

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**  
**KA 'OIHANA LAWELawe KAIĀULU**  
**CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

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RICK BLANGIARDI  
MAYOR  
MEIA



ANTON C. KRUCKY  
DIRECTOR  
PO'O

AEDWARD LOS BANOS  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
HOPE PO'O

February 10, 2025

The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair  
And Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education  
State Capitol, Conference Room 229  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Chair  
The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair  
And Members of the Senate Committee on Education  
State Capitol, Conference Room 229  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Kim and Chair Kidani  
And Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education  
And Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

SUBJECT: Measure S.B. No. 426 – Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of S.B. No. 426. Our State faces a critical shortage of affordable, high-quality child care options.

Families are struggling to secure the care they need to support their children's development while maintaining economic stability. This bill offers a tangible solution to this urgent issue by:

1. **Supporting the Early Learning Workforce:** The grant program will support retention in a historically low-paying field, and address turnover rates by offering pathways for career advancement.
2. **Increasing the Supply of Child Care Slots:** By incentivizing individuals to enter and advance in the field, this program will increase access through the creation of additional slots. These added slots will help families currently on waiting lists and those forced to make difficult compromises between work and caregiving.

The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
And Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education  
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Chair  
And Members of the Senate Committee on Education  
February 10, 2025  
Page 2

3. **Creating Sustainable Career Pathways:** Funding apprenticeship programs will recruit new talent into the early learning profession, while offering structured pathways for career growth. This approach builds a sustainable pipeline of high-quality child care professionals, many of whom reflect the diverse communities they serve.
4. **Strengthening Economic Stability:** The child care industry generates over \$300 million in revenue for the State. In addition, access to reliable child care is critical for families in Hawai'i where the high cost of living makes workforce participation a necessity. This program helps to strengthen Hawai'i's economy by generating revenue and creating new jobs, while also supporting families in securing employment opportunities.

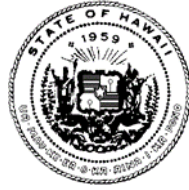
This legislation aligns with our shared vision of prioritizing early learning as a cornerstone of Hawai'i's future. By investing in this apprenticeship grant program, we address immediate workforce while laying the foundation for long-term, systemic improvements in the field.

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

Sincerely,

Anton C. Krucky  
Director Designate

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWE LAWE KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 8, 2025

TO: The Honorable Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senate Committee on Higher Education

The Honorable Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair  
Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 426 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.**

Hearing: February 11, 2025, 3:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 229, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this measure and defers to the University of Hawaii. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace a priority identified in the executive budget.

**PURPOSE:** This bill establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

A registered apprenticeship program is one strategy that provides opportunities to support the recruitment, retention, and professional development of early learning professionals in a career field that has been experiencing a continuous shortage of qualified caregivers and staff for early learning programs. Providers are incentivized to participate in a

February 8, 2025

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registered apprenticeship program through awarded grants, which may be used to cover providers' expenses.

DHS supports the apprenticeship grant program aimed at increasing the number of qualified early learning professionals and expanding the existing child care capacity.

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



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 426**  
**RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM**

Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Senate Committee on Education

February 11, 2025

3:00pm

Conference Room 229

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani and Members of the Higher Education Committee

Dear Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim and Members of the Education Committee

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) submits this testimony in **Support of SB 426** which proposes establishing an early learning apprenticeship grant program. This bill represents an important step forward in addressing the critical shortage of qualified early learning professionals in Hawai‘i and will provide significant benefits for all of our keiki, especially Native Hawaiian children and families.

**The Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program acknowledges that early childhood development is foundational for long-term success.** The early years of a child’s life are when brain development occurs most rapidly, making access to quality early learning not just beneficial but transformative. By supporting early learning programs, we are investing in Hawai‘i’s future and ensuring our keiki have the tools they need to thrive.

**This bill directly tackles the shortage of qualified early learning professionals, a challenge that limits access to quality early education for many families across the state.** Apprenticeship programs are a proven solution, combining hands-on experience with classroom instruction to ensure educators are well-prepared to meet the diverse needs of our keiki.

Additionally, **SB 426 recognizes the need for fair and competitive wages for early learning professionals.** Ensuring salaries align with industry standards is key to attracting and retaining high-quality educators, particularly in Native Hawaiian communities where economic disparities and limited access to services have historically been barriers to success.

**SB 426 represents an opportunity to strengthen Hawai‘i’s early learning workforce while ensuring Native Hawaiian families and communities benefit from a high-quality, culturally relevant education system.** This aligns with OHA’s *Mana i Maui Ola* Strategic Educational Pathways Strategic Outcomes, which emphasize culturally grounded, equitable learning opportunities. By supporting the training and retention of early learning professionals, we foster an environment where all children—especially those from Native Hawaiian backgrounds—can succeed academically, culturally, and socially.

