



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

Date: 03/18/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 0819, SD2 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Establishes criteria for obtaining and renewing an international teacher license. Effective 7/1/2050. (SD2)

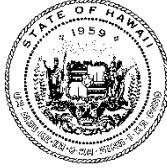
Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) strongly supports SB 819, SD 2 which creates an international visiting teacher license.

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

Hawaii requires all teachers to hold a valid license or permit prior to employment. Currently, J-1 Visa Program participants receive a permit, which restricts their stay in Hawaii to a maximum of three years. We hope the proposed international teacher license would enable qualified international educators to remain for up to five years permitted under the J-1 visa program, so that the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators who not only provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community, but also serve as inspirational role models who may motivate our keiki to pursue teaching careers themselves.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD

650 IWILEI ROAD, SUITE 268
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

PERSON TESTIFYING: Mitzie Higa, Licensing Specialist, on behalf of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board

DATE: March 18, 2025

TIME: 2:00 PM

LOCATION: Conference Room 309 and Video Conference

TITLE OF BILL: SB819 SD2, RELATING TO EDUCATION

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

POSITION: Opposes

Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) opposes SB819 SD2, relating education.

The mission and vision of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) is to ensure that all public-school students in Hawai'i are taught by qualified teachers. This is achieved through the development of rigorous professional teacher licensing standards. **HTSB holds all applicants to the same standards, regardless of whether their educational credentials come from a regionally accredited institution or a non-U.S. institution. HTSB also provides all applicants with access and opportunity to obtain licensure, if they meet the required standards.**

This bill states that Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires". This statement is not correct. J-1 teachers who possess the qualifications necessary for licensure have been issued licenses in their approved license field. The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) is statutorily responsible for setting the criteria for the requirements of each license. HTSB is a regulatory agency which is administrative attached to the Hawai'i Department of Education ("HIDOE"), but not under the HIDOE. HTSB became a separate entity by statute from HIDOE to ensure that there would be no conflict of interest or entanglement between employment and licensure HTSB receives their authority from Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) §302A-802 to determine licensing and certification standards which is expressed in detail in Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR).

HTSB knows this bill was well intentioned, but it is not the answer to the problem. What is more concerning is the fact that J-1 visa holders are being taken advantage of by loan sharks. These loan sharks are offering J-1 visa holders high interest loans to move to the U.S. and are offering super high-interest loans (around 50%- 60% annual interest!) to pay for their flights, moving expenses to move to the U.S. to work, relocation fees, licensing, etc. to become a teacher in the U.S.

At the National Conference for State Legislatures (NCSL) a few years back, there was a labor session and a resolution that specifically served to protect J-1 Visa holders. The legislators decided to add language to the NCSL resolution to protect J-1 teachers from 3rd party "coyote" companies offering J-1 Visa holders these

high-interest loans. The 3rd party “coyote” companies even charged J-1 Visa holders a licensing fee even when states, such as ours, do not have licensing fees. NCSL brought it to the attention of members that there have had major problems in many other states before we even heard about it in Hawai‘i, so they were letting us know. NCSL passed this resolution with those protections for J-1 teachers. We should follow suit as NCSL did in protecting J-1 visa holders from these loan sharks.

Here are links to documents that explain more that were shared at NCSL. AFL-CIO [Use and Abuse of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Teacher Program — Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO](#) Note: Make sure you check out the articles they cite as well at the bottom of this report. Here is also a report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) [Importing Educators: Causes and Consequences of International Teacher Recruitment](#) who is more aware of this problem as it hit them first. [Start on page 17 to see the fraud and the 'coyote' recruiting tactics that are being used.]

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

It has been brought to our attention that some principals have been covering the costs of the Praxis tests for some J-1 teachers, as well as other teachers who may need to take the Praxis tests. This is a commendable gesture, and it’s possible they are utilizing Title II funds to do so. The Praxis Core is \$150, PLT is \$156, and content exams range from \$130 to \$180, depending on the specific test taken, the cost for all three is typically less than \$500.

While J-1 visa holders are responsible for covering the Praxis test fees, it’s important to note the HTSB does not charge licensing or application fees beyond the tests cost. In contrast, other states, such as **Alaska (as mentioned in the preamble) charge a licensing fee of approximately \$200 and an additional application fee of \$50, as do Nevada, and North Carolina. Alaska also does require passing scores from a basic competency exam for teachers with preparation outside the U.S.** (See #8 [Alaska Teacher Certification FAQ](#)). These states also require applicants to complete additional coursework as part of their licensing requirements; Nevada requires a Family Engagement course and Alaska requires a Multicultural course.

In the most recent bargaining session, HSTA successfully negotiated an increase in pay for Emergency Hires as part of the 2024-2027 contract. Prior to this new agreement, salaries for individuals holding Emergency Hire Permits were set at \$45,593 per year. However, under the new contract, their salaries have been raised to \$50,325 for the 2023-2024 school year, \$51,835 for the 2024-25 school year, and \$53,649 for the 2026-27 school year.

Through these negotiations, HSTA has secured an addition \$6,242 for Emergency Hire teachers in the 2024-2025 school year, with further increases in the following year. Once applicants pass the Praxis tests, they can transition to a full teaching license and move onto the HDOE Licensed Teacher pay scale, that begins at \$53,390 per year in the 2024-25 school year, and rises to \$55, 250 per year in the 2026-27 school year.

The Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) requires teachers who have completed out-of-state educator preparation programs outside the U.S., including international teachers and those teachers with international licenses, to pass three Praxis tests to gain licensure. This process is designed to ensure that these teachers have a thorough understanding of the content they will teach, the grade levels they will

instruct, and the specific field and grade span of their degree. It is essential for our teachers to meet these standards to effectively address the needs of our students.

Additionally, it's important to note that special education laws in the U.S. differ from those in other countries, and acceptable forms of discipline also vary. For instance, we've been informed by J-1 teachers from the Philippines that corporal punishment is allowed in their home country, but it is explicitly prohibited in our state. This is just once example of the differences international teachers may face when transitioning to teaching in the U.S.

The idea of creating an International License for the J-1 Visa Holders was previously presented to the board's committee responsible for teacher licensure. However, committee members strongly opposed this proposal, stating that they want international teachers to complete the three required Praxis exams, just as the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) mandates for teachers who obtain a teaching degree from out-of-state institutions, even if they are already within U.S.

As the state's official teacher licensing agency, HTSB is deeply familiar with the trends and best practices in teacher licensure. We are committed to ensuring that only qualified teachers are allowed to teach in Hawai'i. HTSB is also vigilant about preventing fraud and the actions of bad actors in this field. This is a critical part of our responsibility to protect the integrity of our licensing process, our educators, and our state. That is why the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board is entrusted with the authority to establish and enforce licensing requirements, as set in our Hawaii Administrative Rules.

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

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

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

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

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 4:04:44 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| amy agbayani | Hawai'i Friends of civil rights | Support | In Person |

Comments:

estimony in support submitted by

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

We strongly support sb819 requiring the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teachers license for J-1 visa holders and establishes criteria for obtaining international teachers license. The bill will help Hawai'i address teacher shortages by providing competent teachers particularly in geographic and disciplines. In addition, J-1 visa holders with cultural and linguistic skills can work with students from these backgrounds. The Department of Education currently has over 200 J-1 visa teachers from the Philippines and my personal contact with some of the individual teachers and comments from my community contacts makes me confident that these teachers and the students are well-served.

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

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

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/14/2025 5:32:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|----------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Alexis Navarro | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

I am Alexis C. Navarro, a Science teacher at Lahaina Intermediate School, and I am writing in strong support of SB 819 SD2 , which seeks to establish an International Teacher Visiting License. As a teacher originally from the Philippines, I am deeply invested in the future of education in Hawaii, and I believe this bill will greatly benefit not only international teachers like myself but also the students and communities we serve here in Hawaii.

