

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'ŌIHANA OLAKINO
P.O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony COMMENTING on H.B. 757
RELATING TO EDUCATION**

REPRESENTATIVE JUSTIN H. WOODSON, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Hearing Date: February 11, 2025

Room Number: Conference Room 309
and Videoconference

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health (DOH) defers to the Department of Education
2 (DOE) for fiscal implications of implementation.

3 **Department Position:** The DOH offers comments on House Bill 757 (H.B. 757), which requires
4 and appropriates funds for the (DOE) to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students
5 enrolled in DOE schools regardless of a student's eligibility for participation in the national
6 school lunch program.

7 **Department Testimony:** Proper and adequate nutrition is essential for student focus,
8 classroom engagement, and academic success. Students who are food insecure and do not
9 have access to consistent, healthy meals are at increased risk for stress, anxiety and depression,
10 and chronic diseases. Providing universal free school meals enhances the nutritional intake of
11 students and promotes equitable access to the opportunity to learn and engage in school.

12 The National School Breakfast and Lunch programs are vital, but currently fail to reach
13 every food insecure child in need in Hawaii. One in three families in Hawaii is food insecure, and
14 one in ten households reported going without food for a whole day for some or most months of
15 the year.¹ Hawaii's current eligibility threshold for participation in the free school breakfast and

¹ The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i 2023. Hawai'i Foodbank. Accessed January 28, 2025.
[HawaiiFoodbank TheStateOfFoodInsecurityInHawaii 2023.pdf](#)

1 lunch program (less than \$47,000 for a family of four) stands in stark contrast to the estimated
2 \$110,000 needed to cover the basic cost of living in Hawaii.² Many students, including those
3 from asset-limited, income-constrained, employed (ALICE) households, start their schooldays
4 hungry and nearly half (46%) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access.³
5 Additionally, our students themselves report going hungry because there was not enough food
6 in their home.⁴

7 A new federal proposal of \$12 billion in cuts to school meals could drastically reduce the
8 number of schools able to offer free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP),
9 which includes an estimated 52 schools and 27,018 students in Hawaii.⁵ Providing universal free
10 school meals ensures that Hawaii's keiki have equitable access to healthy, nutritious meals and
11 drastically reduces the administrative burden on both families and the DOE caused by the
12 current requirement to demonstrate income and need.

13 If Hawaii adopts H.B. 757, we would be joining eight other states that are using the
14 universal school free schools meals program to reduce hunger and ensure children have the
15 support and access they need to healthy, nutritious meals to enhance their health, well-being,
16 and academic success.

17 **Offered Amendments:** None

18 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

² US Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2024 Adjusted Home Income Limits - Hawaii. Accessed January 28, 2025.

³ ALICE in Hawai'i: 2024 Facts and Figures. Aloha United Way. Accessed January 28, 2025.

https://www.auw.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024_ALICE-Report_Facts-and-Figures_v-25-01-09.pdf

⁴ Hawaii State Departments of Education and Health. Hawaii Health Data Warehouse, Hawaii School Health Survey: Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Nutrition/Health - went hungry, past 30 days by Year, 2023. Published September 20, 2024. Accessed January 28, 2025.

⁵ New Proposal Drastically Reduces Number of Schools Eligible for Community Eligibility Provision. Food Research & Action Center. Accessed January 28, 2025. <https://frac.org/blog/new-proposal-drastically-reduces-number-of-schools-eligible-for-community-eligibility-provision>



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

Date: 02/11/2025

Time: 02:01 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0757 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools. Appropriates funds.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of HB 757.

The school meal program operates in each of the Department's non-charter schools and offers meals to its students in elementary through high school. The Department understands the importance of child nutrition and its role in improving overall student health and agrees that children should have adequate meals provided to them, including breakfast and lunch. It supports universal meals if the State can subsidize what is not received through Federal claim reimbursements.

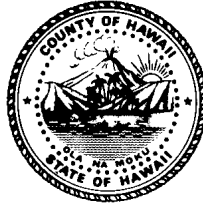
Additionally, the Department supports maximizing opportunities for student access to school meals by examining appropriate meal service models, such as breakfast in the classroom or Grab and Go. Second-chance breakfast is presently implemented in the school meal program.

Currently, the Department is working to calculate what the potential cost might be of providing universal free school breakfast and lunch.

The Department appreciates this proposal and the inclusion of funding but asks that any additional funding does not affect the Governor's approved budget requests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

Jennifer Kagiwada
Council Member District 2 South Hilo



Office: (808) 961-8272
jennifer.kagiwada@hawaiiicounty.gov

HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL - DISTRICT 2

25 Aupuni Street • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

DATE: February 7, 2025
TO: Committee of Education
FROM: Jennifer Kagiwada, Council Member,
Council District 2
SUBJECT: HB 757

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Committee Members,

I am testifying in support of HB 757 to require the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools, beginning in the 2025-2026 school year.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai'i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai'i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch" programs and will remove a huge burden from parents who will no longer have to worry about making sure their children are able to eat while at school.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jenn Kagiwada", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jenn Kagiwada

RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR.
Mayor

JOSIAH K. NISHITA
Managing Director



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
COUNTY OF MAUI
200 SOUTH HIGH STREET
WAILUKU, MAUI, HAWAII 96793
www.mauicounty.gov

TO: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Committee on Education

FROM: Richard T. Bissen, Jr., Mayor
Rogerene Arce, Director of Agriculture

DATE: February 10, 2025

SUBJECT: SUPPORT OF HB757, RELATING TO EDUCATION

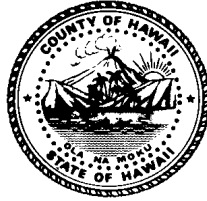
Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT** of this important measure. The Act requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

We **SUPPORT** this measure for the following reasons:

1. This bill will improve nutrition & reduce food insecurity. For many students, school breakfast and lunch are the only full, balanced meals they receive a day. Providing free breakfast and lunch to all students is a proven strategy to improve nutrition and food insecurity.
2. The Maui County Department of Agriculture strongly supports this bill because free breakfast and lunch programs benefit local farmers, through Farm-to-School initiatives that incorporate fresh, locally grown produce into school meals. This provides students with healthier, more sustainable food options.
3. This bill supports ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households in Hawai'i struggling to stretch their budgets. Two out of three struggling Hawai'i households still have to pay for school meals. This bill ensures that every child has access to nutritious meals regardless of their family's ability to pay.

For the foregoing reasons, we **SUPPORT** this measure.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor



Benson Medina
Director

Dennis Lin
Deputy Director

LATE

County of Hawai'i

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

25 Aupuni Street, Room 1301 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4252
(808) 961-8366 • Fax (808) 935-1205
E-mail: chresdev@co.hawaii.hi.us

February 10, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

TUESDAY, February 11, 2025
2:01 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 309

TESTIMONY ON HB 757 Relating to Education

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

I am Benson Medina, Director of the Department of Research and Development, County of Hawai'i. One of the agricultural objectives of this department is to "support collaboration, innovation, resource development, and programmatic sustainability throughout the food system to reduce food waste, improve producer viability and resilience, develop workforce development pathways, or increase access to locally produced food among low-income residents."

The County of Hawai'i provides written testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB757**, requiring the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

The Hawai'i County Council has demonstrated its commitment to free school meals by adopting Resolution 42-25, urging the Hawai'i State Legislature to establish a universal free school lunch program for public school students, prioritizing local sourcing and regional procurement. This resolution highlights the pressing need to ensure that all students have access to nutritious meals essential for academic success and personal well-being, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Hawai'i County faces the highest rates of food insecurity in the State, with an alarming 40% of households reporting food insecurity in a 2023 study commissioned by Hawai'i Foodbank. The cost of school meals poses a significant barrier to accessing balanced nutrition for many students; two out of three struggling families in Hawai'i are ineligible for free school meals due to strict eligibility thresholds (HIPHI, 2024). Implementing universal free school meals would ensure that all students receive the nourishment they need, regardless of household income, thereby combating hunger and its associated negative impacts on health, well-being and learning outcomes.

Additionally, implementing universal free school meals provides an opportunity to support local farmers through Farm-to-School initiatives. Increasing school meal participation enables the

February 10, 2025

Page 2

HDOE to incorporate fresh, locally grown produce into school meals. Thus, providing students with healthier, more sustainable food options while bolstering Hawai'i's agricultural economy.

Investing in universal free school meals is a cost-effective strategy that addresses food insecurity, enhances academic performance, promotes equity, and supports local agriculture. The County of Hawai'i Department of Research and Development urges you to favorably pass HB757 to ensure that all students in our state have access to the nutritious meals they need to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT of HB757**.

Respectfully,

Benson Medina
Director, Research and Development
County of Hawai'i



HAWAI'I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Phone: (808) 489-9549

Web site: <http://www.hysn.org> E-mail: info@hysn.org

Vonnell Ramos, President
Cyd Hoffeld, Vice President
Sione Ford Naeata, Treasurer
Greg Tjapkes, Secretary

Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

Access to Independence
Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i
Bobby Benson Center
Child and Family Service
Coalition for a Drug-Free Hawai'i
Domestic Violence Action Center
EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.
Friends of the Children's Justice
Center of Maui
Get Ready Hawai'i
Hale Kipa, Inc.
Hale 'Opio Kaua'i, Inc.
Hawai'i Children's Action
Network
Hawai'i Health & Harm
Reduction Center
Hawaii Island Community'
Health Center
Ho'ola Na Pua
Ho'okele Coalition of Kaua'i
Ka Hale Pomaika'i
Kokua Kalihi Valley
Kaua'i Planning and Action
Alliance
Lines for Life Youth Line
Maui Youth and Family Services
Na Pu'uwai Molokai Native
Hawaiian Health Care
Systems
P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.
Parents and Children Together
PHOCUSED
Piha Wellness and Healing
Planned Parenthood of the
Great Northwest, Hawaii
Alaska, Kentucky, Indiana
Residential Youth Services
& Empowerment (RYSE)
Salvation Army Family
Intervention Services
Sex Abuse Treatment Center
Susannah Wesley Community
Center
The Catalyst Group

February 7, 2024

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Education

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 757 RELATING TO **EDUCATION**

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports HB 757 Relating to Education/

Across the islands, tens of thousands of local households make too much money to qualify for free or reduced-cost school meals, but are still struggling financially. Those households are considered asset-limited, income-constrained, and employed — also known as ALICE households.

One in three families in Hawai'i are experiencing hunger or food insecurity,

In 2023, one in ten Hawai'i households were going without food for a whole day, some or most months out of the year.

37% of all households felt anxious about running out of food.

Universal free school meals will ensure that all public school students will have access to healthy food.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 5:55:51 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

We must ensure that no child go hungry on our islands. It's in all of our best interests economically, educationally, and compassionately for our future, for many reasons. This pans out financially from costs saved in other areas, and is a worthwhile investment beyond the obvious reasons of ensuring our keiki are taken care of. We require them to be in school, so we should ensure they are nourished when they are there. With Federal cuts targeting school meals, this bill is more important than ever.



To: House Committee on Education
Hearing Date/Time: February 11, 2025 2:01PM
Place: Hawaii State Capitol, Room 309
Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB757

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

Members of AAUW of Hawai'i thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of HB757 which would require the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

Equal access to quality education is essential to advancing "equity for all", AAUW's vision. Studies show not only do free school meals are associated with improvement in health of children, they are associated with improvements in academic performance.¹ We also support universal free school meals because it will remove the social stigma of free school meals being associated with low-income families.

Please pass this important measure and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Younghee Overly
AAUW of Hawai'i Public Policy Committee

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Hawai'i is an all-volunteer, statewide chapter of a national organization and is made up of six branches: Hilo, Honolulu, Kaua'i, Kona, Maui, and Windward O'ahu. AAUW's mission is to advance gender equity through research, education, and advocacy. Our goal is economic security for women in Hawai'i .

¹ <https://hspop.uw.edu/universal-free-school-meals-improve-health-outcomes/>

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 8:09:04 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan B Roberts Emery	Green Party of Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of Committee,

My name is Susan RobertsEmery, I am Co Chair of the Green Party of Hawai'i. We are offering our strong support for HB757, Universal Free School Meals. We understand that a hungry child cannot focus on learning and that they will fall through the cracks of our educational system if food support is not offered to the food insecure.

The facts are in, one in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

Please vote Yes to support HB757,

Mahalo,

Susan RobertsEmery
Co Chair GPH
Green Party of Hawai'i
Paauilo



Protect Democracy Move Forward

www.indivisiblehawaii.org

info@indivisiblehawaii.org

To: House Committee on Education
Hearing Date/Time: February 11, 2025 2:01PM
Place: Hawaii State Capitol, Room 309
Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB757

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

Members of Indivisible Hawai'i thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of HB757 which would require the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

Two out of three struggling working families in Hawaii are not eligible for free school meals and this measure would ensure that any keiki can eat for free and no keiki would be forced to skip meals. We also support the "universal" aspect of this measure to remove any social stigma associated with free school meals.