OHA appreciates the opportunity to share our mana‘o and **strongly urges the Committee to pass SB 426.** Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**Executive Office on Early Learning**  
Ke'ena Ho'okele Ho'ona'auao Pae Kamali'i o Hawai'i Moku'āina  
2759 South King Street, Room C6  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

TO: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senate Committee on Higher Education

Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair  
Senate Committee on Education

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

SUBJECT: Testimony on S.B. No. 426 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

Committee: HRE/EDU  
Date: Tuesday, February 11, 2025  
Time: 3:00 p.m.  
Location: Conference room 229

Executive Office on Early Learning Position: **SUPPORT**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments in support of S.B. No. 426, and defers to the University of Hawai'i regarding implementation and funding.

Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs) create structured pathways for aspiring early childhood professionals to gain hands-on experience, earn credentials, and achieve career advancement through apprenticeships that integrate employer-paid classroom learning with on-the-job training and comprehensive wraparound support.

This bill creates a grant program to mitigate financial barriers to participation in state-approved or federally approved ELRAPs for licensed or registered early learning program service providers, with priority given to infant and toddler programs.

EOEL is committed to improving the recruitment, retention, and career pathways for our early learning workforce, and recognizes that our capacity to expand access to early learning opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki is dependent on our ability to grow and support our workforce.

ELRAPs can enhance the sustainability and capacity of the workforce by:

- Addressing workforce shortages in the early childhood field by supporting recruitment and retention;
- Providing competitive compensation and benefits to ensure employees are valued; and
- Improving opportunities for professional advancement.

EOEL would be happy to collaborate with the University of Hawai'i to develop the award criteria for this grant program, as directed in this bill.

We appreciate the Legislature's continued investment in our youngest keiki and their families. Thank you for the opportunity to share these comments in support of this bill.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**Early Learning Board**  
2759 South King Street, Room C6  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

February 8, 2025

To: Senator Kim, Chair  
Senator Kidani, Vice-chair  
Members of the Higher Education Committee

Senator Kidani, Chair  
Senator Kim, Vice-chair  
Members of the Education Committee

From: Elaine Yamashita, Chair  
Early Learning Board

Re: SB 426 support

Aloha, Honorable Chair Kim, Vice-chair Kidani, Honorable Chair Kidani, Vice-chair Kim, and the members of the Higher Education and Education committees:

The Early Learning Board (ELB) formulates statewide policy relating to early learning, as well as directing the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL).

The Early Learning Board supports SB 426, which will expand the current early childhood registered apprenticeship program. This directly affects and supports much needed expansion of the early childhood workforce. Recruitment and retention of our important early educators is key to providing high quality care and education for our youngest keiki.

It is a specialized body of knowledge and experience based on child development and effective relationships, and apprenticeships provide both. The bill would also allow community-based providers resources to provide incentives for apprentices to continue and for the program as a whole.

Mahalo for your consideration and support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Elaine Yamashita  
Early Learning Board Chair  
[elb@eoel.hawaii.gov](mailto:elb@eoel.hawaii.gov)





# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Senate Committee on Education  
Tuesday, February 11, 2025 at 3:00 p.m.

By

Nathan Murata, Dean  
College of Education

And

Michael Bruno, PhD  
Provost

University of Hawai'i at Manoa

### SB 426 – RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM

Chairs Kim and Kidani and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 426, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

Families across our state are struggling to find affordable, high-quality early learning programs that support their young children's development while families maintain their own economic stability. At the same time, there is a desperate need to support the recruitment, retention, and stabilization of our specially trained early learning workforce.

This bill offers a tangible solution to these pressing issues by:

1. **Supporting the Early Learning Professionals:** The grant program will provide funding to support over 500 existing early learning professionals, helping them access critical training and professional development opportunities. This investment will not only enhance the quality of care but also improve recruitment and retention in the early care and education field that has historically faced high turnover due to low wages and limited growth opportunities.
2. **Increasing the Supply of Early Learning Slots:** By incentivizing individuals to enter and advance in the field, this program has the potential to add up to 75 additional slots for infants and toddlers

under the age of three, and up to 200 slots for three and four-year olds. These additional slots will directly benefit families who are on waiting lists or forced to make difficult compromises in their work and other responsibilities.

3. **Creating Career Pathways:** By funding apprenticeships, the program will offer a structured pathway for career entry and advancement, that will enhance the recruitment of new individuals into the early learning profession. This is especially important in creating good jobs for individuals who reflect the diverse communities they will serve.
4. **Strengthening Economic Stability:** For families in Hawai'i who struggle with the high cost of living, access to reliable child care is often the key to maintaining stable employment and achieving economic security. The proposed program will play a critical role in ensuring parents can participate fully in their jobs and careers, knowing their children are in safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate settings.

This legislation aligns with our shared vision of prioritizing early learning as a cornerstone of our state's future. By investing in the apprenticeship grant program, we are not only addressing immediate needs but also laying the groundwork for long-term systemic improvements in early care and education for our young children's success in school and in life.