I would like to share my personal experience and perspective as a J1 teacher in Hawaii:

1. I have worked tirelessly to earn my degrees, including a master's and doctorate, in the Philippines. With many years of teaching experience, I've had the honor of leading a school as a school head. My educational background and professional journey have prepared me to contribute positively to the school communities I serve.
2. As a J1 teacher here in Hawaii, I am proud to share my knowledge and expertise with students, staff, and parents. The administration has expressed their appreciation for my talents, and I truly value being able to contribute to the educational environment. This kind of mutual respect and recognition motivates me to continue improving and supporting the success of all students.
3. I am dedicated to continually improving as an educator. I actively attend training sessions, conferences, and workshops to learn the most effective teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and other skills to better serve my students. This ongoing commitment to growth is a testament to my passion for teaching and my desire to be an effective educator here in Hawaii.
4. The proposed five-year stay under this bill would provide my family and me the stability we need to establish a strong foundation. The current three-year contract length is insufficient to cover the loans we took out in the Philippines before coming here. A five-year period would offer us the time needed to pay off these financial obligations and build a more secure future.
5. As international teachers, we already face the financial burden of paying for the Praxis exam, which is costly and time-consuming. Additionally, the preparation required for this exam takes away valuable time that could otherwise be spent planning lessons, creating educational innovations, and focusing on our students' needs. The proposed changes in this bill would reduce this burden and allow us to devote more energy to our teaching and professional development.
6. I firmly believe that the educational qualifications I hold, as well as my professional experience, are on par with the standards of teaching here in Hawaii. The reciprocity of our licenses from the Philippines, combined with the real-world experience we bring, ensures that we are equipped to contribute effectively to the local education system. We are fully capable of

meeting Hawaii's teaching standards, and this bill will help validate and streamline our contributions.

I strongly urge the committee to pass SB 819 SD2, as it will not only support international teachers but also improve the quality of education in Hawaii. It will foster a more stable, dedicated teaching force and ensure that educators can focus on what truly matters: the success and well-being of our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

ALEXIS C. NAVARRO
Science Teacher
Lahaina Intermediate School
Maui, Hawaii

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/14/2025 5:52:08 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Aljhon Tamondong | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Aljhon King Tamondong, a third grade teacher at Wailuku Elementary School. Today, I am writing to express my strong support for SB819 SD2 which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

As an educator, I have demonstrated unwavering dedication to my students' academic success and personal growth. Teaching in a diverse and multicultural environment has strengthened my passion for inclusive education, cultural exchange, and student-centered learning.

I am committed to nurturing a supportive classroom environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to achieve their full potential. By integrating innovative teaching strategies, technology, and culturally relevant materials, I ensure that learning is both engaging and meaningful.

Beyond the classroom, I actively participate in school events, mentorship programs, and cultural activities that foster cross-cultural understanding between my home country, the Philippines, and my Hawaiian community. I take pride in sharing my Filipino heritage while embracing the rich traditions of Hawaii, strengthening the bond between our cultures.

Despite challenges such as financial adjustments and being away from family, my dedication to my students keeps me motivated. I believe that education is a powerful tool for transforming lives, and I am grateful for the opportunity to make a lasting impact on my students and school community.

It is essential to recognize educators like myself to promote quality education and acknowledge the invaluable contributions of dedicated J1 teachers. I respectfully encourage you to support SB819 SD2 allowing us to persist in our crucial roles of teaching, mentoring, and inspiring learners throughout Hawaii. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Aljhon King M. Tamondong
3rd Grade Teacher
Wailuku Elementary School, Maui

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/14/2025 5:49:07 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Jerusana G. Divino | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Jerusana G. Divino, and I am a teacher within the Hawaii Department of Education. I feel incredibly blessed to be here, serving the students of Hawaii.

I came to Hawaii from the Philippines, where I earned my teacher's license and subsequently completed a Master's degree in Educational Management. I have dedicated many years to honing my skills and developing my expertise as an educator. Therefore, I was deeply disheartened to learn about the requirement to pass the Praxis exam to secure a five-year license here in Hawaii.

My concern is not about the cost of the exam. Rather, it is the feeling that my extensive education and proven competence, demonstrated through my Philippine credentials and experience, are somehow deemed insufficient. I believe that my skills and dedication are valuable assets to the students of Hawaii.

I wholeheartedly support SB819. This bill represents an opportunity to recognize the qualifications and experience of educators like myself, who bring diverse perspectives and valuable expertise to the classroom. Passing this bill would not only provide much-needed stability for my family but, more importantly, it would allow me to fully dedicate myself to the students of Hawaii.

I am passionate about helping these students learn, grow, and become competent individuals who will contribute positively to their future and our community. I believe that SB819 will enable me and other qualified educators to do just that.

Mahalo nui loa and more power!

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/14/2025 6:45:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Berly Ann G. Cular | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully,

BERLY ANN G. CULAR

Math 7 Teacher

Kalama Intermediate School

Maui, Hawaii

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/14/2025 11:04:20 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

My name is Ryan Taeza Macadangdang, and I am a dedicated 6th-grade teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB819 SD2, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. This legislation is essential in recognizing the contributions of experienced international educators and ensuring they can continue to serve Hawaii's students effectively.

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

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

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

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

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

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 439, removing unnecessary barriers and enabling highly qualified international teachers to contribute fully to Hawaii's education system.

Mahalo for your time and support.

Respectfully,

Ryan Taeza Macadangdang

6th Grade Teacher, Lokelani Intermediate School

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 8:18:20 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear Chairs Woodson and Garrett, Vice Chairs La Chica and Amato, and Members of the House Education and Higher Education Committees,

I support SB819, SD2, requiring the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders and establishing criteria for obtaining and renewing an international teacher license. The purpose of SB819, SD2 is to recognize the qualifications and experiences of international teachers, while ensuring equitable compensation, by requiring the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board to establish a provisional licensing pathway for visiting international teachers.

Hawai‘i is experiencing a tremendous shortage of qualified teachers. SB819, SD2 will help with the shortfall to support our education system and students.

Please pass SB819, SD2 out of your Committees. Mahalo.

Testimony in Support of SB819 SD2

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

I wholeheartedly endorse the establishment of an international visiting teacher license. I propose that SB819 SD2 be revised to align with SB 819, SD2 pertaining to education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has proven to be immensely beneficial for the children of Hawai'i. To date, 218 certified educators with degrees comparable to those trained in the U.S. are serving in 55 schools throughout Hawaii, mainly in challenging-to-fill positions and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators participating in the Department's J-1 Visa Program have eagerly stepped forward to deliver exceptional education to the students of Hawai'i while also acting as cultural ambassadors within their communities. For the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to hire an additional 116 international educators as part of its Strategic Plan aimed at fostering students who are "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

Nevertheless, the current licensing regulations in the State impede the full potential of aspiring teachers in the J-1 visa program. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have simplified and reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without requiring extra exams, Hawai'i categorizes J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification obligates prospective participants to undergo a series of additional comprehensive tests that can cost more than \$1,000. The time spent preparing for these exams detracts from their ability to analyze formative assessments, engage with families, and develop curriculum. Furthermore, J-1 teachers do not qualify for extra compensation available to educators in hard-to-fill roles, despite performing equivalent responsibilities.

The J-1 Visa Program offers valuable educational and cultural experiences to schools across Hawai'i. SB819 SD2 guarantees that qualified international teachers in Hawaii's schools can stay for up to five years, ensuring continuity in instruction and providing high-quality learning and cultural experiences for Hawaii's keiki. By instituting an international teacher license that does not require additional examinations, the State can fully utilize the skills, expertise, and experience of international educators, resulting in a more diversified workforce that reflects Hawai'i's global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony regarding SB819 SD2.

Respectfully,

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

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Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee

I am Ligaya R. de Vera, and I am an Inclusion Teacher of Math, Grade 7 and 8 at Lokelani Intermediate School. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB819 which seeks to create an international teacher license for qualified visa holder. My time as a J-1 teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School has been an incredibly rewarding experience. I've been consistently impressed by the dedication of the staff, the resilience of the students, and the supportive atmosphere within the school community. I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this positive learning environment. This exchange has broadened my understanding of education and has allowed me to develop more culturally responsive teaching practices. I have seen how exposure to different cultures and viewpoints can spark curiosity, promote empathy, and prepare students to thrive in an increasingly globalized society.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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

Aloha,

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

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

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

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

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

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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

Aloha Chair Woodson,

I strongly support establishing an international visiting teacher license and recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, D2 regarding education.