Please pass this important measure to help working families in Hawaii make ends meet. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Indivisible Hawai'i Working Families Team

We're a grassroots movement of thousands of local Indivisible groups with a mission to elect progressive leaders, rebuild our democracy, and defeat the Trump agenda. In Hawai'i, we have ten groups across four islands, representing over a thousand pro-democracy citizens.



House Committee on Education

Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA) Supports: HB757

Tuesday, February 11, 2025 at: 2:01 p.m. Conference Room 309

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

HAPA supports HB757 which, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

One in three households in Hawaii report food insecurity,¹ and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity². Yet two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals³. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai'i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai'i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. Being able to feed all students regardless of need at no cost to the students allows for us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch" programs, and also removes a huge burden from parents who will no longer have to worry about making sure their children are able to eat while at school.

Free school meals would cost around \$26 million⁴ per year—only 1.2 percent of the Hawai'i Department of Education's annual budget⁵. Compare this with the \$656 million

¹ <https://hawaiifoodbank.org/food-insecurity/>

² <https://www.auw.org/auw-alice-report-2024/>

³ <chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcajpcgclclefindmkaj/https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/APECIII-Vol1.pdf>

⁴

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcajpcgclclefindmkaj/https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601374ae84e51e430a1829d8/t/6797fb1f306e08692e2a776a/1738013473377/Benefits+of+UFSM+%281%29.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/ConnectWithUs/Organization/Budget/Pages/home.aspx>



the state will lose as a result of last year's tax cuts⁶, or the \$279 million⁷ the state could raise by imposing progressive taxes on the sale of mansions.⁸

Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Anne Frederick', is written over a light gray horizontal line.

Anne Frederick
Executive Director

⁶ <https://hiappleseed.org/blog/the-big-budget-trouble-with-hb2404s-over-broad-and-sweeping-tax-cuts>

⁷ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601374ae84e51e430a1829d8/t/65cadb47181c337e13aa61db/1707793227150/Convayance+Tax+Brief_FINAL.pdf

⁸ <https://hiappleseed.org/blog/hawaii-keiki-waiting-universal-free-school-meals-act-now>



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96819
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Osa Tui, Jr.
President

Logan Okita
Vice President

Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Ann Mahi
Executive Director

1

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Item: HB 757 – Relating to Education

Position: Support

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

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

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

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) strongly supports HB 757 which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to provide free breakfast and lunch to all public school students. As educators, we witness firsthand the devastating effects of food insecurity on our students. Many working families in Hawai'i are struggling to make ends meet, and countless children go hungry during the day. This legislation would ensure that all students have access to the nutritious meals they need to learn and thrive.

Food insecurity has a direct impact on a child's ability to succeed in school. Hungry children are more likely to experience developmental delays, behavioral problems, and chronic illnesses. They also have lower academic achievement and are more likely to drop out of school. By providing free breakfast and lunch to all students, we can help to level the playing field and ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

This bill is an investment in our children and in our future. It is a common-sense solution that will have a profound impact on the lives of thousands of Hawai'i's keiki. We urge the committee to pass HB 757 and make school meals a right, not a privilege.

Mahalo.



HOUSE BILL 757, RELATING TO EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 11, 2025 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports HB 757, relating to education, which, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

Hungry children can't learn.

A recent study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research focused on the federal National School Lunch Program's Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools where many students qualified for free or reduced-price meals to provide a free meal to all students. The study examined whether the provision of schoolwide free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision impacted school suspension rates and estimated that the chances of being suspended multiple times fell in both elementary school and in middle school.

Moreover, a 2021 study by the Brookings Institute found that schoolwide free meals improve math performance. This is further bolstered by research conducted by the Food Research and Action Center, which has noted that students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and achievement. Studies have clearly demonstrated the link between school meals and student success, which is especially

important as schools and educators continue to strategize how to combat the lingering loss of opportunity to learn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, improving access to school meals will boost overall health outcomes, both now and in the future. Thirty million students rely on schools to provide them with breakfast and lunch every day in the United States. Those who participate in the school meal program consume breakfasts and lunches of higher nutritional quality than nonparticipants and are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables. Participation in the school breakfast program is associated with lower body mass index (BMI), lower probability of being overweight, and a lower likelihood of obesity. More Americans are sick than they are healthy: half of adults have diabetes or prediabetes; more than half of adults have cardiovascular disease; and 3 in 4 adults are overweight or obese. Healthcare costs account for 29 percent of state budgets and 28 percent of the federal budget.

As the National Education Association has stated, through universal free school meals programs, “We can grow generations of healthy eaters and save our country billions.” School meals cost less per student when more students participate in a free meal program. An article in *Nutrients* entitled “Universal Free Meals Associated with Lower Meal Costs While Maintaining Nutritional Quality” found that **schools that participated in a universal meal program spent 67 and 58 cents less per lunch and breakfast**, respectively, while maintaining the same nutritional quality.

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

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com

To: House Committee on Education
Re: **HB 757 – Relating to Education**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
February 11, 2025, 2:01 PM

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of HB 757**. This bill, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education (DOE) to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools and appropriates funds.

Hawai'i public schools provide students with access to meals through the federal National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Currently, students qualify for free school meals if their families earn up to 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and for reduced-price lunch if their income is between 130% and 185% of the FPL.

Many families who have to pay the full price for school meals struggle to make ends meet. For example, a family of four that makes \$67,000 per year doesn't qualify for free or reduced-price lunch,¹ while the ALICE household survival budget to be able to afford the "bare-minimum costs of basic necessities" for that same family nearly \$108,000.² If that family has two students eating breakfast and lunch at school, they pay about \$1,300 per year for those meals.

The case for universal free school meals is strong.³ Schools benefit from reduced administrative burdens and costs because they no longer need to collect and track meal payments. Students see better academic performance and nutrition. Currently 94 DOE schools already provide universal free meals.⁴

If DOE were to provide **free breakfast and lunch to all students**, and there was no increase in meal participation, we estimate it would cost about **\$19.2 million per year**. We based our calculations on the free, reduced-price and paid student participation in school meals in Hawai'i during the 2018-19 school year⁵ (before the pandemic disrupted participation rates) and the current school meal prices.

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

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

¹

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

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

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

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

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

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 7:25:34 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristen Young	Faith Action for Community Equity	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee Members,

I am a Honolulu resident and member of Faith Action for Community Equity. On behalf of the organization, I am submitting testimony in strong support of HB757 for universal free school meals, which I believe is essential for equitable education.

From kindergarten to senior year, I attended public schools here on O‘ahu. I remember carrying lunch money each day then eventually having a meal card that had to be filled with funds. I was very fortunate to be able to buy school meals whenever I wanted, but if I ever forgot my money or card or didn’t realize my funds were insufficient, not being able to buy and eat lunch would be a major disruption to my day. For some kids, not being able to buy lunch is their reality more often than not. All kids should be able to eat while in school (where they are required to be) regardless of their family’s ability to pay.

Universal free school meals can provide meals to students who may otherwise not eat at all. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need while in school. I would be happy for my tax dollars to fund this. Ensuring our keiki are fed today is an important investment for our future. It would also greatly help working class families.

Following the example of Christ who fed crowds not just with spiritual food but also with physical sustenance, we support free school meals! When bodies are nourished, brains can be nourished. We cannot expect to provide quality education if we are neglecting to nourish the full person.

Please pass HB757!

Mahalo nui,

Kristen Young
Faith Action for Community Equity
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96813

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 7:41:03 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Doris Matsunaga	Save Medicaid Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Save Medicaid Hawaii supports HB 757 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:13:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kathryn Parsons	Castle HS - PD 6 MOW II Class	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Board of Education, State of Hawai‘i**From: DOE High School Student’s in MOW II PD 6****Date: February 6, 2025****Aloha,**

We, PD 6 Castle High School MOW II students, strongly support providing free school lunch to every student, as outlined in the proposed bill. We believe this initiative is crucial for the well-being and academic success of all students in Hawai‘i. Our previous testimony highlighted the financial struggles many families face, and this proposal offers a vital solution.

Key Points in Support of Free School Lunch:

- **Easing Financial Strain:** Previously proposed increases would impact the cumulative effect of rising costs in Hawai‘i, especially the 80-90% increase in school lunch prices over five years, which would place immense pressure on household budgets. This increase, which saw high school lunch prices rise to \$5.00 and elementary/middle school prices to \$4.75, would force families to make difficult choices. Free school lunch eliminates this burden, freeing up family resources for other essential expenses like housing and transportation. For example, a family with one high school student and one elementary student could save approximately \$732 annually.
- **Supporting Low-Income Families:** Our earlier testimonies emphasized how low-income families are disproportionately affected by rising costs. Free school lunch ensures that all students, regardless of their family’s financial situation, have access to a nutritious meal. This is particularly important in Hawai‘i, where many families are living paycheck to paycheck and struggling to make ends meet. As one student shared, making only \$300 a week with \$250 going to necessities makes it difficult to afford increased school meal costs. Free lunch would alleviate this stress.
- **Promoting Educational Equity:** Students who are hungry struggle to learn. Providing free school lunch removes a significant barrier to learning for students from low-income families, promoting greater educational equity. When students are well-fed, they can focus on their studies and achieve their full potential.

- **Improving Student Health:** Nutritious meals are essential for student health and development. By ensuring access to healthy meals that meet federal nutritional guidelines (7 CFR 210.10), free school lunch contributes to improved student health and well-being. Our previous testimonies mentioned concerns about the current quality and portion sizes of school meals; this initiative, coupled with the nutritional guidelines, will address these concerns.
- **Reducing Stigma:** Providing free meals to all students eliminates the stigma associated with receiving free or reduced-price lunch. This creates a more inclusive and supportive school environment for all students.

We believe that providing free school lunch to all students is a vital investment in the future of Hawai‘i. It will improve student health, reduce financial strain on families, enhance academic performance, and create a more equitable learning environment. We urge the Board of Education to fully support this initiative.

Mahalo Nui!

Please support this crucial initiative!



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TO: Committee on Education
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 11, 2025
TIME: 1:01pm

RE: HB757 Relating to Education
Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of this measure. Students' access to healthy meals is critical to academic success and achievement. Access to nutritious meals also promotes students' short term and long-term health, improves behavioral outcomes, and improves overall wellbeing.

Ensuring that all keiki have access to enough food should be a top priority of the State.

For some students, school meals may be their only consistent source of food.

As this measure notes the current income level for eligibility in the school lunch program excludes many children whose families cannot afford lunch. Other children may miss out on free school lunch programs because of stigma, or other reasons. Providing free school meals to all Hawaii keiki ensures that every child in our school system has access to food.

Hawaii's keiki deserve this, and we urge the committee to pass this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Student Testimony Regarding Proposed FREE School Meals

To: Board of Education, State of Hawai‘i

From: DOE High School Students in MOW II PD 1

Date: February 10, 2025

Aloha,

We, DOE high school students in MOW II PD 1, strongly *support* the provision of free school meals. We believe that access to nutritious school meals is essential for all students, and providing these meals at no cost will eliminate the significant hardship that paying for meals creates for many families in Hawai‘i.

Key Concerns:

- **Unreasonable Price Increases:** The previously proposed increases are excessive and will place an undue burden on families. Elementary/middle school lunch costs have already increased by 90%, and high school lunch costs by 82%. These increases are particularly concerning given the already high cost of living in Hawai‘i.
- **Impact on Low-Income Families:** Many families in Hawai‘i are struggling to make ends meet. As one student shared, "I know a lot of families that don't make enough money to even pay their bills on time and have money to feed their families." These price increases will force difficult choices, potentially leading to students skipping meals. Students have expressed concern that "kids in high schools have to skip lunch so their younger siblings can have money to eat and so their parents can pay their bills."
- **Negative Impact on Student Health and Academic Performance:** If students cannot afford school lunch, their health and academic performance will suffer. "If these prices increase it will most likely decrease the number of students who eat school lunch, which will negatively impact the students' health and academic performance." Hungry students cannot focus on learning.
- **Concerns about Food Quality and Quantity:** Students have also raised concerns about the quality and quantity of food served. One student noted, "A 90% and 82% increase is way too high because it would make the kids not want to get lunch because of how little bit of food they give us and how bad the food is." Another student described receiving a very small portion of rice and meat. Raising prices without improving the quality and quantity of food is unacceptable.
- **Exacerbating Existing Financial Struggles:** "Hawaii is already so expensive on its own they want to increase it by over 80% where people are struggling to pay the school meal price now. It just doesn't make any sense." The high cost of living in

Hawai‘i makes these increases particularly damaging.

- **Personal Hardships:** Students shared personal experiences of financial strain. One student explained, "I also have a kid so I have to work harder to make enough money to buy all the things he and I need. It's really, hard as it is but when the price is raised by 90% or even 82% it will make it 100 times harder to make enough money. I skip breakfast and lunch and mostly eat at my job so I can save money for my kid."

