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Fretto-Girard	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support Bill HB439.



HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 4:52:01 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JENNICAH CYRIL S. REYEL	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of Abolishing the PRAXIS Requirement for Filipino Teachers Seeking Certification Extensions in Hawaii

Aloha Members of the Hawaii Board of Education,

I am writing to respectfully urge the Board to reconsider and abolish the current requirement mandating that teachers from the Philippines take the PRAXIS exam in order to secure an extension of their teaching certification in Hawaii. This policy poses unnecessary financial, logistical, and emotional burdens on a group of educators who are already contributing significantly to our educational system.

1. Financial Burden

The cost of taking the PRAXIS exam is prohibitive for many Filipino teachers. The exam fees, combined with preparatory materials, can total hundreds of dollars—a significant expense, particularly for those supporting families both in Hawaii and back home in the Philippines. Many of these teachers are already navigating the high cost of living in Hawaii, and this additional financial strain can be overwhelming.

2. Time Constraints

Preparing for the PRAXIS exam demands extensive time that these teachers could otherwise dedicate to lesson planning, student engagement, and professional development within their schools. Many Filipino teachers are already working extended hours to meet the diverse needs of their students, and this requirement diverts their valuable time and energy away from their primary role as educators.

3. Logistical Challenges

In many cases, taking the PRAXIS exam necessitates traveling to testing centers that may not be conveniently located, adding transportation and accommodation costs to the already hefty financial burden. For teachers stationed on islands without testing facilities, this means inter-island travel, further compounding the expense and time away from their classrooms and families.

4. Existing Qualifications and Experience

Filipino teachers come to Hawaii with robust educational backgrounds and substantial teaching experience. Many hold advanced degrees and certifications that meet or exceed international

standards. Their contributions have been instrumental in addressing teacher shortages and enriching the cultural diversity of our schools. Requiring them to take an additional standardized test undermines their professional expertise and the qualifications they already possess.

5. Impact on Teacher Retention and Student Success

This requirement may deter highly qualified Filipino teachers from continuing their careers in Hawaii, exacerbating teacher shortages and disrupting student learning continuity. By abolishing this unnecessary hurdle, we can retain skilled educators who have already proven their commitment and competence in our classrooms.

In conclusion, the PRAXIS exam requirement for Filipino teachers seeking certification extensions is an unnecessary obstacle that imposes financial, time, and logistical hardships. Eliminating this requirement would not only support the well-being of these dedicated educators but also enhance the stability and quality of education in Hawaii.

Mahalo for considering this important matter.

Respectfully,
Jennicah Cyril S. Reyel

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 5:18:13 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kellyne Weathers	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kellyne Weathers and I teach on the island of Kauai. I have been teaching in Kauai since 2021. For 2 years we did not have a full time math teacher. The struggle of trying to teach a content while also trying to support two long term subs made it incredibly hard and complex when I was trying to do my own responsibilities while also supporting them not only with the technology but also the content. Finally two J1V teachers were placed on our team and we have consistency for our students from individuals who know the content. While I think there does need to be a support program for these teachers to help them feel more comfortable to ask questions and to help them with the transition, their ability to present the content and their level of understanding has never been in question which is what is proven through their work. They should be accredited the licensure they have received for their studies.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

Norma Barroga Cronkite
691 Maika Place
Wailuku, HI 96793
February 3, 2025

LATE

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 439

Dear Hawaii State Legislators,

My name is Norma Barroga Cronkite and I'm in support of HB 439. I'm an immigrant and a retired school principal who served in several public schools on Maui for 36 years. I am aware that there has been significant and chronic shortage of teachers on Maui for several years now. Please pass HB 439 because it will help alleviate the shortage of qualified teachers who will be teaching our children in the classrooms. Our children deserve a stable learning environment that substitute teachers are unable to provide as different substitute teachers may be hired for a classroom.

I wholeheartedly support the intent of the bill that will allow the the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish international criteria for obtaining an international teacher license. I personally know the 44 JI teachers who came to Maui from the Philippines. Several of them have completed their Masters and Doctoral degrees. They are fluent and have a good command of the English language. Many of them have so many years of teaching experiences in the Philippines. These Filipino J1 teachers may also serve as good role models and could serve as an inspiration for our Filipino students.

In my discussions with them, I deduced that they have working knowledge of standards and research-based teaching strategies. These J1 teachers deserve to have an international teacher license and be given the same benefits as those of the licensed and tenured teachers in the Hawaii State Department of Education public schools.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit a written testimony and I would like to urge you all to pass HB 439. Should you have any questions, you may contact me at (808) 385-0856 or email barrogaf001@hawaii.rr.com.