Hawai'i's keiki have greatly benefited from the Department's J-1 Visa Program. Currently, 218 certified educators with equivalent U.S. degrees teach in 55 Hawai'i schools, primarily in hard-to-staff and special education areas, from Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu. These international educators, employed through the J-1 Visa Program, provide high-quality education and serve as cultural ambassadors. For the 2025-26 school year, the Department will add 116 international educators, in line with its strategic plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, Hawai'i's licensing rules restrict the potential of J-1 visa teachers. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing for international educators, Hawai'i designates J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This requires them to take additional, costly exams (over \$1,000), which reduces their time for essential tasks like analyzing student assessments, meeting with families, and curriculum planning. Additionally, despite performing the same work, J-1 teachers are ineligible for extra compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions.

The J-1 Visa Program offers valuable educational and cultural opportunities. HB 439, HD 1 allows qualified international teachers to stay for up to five years, ensuring instructional continuity and enriching students' learning and cultural experiences. Creating an international teacher license *without* additional exams will allow Hawai'i to fully utilize the skills and experience of these educators and create a more diverse teaching workforce that reflects Hawai'i's global community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB819, D2.

Aloha Mae E. Tamulac

J1 Teacher/ Naalehu ES

January 31, 2025

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully yours,

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

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 9:02:44 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| June Kenneth | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

My name is June Kenneth G. Roska, and I am a mathematics teacher. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB439 that acknowledges the dedication and contributions of educators like myself.

As an educator, I have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to my students' academic and personal growth. I create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where every child feels valued and empowered to succeed. My ability to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students is commendable, ensuring that each learner receives the necessary support and encouragement to reach their full potential.

Beyond my responsibilities in the classroom, I actively engage in the school community, collaborating with colleagues, parents, and stakeholders to foster a culture of excellence. I consistently go above and beyond to develop innovative teaching strategies, integrate technology into instruction, and provide meaningful learning experiences tailored to my students' abilities. Despite the challenges that come with being a mathematics teacher, I remain dedicated and passionate about my profession. My resilience, adaptability, and genuine care for my students set me apart as an educator. The impact of my work extends beyond academics—I nurture confidence, instill values, and prepare my students for lifelong success.

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

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

June Kenneth G. Roska

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 9:05:15 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Shanika Mae Isagan | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Member of the Committee

My name is Shanika Mae Isagan, a 6th grade teacher at Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School. I wholeheartedly support SB819 SD2, which proposes an International Visiting Teacher License. This bill is incredibly important to me, and to teachers like me who have already earned our teaching licenses in the Philippines. We came to Hawaii with a deep passion for education and a desire to share our knowledge and experience with your children. We've poured our hearts into our training and dedicated ourselves to the profession, yet we face significant hurdles, like the Praxis exams, to continue serving students in the Hawaii Department of Education. It feels like an unnecessary obstacle placed in our path when all we want is to nurture and inspire the young minds in our classrooms.

As international teachers, we are deeply committed to providing the best possible education for our students here in Hawaii. We see their potential and are driven to help them succeed. However, the reality of balancing our teaching responsibilities with the intense pressure of preparing for multiple licensure exams is incredibly challenging. It pulls us away from what we love most – lesson planning, engaging with our students, and creating a positive and supportive learning environment. While I understand the need to demonstrate subject knowledge, I truly believe that our existing qualifications, experience, and the dedication we demonstrate in our classrooms every day should be recognized. Requiring us to take numerous standardized tests adds a financial and emotional strain that ultimately takes away from our students.

The limited duration of our visas, ranging from three to five years, adds another layer of uncertainty and anxiety. It's difficult to fully invest in our students and our communities when we're constantly worried about the future. I've also heard that extending our stay to the full five years is contingent upon obtaining licensure, which only compounds the pressure we face. The high cost of the Praxis exams, combined with the limited time we have, makes it incredibly difficult to focus entirely on what truly matters: our students. We are here to share our love of learning and contribute to the vibrant educational landscape of Hawaii, but these bureaucratic hurdles make our mission so much harder.

I urge you to consider the impact of SB819 SD2 on dedicated teachers like myself. We are not just numbers or statistics; we are individuals with a genuine passion for teaching and a deep desire to make a difference in the lives of Hawaii's children. Passing this bill would not only streamline the licensing process but also show international teachers that their skills and

experience are valued and respected. It would allow us to focus on what we do best: inspiring the next generation.

I fell in love with Hawaii the moment I set foot on this beautiful island. I adore the school where I currently teach; it feels like home. I've never felt like I don't belong because the aloha spirit, the 'ohana, is so strong here. Every single day, I wake up before sunrise with one goal in mind: to help my students become the best versions of themselves. That's what drives me, what inspires me, and what makes me excited to face each new day.

My heart is here, with my students, in this community. I wish to continue inspiring and supporting them, nurturing their dreams, and helping them reach their full potential. However, the burden of excessive testing requirements threatens to pull me away from that core mission. It takes time, energy, and focus away from what truly matters: my students.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB819 SD2. This bill is not just about paperwork and procedures; it's about allowing dedicated teachers like myself to focus on what we do best: teaching, mentoring, and shaping the future of Hawaii's students. It's about ensuring that the children of Hawaii have access to passionate and qualified educators who are fully present and engaged in their learning. Please, let us focus on our students, on building relationships, and on fostering a love of learning. Please, support SB819 SD2.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill.

Respectfully,

Shanika Mae Isagan

Testimony of Contribution and Support

Aloha Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

As a special education teacher at Lokelani Intermediate School, I am deeply committed to meeting the unique academic and social-emotional needs of my 6th grade students. Through both push-in and pull-out sessions, I provide individualized instruction, creating tailored lessons that address the diverse learning needs of each student. This personalized approach allows my students to make meaningful academic progress, while also building the self-confidence they need to succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

In addition to my direct work with special education students, I collaborate closely with general education teachers, helping to extend support to regular students in the classroom setting. By helping during lessons and providing real-time intervention, I contribute to maximizing learning opportunities for all students. This collaboration ensures that every student, regardless of their learning profile, can engage with the curriculum and receive the support they need to excel.

My contributions are integral to achieving the mission and vision of Lokelani Inter, which seeks to foster an inclusive, nurturing environment where every student can thrive. Through my work, I strive to ensure that all students feel supported and valued as they work toward their educational goals.

Additionally, I would like to express my strong support for SB819, SD 2, which proposes the creation of an International Teacher License. This bill would allow teachers from the Philippines, like me, to use our credentials and teaching licenses here in the United States. By recognizing our qualifications as highly experienced and dedicated educators, we would be afforded equal pay for equal work, access to salary differentials, and the opportunity to work without the burden of additional requirements such as the Praxis exam. The Praxis exam poses a significant challenge given the time it demands for preparation, especially when balanced with our already demanding workloads. Moreover, international teachers teaching in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, and few other states enjoy the full benefit of teaching license reciprocity. It is my belief that SB819, SD 2 would not only benefit teachers like me but also enhance the overall educational experience for our students by ensuring that highly qualified educators are retained and supported. Mahalo for your support to us.

Sincerely,

MAYLEN M. PATANAO

Special Education Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School

Testimony in Support of SB819, SD 2

Submitted by: Joana Marie G. Anonuevo

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joana Marie G. Anonuevo, and I am a 7th-grade Science teacher at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School on the beautiful island of Kauai. I am writing to express my strong support for SB SB819, SD2 which would honor the experience and qualifications of teachers like myself who have earned teaching credentials in our home countries.

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

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

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

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

I absolutely love teaching here in Hawaii. The connection I have with my students, the joy I feel when they grasp complex concepts, and the relationships I've built within the school and community are incredibly rewarding. The professional development opportunities we receive through monthly seminars and PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) have been invaluable, and I am continuously growing as an educator. These opportunities help me improve my practice, but they also make me feel supported and valued as a teacher.