The University of Hawai'i supports this measure, provided the its adoption does not impact the priorities as identified in the BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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

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**ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:**

S.B. NO. 426, RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM.

**BEFORE THE:**

SENATE COMMITTEES ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND ON EDUCATION

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 11, 2025      **TIME:** 3:00 p.m.

**LOCATION:** State Capitol, Room 229

**TESTIFIER(S):** Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or  
Candace J. Park, Deputy Attorney General

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Chairs Kim and Kidani and Members of the Committees:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

This bill adds a new section to subpart M of part IV of chapter 304A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, that establishes an early learning apprenticeship grant program to be administered by the University of Hawai'i. The bill appropriates funds for this purpose.

Article X, section 6, of the Hawai'i Constitution gives the Board of Regents of the University of Hawai'i "exclusive jurisdiction over the internal structure, management, and operation of the university." Section 6 further provides: "This section shall not limit the power of the legislature to enact laws of statewide concern. The legislature shall have the exclusive jurisdiction to identify laws of statewide concern." We recommend an amendment that adds a statement identifying this bill as a law of statewide concern.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.



February 11, 2025

Aloha Chair Kidani, Vice-Chair Kim, and committee members,

**I am testifying in strong support of this bill, which would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai'i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).**

To ensure families have access to high quality early childhood care and education from birth to Kindergarten we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

This bill would give priority to licensed and/or regulated childcare providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai'i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access quality care from the time babies need it most.

In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai'i's children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable childcare.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo,

Melodie Vega, MAEd  
Chief Early Education Officer  
Keiki O Ka Aina Family Learning Centers



Hearing Date: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 3:00 PM , Rm. 229

To: Committee on Higher Education  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Committee on Education  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair

**Re: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 426, Relating to Early Learning APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM**

Dear Chairs Kim and Kidani, Vice Chairs Kidani and Kim, and the Members of the Committee,

Members of AAUW of Hawaii thank you for this opportunity to testify in **strong support of SB 426** which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

Hawaii has a shortage of qualified child care employees to fill these many vacant, but critical positions. Early childhood care and educational professionals are undervalued in Hawaii, averaging just \$13 to \$17 per hour wage. It is no surprise that the number of professionals in this sector has been decreasing, although they are in high demand.

Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAP) are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. AAUW of Hawaii supports this measure that will aid Hawaii in retaining and recruiting qualified child care workers, including women who want to work in the field, but cannot, or will not, due to the current low wage. An important feature in this bill will provide funding to eligible providers participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs to adequately compensate these workers in training as well as allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

Please pass this important measure and mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jean Evans".

Jean Evans  
Public Policy Committee, AAUW of Hawaii  
publicpolicy-hi@aauw.net

*The American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Hawaii 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 Oahu. AAUW's mission is to advance gender equity through research, education, and advocacy. Our goal is economic security for women and their families.*



Date: February 8, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Education  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Support for **SB426**, Relating to An Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

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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 SB426**, which would provide financial support for early learning employers to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).

High-quality early learning programs are fundamental to thriving children, flourishing families, and a robust economy. An effective, well-trained, early learning workforce is the backbone of these programs. Chronic issues related to poor compensation and limited professional advancement opportunities, however, pose huge barriers to workforce recruitment and retention.

Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs offer new early learning professionals appropriately-scaled, higher compensation, and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning college degrees. ELRAPs have proven to be an effective recruitment and retention strategy, facilitating a pipeline of new employees into early learning programs and providing the compensation and career pathways instrumental to retaining professionals in the field.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff, as well as support the training and mentoring activities associated with apprenticeship. By providing key grant funding, this measure would help close budget shortfalls and remove the financial barriers impeding the participation of eligible early learning providers in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs.

By building the supply of highly-skilled and well-compensated early learning professionals, expansion of ELRAP participation, via the support of grants, would ultimately increase the number and seat capacity of early learning programs, as well as enhance the quality of care provided by programs.

In order for Hawai'i to meet the education, employment, and economic needs of the state, the state must support and sustain the child care sector and improve families' access to child care and early learning programs by prioritizing strategies to stabilize and expand the early childhood workforce. Towards this end, we strongly urge you to support **SB426**.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair  
Senate Committees on Higher Education and Education

From: Chevelle Davis, MPH - Director of Early Childhood & Health Policy  
Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!

