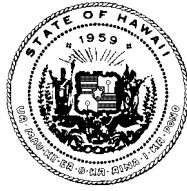


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



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 LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

January 27, 2025

To: The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 53 – RELATING TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.**

Hearing: Wednesday, January 29, 2025, Time 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this bill, provides comments, and requests clarification. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace priorities identified in the executive budget.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the bill is to increase the monthly income eligibility limit for a supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) applicant or recipient households earning equal to two hundred percent and no more than three hundred percent of the federal poverty level and who meet all other criteria for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to be eligible for SNAP benefits.

Section 2 proposes new income criteria and provides funding to subsidize individuals and families meeting this criterion to continue SNAP benefits. The Department requests clarification as to the calculation that was used in determining the funding amount of \$50,000,000 in general funds to provide additional SNAP food benefits as it may not be sufficient to support the indeterminate number of households that earn between 200 to 300 percent over the federal poverty limit.

The Department also requests clarification on funding options available should the recommended general funding be insufficient to meet the demand over time based on the expanded eligibility.

If the measure progresses, DHS will need time to research the potential number of SNAP households that may be disqualified from SNAP food benefits due to an increase in income (either earned or unearned) that meets the extended income parameters of this bill. The households that may be eligible for an increase in their social security benefits and then become over income for SNAP would also be added to the number of households that would be eligible to continue to receive SNAP food assistance under this proposal. Additionally, the proposed change in income criteria would increase the number of applications received and overload the current processing capacity to process benefit eligibility determinations.

The increase in the number of households that would become eligible under the increased income criteria would likely result in households remaining on SNAP for a more extended period, which would require continued and sustained funding to maintain benefit assistance.

If the measure continues, DHS will need to amend rules and administrative processes to determine eligibility for these households in addition to implementing system modifications to the SNAP eligibility system. In addition to funding for the benefits, DHS will need funds to modify the SNAP eligibility system. The Department is presently developing a new eligibility system and these proposed changes would require additional funding for system modifications. The new eligibility system is scheduled for statewide rollout and implementation in the fall of 2026. System modifications could only begin after the final implementation of the new eligibility system but no earlier than the adoption of final rules.

With the expansion of eligibility criteria, the current workload would increase significantly and would require an increase in staffing statewide and programmatically. The Department has a workforce vacancy rate of approximately 25 percent for eligibility workers and 50 percent for clerical staff in our processing centers for SNAP and cash assistance applications. High vacancies and challenges to both recruitment and a sustained workforce can be attributed to retirements, a lack of interested applicants, and opportunities for higher-wage jobs, which, combined, make the vacancies very difficult to fill.

DHS will update the resources needed to implement this measure as the session progresses.

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



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM
‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony
Hō‘ike Mana‘o I Mua O Ka ‘Aha‘ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Wednesday, January 29, 2025, 1:00 PM
By
Della Teraoka
Interim Vice President for Community Colleges
University of Hawai‘i System

SB53 - RELATING TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai‘i supports the intent of SB 53, which expands eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to include any individual or household whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent (300%) of the federal poverty level.

Raising the eligibility threshold would not only offer stability but also prevent families from losing vital support during temporary fluctuations in their income. Families facing financial hardships often resort to working additional hours or overtime to manage unexpected emergencies, such as hospitalizations or other unforeseen expenses. Unfortunately, if this temporary increase in income aligns with a SNAP renewal certification, these needy families risk being denied benefits due to pay stubs that do not accurately reflect their typical income. Expanding SNAP eligibility is an essential step toward helping families stabilize their finances and ensuring no one is forced to choose between meeting basic needs and weathering a financial crisis.

The University of Hawai‘i Community Colleges has administered the Hawai‘i Nutrition and Employment Training (HINET) program in partnership with the Hawai‘i Department of Human Services. HINET is a federally funded program that is designed to help remove barriers and provide students with access to education and skills training opportunities so they can earn a living wage and achieve financial independence. A student must be currently receiving or be eligible to receive SNAP benefits to qualify for HINET.