It is my belief that SB SB819, SD2 will be an important step forward in allowing teachers like me to focus on what we do best—teaching. The requirements to pass the Praxis exams should not be an obstacle that prevents us from continuing our work, especially when we have already demonstrated a high level of competence and professionalism in our home countries. The International Visiting Teacher License will acknowledge the strengths we bring to our schools and communities, and will allow us to focus on our students and on our ongoing growth as educators, rather than spending excessive time and money on exams that do not truly reflect our abilities or our dedication.

I wholeheartedly support SB SB819, SD 2 and urge you to consider the positive impact this bill will have on both teachers and students across Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joana Marie G. Anonuevo

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

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:12:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

My name is Liza Resurrecion, and I am a 6th-grade math teacher at Kalama Intermediate School. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819, which would establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

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

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

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

Filipinos have long been an integral part of Hawaii's culture, demonstrating dedication and excellence in everything we do. I am truly grateful for the warm welcome I have received in Hawaii, and I hope that by passing SB 819, international teachers like myself can continue to serve Hawaii's keiki and communities.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

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

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:13:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Jan Mariae Margaret Labadan | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 819

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jan Mariae Margaret M. Labadan, and I am a J-1 teacher in Hawai‘i. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819, a bill that will significantly benefit Hawai‘i's students and schools by addressing the challenges faced by J-1 teachers.

As a J-1 teacher, I have witnessed the great contributions my colleagues make to our educational system. We bring various outlooks, improving classrooms with global experiences and promoting cross-cultural understanding. We introduce creative teaching methodologies, ignite a passion for learning in students, and provide critical support to those with diverse learning needs. My fellow J-1 teachers serve as mentors, actively participate in extracurricular activities, and become deeply integrated members of our school ‘ohana. Outside of the classroom, we expand horizons and reinforce community ties by sharing our cultures through storytelling, activities, and culinary adventures. We act as role models by exhibiting fortitude, flexibility, and a strong dedication to education. Nonetheless, there are a number of difficulties with the existing J-1 visa regime. We are unable to properly invest in our students and the communities we serve because of the ongoing uncertainty caused by the temporary nature of our permits. Our mid-year departures produce disruptions that have a detrimental effect on student learning and deprive schools of committed, experienced teachers. We are also unable to adequately support our schools' long-term objectives and strategic plans because of this volatility. SB 819 provides an important remedy. It would give teachers and schools much-needed stability if J-1 teachers were allowed to stay in Hawai‘i for five years after receiving their license. Fundamental justice and a fair assessment of our abilities and knowledge require equal compensation for equal labor, which includes differentials for certified teachers. It shows respect for our professional status and expedites the licensing procedure when we acknowledge our globally recognized credentials as proof of our qualifications and waive the expensive and time-consuming Praxis exams when we already hold international degrees and licenses. Enacting SB 819 is an investment in the future of Hawai‘i's educational system, not just a way to help J-1 teachers. It guarantees that we can keep improving our students' lives and adding to Hawai‘i's dynamic educational environment. This law enables us to concentrate on the things that really count: fostering student development, fortifying our school communities, and creating a welcoming and stimulating learning environment for everyone. With all due respect, I implore the legislature to back SB 819 and give Hawai‘i's keiki's future top priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Honorable members of the committee,

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

That is why I, Heriel Jhon S. Bravo, one of the International Teachers, stand before you in strong support of SB819, SD 2, the International Visiting Teachers License. As a visiting teacher, I am deeply committed in providing the best possible education for my students, yet I face a significant challenge when it comes to obtaining the proper licensure to do so.

The process of earning a teaching license in this state is not only time-consuming but also financially burdensome. Many of us international teachers are already highly trained and experienced in our home countries, and we bring valuable perspectives and expertise to the classroom. We also underwent training and workshops in our home country and before we can practice our profession as a teacher, we also took Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers which focused on fundamental teaching concepts like classroom management, child development, learning theories, teaching methodologies and basic academic skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

However, in order to teach here, we must navigate a complex system of exams, fees, and documentation. These requirements often do not consider our unique qualifications, and the cost of taking multiple exams just to qualify is prohibitively expensive. These fees add up quickly, with no guarantee of success, and they place an enormous financial strain on teachers who are already contributing to the community in meaningful ways.

By supporting SB819, you would be providing us with a streamlined process that recognizes our expertise while ensuring that we meet the necessary standards to teach effectively. This license would allow us to focus on our primary goal: educating and inspiring students. The current system creates unnecessary obstacles, and the financial burden on teachers like myself can often outweigh the benefits of continuing to pursue a license. With the passage of this bill, we would be able to focus more on our students and less on the financial and bureaucratic hurdles.

I ask that you please consider the immense value that international teachers bring to our classrooms, and the challenges we face in obtaining licensure. SB819 represents a fair and sensible solution to this issue, and I urge you to support its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Chun and Members of the Committee, my name is Zhylaine Dacoron, and I am writing to express that I firmly support the SB819, SD 2. I am a dedicated educator here in Hawai'i, and I firmly believe that this bill will not only honor the exceptional experience and qualifications that teachers like me bring to our schools but also allow us to continue making a meaningful impact on our students.

I have had the privilege of teaching in Hawai'i for 6 months now, and during this time, I've worked hard to create an inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning environment for my students. I'm proud to have contributed to their growth and success, whether it's through personalized instruction, fostering a love of learning, or helping them develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. My background and diverse experience as a teacher—honed in my home country, where I earned my teaching license and underwent rigorous training—have equipped me to offer unique perspectives and methods in the classroom.

However, as a foreign-trained educator, I've faced significant challenges when it comes to obtaining a teaching license in Hawai'i. While my qualifications have been evaluated and recognized, the process of taking and passing the required exams is expensive and logistically difficult. In some cases, scheduling the exams locally on Maui can be difficult. I have often found myself running out of available exam dates here, which means I need to travel to Oahu in order to take exams that are not available locally. This will result in additional financial burdens and time away from my students, which is particularly challenging for teachers who are committed to being present for their students' learning. This often means I must wait for an open exam slot on Maui before I can proceed with the testing. These barriers create unnecessary hardships for teachers like me, who are committed to making a difference here in Hawai'i but are limited by the current system.

This bill will alleviate these challenges by providing a clear and accessible path for international teachers to earn a license that reflects their expertise and qualifications. Having a specific international teacher license will streamline the process for teachers who have already demonstrated their abilities abroad and make it easier for us to continue contributing to the Hawai'i educational system. The ability to teach without unnecessary barriers would allow us to focus on what truly matters—our students' success.

I truly believe that the diverse backgrounds and experiences of international educators add significant value to our classrooms, and this bill recognizes that value. By establishing criteria for an international teacher license, we can ensure that more highly qualified educators have the opportunity to share their knowledge, enhance the learning experience, and contribute to the future success of our students and communities.

Thank you for considering this important bill. I hope that you will support it so that teachers like me can continue making a positive and lasting impact here in Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui loa,
Zhylaine Dacoron
6th grade ELA/ Social Studies/ Reading Workshop Teacher
Lokelani Intermediate School
zhylainecdacoron@gmail.com/ 8083853349

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:17:44 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony on SB 819 – Relating to Education

Dear Committee Members/Legislators,

I am writing as a dedicated educator who is deeply affected by the numerous licensure tests required to continue teaching in the U.S. As a teacher from the Philippines, I have already undergone rigorous testing to obtain my license, yet I find myself facing an overwhelming number of additional exams just to keep my position for a limited time—often just three years.

The financial burden of these tests is significant. The costs of registration fees, study materials, and review courses add up quickly, diverting money that could be better used to support our families. Beyond the financial strain, the time commitment required for test preparation takes away from valuable lesson planning and student engagement. Instead of focusing on my students' success, I am forced to spend countless hours reviewing for exams that do not necessarily reflect my effectiveness in the classroom.

Moreover, the stress and uncertainty of passing these tests take a toll on my mental health. The pressure to succeed—while balancing teaching responsibilities—creates immense anxiety and self-doubt. This process is not only exhausting but also discouraging for teachers who are passionate about their profession yet feel burdened by unnecessary hurdles.