We urge the Board of Education to prioritize the implementation of free school meals and thereby prioritize the nutritional needs and academic success of all Hawai‘i's students. We believe that access to nutritious school meals is a right, not a privilege, and that providing these meals free of charge is the best way to ensure this right for every student.

Mahalo Nui!

Please listen to our voices when making a decision!

To: Board of Education, State of Hawai‘i

From: DOE High School Students in MOW II PD 2

Date: February 10, 2025

Aloha,

We, DOE high school students in MOW II PD 2, strongly support the proposed FREE school meals. We believe this initiative will alleviate significant financial hardship for families in Hawai‘i and improve students' access to nutritious meals.

Key Concerns:

- **Excessive Financial Burden:** The previously proposed increases are substantial and will place a significant strain on family budgets. With elementary/middle school lunch prices rising by 90% and high school lunch prices by 82%, families will face a considerable increase in expenses.
- **Impact on Family Budgets:** As one student explained, "A parent with a child in elementary and high school would pay roughly an extra \$1,260" per year. A family with children in both elementary and high school would face a similar increase. This added cost can make a significant difference, especially for low-income families. "A \$500 weekly income for a low-income family (minus taxes) can barely cover the bills of weekly living expenses, let alone the new costs of school meals."

- **Potential for Severe Consequences:** The financial burden could have serious consequences for families. One student expressed concern that these increased costs could even lead to families losing custody of their children due to an inability to afford basic necessities. While this is an extreme scenario, it highlights the level of financial pressure many families are already under.
- **Disproportionate Impact on Low-Income Families:** Many families in Hawai‘i already struggle financially. These price increases will disproportionately affect low-income families, making it even harder for them to provide for their children. "A couple reasons why it is bad is because many people can't afford to pay that much, especially a cost upwards of 1,000 dollars or more a year. A lot of people face financial problems and upping the price on these things puts them in a bad position."
- **Proposed Alternative:** Students suggest exploring alternative solutions, such as providing free meals to students who qualify based on specific needs. "Maybe they could make free meals for students who qualify for specific things that lead to them getting free meals. That would be the best outcome in my opinion."

We urge the Board of Education to reconsider this proposed price increase and prioritize the nutritional needs and academic success of all Hawai‘i's students. We believe that affordable, nutritious school meals are essential for student well-being and academic achievement.

Mahalo Nui!

Please listen to our voices when making a decision!

To: Board of Education, State of Hawai‘i

From: DOE High School Students in MOW II PD 6

Date: February 6, 2025

Aloha,

We strongly support the implementation of free school meals for all students in Hawai‘i. Our previous concerns regarding proposed meal price increases highlighted the significant financial strain such increases would place on families, and we believe that free school lunch is the most effective solution to address this issue and ensure the well-being of all students.

Our Previous Concerns Regarding Price Increases:

We previously expressed serious concerns about the financial burden of the proposed 80-90% meal price hike. This increase would have raised school lunch costs to \$4.75 for elementary and middle school students and \$5.00 for high school students. For a household with two children, this would have resulted in an annual cost of approximately \$1,700, a significant jump from the current \$968. This substantial increase would have been particularly difficult for families already struggling with Hawai'i's high cost of living, including housing, transportation, and taxes. We emphasized how adding this expense would create additional financial strain, especially for those living paycheck to paycheck.

We also raised concerns about the negative impact on students' well-being. We feared that some students would be forced to skip meals, negatively affecting their health, focus, and academic performance. The increased price could have forced parents to make impossible choices between paying for food or other necessities like rent and utilities. We also pointed out that many students who do not qualify for free or reduced lunch would have struggled to afford daily meals at school.

Finally, we expressed concerns about the quality and quantity of school meals. We argued that despite the drastic price increase, school meal quality and portion sizes remained inadequate. Many students reported that the food was unappetizing, lacked nutritional value, and was often not filling. We stressed that if prices were going to rise, meal quality and portion sizes should improve significantly to justify the cost.

Why Free School Lunch is the Solution:

These previous concerns underscore the urgent need for a different approach. We believe free school meals for all students would be a better long-term investment in Hawai'i's youth. It would ensure that no student goes hungry while receiving an education, regardless of their family's financial situation. Free school lunch directly addresses the financial strain we previously highlighted, removes the stigma associated with reduced-price meals, and promotes better nutrition and academic performance for all students.

We urge the Board of Education to prioritize the implementation of free school meals and thereby prioritize the nutritional needs and academic success of all Hawai'i's students.

Mahalo nui!

Please listen to our voices when making this decision.



**HAWAI'I
FOOD+
POLICY**

Honolulu, HI 96813
food@purplemaia.org

February 9, 2025

To: Chair Justin Woodson, Vice Trish La Chica, and the House Committee on Education,

Subject: **HB757**, Relating to Education

Aloha,

Hawai'i Food+ Policy strongly **supports HB757**, which mandates the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools and appropriates necessary funds to support this initiative.

Ensuring universal access to nutritious school meals is a critical step in addressing food insecurity and academic disparities among Hawai'i's students. Hunger negatively impacts student performance, attendance, and overall well-being. Universal free school meal programs have been shown to improve educational outcomes.

By eliminating financial barriers to school meals, HB757 fosters a healthier, more equitable learning environment where every child, regardless of economic background, has the nourishment they need to thrive. Offering free, nutritious meals to all students will also remove stigmas associated with free meal programs, and foster the physical and mental health of Hawai'i children.

We urge the committee to pass HB757 to support the health, education, and future success of Hawai'i's keiki.

Mahalo,
The Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2025, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.



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Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: February 10, 2025

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

RE: Support for HB 757, Relating to Education

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

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ **supports HB 757**, which beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in department schools.

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

Half of Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.²

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

Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.³ By failing to ensure they have access to

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

² "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census.

<https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702&g=040XX00US15>

³ "Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7282962/>



meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success.

Improved Academic Achievement

Hungry students can't learn. Providing healthy nutrition to our students will ensure they have the resources they need to thrive. Studies have shown that free school meal programs lead to improved student performance.⁴ This program is only estimated to cost around 1-2% of the Department of Education's total budget and provide a 15% increase in test scores, a 15:1 return on investment.⁵

Federal Funding Increases

Eight other states—California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont—have implemented free school meal programs, with data showing increases in their federal reimbursement funding. In California, free and reduced-price lunch enrollment rates have risen alongside the implementation of their program, further maximizing federal support for students.⁶ Hawai'i can follow the lead of these other states by implementing free school meals for all students while also increasing the federal funding we receive to support the program.

Thank you for considering increasing access to school meals for our keiki. Please support HB 757 to deliver free school meals for all students.

Mahalo,

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

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

⁴ "Universal free lunch is linked to better test scores in New York City, new report finds"

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2019/10/15/21121847/universal-free-lunch-is-linked-to-better-test-scores-in-new-york-city-new-report-finds/>

⁵ "Equity on the Menu". Hawai'i Applesed.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601374ae84e51e430a1829d8/t/65f390f60a673a7bf3cfeb89/1710461187562/Equity+on+the+Menu_FINAL.pdf

⁶ "Free or Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data". California Department of Education.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filesasp>



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 757: RELATING TO EDUCATION

TO: House Committee on Education
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai'i
Hearing: Tuesday, 2/11/25; 2:01 pm; Videoconference and Room 309

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members, Committee on Education:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i Supports HB 757, which requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in department schools. Provides funds.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH) is a tax exempt, non-profit agency that has been providing social services in Hawai'i for over 75 years. CCH has programs serving elders, children, families, homeless and immigrants. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy to the most vulnerable of the people in Hawai'i. We serve over 40,000 people each year throughout the state. This bill is one of our economic justice priorities.

Food. A basic human necessity. Keiki need it to grow strong and healthy. Keiki need it to be alert and ready to learn. Keiki are our future, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have access to adequate food while in school.

Many hardworking families in Hawai'i juggle multiple jobs to manage the high cost of living. Yet, despite their efforts, they do not qualify for free or reduced-price school meals (set at a maximum of 185% of the Federal Poverty Level). These families still struggle with food insecurity, leaving their children vulnerable.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i strongly supports this bill to provide food security for our keiki. Research has shown that free school meals lead to improved academic performance, higher test scores, and better overall well-being. They also help reduce stress and depression—challenges that many students face today.

Take action now! Supporting this initiative will not only help families and their children thrive but also build a stronger, healthier future for our community. By ensuring our keiki are well-fed, we invest in their education, their health, and their future success.

We urge your support for this bill. If you have any questions, please contact our Legislative Liaison, Betty Lou Larson at (808) 527-4813.



Date: February 11, 2025

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

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: House Bill 757, Relating to Education

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) is a statewide cross-sector collaborative designed to improve the system of care for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. ECAS partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

ECAS strongly supports passage of House Bill 757 which would require the State Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

ECAS recognizes the economic situation that many families in our community face each day. It is expensive to live, work, and raised a family in this state, and this results in numerous families living at or below the federal poverty level. Furthermore, these economic factors often lead to food insecurity for countless local families and their children.

Currently, the income eligibility threshold to qualify for free school meals sits at \$47,000 for a family a four. At the same time, this same family would need to bring home more than \$100,000 each year in order to cover their basic needs like housing and food. The disparity between these two numbers is exactly why we must expand the meals offered to children in our schools.

ECAS would like to particularly emphasize that the cost of providing these meals is vastly outweighed by the impact it could have on keiki in our schools. As noted in the measure's preamble, research into school meal programs continues to show that access to free meals has a marked impact on student test scores.

If we are committed to providing our keiki with the best possible educational opportunities, supplementing their school day with free, nutritious meals is an absolute necessity.

For these reasons, ECAS strongly supports HB757.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony.



February 11, 2025

RE: Support for HB 757 Relating to Education

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for HB 757 Relating to Education. This bill, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools and appropriates funds.

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

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

There are well-documented links between food insecurity and poor child health and behavioral outcomes, including physical, developmental, and cognitive impairments. Providing school meals to children is an important step in our collective effort to address food insecurity and care for our most vulnerable keiki. We urge you to consider this important measure.

Mahalo for your consideration.

With aloha,

Amy Miller
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank



February 11, 2025

RE: Support for HB 757, Relating to Education

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

On behalf of the Maui Food Bank, I express our strong support for HB 757 Relating to Education which beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

For 30 years, Maui Food Bank has provided daily and emergency assistance to those facing food insecurity in Maui County. Maui Food Bank distributes food to families and individuals on Maui, Molokai and Lanai through direct service programs and through our network of 170 agency partners. Last year, we served an average of 45,000 people each month, distributing a total of 8.7 million pounds of nutritious food, including 2.3 million pounds of fresh produce. Of those served, 40% are children and youth.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony,

Lisa H. Paulson
CEO, Maui Food Bank



Maui Food Bank
Nourishing Lives, Feeding Futures



Hawaii Legislative Council Members

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Wainiha Country Market
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Abundant Life
Natural Foods
Hilo

Tanya Aynessazian
Principal Contractor

Chamber of
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808.445.7606
P.O. Box 22394
Honolulu, HI 96823

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Committee on Education

Tuesday, February 11, 2025
2:00 PM Conference Room 309

RE: **HB757** DOE Universal Free Meals - **Strong support**

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

The Chamber of Sustainable Commerce represents over 450 small businesses and entrepreneurs across the state that strive for a triple bottom line: people, planet and prosperity.

As small business owners who believe we can strengthen Hawaii's economy without hurting workers, consumers, communities or the environment, we urge this committee to support HB757 which would provide free school meals to all students.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price meals. But all students need to eat. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression and long-term health issues. Students are the future of commerce in Hawaii. Going hungry and enduring the stigma of having to return a meal because of lack of funds in their school fund is not the way to pave success.

Universal free school meals in other areas is related to a rise in student test scores. Investing in universal free school meals will increase academic performance and improve health outcomes.

In short, investing a 1% increase in the DOE budget for universal free school meals is an investment in the health of our future. Please vote yes on HB757.



To: The Honorable Justin H. Woodson, Chair
The Honorable Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
House Committee on Education

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager
Sarielyn Curtis, External Affairs Specialist

Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 2:01 p.m., Conference Room 309

RE: **HB757 Relating to Education**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of **HB757**. This measure requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools beginning with the 2025-2026 school year; appropriates funds.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 70,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 37 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

Proper nutrition is vital for keiki growth and development and may reduce the risk of health conditions like anemia, asthma, hyperactivity and anxiety.¹ According to the Hawai'i Foodbank, 1 in 4 keiki in Hawai'i may not know where they will get their next meal, and for more than 81,000 keiki, getting the energy they need to learn and grow can be a daily challenge.²

While assistance is available for students who qualify, many students may be denied meals due to inability to pay and their household's income being even slightly over the income requirements to participate in the free or reduced school meal program. This measure would remove the stigma for students accessing free or reduced meals and ensure every student has access to a consistent source of nutritious food.

By ensuring all students have access to free school meals, we are addressing immediate and basic nutritional needs, combating the numerous health risks that are associated with hunger, and giving kids the energy they need to learn and grow.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support** of **HB757**.

¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>

² <https://hawaiiifoodbank.org/keiki/>



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for HB 757 – Relating to Education
House Committee on Education
Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 2:01pm

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 757, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education (HIDOE) to provide up to two free, nutritious meals to all students, regardless of their financial situation.

School meals are one of the government’s most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to students. In Hawai‘i, there are still three in 10 households with children facing food insecurity.¹ This means that for many children in Hawai‘i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they eat in a day.

Despite this, many students in Hawai‘i are not getting the nutrition they need. In some cases, their families don’t meet the strict eligibility thresholds for free or reduced-price meals, yet still struggle to stretch their budgets. For example, a family of four that makes \$47,000 per year doesn’t qualify for free lunch,² while Hawai‘i’s costs of living require that same family to make over \$107,000 to simply survive.³ In other cases, even students who do meet the eligibility requirements can slip through the cracks. In fact, one study found that 34 percent of students not receiving school meals were actually eligible to receive them.⁴

Hawai‘i still allows schools to deny meals to students who have a negative meal balance, leaving students not only hungry but also ashamed. One student testifying asking the legislature to pass this bill last year stated, *“Earlier this year I ran out of money on my lunch account and the lady sent me to put my food back because I didn’t have enough...I wouldn’t want another student to feel that type of embarrassment.”* Implementing UFSM would serve as a vital safety net, ensuring no child goes hungry during school hours and fostering a more equitable educational environment.

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

https://hawaiiifoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/HawaiiFoodbank_TheStateOfFoodInsecurityInHawaii_2023.pdf

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

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

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

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/Attachments/AllReports/2024-ALICE-Update-HI-FINAL-v2.pdf>

⁴ R. Milfort, J. Taylor, L. May, & M. Collins, “Third Access, Participation, Eligibility, and Certification Study (APEC-III) Final Report,” Prepared for USDA, Westat Corp., September 2021.

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/APECIII-Vol1.pdf>

Research consistently links proper nutrition to better healthy development and learning outcomes.⁵ Universal free school meals would ensure that every student in Hawai‘i has access to the nutrients necessary for optimal learning, helping to close achievement gaps. One public school teacher put it this way:

“We put a great deal of emphasis on student outcomes such as test scores. However, if we want to improve student output we must address student input such as access to qualified teachers and healthy meals... Providing students with universal free lunch may also be an important tool to help decrease the chronic absenteeism that has plagued schools ever since the Covid-19 Pandemic.”

— Hawai‘i public school teacher

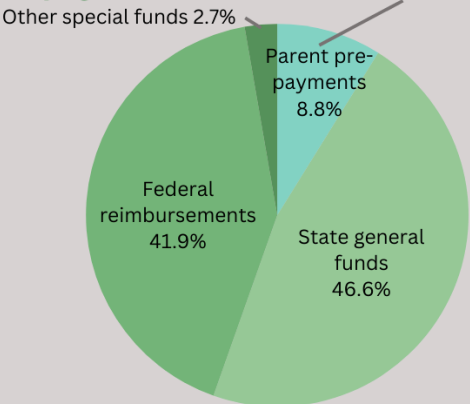
Finally, UFSM would ultimately support Hawai‘i’s local farmers, through the DOE’s other school meal initiatives, notably Farm-to-School. This not only provides students with healthier, more sustainable food options but also strengthens Hawai‘i’s economy. Reducing the state’s reliance on imported food fosters a more resilient and self-sufficient community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 757. As shown in the attached page, there are multiple revenue options that would cost the DOE only 1% of its annual budget. Across the country, UFSM has been implemented successfully through the intentional blending of policies and funding mechanisms at the federal, state, and local levels. We are pleased that the Hawai‘i legislature is paying attention to this important issue because hungry keiki cannot learn. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

⁵ Amy E. Schwartz & Michah W. Rothbart, “Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance,” Maxwell School Center for Policy Research, July 2019.
https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/working-papers/wp-203-let-them-eat-lunch.pdf?sfvrsn=efae783d_8

ESTIMATED COSTS

The current proposal would cover the cost of parent pre-payments for school meals - an estimated \$15.3M.



DOE School Food Services Branch Revenues by Funding Source, School Year 2023-24

	Existing Participation Rates	Projected Participation Rates ¹
Breakfast	\$1,384,463.70	\$4,099,767.83
Lunch	\$13,872,568.20	\$22,621,313.73
Breakfast & Lunch	\$15,257,031.90	\$26,721,081.56

1. Assumes a 6.8% increase for lunch and 12.1% increase for breakfast over SY23-24 average daily participation rates.

Note: These cost estimates represent 0.7% to 1.2% of the overall DOE budget.

FUNDING UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS

How Can Hawai'i Fund UFSM?

Closing the capital gains tax loophole could bring in

\$134.8M

in 2025, going up to \$166.9 million by 2030 annually to the state.²

Increasing tax on non-owner occupied home sales over \$4M could bring in

~\$278M

in annual revenue.³

How Have Other States Funded UFSM?

General Funds (Education Fund Appropriation)	CA, ME, MI, MN, NM
Voter-passed tax measure that reduces income tax deductions available to households earning \$300,000 or more	CO
Voter-approved 4% tax on incomes over \$1 million	MA
\$.03 property tax rate increase	VT

2. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 2023 analysis.
3. Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law & Economic Justice, Preserving Hawai'i, How the State Conveyance Tax Can Re-Invest Nonresident Wealth Into Our Island Communities, 2024 analysis.



The Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice advocates for economic justice for and with Hawai'i's people. We envision a Hawai'i that puts its people first—where everyone can meet their basic needs while living happy, healthy and creative lives.

LATE



2025 Network Members

Aloha Harvest
Aloha United Way
Chef Hui
City and County of Honolulu
County of Hawai'i
Hawai'i Alliance for
Progressive Action (HAPA)
Hawai'i Appleseed
Hawai'i Children's Action
Network
Hawai'i Dept. of Agriculture
Hawai'i Dept. of Health
Hawai'i Food Bank
Hawai'i Food Bank - Kaua'i
Branch
Hawai'i Good Food Alliance
Hawai'i Public Health Institute
Kōkua Kalihi Valley
Lanakila Pacific
Mālama Kaua'i
Maui Department of
Agriculture
Maui Food Bank
Parents and Children Together
Supersistence
The Food Basket
The Pantry, by Feeding Hawai'i
Together
Wai'anae Coast
Comprehensive Health Center

hawaiihungeraction.org

House Committee on Education

February 11, 2025, at 2:01pm

RE: Support for HB 757, Relating to Education

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

The Hawai'i Hunger Action Network, a coalition of more than twenty local organizations with the mission to advocate for food security for Hawai'i households, would like to express strong support for HB 757 which would appropriate funds to the Department of Education (HIDOE) to provide up to two free, nutritious meals to all students.

For many keiki, school meals are the most nutritious meals they receive all day. Offering up to two free meals a day would eliminate the stigma associated with unpaid meal balances, ensuring that every student has access to healthy food, regardless of their family's financial situation. By implementing UFSM, the burden on teachers to provide snacks out-of-pocket is also reduced.

Additionally, UFSM has proven to improve academic performance in other states by ensuring children receive proper nutrition necessary for healthy development and learning.¹ This program would also support ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) households, who often earn too much to qualify for free meals but struggle to afford the rising cost of living in Hawai'i.

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of this important legislation because keiki cannot learn when they are hungry.

With aloha,
Hawai'i Hunger Action Network membership

¹ Amy E. Schwartz & Michah W. Rothbart, "Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance," Maxwell School Center for Policy Research, July 2019.

https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/working-papers/wp-203-let-them-eat-lunch.pdf?sfvrsn=efae783d_8

LATE

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 3:23:09 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ocean Singleton	LIGHT OF THE WHIRL HEALTH CARE LLC/ (DBA) what are you doingWE SELL EDIBLE FLOWERS	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a company deeply rooted in the aloha spirit and committed to the well-being of our community in Hawaii, we recognize the pressing need to address food insecurity among our keiki. Many local families struggle to meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at just 185% of the Federal Poverty Level. This threshold is far too low to cover the basic living expenses that many families face, often exceeding 300%. When our students experience hunger, they are at greater risk for stress, depression, and long-term health issues that can hinder their growth and academic success.

Research clearly shows that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, resulting in higher test scores and better overall outcomes. By investing just 1% of the Department of Education's budget, we can ensure that every student receives the nutritious meals they need to thrive and succeed in our beautiful islands.

No Child Should Go Hungry – It is heartbreaking that 2 out of 3 struggling families in Hawaii do not qualify for free school meals. This bill would ensure that all students, regardless of their financial situation, can eat for free, so our hungry keiki will no longer be forced to skip meals and can enjoy the nourishment they deserve.

Eliminating the stigma associated with meal access is essential in our ohana. No child should ever have to return a meal simply because there is no money in their school food account. By removing this barrier, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all our students, embodying the spirit of 'ohana that is so important in our culture.

Hungry students cannot focus on learning. It is crucial that we provide all children with the nourishment they need during the school day, enabling them to be ready to learn and succeed in their studies.

Increased Academic Performance – Implementing universal free school meals in other regions has shown remarkable results, with student test scores rising the equivalent of an additional 6 weeks of school. A mere 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can yield a 15% improvement in educational outcomes, helping our keiki reach their full potential.

Improved Health Outcomes – Students who experience hunger are at significantly higher risk for stress, depression, and chronic diseases. By investing in nutritious food for our keiki, we are not just addressing immediate needs; we are also creating lifelong benefits that will positively impact their health and well-being, ensuring a brighter future for our community.

We urge you to support this initiative to ensure that no child in Hawaii goes hungry. Together, we can create a healthier, more equitable future for our students and our community, reflecting the true essence of aloha. Thank you for your attention to this vital issue.



LATE

February 10, 2025

Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson,
Chair, House Committee on Education

Honorable Representative Trish La Chica,
Vice Chair, House Committee on Education

Regarding: **Support for HB757 Relating to Education**

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

Please accept this testimony in strong support of HB757 which requires the Department of Education to provide universal free school breakfast and lunch.

Founded in 2017, HawaiiKidsCAN is a local nonprofit organization committed to ensuring that Hawai'i has an excellent education system that enables all keiki to thrive.

Nearly a third of Hawai'i families experience food insecurity.¹ No child should have to worry about where their next meal will come from, yet the current income eligibility threshold for free school meals excludes many families who struggle with the high cost of living in our state. Research has shown that universal meal programs improve student health, reduce stigma, and lead to better educational outcomes, including increased test scores and higher classroom engagement.²

By ensuring **every** student is eligible for free meals, HB757 removes access barriers for families, administrative burdens for schools, and treats every child as worthy of a healthy start, no matter their circumstances. I urge the committee to pass this measure and take a meaningful step toward supporting student success across the state.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Erica Nakanishi-Stanis
Advocacy Director
HawaiiKidsCAN

¹ *The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i, Hawai'i Foodbank, 2023*

² Hecht et al. Impact of the Community Eligibility Provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on student nutrition, behavior, and academic outcomes: 2011–2019. *Am J Pub Health.* 2020;9:1405-1410.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 1:03:27 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly SUPPORT HB 757 which beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools. Appropriates funds.

It amazes me greatly that with all of the evidence, research and examples from other states who have initiated providing free breakfast and lunch to all students successfully that we are once again debating this issue. As a retired elementary teacher, my personal experiences with students over 40 years , I can repeat the reasons why we need this bill but it comes down to doing the right, pono thing for our keiki. The argument that our keiki "waste" food does not address the real issues which from my experience are the real issue. A possible lawsuit by someone, some day is not a reason to deprive keiki from food. In most schools, due to the enrollment and scheduling, some keiki are asked to eat lunch at 10 am or as late as 1 pm. They are also put in situations of waiting in line, being late to lunch, safety drills, cafeteria use by others which limits their actual eating time. When I first started working in the DOE in the 1990's, the children, teachers and even some community members ate lunch from the cafeteria. It was cooked there and the workers knew how to provide for the community they worked. We have lost this with the "institutionalism" of current lunch paths. In my last years of teaching in the DOE, lunch time became hard for everyone. Many of my students needed and wanted to eat their lunch but time constraints at breakfast and lunch made it a challenge. What happens then? We find ways to get them the food. We are NOT feeding institutions, we are feeding children. As I was told by one principal, you know you are risking your job by doing that? My answer; what is my job worth if I am not able to help my students? Our children should not be hungry, nor should our families have to pay monies for these foods. It is the very least we can do for our community keiki. The DOE should be the biggest advocate for this bill and finding ways to make sure all our keiki are fed for free.

C. Burghardt

Kou, Oahu

RE: Support for HB757, which would require the Hawai'i DOE to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

Dear Chair and Vice chair,

I am writing in **strong support** for HB757, which would require the Hawai'i DOE to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses.