Subject: Measure S.B. No. 426 – Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 3:00 PM, Conference Room 229

**POSITION: STRONG SUPPORT**

Aloha e Chair Kim, Chair Kidani, and members of the committees:

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT of S.B. No. 426**. The proposed Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program is critical to stabilizing our early learning system and ensuring all keiki across Hawai'i access early learning services. Families across Hawai'i are facing a severe shortage of affordable, early learning options, making it increasingly difficult for parents/guardians to balance work and their children's early development. This bill presents a meaningful solution by:

1. **Investing in the Early Learning Workforce** – Early learning starts with well-trained and supported educators. This grant program will provide professional development and training for over 500 early learning professionals, improving the quality of care, reducing turnover, and creating pathways for career advancement in a historically underpaid field. When we invest in our educators, we invest in better outcomes for our keiki.
2. **Increasing Supply of Child Care Spaces** – By supporting workforce growth and retention, this program will help create 100-150 new slots for infants and toddlers under the age of three and up to 200 additional slots for three- and four-year-olds. These additional spaces will help alleviate long waitlists and provide much-needed relief for working families who struggle to find care.
3. **Building Sustainable Career Pathways** – This bill establishes structured apprenticeship opportunities, recruiting new professionals into the field while ensuring they receive hands-on training and mentorship. We can create a lasting, sustainable pipeline of early childhood educators by fostering a strong, well-trained workforce that reflects the diverse communities they serve.

4. **Supporting Hawai'i's Economic Stability** – The child care sector generates over \$300 million in revenue for the state and is an essential component of our economy, enabling parents/guardians to participate in the workforce. With Hawai'i's high cost of living, reliable child care is essential for families striving to maintain financial stability. This program strengthens our economy by supporting businesses, creating jobs, and ensuring that parents/guardians have the ability to work while knowing their children are safe.

This measure aligns with our collective vision of prioritizing early learning as a foundational investment in Hawai'i's future. By supporting this apprenticeship grant program, we take a critical step in addressing our child care crisis while laying the foundation for a stronger, more resilient early learning system.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support** of **S.B. No. 426**.





### Our Mission

Increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to Hawai'i's youngest keiki and families.



### Steering Committee

*City and County of Honolulu*

Justina Acevedo-Cross  
Greg Auberry  
Chiyomi Chow  
Kanoë Enos  
JoAnn Farnsworth  
Jordana Ferreira  
Nadia Garcia  
Danny Goya  
Alex Harris  
Sakinah Harrison  
Erin Henderson  
Monique Ibarra  
Shawn Kana'iaupuni  
Ryan Kusumoto  
Ka'iulani Laehā  
Lynelle Marble  
Megan McCorriston  
Marty Oliphant  
Cherilyn Shiinoki  
Laurie Tochiki  
Sunshine Topping  
Kerrie Urosevich  
Carol Wear  
S. Kukunaokalā Yoshimoto

*Maui County*

Ka'ina Bonacorsi  
Kawika Mattos  
Bobbie-Jo Moniz-Tadeo

*Kaua'i County*

Sarah Blane  
Alice Luck

*Hawai'i County*

Sulma Gandhi  
Kahi Moreman  
Angela Thomas



### Contact Info

700 Bishop Street, Suite 1701  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 93813

info@committokeiki.org  
CommitToKeiki.org

Date: February 11, 2025

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education

Senator Michelle Kidani, Chair  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

From: Commit to Keiki

RE: Senate Bill 426, Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

Commit to Keiki is a statewide, non-partisan, public-private collaborative to ensure a brighter start for Hawai'i's youngest keiki. Led by a diverse Steering Committee, Commit to Keiki's mission is to increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to early childhood.

**Commit to Keiki strongly supports passage of Senate Bill 426**, which would establish the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program at the University of Hawai'i and provide financial support to early learning employers who participate in the program.

The importance of high-quality early learning opportunities cannot be overstated. Providing our community's youngest keiki with access to programs of this nature is critical to their overall development and has positive impacts on both the wellbeing of their families and our local economy.

It is impossible to provide these high-quality opportunities without a workforce of highly prepared educators.

For years, the field of early learning has struggled with numerous issues including low compensation and limited opportunity for professional advancement. This has propped up significant barriers for individuals who are looking to enter the workforce and resulted in a limited number of available slots at a limited number of early learning programs.

The Early Learning Apprenticeship Program would provide those studying to become early learning educators with higher compensation and applicable, on-the-job experience while they are still completing their undergraduate coursework. Similar apprenticeship programs around the country have proven to be successful in both recruitment and retention of individuals who are interested in joining the early learning workforce, and it is our position that the program laid out in this measure would enjoy similar success.

**For these reasons, CTK strongly supports Senate Bill 426.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



**LATE**

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair

BILL SB426  
POSITION: SUPPORT

Hearing Date: Wednesday, February 11, 2025 3:00pm, Room 229

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Chair Kidani, Committee Members:

**Aloha United Way and the ALICE Initiative supports SB426**, which establishes an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program to be administered by the University of Hawaii to provide financial support for early learning program service providers in the State to participate in state- or federally-approved early learning apprenticeship programs.

Childcare costs and a shortage of seats create an economic drag on our State. This program will help to solve a major barrier for Hawaii to have adequate childcare seats and will build a career path for trained childcare providers.

The new **2024 State of ALICE in Hawaii report found that 50% of our State's residents with children are ALICE families. ALICE** stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE are our households who are employed but whose incomes are not sufficient to meet basic costs. Childcare costs and the loss of income when caretaking are drivers of that gap.