Sincerely,



Norma Barroga Cronkite

LATE

Testimony for HB439

My name is Rowena Aldana, and I am a J-1 teacher currently teaching 9th Grade Science at Henry Perrine Baldwin High School in Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii. I am honored to share my perspective as an international educator directly benefiting from the provisions that HB439 seeks to enhance.

As a J-1 teacher, I have the privilege of bringing diverse cultural perspectives into the classroom, enriching the educational experiences of my students while also fostering global awareness and cross-cultural understanding. This program not only allows me to share my knowledge and heritage but also to learn from my students and colleagues, creating a dynamic, inclusive learning environment.

HB439 is critical because it supports the professional growth and well-being of J-1 teachers like myself. Specifically, this bill addresses the process for obtaining an international teacher license in Hawaii, which is essential for ensuring that qualified educators from around the world can continue to teach and contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's classrooms. By streamlining licensing procedures, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and enhancing access to resources, HB439 will make it more feasible for passionate, qualified educators to thrive both professionally and personally.

Moreover, this bill recognizes the value of cultural exchange as a cornerstone of educational excellence. In an increasingly interconnected world, exposing students to diverse perspectives prepares them to be thoughtful, informed global citizens. The presence of international teachers helps bridge cultural gaps and promotes mutual respect and understanding among students from different backgrounds.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to support HB439. This legislation will not only benefit J-1 teachers by facilitating the international teacher licensing process but also enrich the educational experiences of countless students across Hawaii.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

ROWENA ALDANA

J-1 Teacher

H.P.BALDWIN HIGH SCHOOL

February 03, 2025

LATE

HB-439

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 8:07:53 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/4/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Douglas Boyer	Lanai High and Elementary School	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Educational Committee Members,

As Principal of Lana'i High & Elementary School (LHES), I offer my strongest support for HB439. LHES, a rural school on the island of Lana'i, has consistently faced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. For the first two years of my tenure, we began each school year with open teaching positions, necessitating reliance on long-term substitutes, a patchwork of rotating substitutes, or administrative staff to cover classes. This created persistent anxiety and stress, impacting our ability to provide a consistent and appropriate education for our students.

The J-1 visa program has proven invaluable in mitigating this challenge, allowing LHES to fill critical vacancies and bring positive change to our students and the Lana'i community. Currently, LHES employs J-1 teachers in the following critical areas: five elementary teachers (grades 1-5, one per grade level), two middle school teachers, one high school teacher, and four special education teachers at various levels.

It is important to note that while many of our J-1 teachers possess advanced degrees, including Master's and Doctorate degrees in their respective fields, and bring extensive classroom experience, they are still required to pass five costly PRAXIS exams to obtain Hawaii teacher certification. Until they achieve this, they are compensated at a lower rate despite performing the same duties and holding the same responsibilities as their certified colleagues. Furthermore, J-1 special education teachers must have a Hawaii-certified special education teacher present at all IEP meetings, placing an additional burden on our existing special education staff. HB439 would rectify this inequity, ensuring equal pay for equal work and eliminating the additional workload placed on our special education teachers.

Beyond their instructional expertise, our J-1 teachers enrich LHES and the Lana'i community in profound ways. They bring valuable cultural and linguistic diversity that is deeply rooted in the community, becoming integral members of our community through active involvement and volunteerism with various organizations and cultural events. This fosters a strong school culture that is connected to the community.

Supporting HB439 is not only a practical solution to our teacher shortage but also a matter of equity and fairness. It is the right thing to do—for our schools, our students, our communities, and our dedicated J-1 teachers.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

LATE

To: The House of Education Committee
RE: In support of HB 439

I would like to express my utmost support for HB 439 which authorizes the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an International teacher license for certain visa holders.

Every year, our school encounters significant teacher shortages in crucial subject areas such as math and science. It has been a continuing challenge to find highly qualified educators to fill our positions. This school year we were privileged and honored to hire five teachers from the Philippines who have been great additions to our faculty. They have adapted well in our community and have shown professionalism, diligence, and are very enthusiastic and eager to learn new customs and practices. They arrived with highly acclaimed international credentials which have been exhibited through their proficiency in English and competence in the classroom.

With the collaboration of Office of Talent Management-Recruiting, Kauai District Office, Community members and our Principal who played integral roles in acquiring their employment and assisting them to acquire housing in Kauai's low inventory rental area through community assistance. Because we have strong Filipino established organizations and businesses, the outpouring of help and sponsorship flourished upon our J1 visas.

I recommend and advocate the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board and the Hawaii Legislatures to support HB 439. We have seen firsthand how this step in the right direction has impacted our school, students, and community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best Regards,

Marlene Wong, SASA
Kauai High School

marlene.wong@k12.hi.us
808-977-9911