By expanding the program eligibility for SNAP, programs like HINET become more accessible, enabling individuals to pursue higher education and gain the skills necessary for sustainable careers. Access to degrees through these pathways helps individuals transition off of SNAP in the long term. Additionally, increasing SNAP access provides financial stability for college students, allowing them to focus on

completing their education without the constant worry of meeting their basic need to eat. By ensuring their nutritional needs are met, we empower students to prioritize their academic and professional goals, which benefits both them and our community as a whole.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB53, as long as its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB53.



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Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

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Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kaua'i

The Hawaii Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFUU supports SB53.**

Expanding eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to encompass individuals and households with monthly incomes up to 300% of the federal poverty level is a crucial step forward for the well-being of our communities. This measure not only addresses the immediate nutritional needs of more of our residents but also strengthens the local agricultural economy. Ensuring that more families can access fresh, nutritious food directly supports Hawaii's farmers and ranchers who strive to provide high-quality produce and livestock products. By broadening SNAP eligibility, we are creating a greater market for locally grown foods, which in turn supports local farms, preserves open spaces, and reduces our dependency on imported goods.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Kaipo Kekona, President HFUU/HFUF



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The State Legislature
Senate Committee on Health And Human Services
Wednesday, January 29, 2025
Conference Room 225, 1:00 PM

TO: The Honorable Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
FROM: Keali'i Lopez, State Director, AARP Hawai'i
RE: Support for S.B. 53 Relating to Expanding SNAP Eligibility

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura and Members of the Committee:

My name is Keali'i Lopez, and I am the State Director for AARP Hawai'i. AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization that advocates for individuals age 50 and older. We have a membership of nearly 38 million nationwide and nearly 135,000 in Hawaii. We advocate at the state and federal level for the issues that matter most to older adults and their families. **AARP supports S.B. 35 which expands eligibility for the supplemental nutrition assistance program to include any individuals and households whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.**

Older workers and retirees living on a fixed income already know all too well that inflation and rising food prices are stretching household budgets in ways that make it harder to put food on the table. Some of them may face life challenges as they age—such as experiencing a medical crisis, job loss, or death of a spouse or other loved one—that may result in financial instability and make it difficult to afford food. For example, newly widowed older adults experience higher poverty rates, greater housing cost burdens, and challenges to getting the help they need.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are a crucial ingredient in the food budgets for many Hawaii residents especially kūpuna. Food assistance for low-income older adults is essential; food insecurity has significant negative impacts on older adults, particularly on their health. Older adults who are food insecure are more likely than their food-secure counterparts to have limitations on activities of daily living, have conditions like diabetes and depression, and experience heart attacks. Research shows that SNAP enrollment among older adults is associated with fewer hospital and emergency room visits and long-term care admissions. Enrolling in SNAP can also lead to increased well-being, especially among older adults. As inflation continues driving up the costs of groceries and other necessities, programs like SNAP that help eligible older adults are especially important. SNAP benefits increase food security and reduce monthly food costs. Expanding the eligibility for more people to qualify for SNAP benefits can help ensure low-income kūpuna have the resources they need. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify in strong support of S.B. 35.



HIPHI Board

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Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: January 28, 2025

To: Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry J. C. Aquino, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services

RE: Support for SB 53, Relating To The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Hrg: Wednesday, January 29, 2025, at 1:00 PM, Conference Room 225

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating, Active Living² (HEAL) coalition is in **support of SB 53**, which expands eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to include any individual or household whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred percent of the federal poverty level.

1 in 3 households in Hawai'i face food insecurity.³ Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are a lifeline to many of these residents. Local families in need receive over \$600 million annually in SNAP benefits.⁴

SNAP benefits are only available to households earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, even though a family needs 300% just to make ends meet.

Helping ALICE Families

Expanding the SNAP income threshold to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) will help the more than 150,000 people who earn too much to qualify for SNAP, but too little to afford their basic needs.⁵ These families need assistance to make ends meet but are not getting it.

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 The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.