In the third grade, I had a humbling experience when I was denied my school lunch due to an insufficient balance in my account, something I was completely unaware of at the time. Instead of enjoying a warm meal like my classmates, I was taken to a small room in the principal's office, where I sat alone eating crackers and milk. The isolation felt crushing, and I remember the embarrassment washing over me. It felt as though I was being punished for not having enough money. That moment has stayed with me, and I can't bear the thought of other children experiencing the same thing.

Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research shows that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need to succeed.

Thank you for considering the importance of this legislation.

Respectfully,
Leigh Ann Lopez

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 2:49:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauren Usagawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill to provide food security for our children. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. I am a single mom who works full-time, and I do not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. I do not receive child support either and I cannot afford to pay for school lunch every day. I have to make home lunch, while also working full-time. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research shows that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need to succeed.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 2:50:08 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Roxann Rowe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

Rep. Terez Amato

Rep. Luke A. Evslin

Rep. Andrew Takuya
Garrett

Rep. Jeanne Kapela

Rep. Darius K. Kila

Rep. Ikaika Olds

Rep. Jackson D. Sayama

Rep. Christopher L.
Muraoka

Rep. Kanani Souza

I strongly support this bill to provide food security for our children. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. It has also been proposed that the costs of school lunches will increase in the near future, further making nutritious meals difficult to access for many. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research shows that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need to succeed.

*Mahalo,**Roxann Rowe, APRN*

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 3:01:25 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Diana Jane Cassidy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill to provide food security for our children. As humans' basic need, I believe that everyone, especially children should have access to free, healthy meals at school. Parents should not have to worry about sending their kids to school hungry because they are unable to pay for lunch. Incarcerated people in jails and prisons here in our State do not have to worry about getting hungry. They are provided free meals three times a day. I do not understand why it is not the same for our kids. This bill will tremendously help struggling parents and kids in our State.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 3:20:45 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caroline Azelski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support. Thank you.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 3:46:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John A. H. Tomoso	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

02-07-25

RE: HB757

Aloha,

For many of our families, the cost of school meals can be a barrier to accessing the balanced diet their children need. Hunger and inadequate nutrition are associated with stress, depression, and chronic disease. We know that two out of three struggling families are ineligible for free school meals. Universal free school meals can provide meals to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

Not only were all children assured they would have daily food, but schools that implemented free school meals saw their Math and English test scores increase at a rate equivalent to attending six additional weeks of school. While six additional weeks of school would cost Hawai'i \$300 million annually, universal free school meals would cost Hawai'i only \$25 million annually. Let it be that "No Child Should Go Hungry" This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.

- No child would have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.
- Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.
- Increased Academic Performance – When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes.
- Improved Health Outcomes – Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

Mahalo for your considerations.

Aloha.

John A H Tomoso+, MSW, ACSW

51 Ku'ula St, Kahului, Maui, Hawai'i 96732-2906

john.a.h.tomoso@gmail.com

808-280-1749

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 3:54:48 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Austin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this important bill, ensuring that all schoolchildren will get no cost meals every school day.

The cost statewide is only 25M, surely a bargain, given the sharply rising foodcosts faced by Hawaii's families!

February 7, 2025

Aloha. My name is Lehuanani Huddleston-Hafoka and I am submitting my written testimony to support HB57 which would require the Hawaii DOE to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in Hawaii DOE schools.

- I strongly support HB57 as it will provide food security for our children.
- Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is needed to cover basic living expenses.
- Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues.
- Research shows that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.
- For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need to succeed.
- Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, starting with breakfast and then with lunch...every school day and **NO** child should have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.

The *pono* thing to do for our keiki is to pass HB57 which would require the Hawaii DOE to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in Hawaii DOE schools. Please do the right thing.

Respectfully submitted,

Lehuanani Huddleston-Hafoka
Kihei, Maui

Date: February 7, 2025

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

Re: **Support for HB 757**, Relating to Education

Hrg: Tuesday February 11, 2025 at 2:01 pm via Videoconference Conference Room 309

Aloha House Committee on Education,

As a parent, community member and healthcare professional I am writing in **strong support of HB 757**, which beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools; and, appropriates funds.

For many families in Hawai'i, the cost of school meals is a barrier to accessing a balanced diet for their children. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for school meals.

This bill would ensure that every child can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.

Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to eat during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.

Schools that provide food free meals experience significant academic increases, as access to basic nutrition empowers students to better focus on learning.

Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

I **strongly support HB 757**, respectfully ask you to pass it out of committee.

Many thanks for your consideration,

Forrest Batz, PharmD
Keaau, HI

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 5:05:55 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Ito	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a former educator, I know firsthand that many students show up hungry to school. Many educators use their own money to provide snacks for these kids, as they know that hungry students cannot thrive, let alone learn. Providing free school meals for all students would ease this gap, lead to improved student outcomes, and improve school culture as a whole. Other states that have implemented universal school lunches have seen increases in test scores; let's serve our keiki and also help our educators in creating a more equitable environment.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 5:53:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Troy Abraham	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Every student deserves free meals as food shouldn't be an issue when it comes to an education.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 5:54:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Teresa Landreau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 6:00:26 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa Hennessy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i reported food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Mahalo,

Lisa Hennessy, Princeville

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 6:11:44 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia Blair	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please provide free nutritional breakfast and lunches to all students enrolled in Dept. schools.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 6:21:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zoe Goodman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha - I am writing in strong support of HB757. Every child deserves to eat. Please ensure that our keiki have access to food in order to learn. To be honest, it's absurd that we have to testify for this. Universal free lunch for Hawai'i kids is a no-brainer. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 6:23:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Richard Janik	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Our children cannot learn without an adequet diet.

Richard Janik, MD

Lihue, Kauai

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 6:25:06 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eliel Starbright	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki! Eliel, Kapaa

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 6:36:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki! Mahalo.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 6:38:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannon Rudolph	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 7:02:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melissa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am submitting this written testimony in strong support of HB757. Many families in Hawaii are working multiple jobs just to make ends meet, with most of the income going towards rent, mortgage, and utilities. And it's the middle class group that don't make enough, yet make too much to qualify for any assistance. This group makes up many first responders, teachers, health professionals, etc - many of our hard-working professionals. Two out of three struggling families are ineligible for free school meals. By providing free meals for all DOE school children it will ensure that the kids are able to have a meal while at school which will help with them focusing and achieving higher academic standards - well worth the investment.

Thank you for your consideration of HB757 and I strongly support this bill.

Melissa Magonigle

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 7:30:51 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Hagan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 8:33:26 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maki Morinoue	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

As a parent, former President of the Holualoa Parent-Teacher Organization, active participant in the School Community Councils of Holualoa Elementary and Kealakehe Intermediate School, and volunteer organizer for afterschool programs addressing food insecurity, I am writing to express my strong support for HB757, which seeks to implement universal free breakfast and lunch for our keiki.

The Urgent Need to Address Food Insecurity

In Hawai‘i, food insecurity is a pressing issue, with one in three households reporting challenges in accessing sufficient food. Alarmingly, nearly half (46%) of ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households experience food insecurity. Despite these numbers, two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state do not qualify for free school meals, leaving many children without reliable access to nutritious food during the school day.

Impact on Houseless Keiki

Our state faces a significant homelessness crisis, with a total of 6,389 individuals experiencing homelessness in Hawai‘i as of 2024. Families with children make up nearly 30% of this population, meaning approximately 1,917 individuals are children without stable housing. These houseless keiki are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, and for many, school meals may be their only consistent source of nutrition.

Title I Schools in Kona

In the Kona area, several schools are designated as Title I due to high percentages of students from low-income families. These include Kona Pacific Public Charter School, with 60.96% of its students eligible, Innovations Public Charter School, with 48.75% eligibility, and Holualoa Elementary School, with 51.52%. Other schools we know are also Title 1, but due to lack of annual applications, there is no data for Kealakehe Elementary, Intermediate and Highschool, Kahakai Elementary, Ho‘okena Elementary, and Honaunau Elementary Schools. Despite these designations, many students still fall through the cracks, not qualifying for free meals yet struggling with food insecurity.

The Imperative for Universal Free Meals

Implementing universal free breakfast and lunch ensures that no child goes hungry during the school day. Access to healthy meals is directly linked to better learning outcomes, improved concentration, and overall well-being. By providing free meals to all students, we eliminate the stigma associated with free or reduced-price lunches and ensure that every child, regardless of their economic background, has the nourishment they need to succeed.

The Housing Crisis and Its Impact

The volatile luxury housing market, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has intensified our housing crisis, leading to increased displacement and financial strain on local families. As housing costs soar, more families find themselves on the brink of homelessness or forced to make difficult choices between housing and food. Universal school meals provide a safety net for these families, ensuring that their children receive essential nutrition even as they navigate housing instability.

As someone deeply invested in the well-being and education of our keiki, I urge you to support HB757. Universal free breakfast and lunch are not merely about feeding children; they are about nurturing the future of our community, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive without the burden of hunger.

Resources:

HAWAIIPUBLICSCHOOLS.ORG

HHDW.ORG

Mahalo and please support this bill that impacts our future generations.

Maki Morinoue

Holualoa, HI

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 8:50:13 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Troy #chacht	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 9:00:06 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cynthia Reves	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a public school teacher.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 12:36:06 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joell Edwards	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals.

as a former food access coordinator on Kaua'i I witnessed first hand how many keiki were affected during COVID as they qualified individually for free and reduced meals, but as the ratio at their school overall was higher, they were denied service unl as they drove out of area. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 1:23:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Judie Hoeppner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 3:38:46 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sven Sorge	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 5:15:38 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 6:25:09 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joni Kamiya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Legislators,

I'm writing to you in support of this bill to provide meals to our keiki in schools. As we all know, many public school parents are struggling to make ends meet on a daily basis. Food is a necessary ingredient for their success in learning.

This is not a new issue however. My mom was a teacher for years and she saw firsthand what happens when kids are hungry. There were a lot of behavioral problems in the class. She took it upon herself to purchase snacks for them to maintain focus for most of her years as a teacher.

please help to give our keiki a good start by supporting their need to learn if the funding is available.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 7:17:40 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gaye Chan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure wholeheartedly. Many Hawaii students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki supports their learning, eliminates the risk of social stigma, and promotes a healthier society.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 7:30:19 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keila Paahana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support universal free lunch

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 7:53:58 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Linda Morgan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki eliminates the social stigma for those receiving free meals.

As a retired teacher, I have noticed the need for all students to receive free meals. At Na'alehu Elementary, 70% of children have to catch the schoolbus at 6:30 AM. These kids don't have time to eat breakfast at home. Without free breakfast, most would go hungry until lunch time. Hungry children have trouble with focus and attention, making them less effective learners.

Please care enough for our keiki to provide all of them free meals at school.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 7:59:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emelia Briscoe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai‘i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 8:11:09 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Wong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Susan Wong, Kailua

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 8:49:20 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nathan Leo Braulick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 9:04:19 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

I urge you to support HB757, which will provide universal school meals. Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

Thank you

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 9:07:11 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brian Piotrowski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 9:08:39 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 9:32:34 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shay Chan Hodges	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 9:41:28 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leah Morse	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

Thank you for your consideration,

Leah Morse

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 10:06:14 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kayla Marie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this measure

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 10:15:18 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Philip Johnson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 10:28:55 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kencho Gurung	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 10:54:26 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vivienne Hill	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Vivienne, and I am a high school student in Hawai‘i writing in **strong support of HB757**. As a student, I’ve seen firsthand how important school meals are. Over the pandemic, my friends and classmates thrived when they didn’t have to worry about affording lunch. Everyone could focus on school instead of stressing about whether their account had enough money to afford lunch. We should go back to that system—where no student has to go hungry.

Right now, two out of three struggling families don’t qualify for free school meals. That means a lot of kids are skipping meals, not because they want to, but because they have no choice. When students are hungry, they can’t concentrate in class. Universal free school meals have been proven to increase academic performance—about equivalent to six additional weeks of learning.

It’s not just about grades, though. It’s about health, and fairness. Hunger is linked to stress, depression, and long-term health problems. No keiki should have to return their meal just because there’s not enough money in their account. It’s humiliating, and it shouldn’t be happening in Hawai‘i’s schools.

HB757 is an investment in our future. By ensuring every student has access to nutritious meals, we’re setting them up for success in the classroom, and beyond. **I urge the committee to pass HB757** and give all keiki the chance to learn, grow, and focus on what really matters—our education.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Vivienne Hill

Prisma High School, Grade 12

Honolulu, HI 96822

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 11:36:57 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Witeck	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My wife, daughter and I strongly support this bill. My two twin grandkids are in 7th grade and attend public school. Their lunch payments take a substantial chunk out of the family budget, especially as the charge for school lunch has risen. For working families with less income or more keiki in school, the burden is even greater. Passage of this bill would lighten the burden on our local families.

We urge you to approve this bill. The state has the funds to cover this expense. Feeding our keiki should be an integral part of educating them!

Mahalo for considering our testimony! Aloha!