Being a teacher requires dedication, preparation, and continuous learning, but excessive testing should not be a barrier to doing what we love. I urge you to consider the challenges we face and seek solutions that support, rather than hinder, skilled educators who are already making a difference in students' lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Vernadeth Salas
ELA Teacher
vernadeth.salas@k12.hi.us

Aloha Chair Woodson:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD2 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school years 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Mahalo!

Sincerely,
Mr. Emelito A. Ortillo

To

SB819

Committee

I am **SARAH JEAN E. ALEGADO**, an ELD Coordinator and teacher at **LOKELANI INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL**. I am expressing my strong support for the creation of an international visiting teacher license and to recommend that SB819 SD2 be approved. This important piece of legislation will provide a structured pathway for international teachers, particularly J1 teachers, to contribute their expertise in the classroom for up to five years.

Currently, the J1 visa program limits teachers to a stay of only a few years, often interrupting the continuity of high-quality instruction. By extending this visa to allow up to five years, we can ensure that international teachers continue to offer high standards of education while also enriching our classrooms with diverse cultural perspectives. These cultural exchanges provide an invaluable learning experience for both students and teachers alike.

Additionally, I recommend that the provisions for the Praxis test, which are currently part of the licensing requirements, be waived for international teachers from countries with established teacher preparation programs, such as the Philippines. By recognizing the qualifications and credentials of international teachers, we are not only acknowledging the professionalism of educators abroad but also giving them the opportunity to showcase their skills without the added burden of standardized testing that may not reflect their expertise.

The creation of an international teaching license will help to foster better opportunities for international teachers, support our education system with skilled educators, and provide continuity for students. It is a step toward a more global and inclusive approach to education.

I urge you to consider this bill, allowing us to tap into a pool of highly qualified international teachers who can help elevate the quality of instruction and cultural understanding in our schools.

Respectfully,

SARAH
ELD
Lokelani Intermediate School

JEAN

E.

ALEGADO
Coor/Teacher

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:21:22 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Angelie Mae Galario | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB819, SD2, which aims to establish an international teacher license for specific visa holders.

Teaching is more than just a job; it is a mission that empowers students from all walks of life. As a SPED teacher, I understand the profound impact that quality education can have on individuals with diverse needs. It is essential that we recognize and honor the credentials and training that educators like myself bring from our home countries while also pursuing an international teaching license. In Hawai'i, I have dedicated myself to meeting the needs of my diverse students, despite holding a license not recognized here. My local training and the teaching license I earned in my home country have provided me with invaluable skills in effective teaching strategies and behavioral management. These skills have been pivotal in nurturing an inclusive and supportive learning environment—something every student deserves.

However, the added burden of obtaining an international teaching license by taking the PRAXIS exam continues to weigh heavily on educators like myself. The financial and emotional toll of this process is significant, especially given that we must pay for the exam each time we attempt it. This is a barrier that hinders our ability to fully engage and support our students.

By approving this bill, we can remove this obstacle and allow dedicated educators to focus on what truly matters—the success of our students. Integrating our diverse qualifications and rich experiences will enable us to create dynamic and inclusive classrooms that celebrate the unique backgrounds of every student. I urge you to consider the positive impact this legislation will have on countless educators and, most importantly, the students we serve. Together, we can foster an educational environment that empowers all learners.

Thank you for your consideration.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:21:49 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

It is a great pleasure to express our unwavering support for SB819 and SD2, bills that require establishing an international teacher license for certain classes of visa holders with the conditions required to obtain and renew such a license. Such a measure marks an important milestone in filling teacher shortages in Hawai‘i while at the same time assuring that international educators reach the highest standards of professional competence.

Being a teacher and researcher, I know how the school has faced difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, especially in specialized areas such as special education and STEM fields. In Hawaii, the presence of a more diverse student body greatly benefits from teachers coming from a variety of cultural and global perspectives. Therefore, the establishment of an international teacher license will provide an avenue for those teachers to achieve the proper credentials through a structured route set forth in SB819, SD2, so Hawaii students may experience high-quality teaching under the guidance of qualified professional teachers of differing perspectives and expertise.

It will ensure a clear standard of protocols for international educators to gain the right qualifications and keep the educators up to date on professional development, ease the teacher shortage in certain subjects, and enlarge the pool of potential candidates who are well-qualified.

It will promote diversity and inclusiveness in schools as students will have an opportunity to learn from educators of an international perspective. This will enhance the collaboration between local educators and the rest of the world to create an even richer learning experience for students.

This is in line with best practices from other states and countries that had successfully started an international teacher licensure program. With the implementation of SB819, SD2, the island of Hawaii can have a career in teaching that is more inclusive, rounded, and lasting in the interest of the welfare of the students.

Please support SB819, SD2 for the good of our children and for this work to be carried out to strengthen our education.

Thank you and best regards,

Jomar Mendezabal

Samuel Enoka Kalama Intermediate School

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

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that SB819, SD1, will be passed at this time.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

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

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. SB819, SD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on SB819, SD 1.

Respectfully,

EMELYN M. BARBA
5th GRADE TEACHER
LIHIKAI SCHOOL

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:24:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Jennelyn Cornelio | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819 SD2

Hearing Date: March 18, 2025, at 3:00 PM

Honorable members of the committee, I am Jennelyn G. Cornelio, a High School teacher at HP

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

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

However, requiring us, J-1 teachers, to undergo state standardized testing within our initial years of service places an unnecessary burden on and, ultimately, on our schools and students.

The following are the key factors that contribute to this:

1. Cultural and linguistic differences: Many of us are J-1 teachers coming from different educational backgrounds, with different pedagogical approaches. While we do possess strong English proficiency to qualify for the program, nuances in standardized testing often focused on specific state curriculum frameworks can be hard to navigate in our initial years. Not to mention the added pressures brought on by adjusting to a new culture, a different school system, and often an unfamiliar language environment.

2. Center Everything on Classroom Instructions: As a J-1 teacher, I want to give my very best of my ability, concentrate on instructing and building relationships with students in a personal relationship. Those time consumed in preparing for and administering standardized tests could

better be used in focusing on our core duties in planning classroom lessons and helping the students-and even professional development that benefits our student populations.

3. Recruitment and Retention Issues: This will create a strong deterrent for qualified international teachers to teach in the state of Hawaii. It adds another layer of complexity and cost to an already hard and costly process, thus making it even more difficult for the schools to recruit and retain valuable, experienced, and most importantly, adjusted teachers. This further exasperates the shortages that already exist in the teaching profession and limits the possibilities for our students to learn from diverse perspectives.

4. The Program Alignment: Standardized testing that is focused on specific state curricular standards also does not fit the broader goal of the program, which focuses on cultural exchange and enhanced mutual understanding. By requiring it, an unnecessary barrier is being established that ultimately has a negative effect on the J-1 Visa Program.

5. Five-Year Exemption as a Reasonable Timeframe: A five-year exemption would provide us, J-1 teachers, with sufficient time to get acquainted with the state's curriculum framework, to adjust our teaching methods, and to settle into the school community. We can have our energies concentrated on what is most important - teaching our children.

After this period of time, we would be expected to take the testing like everyone else.

This exemption will indeed not affect the educational quality in Hawaii State. We, J-1 visa holders, in this country are thoroughly screened during the visa processing for English competency and qualifications that make us good fits for hiring in different teaching areas. We,

J-1 visa holders, are similarly obligated for evaluation through regular activities set by school and district authority for accountability to standards.

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

Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:25:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Marie Jane B. Agcaoili | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

My name is Marie Jane B. agcaoili,a Science teacher and 6th Grade Adviser at Lokelani Intermediate School in Kihei, Maui. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB819, SD2, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders.

As an educator, my impact and role extend far beyond the traditional confines of the classroom. I am an instrumental in igniting a passion for learning, shaping personal identities, fostering community values, and cultivating a generation equipped to face the challenges of tomorrow.

Having the opportunity to teach in US, I have worked diligently to provide an engaging and effective instruction, contribute to the school community, and support my students in their academic and personal growth.

Being a homeroom and Science teacher, I am fostering a positive classroom culture, encouraging critical thinking, supporting emotional development and taking on leadership roles, I have sought to leave a lasting impact on my students and the school as a whole. Teaching is not just a profession for me; it's a vocation, and I am committed to continually growing and contributing to the educational community in meaningful ways.