³ The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i - Hawai'i Food Bank.
https://hawaiiifoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/HawaiiFoodbank_TheStateOfFoodInsecurityInHawaii_2023.pdf

⁴ Hawai'i Department of Human Services.
<https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SFY-2024-SUMMARY-apr.pdf>

⁵ <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2022.B17002?q=poverty%20ratio&g=040XX00US>
15



In Hawai'i, a family of four needs to earn more than \$104,000 to survive financially. In order for that family of four to qualify for benefits, their income cannot exceed 200% of the FPL, which is about \$71,000.⁶ Providing SNAP benefits to these “gap” households—with incomes between \$71,000 and \$106,000 for a family of four—will help them survive. They will have enough money to afford healthy and nutritious groceries.

Worse off Earning More

SNAP-eligible families who earn just below 200% of the FPL are faced with a no-win decision. They need to earn more to be comfortable, but the system currently discourages them from increasing their income. The moment they earn more than \$71,000 they lose all of their SNAP benefits. This loss equates to more than \$10,000 annually.

After-tax spending power for an average family of four earning \$65,000 and receiving SNAP benefits is roughly \$64,000. Compare that to a family of four making \$72,000 who is ineligible for SNAP benefits and has after-tax spending power of only \$58,000.

A SNAP participant earning \$14 per hour needs to receive more than a 50% raise (\$21 per hour) to not lose out on a substantial amount of liveable income. A raise of any less than that would cost them more money because they would lose their SNAP benefits. This sudden loss of benefits is referred to as the “SNAP Cliff.”

Building a Pathway out of Poverty

Once SNAP benefits are expanded to serve those who earn 300% of the FPL, working families can take advantage of opportunities for raises and to work extra hours. Hawai'i can begin building a pathway for residents that leads out of poverty rather than keeping them trapped in situations that have no realistic, financially feasible way to move out of low income.

Increased Health and Prosperity

By expanding SNAP eligibility, we can increase the health and well-being of our population. Food insecurity affects more than one in six local residents and results in higher risks of heart disease, stress, depression, and other chronic diseases. Our population will be better off if they know where their next meal is coming from. SB 53 can help make this a reality.

We look forward to working with the legislature and the Department of Human Services to ensure they have the necessary information and support they need to successfully implement this proposed program.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nate Hix'.

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

⁶ <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/bessd/snap/>



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for S.B. 53 – Relating to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services
Wednesday, January 29, 2025, at 1:00PM

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **S.B. 53**, which would appropriate funds and expand eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to include any individual or household whose monthly income is equal to or less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL).

With recent statistics that 1 in 3 households in Hawai‘i are food insecure,¹ it is clear that SNAP is failing to reach many struggling households. One major barrier is that federal income eligibility thresholds are too strict and do not adequately reflect Hawai‘i’s cost of living.² According to Aloha United Way, a household survival budget for a family of four is over \$107,000.³ The current SNAP eligibility cut off of 200% FPL (\$71,760 for a family of 4) leaves households making just \$1 above the income limit without benefits or meaningful support to access food in the face of rising costs and stagnant wages.⁴

These unfortunate yet widespread economic circumstances mean that public benefit programs like SNAP are required to support these families. In light of the rigid federally set requirements, elected officials in places like Washington, D.C. and Oregon are also considering creating state-funded programs to supplement the federal SNAP program to better serve and reach their ineligible, food insecure populations. Lifting eligibility to 300 percent of the FPL aligns with these forward-thinking initiatives and would ensure every family in Hawai‘i’s ALICE gap receives some level of assistance.

Thank you for considering these comments in your deliberation of S.B. 53. Expanding access to one of our most important safety nets reflects a commitment to addressing the unique economic challenges faced by our residents, and would be an enormous boost to Hawai‘i’s local economy.

¹ Hawai‘i Foodbank, “The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai‘i,” 2023, p. 6.

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

² Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice. Hawai‘i SNAP: Challenges and Opportunities for Improving Food Security for Hawai‘i Residents, January 2023.

³ Aloha United Way, “ALICE in Hawai‘i: 2024 Facts and Figures,” January 2025.

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

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Poverty Guidelines: A chart with percentages of the guidelines,” Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2025.