John Witeck, Kamemeha Heights, Honolulu

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 12:59:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
KELEN R CASEY	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 1:11:25 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannon Matson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I hope you get a chance to view this 1.5 minute video, he says it all better than I could: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/12FY3gfGLfw/?mibextid=wwXIfr>

if it doesn't work then I hope my words will suffice- free school meals for our keiki is the most affordable investment in the future you can make. All children deserve to be fed, free of stigma. Please support this bill and continue to work to make sure all of our children get fed nutritious, delicious, and locally grown meals as much as possible.

Mahalo,

Shannon Matson

Mother of 2 mostly well-fed keiki on Hawai'i Island

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 1:50:06 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessie L Gonsalves	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

"I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma".

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 2:16:08 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Lum	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo Chair and esteemed members,

my name is Jennifer Lum and I am a public school teacher. I have been teaching for over twenty years in the Leeward district. I was also a public school student that received free and reduced lunch.

During the years as students were returning to school after lockdowns lunch was provided for ALL students. I witnessed many many more students actually eating lunch at school. Some of my students were so grateful for that meal. Since students have been required to pay for lunch the numbers have dropped considerably.

We don't know the reasons why kids don't all apply for free or reduced lunch. It could be pride. It could be language barriers. It could be shame of not having money to put in student accounts. Regardless, students deserve free and healthy food at the place where they are required to attend.

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Mahalo,

Jennifer Lum, 'Ewa Beach

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 2:33:25 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rev. Samuel L Domingo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- No Child Should Go Hungry – 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.
- No child would have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.
- Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.
- Increased Academic Performance – When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes.
- Improved Health Outcomes – Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 2:37:42 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kealakai Hammond	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in strong support of HB757. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Kealakai Hammond

Honolulu, HI

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 3:12:37 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noelle Lindenmann	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Members & Chair

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Thank you,
Noelle Lindenmann, Kailua-Kona

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 3:20:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JANE TOLLEFSRUD	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. As a tenured Hawaii teacher, I worked at a school that provided meals to 100% of our students!!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 3:30:29 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gail Morrison	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 3:52:19 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
DeWaine Tollefsrud	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a former teacher at Mountain View Elementary I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. A healthy mind depends on a healthy body.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 4:24:25 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kanani Kai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

Kanani Kai

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 4:33:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonathan Simonds	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I urge you to please support HB757. Universal free school lunch is the best way to make sure that all students are ready to learn and can get the most out of the resources that the state is already putting into their education in every other area. As teacher at Kohala High School it was clear how critical it was that students needs were met throughout the day. This will be a small price to pay to make sure that everyone can get as much out of their education as possible.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 4:36:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Isis Usborne	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Mahalo,

Isis Usborne (96815)

Hawai'i State House Committee on Education Hearing
Tuesday, Feb. 11th at 2:01 p.m.
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 309
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

RE: H.B. 757 - Relating to Education

Testimony in SUPPORT

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, Maui Rep. Amato, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews and I am from Wailuku, Maui. I submit this testimony today in SUPPORT of H.B. 757, relating to education, which would, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, require the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

My children were born and raised on Maui, but we spent ten years in Saint Paul, Minnesota where they attended Saint Paul Senior High School, a large urban high school of over 2,000 students. The Saint Paul Public School system provides free school breakfast and lunch for all students. Even though our family was not income eligible, I saw the benefits of this program for my own children.

My kids, like most high schoolers I know, would leave for school late or forget to eat breakfast. Fortunately for them, at all entrances to their school, there were carts that had little containers of milk, containers of yogurt, and fresh fruit. I had the opportunity when volunteering at the school to watch students walking into the school, almost all of them grabbing a milk and, my eyes did not deceive, a fruit on the way to class. As a parent who would nag my kids to eat before school or to eat their fruit, and be responded to with an eye-roll, there was something supremely comforting in feeling like my kids' school had their back. That they might not stop for breakfast if I reminded them, but that they would grab something from the cart under the warm gaze of the school cafeteria workers. My daughters both had very bad social anxiety, and also had almost daily after school activities. I am very certain that they would not have felt comfortable bringing a packed lunch to school. They never would or did. I do feel like the free lunch, the communal experience that all students shared in equally at the cafeteria, made it possible for my girls to eat at school when they otherwise would not have. So, even as a family that would not have qualified for free school meals, I know that having free school meals made a significant difference in my kids' lives.

You don't have to take my word for it. I know that the cost of these meals, especially if provided to children who would not otherwise qualify, seems like a big investment. Yet, the benefits of these programs have been well documented. Heck, the benefits of them in Minnesota were so substantial that Gov. Tim Walz was tapped as a candidate for Vice President and spent a good

part of last summer and fall boasting about them. According to the Rockefeller Foundation's True Cost of Food: School Meals Case Study, "Research and practice suggest that providing this benefit without the burden of income eligibility to all students would: enable students that may hover at or slightly above the income threshold to receive the financial and health benefits of free, healthy meals; mitigate problems of stigmatization; eliminate the administrative burdens of meal applications and lunch debt on students, families, and administrators; and translate into better academic performance and lasting improved health outcomes. Additionally, an increase in economies of scale for school meals may allow many schools to provide better food at the reimbursement rate, and have an even greater beneficial impact on local economies and the environment".

The foreword of the Case Study notes, "This case study shows that school meals are essential for the health and economic stability of communities. **We learned that while school meal programs cost \$18.7 billion per year to run, they provide nearly \$40 billion in human health and economic benefits, providing at least \$21 billion in net benefit to society even when we measure only their benefits to human health and economic equity.**

Enhancements to school meal programs can increase their net value even more as they expand their benefits to additional impact areas. **We analyze investments to maximize student participation, improve dietary composition, and optimize food purchasing policies, which together would produce an additional \$10 billion worth of net-positive health, equity, environmental, and economic impacts.**" [emphasize added].

I encourage the members of the Committee to read the report, (available for download at <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/reports/true-cost-of-food-school-meals-case-study/>) in its entirety so that they can fully appreciate that, while the costs of providing free school meals (breakfast and lunch) to ALL Hawai'i students, without regard to income eligibility, has a net benefit to health, academic performance, local food producers, and the economy, that makes the investment in our children a wise one.

I thank the members of the Committee for their time and humbly request that they PASS H.B. 757.

Mahalo,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.
Wailuku, Maui

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 6:15:32 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marlene Thom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma. There is well-established scientific evidence that undernourished children and those who experience food insecurity are unable to learn effectively and could suffer long-term developmental deficiencies. Given the high cost of living in our state, it behooves our government to provide assistance where it is most needed to safeguard the future of our children.

Thank you for your support and consideration.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 6:17:49 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alana Stecker	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

any struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 6:20:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherry Pollack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB757 that requires the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools. We need to end child hunger and food insecurity. In addition to impacting the ability of a child to learn, students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. They deserve better from us. Hunger in this state and our country is a disgrace.

All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn. No child should go hungry. Period.

This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and a hungry child would not be forced to skip meals.

I urge you to pass HB757.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical measure.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 6:57:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tamara Luthy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 7:50:01 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

Members of the House Committee on Education,

I strongly support this bill to provide food security for our children. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research shows that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need to succeed.

*Elizabeth Winternitz,**Kula, Maui*

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 8:34:09 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anika Agerlie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to voice my strong support for HB757, which seeks to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students in the state. With rising grocery costs and food insecurity impacting a third of the households in our state, providing free breakfast and lunch to all students would have a huge impact. As a 2nd grade teacher at a school that no longer offers free meals to all students, the difference in my students' readiness to learn is astounding. Instead of arriving in the classroom ready to learn, students are distracted, tired, and cranky from not having eaten breakfast. In prior years when we offered free breakfast and lunch, this was not an issue. The question of free school meals for all is not "Should we do it?", but "How should we do it?", and I believe this bill provides a way forward that will benefit all of our students.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 9:02:08 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Evan Harrison	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

I strongly urge you to vote in favor of HB757.

Sincerely,

Evan Harrison

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 10:07:53 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
gabrielle davidson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 11:27:43 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lynn Otaguro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma. This measure helps to ensure that our keiki are fed and ready to learn.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 7:19:33 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Shizuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee members of the House Committee on Education,

I am testifying in support of this bill.

The cost of living in Hawaii, along with stagnant wages, and extremely high cost of homes are all reasons many of our middle-class families are struggling to make ends meet. For many of these struggling families, it isn't always guaranteed that there will be food available for them to eat at home. We need to be helping those who are struggling to provide food for their families, and this bill does just that.

I prefer this bill to the others offered this year as it is providing free meals for all students. I've heard of the challenges that remain regarding paperwork that ALICE families need to provide, and also the embarrassment of discounted meals for the students. Students know who gets discounted meals and who doesn't, and this creates a unique paradigm in school. Bullying is already bad as it is, and knowing who is an ALICE family member and who isn't doesn't help with this. This is why I appreciate this bill the most. Let's level the playing field for all students and remove that aspect of bullying from the environment by passing this bill.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Keoni Shizuma, from Kaneohe, Oahu

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 7:51:59 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
C.Yamamoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:19:36 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alice Lina Liu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee Chair and Committee Members,

I stand in unwavering support of HB757. Let us sow the seeds of change with our taxpayers' dollars, cultivating a future where our islands thrive. By investing in nourishing, wholesome meals for our keiki, we are not just feeding bodies—we are nurturing minds, strengthening families, and safeguarding the soul of Hawai‘i. This bill is more than policy; it is a promise—a commitment to the well-being of our ‘ohana and the resilience of our land. The choices we make today will echo for generations. Let them be choices of abundance, health, and aloha. Please pass HB757, mahalo!

Alice Lina Liu

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:34:14 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eve Furchgott	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Children in our school system should be able to have free meal at school as needed.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 10:13:14 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
A Wilkie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please,please,please, support this bill and show you care for children in Hawaii and their education. No child hungry!

Thank you

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 10:21:23 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janice English	Waimea Middle Public Conversion Charter School	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee Chair Woodson,

I am writing to highlight an important consideration regarding meal distribution at Waimea Middle PCCS. Currently, our students are receiving meals from the Waimea Elementary School (WES) Cafeteria. These two schools serve many of the same families, and limiting meal distribution to just WES students could potentially create a hardship for some of our families who have children at both schools.

It is important to note that both Waimea Middle PCCS and WES are supported under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which aims to ensure all students have access to nutritious meals. Ensuring that both schools continue to share resources would help maintain this important support for our families.

Mahalo for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Janice English, Principal

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 10:51:49 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melissa Lahti	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Children need free school lunches! Many families here cannot afford the cost of living here. Let's keep the children fed. I support this bill.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 10:55:30 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
martha chantiny	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma that impairs their education. Mahalo

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 11:09:27 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacey Alapai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 12:09:21 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Chiwa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Please support HB 757 to provide free breakfast and lunch to public school students.

Mahalo.

Jennifer Chiwa

Makiki and life long resident of Oahu

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 1:07:37 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rev. Dr. Robert W. Nelson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of our children do not qualify for free school meals and yet many of their families struggle just to put food on the table.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 1:21:09 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Bellamy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 1:21:10 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Audrey Higbee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 1:43:36 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
MANDY CHUN	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 2:06:13 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
teri skillman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma and ensure that children can focus on learning in school.

Mahalo nui,

Teri Skillman

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 2:16:56 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carol Linde	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in supprt of this measure. Predictable access to nutritious foods is a huge and important support for famlies and children. We cannot expect that children will perform their best in school if they are hungry or anxious about their next meal. This bill supports our children and their future. Mahalo!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 3:13:54 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alice Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 3:40:59 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noel Shaw	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It pains me that testimony for ensuring our keiki have food when they go to school is necessary. When one assumes the responsibility of caring for a child, that includes very much so being responsible for feeding them when they're in your care- regardless of that child or their support systems ability to pay for the food. The State of Hawaii mandates children to go to school but does not promise that while they're there they will be fed. Children do not have jobs and even if older and able to work, should not be burdened with having to think about how to pay to eat. We owe it to our future generations that they have the basics secured especially while they're at school and are asked to learn. They are worthy of sureties and trust is built here when they can be promised at least two meals a day.

I strongly support this bill as it's a true marker of a caring society to ensure its children are fed. I believe this is an important step to improving the collective school food system as well- providing a venue for not just free school meals but also healthy nutritious locally grown school meals to happen.

Please pass this bill and please see it all the way through the legislative process.

In a time when so much growth and development is happening for our youngest community members- this investment offers a major opportunity to have a positive impact on children and their support systems.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 3:53:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alyson M Miles	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Honorable Members of the Legislature,

Would any of you take food away from the mouth of a child? Would you stigmatize a child in need of food, suffering from food insecurity or food instability? According to the Hawai'i Foodbank, nearly 1 in 3 households in Hawai'i are food insecure. In this time of callous cruelty, where funds from the federal government are called into question, when our Title 1 funds for our most vulnerable students in our poorest schools are poised to be stripped away, when SNAP benefits and so many support systems for our neediest keiki are disappearing before our eyes, I entreat and enjoin you to provide our keiki with the food they need to survive and grow. Make Hawai'i shine by example, ensuring that our keiki are supported and fed. Provide free meals to ALL our keiki, eliminating the risk of social stigma.