The reality is childcare is critical for families to earn the two incomes often needed to survive in Hawaii. Yet the childcare that makes this possible is hard to secure for households across the state. SB426 helps to build a pipeline of workers essential to increasing availability of childcare for working parents. It will also help Hawai'i's economy, which loses up to \$476 million annually due to insufficient childcare program options and will help our businesses address the workforce shortage.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your support for SB426.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle Bartell".

Michelle Bartell  
President & CEO  
Aloha United Way

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Suzanne Skjold".

Suzanne Skjold  
Chief Operating Officer  
Aloha United Way

February 7, 2025

To: The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
The Honorable Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education

The Honorable Michelle Kidani, Chair  
The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair  
And members of the Senate Committee on Education

Hawai'i State Capitol  
415 South Beretania St.  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Measure S.B. No. 426 – Relating to the Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

**Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of S. B. No. 426.**

Aloha,

My name is Dr. Terry Lock. Currently, I am the Director of the Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Excellence and Equity (ECE<sup>3</sup>) Project at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa College of Education. For almost 50 years I have been in the field of early childhood education. I am also a parent of three adult children and grandparent of six grandchildren.

Many parents with young children in Hawai'i are struggling to find affordable, reliable high-quality early learning programs that support their young children's development and help them to work and achieve economic security. At the same time, there is a desperate need to support the recruitment, retention, and stabilization of our specially trained early learning workforce.

This proposed Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program offers a tangible solution to these pressing issues by:

1. **Supporting the Early Learning Professionals:** The grant program will provide funding to support over 500 existing early learning professionals, helping them access critical training and professional development opportunities. This investment will not only enhance the quality of care but also improve recruitment and retention in the early care and education field that has historically faced high turnover due to low wages and limited growth opportunities.
2. **Increasing the Supply of Early Learning Slots:** By incentivizing individuals to enter and advance in the field, this program has the potential to add up to 75 additional slots for infants and toddlers under the age of three, and up to 200 slots for three and four year olds. These additional slots will directly benefit families who are on waiting lists or forced to make difficult compromises in their work and other responsibilities.
3. **Creating Career Pathways:** By funding apprenticeships, the program will offer a structured pathway for career entry and advancement, that will

enhance the recruitment of new individuals into the early learning profession. This is especially important in creating good jobs for individuals who reflect the diverse communities they will serve.

4. **Strengthening Economic Stability:** For families in Hawai'i who struggle with the high cost of living, access to reliable child care is often the key to maintaining stable employment and achieving economic security. The proposed program will play a critical role in ensuring parents can participate fully in their jobs and careers, knowing their children are in safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate settings.

As the Director of the ECE<sup>3</sup> Project at the UHM College of Education, I supported Honolulu Community College (HonCC) and Keiki O Ka 'Āina Family Learning Centers' (KOKA) in launching our state's first early childhood education (ECE) registered apprenticeship program through KOKA in the summer of 2023. Recently, I spoke to one of KOKA's apprentices. She is employed as an aide at KOKA's Ka Pua Preschool, located in Mā'ili, 'Oahu. With strong support from her husband and their four boys, ages 14, 11, 10, and 5, she enrolled in her first ECE course at HonCC in the 2023-2024 academic year. She shared, "To be in a job, while going to school, has made a huge difference. This [apprenticeship program] fits the type of learner that I am. I love that I get to apply what I learn from my mentor and my college instructors, while interacting with preschool children." She also credits her "very encouraging" instructors at HonCC. She is on target to complete her first of three milestones, a Child Development Associate (CDA), a nationally recognized credential in May 2025. Her goal is to be a preschool lead teacher or open her own day care program.

SB 426 will help to grow our ECE workforce and aligns with the shared vision of prioritizing early learning as a cornerstone of our state's future. By investing in the apprenticeship grant program, we are not only addressing immediate needs but also laying the groundwork for long-term systemic improvements in early care and education for our young children's success in school and in life.

**Mahalo for supporting S. B. No. 426.**

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 6:44:29 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Mahalo Chairs Kim and Kidani and Committee Members for hearing SB426.

**I strongly support SB426.** Our keiki need early learning to support their development, and families across the state deserve to have increased access to early learning resources. This bill would establish an apprenticeship program and support both rising professionals and existing service providers. We know that one of the barriers that stops providers from participating in apprenticeship models is pay parity. The bill proposal is designed to prevent that issue by outlining that current providers are appropriately incentivized and supported so the program can be successful.

Mahalo for your support!

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 9:25:21 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chloe Pua'ena Vierra-Villanueva	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

From: Chloe “Pua’ena” Vierra-Villanueva

Subject: Measure S.B. No. 426 – Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program

**Position: Strong Support**

Aloha Chairs Kim and Kidani, and Committee Members,

**I am testifying in strong support of SB426, which would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai‘i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).**

To ensure families have access to high quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten, we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

This bill would give priority to licensed and/or regulated child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai‘i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access quality care from the time children need it most.