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/8aa67da24fa1e8cebfe5c144d9fe2532/detailed-guidelines-2024.xlsx>



SB961 SNAP Adjust Min Period and Elderly Program

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

Senator Henry Aquino, Vice Chair

Wednesday, Jan 30, 2025: 1:00: Room 225 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports SB961:

ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Alan Johnson. I am the current chair of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition (HSAC), a statewide organization for substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorder treatment and prevention agencies and recovery-oriented services.

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) **plays a crucial role in supporting individuals during their recovery process** when dealing with mental health conditions and substance use disorders:

1. **Support During Recovery:** Individuals undergoing treatment for substance use disorders or mental health issues often need additional resources to stabilize their lives. SNAP provides essential support to ensure they can focus on recovery without worrying about food access.
2. **Improved Treatment Outcomes:** Studies show that food insecurity is linked to worse outcomes for people with mental health conditions. SNAP may help improve adherence to treatment plans, better medication efficacy, and greater engagement in therapy.
3. **Indirect Community Support:** SNAP also supports caregivers and families of individuals with behavioral health illnesses. When families can access healthy meals, it creates a more stable and supportive environment for everyone.
4. **Reduced Financial Stress:** Many people with behavioral health illnesses face financial instability due to employment challenges or medical costs. SNAP helps reduce food insecurity, alleviating one major source of stress, which can exacerbate mental health symptoms.

By improving nutrition, reducing food insecurity and providing critical support, SNAP benefits act as a foundation for better health and recovery for those managing behavioral health challenges.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and are available for questions.

Wednesday, January 29, 2025, at 1:00 PM
Via Video Conference; Conference Room 225

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

To: Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry Aquino, Vice Chair

From: Michael Robinson
Vice President, Government Relations & Community Affairs

Re: **Testimony in Support of SB 53
Relating To The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**

My name is Michael Robinson, and I am the Vice President of Government Relations & Community Affairs at Hawai'i Pacific Health. Hawai'i Pacific Health is a not-for-profit health care system comprised of its four medical centers – Kapi'olani, Pali Momi, Straub and Wilcox and over 70 locations statewide with a mission of creating a healthier Hawai'i.

HPH writes in SUPPORT of SB 53 which expands the eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to include any individual or household whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

HPH has long recognized the relationship between healthy outcomes and food security. The link between a healthy diet and healthy living is well established where lower food insecurity is linked to lower risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers. Healthy eating can help people with chronic diseases manage these conditions and avoid complications. The crisis in food security among the most vulnerable population has been reported and has come to light more recently in the Aloha United Way's 2024 ALICE Report. The Report indicated that 28% of households statewide face food insecurity; nearly half (46%) of households below the ALICE Threshold do not have consistent access to food.

HPH recognizes the strong connection between access to healthy foods with health and wellness. HPH screens our in-patients across our facilities for indications of food insecurity and is acutely aware of the challenge it is for our patients. HPH has supported the Double Bux food program to both foster strengthening local food systems and better enable SNAP recipients to access locally sourced agricultural offerings.

The SNAP program has been successful in encouraging its recipients to make healthy food choices. Expanding the eligibility for SNAP to individuals or households whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent federal poverty level, as

established by the United States Department of Agriculture will greatly benefit low income households to obtain the foods they need.

We support SB 53.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-53

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 10:22:43 AM

Testimony for HHS on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Younghee Overly	Testifying for AAUW of Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The members of AAUW of Hawaii support SB53 which would expand the eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to 300% of the federal poverty level. This would address the food insecurity 1 in 3 families in Hawaii face. Please pass this measure and mahalo for your consideration.



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info@hawaiiifood.com

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Toby Taniguchi, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*
Joe Carter, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, *Advisor*
Eddie Asato, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*
Gary Okimoto, Safeway, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: January 29, 2025

TIME: 1pm

RE: SB53 Relating to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

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 supports this measure. Food insecurity has reached alarming rates in our state in recent years. Current data suggests up to 30% of families in the State face food insecurity and that in some areas that number could be as high as 40%.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a vital resource to help families in need in Hawaii. It also benefits all Hawaii consumers by bringing much needed Federal funds into our food systems and acting as a stabilizing force in the food industry at large.