I support this measure, knowing that while many of Hawai'i's students currently do not qualify for free school meals, but their families struggle to put food on the table.

Pass this measure, I urge you.**He lei poina 'ole ke keiki.**

Sincerely,

Alyson M. Miles

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 3:54:20 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Stayton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Representatives,

I am writing as a former educator. This is extremely important for the future of Hawaii.

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

Thank you for your consideration,

Susan, Lawai, Kauai

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 3:55:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Valerie Clack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Let's take care of our keiki! Free school meals benefit all members of our community and most of all, our keiki. This investment addresses food insecurity in our communities, improves academic performance of our students, and increases healthy childhood development.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 4:11:35 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

I strongly support HB757. It's time we ensure that all Hawaii children are well fed. This investment will take hunger off the list of barriers to learning. We owe it to our children to support this bill.

Thank you,

Carla Allison - Honolulu

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 4:15:35 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Priscilla Stuckey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Committee Members, please support HB757. Children cannot learn when they are hungry. Please implement universal school meals to ensure that our keiki can focus on school instead of on their hungry bellies. The need is great. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 5:20:58 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Taralee Arrowood	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Taralee Arrowood, and I am a dedicated educator working here in Hawai'i. I am writing to express my strong support for HB757 , which would ensure that all students in Department of Education schools receive free breakfast and lunch beginning in the 2025-2026 school year.

Throughout my career Hawai'i, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of food insecurity on students' ability to learn and thrive. Many of the students I work with come from hardworking families who still struggle to make ends meet due to the rising cost of living. I have seen children come to school hungry, unable to focus, and weighed down by the anxiety of whether they will have a meal that day. No child should have to carry that burden—especially when they are expected to learn, grow, and reach their full potential.

Providing free school meals for all students is not just a matter of nutrition—it is a matter of equity. When meals are universally free, we remove the stigma associated with needing assistance, allowing students to eat without shame or judgment. I have seen too many students refuse to eat because they don't want to be labeled as "needy." Universal meals eliminate that barrier and create an environment where every child has the same access to nourishment and opportunity.

Additionally, this policy would ease financial and emotional stress on families. In the communities I serve, parents work multiple jobs to provide for their children, yet food insecurity remains a persistent challenge. By ensuring that every student has access to breakfast and lunch, we are not only supporting academic success but also contributing to the overall well-being of families across our state.

The investment we make in feeding our children today will pay dividends in their academic achievement, health, and future contributions to our communities. I urge you to pass this bill and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that no child goes hungry in our schools.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Taralee Arrowood
7th Grade ELA
Kalama Intermediate

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 6:21:33 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hilary Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Students in Hawaii should have access to free school meals, as many families face financial hardships despite not meeting current eligibility requirements for meal assistance. This universal approach ensures all keiki can eat nutritious meals at school while removing the social stigma that often accompanies means-tested programs. By providing free meals to all students, we create an equitable environment where every child can focus on learning rather than worrying about hunger or feeling singled out.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 7:12:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janice Palma-Glennie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

aloha,

haivng a good breakfast and lunch shoudl be the right of every student, every human.

mahalo for supporting HB757.

sincerely,

janice palma-glennie

kailua-koa

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 7:27:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sheryl Summers	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 7:31:33 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christina Puakea Busby	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Christina Busby. I am a Native Hawaiian woman resident of Honolulu and a former public school educator with over 13 years of teaching experience serving diverse populations in both Hawaii and Washington. I support HB757 which ensures universal free school meals in Hawai'i schools.

As a former teacher, I have witnessed firsthand how important school meals are for all students, especially students from vulnerable populations and communities with high rates of poverty. Having taught for many years in a Title I school, many of my former students depended on school breakfast and lunch for meals as their families experienced food insecurity at home. Studies have consistently shown that students whose basic needs are unmet at home struggle to learn and achieve at school. Children with secure access to food are able to focus and retain more information than students who regularly go hungry. Further, children struggling from hunger do not receive the proper nutrition to develop healthy bodies, which impacts brain function during an important time period in children's growth and development. We know that one in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity and two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Our communities are still recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic shut down in which many families lost their main income sources and experienced food and housing insecurity. As the Hawaii and global economy struggles with inflation and increasing costs of living, more families in Hawaii will experience food insecurity. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food security for our youth!

Mahalo

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 7:44:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cynthia Hartman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a registered dietitian, a 2006 graduate of the Dietetics Program at UH-Manoa. My first job as a dietitian was at the San Antonio Food Bank in San Antonio, TX, where I worked for 18 months as a Nutrition Education Coordinator. As a result of that experience, I am very familiar w/ the impact hunger has on learning when children are not adequately fed. I have lived in Hawai'i for 30 years, where one in five children is experiencing food insecurity. If we want functional, well-educated adults who can contribute to the challenges we face in the coming years, it is imperative that we start by ensuring that ALL of our children are fed, at least on the days that they attend school. Please support HB757. Thank you. Sincerely, Cynthia M Hartman

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 8:05:26 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jada Rufo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:23:35 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

I am in support of SB757 because every child deserves to be well nourished and cared for at school. Having free access to food for all students on campus encourages learning equity. Families struggle, having enough food to eat shouldn't be a problem our keiki shoulder. We have the resources - invest in our youth.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 9:29:42 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tanya Dean	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to support HB757 because all keiki in Hawai'i need access to free meals at school. Making meals available to ALL keiki provides the security and social equality that allows them to thrive. I am college instructor who sees student-parents who struggle to provide for their keiki while juggling their jobs and college commitments. Providing nutritional meals for these families without requiring an application and demonstrated need/low income will be tremendously helpful as they are already burdened by trying to piece together financial support. Support kids and families broadly!

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 10:38:59 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alex Tam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Alex Tam and I am a public school teacher at Ewa Makai middle school. I support universal free school meals because I know how important nourishment is to my students' health and learning. Every other day I have students coming into my room and asking for snacks, and I often see students who skip lunch because they don't have enough money. This in turn affects their well being and ability to focus in class.

I also see a lot of students eating ramen for lunch every day because it is cheaper and easier for families than purchasing nutritious food. Providing universal free school meals would make a big difference for my students and their ability to get the nutrients they need to focus in the classroom. Mahalo

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 12:04:54 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Summer Begnaud	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Having a hungry stomach all day is no good for children's learning, behavior, and emotional regulation. Keiki deserve full bellies so that they can function at optimal levels, and not have to be traumatized by going through consistent periods of hunger. They deserve to be fed no matter what their parents can afford it. That is the right thing to do.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 2:37:56 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Kuzmier	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am very much in favor of providing free meals to all of our students and believe it is aloha to do so. Mahalo.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 5:08:30 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marjorie Maertens	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of HB757 which would provide free breakfast and lunch to all students in DOE schools starting on July 1st, 2025. It is well known that children need to have their basic needs met to be fully engaged in their learning. Food and nutrition is a necessity that many Hawai'i families struggle with, living paycheck to paycheck, but do not meet eligibility to qualify for free school lunch. Students who are food insecure are more likely to struggle in school and experience higher rates of poor physical and mental health outcomes. This bill would help to combat food insecurity and childhood hunger in our public schools.

I have worked in the DOE for 7 years. I have witnessed a student go through the lunch line with their plate of food, scan their ID, only to have their lunch taken away by an adult because they didn't have enough money in their account. This is incredibly stigmatizing and dehumanizing. I've also seen students come into the office to check their lunch balance and walk away knowing that they don't have enough money to eat. The last thing a child at school should have to worry about is where their next meal is going to come from. I humbly urge you to pass this bill for the benefit of our public school students. Thank you for this opportunity to submit my testimony.

Marjie Maertens

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 6:18:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Josef	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 6:48:37 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lana Bilbo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawai'i report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students. Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki!

hank you,

Lana B

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 7:04:33 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leila Ventar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill to provide food security for our children. Having free nutritious meals in school will provide nourishments to children which help them perform better in school and lessen the stress on hard working parents/family who have more than one job to make ends meet.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 7:40:52 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee. I strongly support this bill to provide universal free school breakfasts and lunches for all students in Hawai‘i’s public schools. Studies have consistently shown that free school meals improve academic performance, reduce absenteeism, and support better physical and mental health for students, ensuring they can focus on learning rather than hunger. For example, schools nationwide that have implemented free meal programs report higher test scores and improved classroom behavior. This bill also alleviates financial stress for families struggling with the high cost of living, promoting equity and opportunity for all keiki. By investing in universal free meals, we are investing in the future of our children and our state. Mahalo for your commitment to nurturing the well-being and success of Hawai‘i’s students

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 7:46:37 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Kern	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 10, 2025**Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Members of the Committee,**

My name is Sarah Kern and I am a resident of Lihue, Kauai and a teacher at Chiefess Kamakahahei Middle School. I am testifying in strong support of HB620 to provide free breakfast and lunch to all enrolled students beginning in the 2023-24 school year. Students should not have to worry about whether they have money in their lunch accounts each day. Teachers, administrators, and other school staff should not have to spend our own money providing meals for students when they don't have funds in their accounts. All students should have access to healthy meals at school every day so that they can have the nourishment they need to focus on their academic and personal growth. Access to quality nutrition is essential to brain growth and function, and should not be a barrier that stands in the way of our students' learning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Mahalo nui loa,**Sarah Kern**

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 7:52:16 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erika Kuhr	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii children are often hungry and do not have enough food to eat, especially with the continuous cost of living. How do I know? Becasue I work and volunteer at the local school and hear it directly from students and see it when I cook and feed students farm tot school meals through programs I run with students and their capstone project.

Mahalo,

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 8:22:51 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kealoha Madriaga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of Universal Free School Meals

Aloha Honorary Chair, Vice Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 757 universal free school meals for all students. Access to nutritious meals is essential for children's health, well-being, and academic success. Yet, many families who struggle to afford basic living expenses do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals due to outdated income thresholds. No child should have to face hunger simply because their family falls just above an arbitrary cutoff.

Studies have shown that universal free school meal programs improve attendance, concentration, and academic performance, leading to better outcomes for students and schools alike. Additionally, removing the stigma associated with meal programs ensures that every child can eat with dignity, without fear of judgment.

By implementing universal free school meals, we are making an investment in the future of our children, promoting equity, and ensuring that no student has to worry about where their next meal will come from while trying to learn. I urge you to support this initiative and make free, healthy school meals accessible to all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kealoha Madriaga

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 8:24:12 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jordan Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please pass Hb757.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 8:46:34 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this bill.

Mahalo nui,

Cardenas (Cards) Pintor

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 8:54:54 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelsey Amos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support free school meals. Feeding our kids collectively should be something everyone agrees on and prioritizes. I can afford to feed my kid, but I DO NOT want his friends and peers and neighbors kids to go hungry or face stigma. That's what aloha teaches us. Every child deserves this, and we as adults can make this happen, so why would we not?

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:29:29 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann V Saffery	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha All,

Please support HB757 to reduce food insecurity for our keiki.

Mahalo,

Ann V Saffery

Honolulu, HI

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:41:19 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaylee Rayne Abad	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I think that our public schools should have free breakfast and lunches because there are a lot of students encluding myself who want to have lunches at school but cannot due to the fact that it costs too much money for my family to fund.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:43:21 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Story Knight	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I believe that school lunch and breakfast should be free to all students. Some students do not have the opportunity to eat meals during the day, and may not have money to buy it. This would help students be able to have guaranteed food.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:46:04 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
zayden sarte-apuna	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I agree with the universal free school breakfast and lunch because the breakfast and lunch is needed because students cant all pay for the food and kids go hungary because they cant buy the food and now the kids are starving and cant focus in class and then there grades start dropping

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:48:18 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jaceten Balisacan	James Campbell High School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a student from James Campbell High School and school lunch and breakfast should be free because I know multiple people that aren't able to afford school breakfast and lunch. I know that they would be extremely joyful if school lunch and breakfast were free.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:49:44 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jayden Velasco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Department of Education should provide free school lunch for students because its always neccesary for students to eat because most students at my school harldy eat and starve themselves the whole day. They starve because they either arent hungry, food is to expensive, or the food isnt good. The DOE should provide free school lunch because it makes students eat and come to school without worrying about being hungry.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:53:44 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Peteru	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I believe that lunches should be free because some students families are struggling with financial problems. Some students get hungry and starve throughout the school day basically 6 hours of starving, One of my friends families are dealing with family problems and financial problems so he basically goes through school without eating.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:54:16 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caden Mayola	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I believe that we should have free school throughout the islands. Espically in Oahu due to the rising inflation as well as the growing house cost and rent making it hard for families in Hawaii to make a living. Causing them to leave the island and move to the mainland for a better life that's way cheaper.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:58:30 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chris Coffeen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

"I support this measure because many of Hawaii's students currently don't qualify for free school meals, yet their families struggle to put food on the table. Providing free meals to all keiki also eliminates the risk of social stigma"

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 10:07:20 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
kekai mokiao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I think school lunches should be free becasue some people might not have any money for them to eat school lunch.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 10:39:25 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Diliaur Tellei	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this measure and urge the committee to pass it. The school meal program needs fiscal support to avoid passing increased meal costs onto students and their families. Additionally, making school meals universally free of charge would destigmatize the use of this program. Making meals free would remove or mitigate two barriers to learning: hunger and stigmatization/bullying. In my ideal society, we feed our children. I honestly wish I could appropriate a portion of my own taxes toward making these meals free for students, and I know there are many others who feel the same. This bill would enable us to do exactly that at scale; please help us build that ideal society. Thank you for your consideration.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 11:01:48 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gerald Tariao Montano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairs and Members of the Hawai'i House Committee on Education:

I am Gerald Montano. I am a pediatrician who works for a safety net clinic on Maui. I'm writing this testimony in **strong support of HB757**

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

As a pediatrician, I see first hand how food insecurity can impact the health and well-being of children. Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health. It's not only a justice issue but a public health issue as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Gerald Montano, DO

Community Pediatrician

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 11:02:07 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha House Committee on Education,

I would like to submit testimony in strong support of HB 757 to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) schools. This program has great potential to benefit the students and their families, communities, and local businesses.