In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai‘i’s children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable child care.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo,

C. Pua‘ena Vierra-Villanueva

‘Ohana Leadership Council

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 9:57:43 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Kailiawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo Chairs Kim and Kidani and Committee Members for hearing SB426.

**I strongly support SB426.** Our keiki need early learning to support their development, and families across the state deserve to have increased access to early learning resources. This bill would establish an apprenticeship program and support both rising professionals and existing service providers. We know that one of the barriers that stops providers from participating in apprenticeship models is pay parity. The bill proposal is designed to prevent that issue by outlining that current providers are appropriately incentivized and supported so the program can be successful.

Mahalo for your support!



**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 6:06:07 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
TERI SAVAIINAEA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Mercado, Chair Kidani and Committee Members,

I *support* SB426.

Kind regards,

Teri Kia Savaiinaea

District 45, Wai'anae resident

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 8:25:17 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Younghee Overly	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for hearing SB426 which would increase and develop the number of childcare professionals through apprenticeship programs. This would help the shortage problem we have with childcare professionals.

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/8/2025 9:33:26 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Mahalo Chairs Kim and Kidani and Committee Members for hearing SB426.

**I strongly support SB426.** Our keiki need early learning to support their development, and families across the state deserve to have increased access to early learning resources. This bill would establish an apprenticeship program and support both rising professionals and existing service providers. We know that one of the barriers that stops providers from participating in apprenticeship models is pay parity. The bill proposal is designed to prevent that issue by outlining that current providers are appropriately incentivized and supported so the program can be successful.

Mahalo for your support!

Elaine Yamashita  
105 Kamehameiki Rd.  
Kula, HI 96790-8451  
808-281-1216  
[elainey208@gmail.com](mailto:elainey208@gmail.com)

February 8, 2025

To: February 8, 2025

To: Senator Kim, Chair  
Senator Kidani, Vice-chair  
Members of the Higher Education Committee

Senator Kidani, Chair  
Senator Kim, Vice-chair  
Members of the Education Committee

From: Elaine Yamashita

Re: SB4 426 support

Aloha, Honorable Chair Kim, Vice-chair Kidani, Honorable Chair Kidani, Vice-chair Kim, and the members of the Higher Education and Education committees:

I've been an advocate for early childhood care and education since the 1980s. I am professor emerita of University of Hawai'i Maui College, where I was the program coordinator from 2000-2019. I am also the current chair of the Early Learning Board, however this testimony is my personal testimony.

I strongly support SB 426, the early childhood apprenticeship program. This would support and expand our critical early educators. Recruitment and retention of early educators, who are the heart and soul of programs, is crucial for high quality early learning programs.

Many in the early childhood community have been working together to bring apprenticeships to Hawai'i. The resources provided in this bill would allow community based providers the opportunity to host an apprentice and the incentives required for the apprentice and for the program.

Mahalo for your consideration of this important bill.

Sincerely,  
Elaine Yamashita

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 7:17:58 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caitlin Kryss	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Chair Kidani, and Higher Education and Education committee members,

**I am testifying in strong support of SB 426, which would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai‘i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).**

To ensure families have access to high quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten, we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy, offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.

However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

This bill would give priority to licensed and/or regulated child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai‘i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access quality care from the time children need it most.

In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai‘i’s children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable child care.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Caitlin Kryss, Mountain View, Hawai'i Island

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 7:38:38 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alfred Castle	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

SB426 is innovative and ingenious. It will allow Hawaii to attract and support the high-quality and experienced educators we want for our fast-growing public preschool system. It will also build a workforce for the private pre-k sector, which is still a significant and critical component of Hawaii's early education choices.

The Castle Foundation, which worked with Representative Justin Woodson, Senator Michelle Kidani, EOEL, and the University of Hawaii to initiate and implement the Hawaii State Stipend Program, will also work with the State and the DOE to implement and fund an apprentice program. I have notified Representative Woodson by letter. Should this brilliant initiative be supported by the Senate, I look forward to working on this program to better serve our workforce, our Keiki, and our Families.

Alfred L. Castle

Director

Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 11:21:56 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Ebert	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo Chairs Kim and Kidani and Committee Members for hearing SB426.

**I strongly support SB426.**Our keiki need early learning to support their development, and families across the state deserve to have increased access to early learning resources. This bill would establish an apprenticeship program and support both rising professionals and existing service providers. We know that one of the barriers that stops providers from participating in apprenticeship models is pay parity. The bill proposal is designed to prevent that issue by outlining that current providers are appropriately incentivized and supported so the program can be successful.

Mahalo for your support!



**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 2:17:23 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support this measure. Mahalo!

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 2:41:04 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Doris Segal Matsunaga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My family and I in Waimea on Hawaii Island support SB 426 RELATING TO AN EARLY LEARNING APPRENTICESHIP GRANT PROGRAM. We need more and better quality childcare!