Ensuring that everyone who needs food assistance has access to SNAP should be a top priority for our state Government.

As this measure notes under current rules a family of four earning an income of \$69,000 per year is ineligible for SNAP benefits. However, due to the high cost of living in our state this family may not be able meet their basic food and housing needs on this income.

Furthermore, as the measure notes, the two hundred per cent poverty level eligibility cutoff for SNAP assistance creates an extreme benefits cliff in which an additional \$1 per

month earned by a household can result in thousands of dollars' worth of lost benefits each year.

Extending SNAP eligibility to individuals and households whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level is a straightforward and logical way to ensure that more of the people who need SNAP can get it. It also helps reduce the problems caused by the benefits cliff.

We urge the Committee to pass this measure and we thank you for the opportunity to testify.



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB53, RELATING TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
JANUARY 29, 2025

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS** SB53, RELATING TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. In accordance with Resolution 2024-25 of the 2024 Democratic Party of Hawai'i State Convention, the Party supports the expansion of the eligibility criteria for SNAP to include all households earning at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is crucial for low-income households, but its current eligibility criteria leave many struggling families without adequate support. With Hawaii's high cost of living, the current Federal Poverty Level cutoff is insufficient, leaving many families earning above this threshold still facing food insecurity. This "benefits cliff" creates a significant barrier to economic mobility, discouraging families from seeking higher-paying jobs due to the immediate loss of all SNAP benefits. Expanding eligibility to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level would provide a more gradual phase-out of benefits, assisting families in their transition to financial stability while ensuring their nutritional needs are met. This is particularly critical given the rising cost of living, increased demand at food banks, and the significant impact of food insecurity on health and well-being across various populations in Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in support of SB53, RELATING TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.



COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
Chair Senator San Buenaventura
Vice Chair Senator Aquino

BILL SB53
POSITION: SUPPORT

Hearing Date: Wednesday, 1/29/25 1pm, Room 225

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Committee Members:

Aloha United Way and the ALICE Initiative strongly support SB539, which expands eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to households whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred percent of the federal poverty level.

AUW 211 Information and Referral line continues to see growing need. **“Food”** as a category is the 2nd highest requested need from callers, after affordable housing. AUW 211 line is a key entity conducting SNAP prescreening for Hawaii. We track data on needs and connect residents to help with food, including SNAP. Yet for every caller we complete SNAP intake for, 3 others make too much money to currently be eligible—leaving a huge documented unmet need!

In the newly released **2024 State of ALICE in Hawaii report** shows how far-reaching food insecurity is in Hawaii. ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, and are our households who are employed but whose incomes are not sufficient to meet basic costs. **ALICE families are 40% of our State’s residents**, and the ALICE report found that 46% of ALICE families have experienced not having enough food and not having enough money to buy more in the past year. It further found that 1 in 5 families above the federal poverty line also said they did not have enough food and could not buy more.

Increasing SNAP eligibility to 300% of FPL will immediately help to address food insecurity for our ALICE households, and it has never been more important to take strong and clear action to support local families as we face the current national situation and potential cuts. The current limit of 200% FPL is clearly insufficient to meet the need and we urge your action on SB53.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your support for SB53 to strengthen SNAP and food security for Hawaii’s ALICE families.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Michelle Bartell in blue ink.

Michelle Bartell
President & CEO
Aloha United Way

Handwritten signature of Suzanne Skjold in blue ink.

Suzanne Skjold
Chief Operating Officer
Aloha United Way



To: The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
The Honorable Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice-Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

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

Hearing: Wednesday, January 29, 2025, 1:00 p.m., Conference Room 329

RE: **SB53 Relating to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of **SB53**. This measure expands eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to include any individual or household whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level and 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.