I humbly want to obtain a teacher's license in Hawai'i but it remains a challenge due to the financial and logistical burdens of the Praxis exams. These exams are expensive and not readily available across the islands, often requiring travel to O'ahu, which further increases costs. These challenges do not represent the expertise, extensive training, and international qualifications that teachers like me have already obtained. This bill recognizes the rigorous education, qualifications, and experience we bring from our home countries and offers a fair and reasonable pathway for us to continue making a significant contribution to Hawai'i's schools.

Passing this bill will allow Hawai'i to honor diversity, inclusion, and the value of international talent, ensuring that our keiki receive the highest quality education.

I am pleading you to support this bill and offer international teachers like myself a clear, accessible, and fair pathway to licensure. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Marie Jane B. Agcaoili

Science Teacher

Lokelani Intermediate School, Maui

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:27:01 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Grezylen O. Lalusin | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Grezylen Lalusin, and I am currently a Math Teacher here in Hawaii. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 819. As an international educator, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to teach in Hawaii and to contribute to the academic growth and personal development of my students. However, I am also aware of the significant challenges faced by international teachers under the current licensing requirements, which this bill aims to address.

Teaching is more than a profession for me—it is my calling and my passion. Every day, I strive to help my students not only excel in Mathematics but also develop critical thinking skills, confidence, and a love for learning. I take pride in fostering an environment where students feel supported and encouraged to succeed.

As an international teacher, I bring a unique and valuable perspective to my students. My training and experiences in the Philippines allow me to enrich their learning by exposing them to new ways of thinking and problem-solving. By teaching Mathematics through real-world and globally relevant examples, I help my students develop a broader understanding of the subject while also preparing them to thrive in a multicultural world. This cultural exchange is not only beneficial to students academically but also helps build a classroom environment of mutual respect and diversity.

Despite these contributions, the current licensing process creates unnecessary obstacles for international teachers. While my qualifications and teaching experience have been thoroughly evaluated in my home country, I am still required to pass costly and time-consuming exams. These exams place an additional financial and emotional strain on educators who are already giving their all to support their students.

The International Visiting Teacher License is a fair and practical solution. It acknowledges the professional training, expertise, and dedication of international teachers, allowing us to focus on our primary goal: providing high-quality education for Hawaii's students. This license would also bring much-needed stability to our roles, ensuring that we can continue contributing to our schools and communities without the looming uncertainty of licensing hurdles.

Without this bill, many of us will face the difficult choice of leaving Hawaii, interrupting the progress and relationships we have built with our students, their families, and our colleagues. The passage of this bill would provide the recognition and support we need to remain in our schools and continue making a difference.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill and to recognize the exceptional value that international teachers bring to Hawaii's education system. By removing unnecessary barriers and granting this license, you will be empowering us to dedicate ourselves fully to our students and to help them achieve their fullest potential.

Thank you for your time, attention, and commitment to the future of education in Hawaii.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:27:02 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Deonel R Advincula | Hawaii DOE | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

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

I strongly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and urge that SB 819, SD1 be amended to align with SB 819 – Relating to Education.

Hawai‘i’s J-1 Visa Program has greatly benefited our keiki, bringing in 218 certified international educators—whose qualifications are equivalent to those of U.S.-trained teachers—to 55 schools across the state, primarily in hard-to-staff areas and special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, these dedicated educators have stepped up to provide high-quality instruction while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. Looking ahead to the 2025-2026 school year, the Department plans to welcome an additional 116 international teachers as part of its Strategic Plan to develop students who are "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

Despite their qualifications, Hawai‘i’s current licensing policies impose unnecessary hurdles for international educators. Unlike states such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have established streamlined or reciprocal licensing pathways, Hawai‘i categorizes J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This classification forces them to take additional comprehensive exams that can cost over \$1,000, creating a financial strain and taking valuable time away from instructional responsibilities such as analyzing formative assessments, engaging with families, and planning lessons. Furthermore, J-1 teachers are not eligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions, even though they perform the same duties.

It is crucial to recognize that international teachers’ credentials are already thoroughly evaluated by accredited third-party U.S. evaluators, ensuring their qualifications meet the same standards as local educators. SB 819 would enable these professionals to continue teaching in Hawai‘i’s classrooms for up to five years, providing stability in instruction and enriching students’ learning through cultural exchange.

Without this bill, Hawai‘i risks losing many international teachers after just one or two years, as they may relocate to states like Minnesota, Nevada, and North Carolina, where their credentials are fully recognized, allowing them to complete their full five-year J-1 visa term without additional testing barriers. Passing SB 819 would not only help retain these educators but also enhance Hawai‘i’s workforce by embracing the diversity and expertise they bring to our schools.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of SB 819 and I humbly urge with all my hearts including the hearts of my family way back home may the committee to move this important measure forward.

My name is Lara Escoto, and I am a J-1 teacher at Kahakai Elementary. I have had the privilege of experiencing firsthand the profound impact that dedicated teachers can have not only on their students but on the entire school community. The support and collaboration from my fellow educators have been invaluable, and together we've cultivated a warm, inclusive, and engaging campus climate. Our shared commitment to student success has created an environment where both students and staff feel empowered to grow, learn, and contribute meaningfully.

One of the most significant benefits of the current system is the opportunity for J-1 teachers like myself to stay in Hawaii for up to five years if we are able to obtain licensure. This stability enables us to form deep, long-lasting relationships with our students and their families, which is essential for creating an effective and supportive learning environment.

However, the process of obtaining a full teaching license can be particularly challenging for teachers with internationally recognized credentials. I am proud of my qualifications and the experience I bring from abroad, yet the additional requirement of passing multiple Praxis exams is a significant burden. While I am deeply committed to my role as a teacher, preparing for and taking eight Praxis exams takes up an immense amount of time and effort. This is especially difficult when I am already dedicating my full focus to lesson planning and ensuring that I am providing the best possible education to my students.

The time and energy spent on preparing for these exams could be better used to enhance classroom instruction and build stronger connections with students. As a teacher, my ultimate goal is to be as effective and efficient as possible in my role. Unfortunately, the demands of the Praxis exams take away from this focus, as I find myself dividing my time between test preparation and lesson planning.

Moreover, ensuring equal pay for equal work is essential to retaining highly qualified teachers. Providing access to differentials for those who are licensed would show a true commitment to the value educators bring to the classroom—particularly those like myself, who bring diverse international perspectives and expertise.

Ultimately, recognizing internationally accredited credentials and simplifying the licensure process would allow teachers like me to dedicate more of our time and energy to supporting our schools, students, and communities—without the added stress of navigating a complex and burdensome exam process.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I am deeply committed to providing the best possible education to my students and look forward to continuing to make a positive impact in our school and community.

Mahalo.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:28:03 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819

Aloha, esteemed members of the committee. My name is Jenelyn Atienza, and I am honored to serve as an 8th-grade Math and Science Inclusion Teacher at Kalama Intermediate School in Maui. As a J-1 teacher, I have the unique privilege of not only imparting knowledge in mathematics and science but also fostering an inclusive learning environment for our special education students. This role has significantly enriched my life and has allowed me to contribute meaningfully to the educational community.

My role as a special education teacher has been particularly rewarding. I have had the honor of witnessing remarkable growth in my students, who often face unique challenges. By implementing inclusive teaching strategies, I strive to cultivate a supportive and nurturing environment where every student feels valued, respected, and empowered to reach their fullest potential. The joy and pride reflected in their faces with each success—no matter how small—serve as constant reminders of the power of patience, encouragement, and dedication in the learning process. It is a privilege to help them unlock their potential and witness their transformation.

I wholeheartedly express my support for SB819. This bill is vital for educators like me, who come from diverse backgrounds around the globe, enriching our classrooms with varied perspectives and innovative teaching methodologies. My firsthand experience has demonstrated the profound positive impact that international teachers have on student engagement and cultural appreciation. By passing this crucial legislation, we can ensure that our schools continue to benefit from the expertise of qualified educators, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for all students.