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 2:42:48 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beth Anderson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Chair Kidani, and committee members,

I strongly support SB 426 to ensure families have access to high quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten. SB 426, would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai'i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs) and help address the shortage of highly qualified child care providers in our State. Infant and toddler care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawaii.

Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated early childhood education workforce.

Many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.

The bill would give priority to licensed and/or regulated child care providers serving infants and toddlers due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high quality, affordable infant and toddler care. This grant will help families access quality care from the time children need it most.

Hawaii's children, families and early education professionals would benefit immensely from SB 426. It would also support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay in the workforce by addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable childcare.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo,

Beth Anderson, RN

Pediatric Nurse

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/9/2025 4:14:21 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
christopher castillo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

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

My name is Kiana Kauwe, and I am testifying in **strong support of SB 426** to establish a grant program that helps early learning employers participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).

I have dedicated my career to education, serving as a Hawai'i Department of Education elementary school teacher for over eight years before earning my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Hawai'i. Today, I am at home raising my one-year-old daughter, which has deepened my understanding of the importance of high-quality early childhood education.

## **Early Educators Deserve Fair Compensation**

As a nine-year DOE teacher with two master's degrees, I would earn over \$80,000 per year under the state's salary schedule. However, a private preschool teacher in Hawai'i—who specializes in early learning and plays a foundational role in brain development—typically earns between \$30,000 and \$40,000 per year (Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan, 2020). This staggering pay disparity devalues the work of early educators and contributes to the severe shortage of qualified professionals in the field.

## **Early Learning is NOT Babysitting—It is Brain Building**

The science is clear: early childhood education is a specialized field that requires deep knowledge of child development, learning within context, and honoring a child's individuality. Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child states that 90% of a child's brain architecture is built in the first five years of life, and the quality of interactions with caregivers during this period has lifelong effects on learning, health, and future success (Harvard, 2023). Early educators are not babysitters—they are specialists shaping the foundation of a child's future.

## **High-Quality Early Learning Must Be Subsidized**

Despite its importance, early childhood education remains one of the most underfunded sectors in Hawai'i. Families cannot afford to pay what high-quality care actually costs, yet early educators cannot afford to stay in the profession without fair wages. Many countries heavily subsidize early childhood education, and states across the U.S. subsidize and support early educators, recognizing it as a public good essential for both economic growth and child development.

## **ELRAPs Are a Critical Investment in Hawai'i's Future**

The Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Program (ELRAP) offers a research-backed solution:

- Recruiting and retaining highly qualified early educators through structured, on-the-job training and degree pathways
- Providing wage increases as educators advance in their professional learning
- Ensuring a well-supported, specialized workforce that improves the quality of care for Hawai'i's youngest children

However, many early learning providers cannot afford to participate in ELRAPs due to the cost of paying apprentices fair wages while maintaining pay parity for existing staff. SB 426 removes this financial barrier by funding wage increases, mentorship stipends, and training costs. This grant program is an investment in Hawai'i's children, families, and economy—ensuring that every child has access to well-trained, well-compensated educators who are equipped to support their lifelong success.

I urge you to **support SB 426** and help build the early learning workforce that Hawai'i's keiki deserve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

*Kiana Kauwe*

Former DOE Teacher (9 years) | M.Ed. Early Childhood, UH Mānoa | Parent & Advocate

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 8:18:56 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kee Lo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

Aloha Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle N. Kidani and Committee Members,

I strongly support SB426. Our keiki need early learning to support their development, and families across the state deserve to have increased access to early learning resources. This bill would establish an apprenticeship program and support both rising professionals and existing service providers. We know that one of the barriers that stops providers from participating in apprenticeship models is pay parity. The bill proposal is designed to prevent that issue by outlining that current providers are appropriately incentivized and supported so the program can be successful.

Mahalo for your support!

Kee Lo



**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 3:34:48 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support SB426.

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 10:11:35 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pamela Strode	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair**

**Senator Michelle Kidani, Chair**

**Senate Committee on Higher Education and Senate Committee on Education**

**From: Pamela Strode, Strode Montessori**

**Subject: Measure S.B. No. 426 – Relating to an Early Learning Apprenticeship Grant Program**

**Position: Strong Support**

**Aloha Chair Mercado Kim , Chair Kidani, and committee members,**

**I am testifying in strong support of SB 426, which would incentivize early learning employers in Hawai‘i to participate in Early Learning Registered Apprenticeship Programs (ELRAPs).**

**To ensure families have access to high quality early childhood care and education from birth to kindergarten, we must fairly compensate our early care and education workforce and provide them with opportunities for professional advancement. Early learning registered apprenticeship programs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy,**

**offering apprentices higher compensation and valuable on-the-job learning experiences as they work towards earning a higher education degree. ELRAPs have also been successful at increasing the quality of early learning programs as they develop a well-prepared, well-supported, and well-compensated ECE workforce.**