AlohaCare's commitment to whole person care includes addressing a variety of social determinants of health, including housing, economic stability, and nutrition among other factors. We understand that without access to affordable healthy food, the health and well-being of our members is negatively impacted. For example, researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that food insecurity is associated with obesity among US adults in Hawai'i and 11 other states.¹

From keiki to kupuna, increasing access to nutritious meals will improve overall health and decrease adverse health outcomes. Families with access to SNAP are more likely to see their doctors for routine health checkups, preventing chronic health conditions and increasing the ability to manage disease.² For our pregnant mothers and babies, maternal and early childhood access to SNAP is correlated to

¹ [J Acad Nutr Diet. 2012 Sep; 112\(9\): 1403-1409.](#)

² [SNAP Is Linked With Improved Health Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)



ALOHACARE

improved birth outcomes and long-term health outcomes as adults. For elderly populations, access to healthy food may be the difference in whether they can continue living in their communities independently, decreasing the need for medical interventions and emergency department visits.³ Investing in SNAP is a long-term solution that will support our ‘ohana and most vulnerable populations’ health and quality of life.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support** of **SB53**.

³ [Hawai'i Medicaid State Plan and Demonstration](#)



Date: January 29, 2025

To: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry Aquino, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Senate Bill 53, Relating to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

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 Senate Bill 53, which would expand access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to individuals and households whose monthly income is equal to or less than 300% of the federal poverty level.

As noted in SB53's preamble, SNAP is the most effective anti-hunger initiative in the country. Here in Hawaii, the program supports more than 130,000 residents and brings more than \$630M into the local economy each year.

Meanwhile, a significant portion of Hawai'i residents continue to struggle with food insecurity—a fact highlighted by the 2023 ALICE report which found a nearly \$30,000 gap between the SNAP eligibility cutoff and the amount of income a household requires to meet its basic housing and food needs.

Expanding SNAP eligibility will have significant positive impacts on countless families across our state while also injecting millions of dollars into the local economy.

For these reasons, ECAS strongly supports SB53.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Wednesday, January 29, 2025; 1:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 225
Via Videoconference**

RE: SENATE BILL NO. 0053, RELATING TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill No. 0053, RELATING TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines to over 150,000 patients each year who live in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

This measure, as received by your Committee, would provide supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits for individuals and households whose monthly income is equal to or less than 300% of the federal poverty level.

SNAP, formally known as the "Food Stamps Program", is the largest federal food assistance program that is currently in operation. It provides food-purchasing assistance for low- and no-income people. SNAP provided assistance to approximately 40 million persons in 2018, at an expenditure of \$57.1 billion. Approximately 9.2% of American households received SNAP benefits at some point during 2017, with approximately 16.7 of all children living in households receiving SNAP benefits.

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 0053
Wednesday, January 29, 2025; 1:00 p.m.
Page 2

Founded during the height of the Great Depression, SNAP is the cornerstone of our national social safety net. It is intended to prevent mass starvation precipitated from unemployment and homelessness. The program was also seen as a way of helping the poor while boosting the economy and ensuring that America's farmers would obtain a fair price for their labors by allowing government to purchase and distribute excess goods in time of crisis.

The COVID-19 Pandemic demonstrated how food scarcity and poverty threatened the health and welfare of our citizens in times of dire crisis. With so many people unemployed, entire families struggled to put food on the table on a consistent basis. Lines at the food bank and food drives stretched for miles and people waited for hours to receive surplus food.

While COVID-19 no longer poses the threat it did in years past, Hawaii's citizens still struggle because of stagnant wages and the rising cost of housing, food and other essentials. The lines for surplus food are still long as citizens continue to be challenged in putting food on their tables.

The HPCA has strongly endorsed this Program in previous years and we continue to urge your support. Additional SNAP benefits for a recipient can mean the difference between having to decide whether someone's last amount of cash will go for food or rent or medications or other necessities.

For these reasons, the HPCA respectfully urges your favorable consideration of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or eabe@hawaiiipca.net.



Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA) Strongly Supports: SB53

January 29th, 2025 at 1:00pm; Conference Room 225

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and members of the committee,

HAPA is testifying in support of SB53 which expands eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to include any individual or household whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. Appropriates funds.