Thank you for considering the importance of this vital bill. Together, let us continue to support and empower our learning communities.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:28:30 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

To Whom It May Concern:

Aloha,

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

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

When I arrived here in Maui, I was amazed by the place as well as the environment and I even told myself if given the opportunity, I want to work here a little bit longer. In terms of the school community that I'm part now, I really like to work even if we are still short-staffed because I love what I'm doing and I want to support the kids in school. Teaching students with different special needs, different nationalities are quiet challenging but I want to be part of their success to live in the community independently that they belong. Although there are some challenges but I always think that an easy task becomes difficult if you do it with reluctant. Thankfully, I was able to surpass some of the challenges with the support of the school administrators, department head, colleagues and most of all my strong faith with God.

Lastly, I'm knocking each one of you to please hear our side and please give us the chance to spend more years in your country so that we will be able to finish our progr am successfully. We will be able to do this if you are going to support this bill. I'm hoping that the state of Hawaii will allow us J1 teachers to spend 5 years just like with the other states wherein our teaching license in the Philippines are considered and granted. Thank you and more power.

Mahalo,

Aina Mae Ranises

Mar 15, 2025

HON. WOODSON

Chair

Aloha,

To the renowned chair and members of the Senate Committee on Education, my humility and respect. I am Raymond Escoto, one of the cultural exchange teachers who was hired at Konawaena High School, would like to express my strong support for the passing of SB819 SD2 which requires the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to reconstruct a licensing pathway for international educators like me.

Filipino educators are known to be passionate and goal-driven professionals. Thus, this is why a lot of countries hire teachers from the Philippines. It is true that the education system and culture here in America is totally different from the Philippines yet because of resilience and willingness to adapt to the new system, I am able to overcome the difficulties and grasp the new environment where I am in.

After fully adapting to the new system, I suddenly feel the "aloha spirit" that they call here in Hawai'i. My students not only the Filipinos but also other races like the Micronesians, Marshallese, Mexicans, and Hondurans show respect and love. I have some students, specifically, Filipinos who have just moved to the island. As they started schooling, they were frightened to move and felt unsafe which resulted in negligence of going to school. However, when one of their teachers introduced me to them, they started to feel comfortable and safe. Now, there are a bunch of students, not only Filipinos, who stay with me during breaktime.

In connection to this, with all humility, I could say that I am making my gains and small wins with my students. These gains happen because they can see the real purpose of me doing the work and the effort that I do for them to understand the lesson. Unfortunately, preparation is not easy. It will take time to fulfill it and make it an interesting yet valuable learning experience for the students.

These are just some of the good things that I observed since I started teaching. However, being required to pass the Praxis exam to be eligible to stay up to 5 years hinder this continued success. As a teacher, it requires a huge amount of planning time and production of instructional materials for all the lessons to achieve its desirable outcome. Having said this, there is no spare time to prepare for this exam which requires a huge amount of money. Moreover, this amount will not be for one time payment only. It must be paid every time you take the test. Instead of focusing on the core mission of why we are here, our attention is being divided to the preparation to pass the praxis exam which did not even exist before.

These are just some of the reasons why I support the passing of the bill and continuously support the future generation of this country within the next 5 years.

Hopefully, this testimony will greatly serve its purpose. Mahalo Nui Loa!

Respectfully yours,
Raymond Escoto
ESOL Teacher
Konawaena High School

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:39:27 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| ROSELYN B. DELA CRUZ | DOE HAWAII J1 Teacher | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Roselyn Dela Cruz, and I am a 4th-grade teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School. I am writing today to express my strong support for ***SB819 SD2***, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License.

I hold a ***professional teaching license in the Philippines and have earned a four-year bachelor's degree with master's units in education***. I respectfully request that the *State of Hawaii reciprocate our credentials by granting us a Hawaii teaching license*.

The ***Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) in the Philippines is equivalent to the Praxis Test mandated in Hawaii***. *Our licensure exam includes core subjects such as Reading, Math, Writing, and Pedagogy, which align with the Praxis requirements. Furthermore, our transcripts and master's units have already undergone Foreign Credential Evaluation, demonstrating that our academic qualifications are equivalent to those in the U.S.*

Previously, J-1 teachers who arrived in Hawaii had their international teaching licenses accepted and reciprocated, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to Hawaii's schools. However, current international teachers face additional ***financial and bureaucratic burdens*** in obtaining a Hawaii license, despite having met similar academic and professional standards.

The financial strain of securing a teaching license in Hawaii has been overwhelming. ***The high cost of living, particularly in hard-to-staff areas like Lanai, adds to this challenge. As an emergency hire teacher, I earn a lower salary than fully licensed teachers, making it difficult to cover essential expenses***. On Lanai, access to resources is limited, and we often have to ***travel to other islands for professional development or even basic supplies***. ***Additionally, housing costs consume a significant portion of my income***, and like many international teachers, I also support family members back in the Philippines.

Passing SB819 SD2 would not only help alleviate the teacher shortage in Hawaii but also ensure that international educators receive the recognition and support they deserve. Many of us have years of teaching experience and have proven our dedication to Hawaii's students, yet we continue to face unnecessary obstacles.

I urge you to support SB819 SD2 to allow international teachers to continue making a meaningful impact on Hawaii's education system. ***By doing so, we can retain qualified educators, provide stability for students, and uphold the quality of education across the state.***

Thank you for your time and consideration.

***Warm regards,
Roselyn Dela Cruz
4th Grade Teacher
Lanai High and Elementary School***

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:40:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| April D. Asuncion | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB819 SD2

To the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Aloha! My name is April D. Asuncion, a J1 teacher from the Philippines and currently working as a teacher at Haiku Elementary School. I am in my second year now working with diverse teachers and pupils who have contributed to my growth and well-being.

For somebody who has been passionate since I had my job, I have been in search for the best measures to suffice the needs of students for them to grow the way our society would need them, somebody who is well-rounded, ready to face life in its greater heights and become an asset of the society as much as possible.

I have been scratching all means to meet the demands of our school of providing quality education to everyone. This was backed up by exposing myself to different seminars and trainings offered by the Department of Education. This, I believed, also helped me bring out the best in my learners as manifested in their achievements.

However, my desire to bring out the best from my learners is being distracted by the demand of having to take the Praxis test which I think should not be since we have license in the Philippines, and we had been teaching there for almost a decade now. Not to discredit but we have been exposed to experiences which shaped us to what we are right now. Our focus is being diverted to that which bothers us.

With this, may I urge everyone to please consider us so we can still take part in providing the much-needed help and support for everyone.

Thank you so much.

Very truly yours,

APRIL D. ASUNCION

J1 Teacher

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:50:03 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Arlene Macotocruz Bejerano | Department Of Education | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 819 SD2 – International Visiting Teacher License

Hearing Date: March 18, 2025

Dear Chair Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair Senator Donna Mercado Kim, and Esteemed Committee Members,

My name is **Arlene Macotocruz Bejerano**, and I am an **international visiting teacher** at **Kihei Elementary School**. I am writing to express my **strong support** for **SB 819 SD2**, which aligns with **HB 439**, to establish an **International Visiting Teacher License** in Hawai‘i.

With over **22 years of teaching experience**, I have dedicated my career to **shaping young minds and fostering academic growth**. I have completed **42 doctoral units** in **Educational Administration and Supervision** and hold a **teaching license from the Philippines**, as well as **out-of-state licenses from Nevada**. However, despite applying for **reciprocity in Hawai‘i**, my credentials were **not converted to a Hawai‘i teaching license**, and I was only granted a **partial reduction** in PRAXIS exam requirements.

Teaching in Hawai‘i has been an **incredibly rewarding experience**, and I take great pride in the **positive impact** I make on my students each day. However, the **licensing barriers** for international teachers create **unnecessary obstacles**, making it difficult for us to continue serving in the classroom. My **husband, Elvin V. Bejerano, and I are both teachers in Hawai‘i**, yet we **struggle financially** due to the **high cost of living**. With **two children to support**, our **emergency hire salaries** make it challenging to make ends meet. If **SB 819 SD2** is passed, it would provide us with **fair pay, additional compensation through differentials, and the stability of a five-year license**—allowing us to focus on what truly matters: **educating and supporting Hawai‘i’s keiki**.