**However, many early learning providers are unable to participate in ELRAPs because they cannot afford to pay the higher wages of apprentices and ensure wage parity for existing staff. The ELRAP grant would remove this financial barrier by providing funding for eligible providers to participate in state- or federally-approved ELRAPs. The grant would also allow providers to pay their existing staff higher wages, ensuring that wages are comparable to federal wage requirements or prevailing industry standards.**

**This bill would give priority to licensed and/or regulated child care providers serving infants and toddlers (I/T) due to the greater challenges families face in accessing high-quality, affordable I/T care. I/T care and education has the highest unmet need among all early learning services in Hawai‘i. Starting with our I/T child care providers will help families access quality care from the time children need it most.**

**In short, ELRAPs are a proven recruitment and retention strategy for the early care and education workforce. This grant would enable more providers to participate, benefiting Hawai‘i’s children, families, and early education professionals. Additionally, it would support businesses by helping employees with young children—particularly mothers—stay in the workforce, addressing the common challenge of inaccessible and unaffordable child care.**

**Please support this measure.**

**Mahalo,**

**Pamela Strobe**

**Strobe Montessori (infant/toddler/preschool)**

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 12:22:48 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristy Arias	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo Chairs Kim and Kidani and Committee Members for hearing SB426.

I strongly support SB426. Our keiki need early learning to support their development, and families across the state deserve to have increased access to early learning resources. This bill would establish an apprenticeship program and support both rising professionals and existing service providers. We know that one of the barriers that stops providers from participating in apprenticeship models is pay parity. The bill proposal is designed to prevent that issue by outlining that current providers are appropriately incentivized and supported so the program can be successful.

Mahalo for your support!

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 1:59:49 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Mahalo Chairs Kim and Kidani and Committee Members for hearing SB426.

**I strongly support SB426.** Our keiki need early learning to support their development, and families across the state deserve to have increased access to early learning resources. This bill would establish an apprenticeship program and support both rising professionals and existing service providers. We know that one of the barriers that stops providers from participating in apprenticeship models is pay parity. The bill proposal is designed to prevent that issue by outlining that current providers are appropriately incentivized and supported so the program can be successful.

Mahalo for your support!

**LATE**

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/10/2025 3:00:46 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Iwalani Hall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo Chairs Kim and Kidani and Committee Members for hearing SB426.

**I strongly support SB426.** Our keiki need early learning to support their development, and families across the state deserve to have increased access to early learning resources. This bill would establish an apprenticeship program and support both rising professionals and existing service providers. We know that one of the barriers that stops providers from participating in apprenticeship models is pay parity. The bill proposal is designed to prevent that issue by outlining that current providers are appropriately incentivized and supported so the program can be successful.

Mahalo for your support!

**LATE**

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 9:03:03 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mandie Gibson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support!

**LATE**

**SB-426**

Submitted on: 2/11/2025 11:22:57 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexandria Sisson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Kim and the HRE Committee, Chair Hedani and the EDU Committee, and mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 246.

Our state’s families are struggling to find affordable and high quality child care to support their young children’s development across all islands. HB549 addresses one of the most pressing challenges faced by Hawai‘i’s early childhood care and education sector: the recruitment and retention of a well-trained workforce. This bill incentivizes providers to join apprenticeship models, invest in their staff and communities, and retain qualified and committed staff within their programs– all of which directly contribute to the stabilization and affordability of Hawai‘i’s ECCE sector, and benefit:

1. Early Learning Providers: By providing financial support to providers who otherwise would not be able to participate, this program offsets operational costs and allows providers to increase staff wages and retention, allowing for more funds to be invested in program quality and preventing program closures in our already-limited market. Currently, there is only 1 licensed ECCE seat available for every four young children in Hawai‘i, with demand only growing.
1. ECE Workers: This program provides an “earn while you learn” workforce pathway that allows apprentices to retain full-time employment. This increases accessibility of ECCE credentials and workforce entry, as well as provides wage parity for existing staff, in turn reducing inequities and chronic turnover in the field and negatively impacting the number of child care slots available.
1. Children and Families: By investing on well-trained and well-compensated staff, this program allows for providers to develop high-quality programming and keeps more programs open with lower tuition, allowing for families to access the high-quality care their children deserve. This bill prioritizes the infant and toddler care market, which suffers the smallest capacity– 11%– of licensed child care slots per child across the



islands. As of 2022, only 12% of Hawai'i's 1- to 2-year olds are served and 3% of infants.

1. Employers: Child care shortages directly and negatively impact workforce participation. This program supports parents in staying in or returning to the workforce by increasing options for accessible child care.

This bill provides a vital step towards strengthening Hawai'i's ECCE landscape and the overall wellbeing of our families. Through this legislation, we provide support to directly impact our early learning providers, invest in our vital ECCE workforce, and lay the foundation for a greater system of sustainable care for our families and children. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 246.