No family should struggle to afford groceries, yet one in three families in Hawai'i are food insecure. Federal SNAP benefits abruptly end once a family's income reaches 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), although a family needs to make 300% of the FPL just to make ends meet. Expanding benefits to 300% of the FPL will allow families to have a gradual decline in benefits as their income rises, allowing families to earn their way out of poverty rather than being stuck in a no-win situation where they lose thousands in benefits just by earning \$1 over the income limit. Please pass this bill to help our families in need.

Please support SB5.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Frederick', written in a cursive style.

Anne Frederick,
Executive Director



January 29, 2025

RE: Support for SB 53, Relating to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the committee,

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for SB 53 Relating to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This bill expands eligibility for SNAP to include any individual or household whose monthly income is equal to or less than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level and appropriates funds.

For over 40 years, Hawai'i Foodbank has provided daily and emergency assistance to those facing food insecurity in Hawai'i. As the state's leading hunger-relief organization, Hawai'i Foodbank distributes food to families and individuals on O'ahu and in Kaua'i County through direct service programs and through our network of 266 agency partners and pantries. Last year, we served an average of over 150,000 people each month, distributing a total of 21 million pounds of nutritious food, including 5.9 million pounds of fresh produce. Hawai'i Foodbank is also contracted as a SNAP outreach provider through the State.

Food security is a critical issue in Hawai'i. With one in three families in Hawai'i food insecure, expanding SNAP benefits will help ensure more families have access to safe and healthy food. Further, the Department of Human Services SNAP department is critically understaffed and we support measures that will help address the shortage. SNAP is one of our most important anti-hunger programs, offering choice and healthy options for families who need extra support putting food on the table.

Mahalo for your consideration,

With aloha,

Amy Miller
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank

SB-53

Submitted on: 1/25/2025 10:37:31 AM

Testimony for HHS on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jean Butel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a resident of Hawaii, I urge policymakers to increase SNAP benefits to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level to address the unique challenges of living in our state. Hawaii faces some of the highest costs of living in the nation, with skyrocketing housing expenses and food prices that far exceed mainland averages due to our reliance on imports. Many families, seniors, and individuals who work full-time jobs still struggle to afford basic necessities, including healthy, nutritious meals. Expanding SNAP benefits will not only provide critical relief to those in need but also bolster local economies by supporting grocery stores, farmers' markets, and local food producers. By increasing SNAP eligibility, we can ensure that no one in our community has to choose between putting food on the table and paying for other essential expenses, helping Hawaii move closer to food security and economic equity for all.

SB-53

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 2:00:20 PM

Testimony for HHS on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patti Hatzistavrakis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura and Health and Human Services Committee,

I fully support **SB53 which would expand SNAP benefits to households earning up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level**. With one in three people in Hawaii facing Food Insecurity, and the price of food continuing to increase, expanding the limit to include additional households will enable more families to become food secure. Food is a commodity that we all need to buy on a regular basis and one that directly influences health and wellness. Everyone should have the ability to purchase food for themselves and for their families so that they can thrive.

Thank you for your consideration of SB53, which would expand SNAP benefits to households earning up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.

SB-53

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 4:34:01 PM

Testimony for HHS on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I am in support of this bill. The cost of living in Hawaii has risen far faster and higher than wages. I frequently have encountered families who are making decisions between food and diapers, between higher-priced fresh foods and unhealthy cheap alternatives, between spending time with their loved ones and picking up another overtime shift so that rent, utilities, groceries can all be paid on time. Our society, our children, and our future will be better if we can include more households in the SNAP program to lower the stress over impossible decisions and improve nutritional outcomes.

SB-53

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 10:43:28 PM

Testimony for HHS on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha, please support expanding SNAP benefits. Everyday we hear more stories of families struggling to buy food even though they work multiple jobs. These income limits just make life harder - We have to make a certain income to pay for our outrageous housing costs but then we make too much for food assistance. These federal limits don't apply to Hawaii cost of living.

No family should struggle to afford groceries, yet one in three families in Hawai'i are food insecure. Federal SNAP benefits abruptly end once a family's income reaches 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), although a family needs to make 300% of the FPL just to make ends meet. Expanding benefits to 300% of the FPL will allow families to have a gradual decline in benefits as their income rises, allowing families to earn their way out of poverty rather than being stuck in a no-win situation where they lose thousands in benefits just by earning \$1 over the income limit. Please pass this bill to help our families in need.