The most basic and critical need of our students is food. No child should go hungry, and the sad reality is that many families in Hawaii are food insecure. Schools should provide nutritious daily meals for children to help them grow, develop taste preferences for healthy foods, and prevent health problems later in life.

Good nutrition is also associated with better educational outcomes. How can students be expected to succeed in school when they are under or malnourished? A healthy breakfast and lunch could help increase students' ability to focus, learn, and practice new skills at school so that they can achieve academically and socially.

Better educational outcomes contribute to the long-term vision of a thriving Hawai'i - a unique and culturally rich environment where our children want to stay because of family connections and a flourishing, innovative, and sustainable economy. The future of our islands is in the hands of students enrolled in HIDOE schools. Let's do what we can now to prepare them for this responsibility later in life.

Increasing food access in schools would also increase the market for local businesses that grow, raise, harvest, prepare, and distribute food to these schools. Using public funds to support local businesses would improve the economic vitality of our communities and create a more reliable and sustainable food system. This food system is critical not just for schools but for everyone living or visiting Hawaii.

My only concern about this bill is some language that might unintentionally contribute to food waste. Please consider revising the wording so that HIDOE schools "must provide breakfast and lunch to students that request a meal, free of charge for each school day." Some families might prefer that their children eat breakfast at home or send them to school with lunch from home. Meals "provided" at school should align with student demand rather than enrollment in order to reduce the potential for food waste. It might also help to clarify that the meals are provided on school days only.

Mahalo,

Jennifer Ryan

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 11:05:02 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gwen Whiting	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Gwen Whiting, and I am writing to express my strong support for HB757, which would implement universal free school meals in Hawai‘i. Families from all income levels rely on these meals to nourish their children as they learn and grow.

As the cost of living, including goods and housing, continues to rise, I respectfully urge you to consider this bill. Universal free school meals would have a profound, positive impact on residents who need to feel supported and connected in these challenging times.

I appreciate your time and consideration on this important issue.

Mahalo nui loa,
Gwen Whiting

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 11:22:36 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paul Bernstein	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson and Member of the EDN Committee:

I'm writing in **strong support** of HB757. On the surface this bill may seem like a handout to many families that don't need the money. But the data show that 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. Therefore, the current program that caps eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level omits many children.

We must do what we can to support our keiki. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. This seems like a very small cost to pay for improving the welfare of many keiki and their families so they don't have to make the choice between rent, electricity, and food.

Mahalo,

Paul Bernstein

Aina Haina

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 11:43:23 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jean Butel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB757, which would establish universal free school breakfasts and lunches for all students in Hawai‘i. Ensuring that every child has access to nutritious meals, regardless of their family’s income, is not just a matter of equity—it is a necessity for student success, public health, and economic stability.

Hunger is a significant barrier to learning. Studies show that students who have access to regular, nutritious meals perform better academically, have improved concentration, and experience fewer behavioral challenges. In Hawai‘i, where the cost of living is among the highest in the nation, many families struggle to provide healthy meals at home. Universal free school meals would help alleviate financial burdens on working families while ensuring that no child goes hungry or feels stigmatized for needing assistance.

Beyond academic benefits, this policy also promotes public health. Access to consistent, well-balanced meals can help reduce childhood obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related health conditions. Moreover, providing free meals to all students streamlines administrative processes, eliminating the burden of meal debt and reducing paperwork for schools and families alike.

Other states, such as California and Maine, have successfully implemented universal free school meal programs, demonstrating the feasibility and benefits of such policies. Hawai‘i has the opportunity to lead by example, showing our commitment to keiki and fostering an educational environment where every child has the nutrition they need to thrive.

I urge this committee to pass HB757 and ensure that all students in Hawai‘i receive the essential nutrition they need to learn, grow, and succeed. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Butel

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 12:47:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
karolle t. bidgood	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for considering this very important bill.

Too many of our families in Hawaii are struggling now to make ends meet. Unfortunately, eliminating payment for a child's school meal is an action parents sometimes have to take.

No child in Hawaii should ever go hungry If we do not take care of and protect our children, who will?

Please do the right thing and support this bill. It is very important to me and I strongly support it.

Mahalo.

Karolle (Josie) Bidgood

Kahaluu

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:11:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Connor Davidson	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. As a concerned citizen, I stand in **support** of HB757.

According to a report from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa from 2021, 48% of Hawai‘i families with children are experiencing food insecurity. Even if one could argue that figure was due to the pandemic, a recent report from the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law & Economic Justice has stated that 46% of Hawai‘i public school students qualify for reduced cost or free school lunches. Considering that studies (such as one from the journal Public Health Nutrition from the University of Cambridge) have found that food insecurity can have an effect on academic performance, even indirectly, guaranteeing access to school breakfast and lunch for Hawai‘i public students could go a long way to helping boost stagnating test scores.

Even if it weren’t for the potential boost to academic performance, I would still be arguing in favor of HB757. I was a beneficiary of the school breakfast and lunch programs, and to have had access to at least two filling lunches each day was certainly a privilege. I strongly believe that every Hawai‘i student enrolled in public schools should have that privilege as well. When a student goes to school, they should not have to worry about when their next meal may be. With HB757, they would not have to worry.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I will remain steadfast in my support for HB757.

Connor Davidson

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:19:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patti Hatzistavrakis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Justin H. Woodson, Vice Chair Trish La Chica, and members of the Education Committee,

I fully support **HB 757, which promotes Universal Free School Breakfasts and Lunches**, requiring the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students enrolled in department schools.

I believe that school should be the one place where families should not need to worry about being able to provide food for their children to thrive. And all students, regardless of income, deserve a proper education and **deserve to benefit from nutritious meals while at school.**

Several states, as well as New York City Schools, have adopted universal free school meals programs because they see the tremendous benefit students receive from not having to worry about eating during school hours.

In addition, the Hawai'i Department of Education successfully ran a free school meals program for two full calendar years. Students received free school meals for both the 2020-2021 school year and the 2021-2022 school year.

Thank you for considering **HB 757, which promotes Universal Free School Breakfasts and Lunches**, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year. The program has the potential to greatly benefit our keiki and their families.

February 10, 2025

To: Chair Justin Woodson, Vice Trish La Chica, and the House Committee on Education,

Subject: **HB757**, Relating to Education

Aloha,

I am writing in **strong support of HB757**, which would ensure all students in Hawai'i's public schools have access to free breakfast and lunch, essential to addressing food insecurity among Hawai'i's keiki.

As a student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa studying Natural Resources and Environmental Management with a focus on environmental policy, I am passionate about food security and sustainability.

No child should have to struggle through the school day hungry, especially when we know that access to nutritious meals directly impacts academic performance, attendance, and overall well-being. By providing universal free meals, we remove financial burdens on families, eliminate the stigma associated with free meal programs, and create a healthier, more equitable learning environment.

HB757 is a critical step in ensuring that every child—regardless of economic background—has the nourishment they need to learn and thrive. I urge the committee to pass HB757 to invest in the health, education, and future success of Hawai'i's keiki. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,
Julie Tam

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:33:19 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abbey Seitz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB757**, which would establish the universal free school meals program. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. No child should go hungry because of the economic status of their family. If we want local families to stay in Hawaii, we must reduce their cost of living - including the high and every growing cost of food. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need to succeed. It is vital that our state legislature pass the universal free school meals program this session. Mahalo for hearing this bill.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:39:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Travis Warren Nishii	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB757 to make sure no child on the islands goes hungry.

Partnered with the drive to introduce local ingredients and traditional cooking onto school menus, this bill can also introduce and popularize local goods like breadfruit, taro, and other native food crops, these free breakfast and lunch initiatives can bolster hawai'i food sovereignty and promote sustainable and local eating habits.

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:43:50 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Ellen Maile Pokipala	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is easy to say that those on SNAP benefits or who have free/reduced lunch are just not working hard enough, or been on the benefits too long. Honestly, the cost of food has skyrocketed so much in the last two years, that I, as a single person making \$66,000 a year struggle to pay all the bills and buy food. Supplementing food through a garden has helped, but how can we continue to insist that families with hungry children are not feeding their children because they are lazy. Please support Universal free breakfast and lunch, so that all families can raise healthy children.

LATE

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 3:21:51 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natalie Graham-Wood	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB757. My name is Natalie Graham-Wood and I live at Sunset Beach, Oahu.

LATE

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 5:29:50 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Suzanne Fields	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee:

For many families, the cost of school meals can be a barrier to accessing the balanced diet their children need. Hunger and inadequate nutrition are associated with stress, depression, and chronic disease. Two out of three struggling families are ineligible for free school meals. Universal free school meals can provide meals to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

Not only were all children assured they would have daily food, but schools that implemented free school meals saw their Math and English test scores increase at a rate equivalent to attending six additional weeks of school. While six additional weeks of school would cost Hawai'i \$300 million annually, universal free school meals would cost Hawai'i only \$25 million annually.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Fields

Haiku, Maui

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 7:44:16 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janet Berreman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill to provide food security for our children. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research shows that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need to succeed.

LATE

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 8:59:53 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bryan Mih	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As a parent and community pediatrician, I strongly support HB 757. Ensuring sufficient food and nutrition for all our keiki helps them learn better. When they skip meals, our keiki cannot focus as well on learning or participating in other school activities. Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health. Please support HB 757 for all our keiki!

Sincerely,

Bryan Mih, MD MPH FAAP

Pediatrician

LATE

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:24:29 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kiana Otsuka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Kiana Otsuka, and I am an O'ahu resident writing in **strong support of HB757**.

Universal school meals will ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day. One in three households in Hawaii report food insecurity, and almost half (46%) of ALICE households reported food insecurity. Two out of three financially vulnerable families in our state are ineligible for free school meals. Implementing free school meals for all can provide food security to students who may otherwise not eat at all. Access to healthy meals ensures better learning outcomes for students.

I am a grateful recipient of free and reduced lunch at DOE schools, and having a breakfast and lunch helped me to focus in school and do my best.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mahalo,

Kiana Otsuka

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 9:34:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Renee Rabb	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am delighted to share my strongest support for HB 757. One of the most important services that the state can provide is to be sure that its children do not go hungry.

Please pass HB 757 out of committee.

Renee Rabb

Keaau, HI 96749

Big Island

LATE

TESTIMONY OF
LARRY S VERAY

TO THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB757

RELATED TO EDUCATION

February 10, 2025

Aloha, Chair Woodson and Vice Chair La Chica and committee members. I am Larry Veray, Chairman for the Pearl City Neighborhood Board No. 21. I am submitting this testimony as an individual. **I am in STRONG SUPPORT OF HB757.**

The Department of Education needs to acquire funding to feed our students. A free school breakfast should be offered to every student. Research has proven that students who have access to free meals will much better on their test scores. In addition, nutritious meals will foster the physical and mental health of our students. Furthermore, today many families are struggling to feed their families. Some children, especially homeless families, send their children to school without breakfast. In all fairness, all children should be treated equally and provided free school breakfasts and lunches. I ask you to please seek this important funding to support this bill. Mahalo! **Please approve funding for HB757.** Mahalo!

Larry S. Veray

HB-757

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 8:02:28 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/11/2025 2:01:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Ball	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing today in strong support of HB757, which provides necessary support for Hawaii's keiki and the future of our state. As a twenty-five-year educator, I can attest that a healthy meal is the absolute foundation of student's school day, and a program like the one supported in this bill is an essential down payment on our state's future. Please vote in support of all of Hawaii's young learners.

Sincerely yours,

David Ball, Waialae-Kahala