Chair Joy San Buenaventura
Vice Chair Henry Aquino

Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

Wednesday, January 29, 2025
1:00 PM

**TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 53 RELATING
TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, Members of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services,

My name is Jun Shin and I am testifying as an individual in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB53**, Relating to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Hawai'i's working people are struggling with the high cost of living, which also makes it very difficult to even afford to eat on a regular basis. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP is an important program that addresses this difficulty by helping individuals and their families pay for groceries. Expanding eligibility will make it possible for more members of our community to get the assistance that they absolutely deserve, while relieving the burden placed on current recipients to meet income restrictions. Making it possible for more people to eat will lead to a more healthy and hopefu Hawai'i.

Please **PASS** Senate Bill 53 out of your committee.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Jun Shin,
Council District V
Cell: 808-255-6663
Email: junshinbusiness729@gmail.com

SB-53

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 10:56:54 PM

Testimony for HHS on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha, I strongly support SB53.

This is where I'm at. I don't qualify by being a little over the limit. But yet I'm struggling to survive. I have sent in several written testimonies already. Please support this Bill. Mahalo nui

SB53 - Expands SNAP benefits to households earning up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level

I am writing to express my strong support for SB53, which aims to expand SNAP benefits to households earning up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. This legislation is crucial for addressing food insecurity and providing much-needed support to families who are working hard to make ends meet.

After graduating from UH Hilo, I was excited to begin my professional journey in O'ahu. However, my reality quickly shifted when I faced unexpected financial challenges. Despite having a degree and a full-time job, my income was barely enough to cover the rising costs of living. When I struggled to afford basic necessities, I sought assistance through the SNAP program. For the first six months after graduation, I received financial support through SNAP. Unfortunately, when the six-month recertification period came, I was denied benefits because my income was just above the threshold. The loss of financial support left me in a precarious position, forcing me to make difficult choices. I had to consider giving up my dream job and moving back in with my parents on the Big Island or taking on an additional job to cover my rent and food expenses. Ultimately, I chose to take on a second job to ensure I could support myself.

While working long hours taught me resilience and hard work, the added stress of juggling multiple jobs took a toll on my physical and mental health. I often found myself exhausted, living in constant worry about making ends meet. Expanding SNAP benefits through SB53 would significantly help individuals and families in similar situations. By raising the eligibility threshold, we can provide critical assistance to those of us striving to build a better future while facing financial hardships. This legislation is not just about food assistance; it's about dignity, health, and providing people the opportunity to succeed without the constant burden of food insecurity.

I wholeheartedly urge lawmakers to support SB53. By doing so, we can ensure that no one has to choose between their job and their next meal. Together, we can build a stronger, healthier, and more equitable community for everyone. Thank you for considering the vital importance of this bill.

SB-53

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 11:33:38 AM

Testimony for HHS on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha,

I support SB53, which will ensure that our ‘ohana do not have to struggle to put food on their tables. When 1 in every 3 households are food insecure, this should be a priority! Feed the lāhui and expand SNAP benefits to help those **who are at and fall beneath the ALICE Threshold**. We should be encouraging ‘ohana to strive to make more money WHILST also providing them with the assistance to do so! If you lower a persons benefits when they earn more, potentially even taking away those benefits, how can you expect anyone to want to improve their circumstances.

Please pass this bill to help the ‘ohana that need the kako‘o and kōkua.

Na,

Leo Nahe Smith

SB-53

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 12:37:17 PM

Testimony for HHS on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

No family should struggle to afford groceries, yet one in three families in Hawai‘i are food insecure. Federal SNAP benefits abruptly end once a family’s income reaches 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), although a family needs to make 300% of the FPL just to make ends meet. Expanding benefits to 300% of the FPL will allow families to have a gradual decline in benefits as their income rises, allowing families to earn their way out of poverty rather than being stuck in a no-win situation where they lose thousands in benefits just by earning \$1 over the income limit. Please pass this bill to help our families in need.