Beyond our **personal challenges**, this bill is **critical** in addressing Hawai‘i’s **ongoing teacher shortage**. International teachers bring **diverse perspectives, multilingual skills, and extensive experience** that enrich the learning environment for students. By **removing excessive licensing barriers** and recognizing our qualifications, Hawai‘i can **retain highly skilled educators** who are dedicated to student success.

I respectfully urge you to **pass SB 819 SD2**, as it will not only support international teachers but also ensure that **Hawai‘i’s students receive the quality education they deserve**.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Arlene M. Bejerano

3rd Grade Teacher, Kihei Elementary School

Dear Chair Woodson and Esteemed Committee Members,

I fully support the creation of an international educator licensing framework and recommend the SB 819, SD2 - Relating to Education. The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been highly successful, with 218 certified international educators contributing to 55 schools across Hawai'i. These educators, who hold degrees equivalent to U.S. counterparts, are especially valuable in high-need areas such as special education and rural schools, enriching communities with cultural insights.

However, the current licensing system creates unnecessary obstacles for J-1 educators. Unlike other states, such as Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, Hawai'i classifies J-1 educators as "emergency hires," requiring them to take multiple costly exams—often totaling over \$1,000. This process takes time away from their core responsibilities, such as curriculum development and family collaboration, and they are also excluded from additional compensation typically offered to teachers in high-need positions.

Supporting SB 819, SD2 will allow qualified international educators to stay for up to five years, ensuring consistency in instruction and enhancing the educational experience for Hawai'i's students. Streamlining the licensing process to eliminate unnecessary exams will help the state better utilize the skills and diverse perspectives of these educators.

Thank you for considering my testimony regarding SB 819, SD2.

Sincerely,
Rizza Verina
J1 Teacher
Chiefess Kamakahalei Middle School

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:56:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Neil Christian T. Corales | Department of Education | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Honorable Chair Woodson and respected members of the committee, my name is Neil Christian T. Corales, a J-1 teacher from the Philippines currently serving as a first-grade generalist teacher at Mokulele Elementary School within the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. As a J-1 visa holder dedicated to educating the children of our military families stationed on Oahu, I stand in strong support of SB 819, SD2. This bill is not just important—it is essential for the future of our public schools and the well-being of our students.

My experience as a J-1 teacher in Hawai‘i has been profoundly rewarding. I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact we have on our students, schools, and the broader community. Filipino teachers like myself bring a unique blend of cultural understanding, diverse teaching methodologies, and a deep commitment to nurturing young minds. We forge strong bonds with our students, often connecting with local families through shared values of respect, family, and a strong work ethic. Moreover, we contribute to a more diverse and inclusive learning environment, enriching the educational experience for all. Many of us are actively engaged in local cultural and community initiatives, further cementing the vital connections between our schools and families.

However, my current J-1 visa status, and that of many other dedicated international teachers, creates a precarious situation. SB 819, SD2 directly addresses a critical need: retaining qualified and experienced educators within the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. My J-1 visa limits my time here in Hawai‘i, and the potential loss of dedicated teachers like myself creates instability for our students. The bill offers a solution by providing a pathway for J-1 teachers to remain for up to five years through an international teacher license. This stability is paramount for our students, especially in the crucial early grades where consistency in education is fundamental to their future success. The disruption and emotional impact on children when a beloved teacher departs due to visa restrictions is significant. And, it allows us to maintain these vital student-teacher relationships, contributing to the long-term health and stability of our schools.

Beyond stability, the bill promotes fairness and equity. It ensures "equal pay for equal work" by granting internationally licensed teachers access to the same salary differentials as locally licensed teachers. This recognition of our qualifications is not simply about compensation; it acknowledges the expertise and experience we bring to the classroom. We have invested years in our education and professional development, earning undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate

degrees and credentials. This bill rightly recognizes the value of that investment and affirms our standing as highly qualified and experienced educators.

Currently, the process of obtaining a local teaching license often necessitates taking the Praxis exams, even when we hold valid licenses and degrees from our home countries. This requirement imposes an unnecessary financial and logistical burden, particularly on teachers coming from overseas, and does not always accurately reflect our teaching abilities or experience. Also, this bill offers a more streamlined approach, recognizing the validity of our international credentials and allowing us to concentrate on what truly matters: supporting our students and contributing to the Hawai'i State Department of Education.

The Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) in the Philippines is a rigorous, nationally standardized exam designed to ensure teacher competency. It covers many of the same core areas as the Praxis, including professional education, subject-specific content knowledge, and pedagogy. Both exams aim to assess a teacher's readiness to effectively instruct students. Specifically, both the LET and relevant Praxis exams evaluate understanding of educational psychology, teaching methodologies, assessment strategies, and classroom management. Furthermore, the LET, like the Praxis, requires aspiring teachers to demonstrate their knowledge in their specific subject area of expertise, ensuring they are qualified to teach the content.

Requiring J-1 teachers to take the Praxis creates an unnecessary barrier. Many of us have already demonstrated our competency through a comparable, government-mandated examination process in our home country. This requirement not only creates a financial burden but also delays our entry into the classroom, potentially exacerbating existing teacher shortages. Instead of requiring the Praxis, Hawai'i could explore reciprocity agreements with the Philippines, acknowledging the rigor of the LET. This approach would be far more efficient and respectful of our existing qualifications.

While specific course titles and institutional structures may differ, the fundamental knowledge and pedagogical skills required to be an effective educator are universal. Foreign Credential Evaluation (FCE) organizations, such as those belonging to the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES), meticulously assess international educational credentials, including teaching degrees. These evaluations compare the curriculum, coursework, and overall educational experience to U.S. standards, determining equivalency. A positive FCE outcome demonstrates that a foreign teaching degree meets the requirements for licensure or further study in the U.S., effectively proving its equivalence. Therefore, a teaching degree from the Philippines, when favorably evaluated by a NACES member, is indeed recognized as equivalent to a U.S. teaching degree.

SB 819, SD2 is not simply about individual teachers; it is about strengthening our entire public school system. It is about ensuring that our keiki have access to the best possible education by retaining qualified and experienced teachers. It is about strengthening our communities by fostering stability and continuity in our schools. It is about acknowledging the invaluable contributions of international educators who are dedicated to serving the students and families of Hawai'i. I strongly urge you to support SB 819, SD2. It is an investment in our children, our schools, and the future of Hawai'i. Mahalo.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:56:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Alvin Montecalto | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

My name is **Alvin Montecalto**, and I am writing in strong support of **SB 819 SD2** that seeks to honor the credentials and experience of Filipino teachers by establishing criteria for obtaining an international teacher license. As a dedicated educator who has been teaching in Hawaii, I have firsthand experience with the challenges foreign teacher face when trying to continue our careers here. This is a significant step forward for countless talented educators who have dedicated their lives to nurturing and shaping the minds of young students in the Philippines.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Testimony in Support of SB819,

March 17, 2025

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

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

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

1. **Cultural and linguistic differences:** Many of us are J-1 teachers coming from different educational backgrounds, with different pedagogical approaches. While we do possess strong English proficiency to qualify for the program, nuances in standardized testing often focused on specific state curriculum frameworks can be hard to navigate in our initial years. Not to mention the added pressures brought on by adjusting to a new culture, a different school system, and often an unfamiliar language environment.
2. **Center Everything on Classroom Instructions:** As a J-1 teacher, I want to give my very best of my ability, concentrate on instructing and building relationships with students in a personal relationship. Those time consumed in preparing for and administering standardized tests could better be used in focusing on our core duties in planning classroom lessons and helping the students-and even professional development that benefits our student populations.
3. **Recruitment and Retention Issues:** This will create a strong deterrent for qualified international teachers to teach in the state of Hawaii. It adds another layer of complexity and cost to an already hard and costly process, thus making it even more difficult for the schools to recruit and retain valuable, experienced, and most importantly, adjusted teachers. This further exasperates the shortages that already exist in the teaching profession and limits the possibilities for our students to learn from diverse perspectives.

4. **The Program Alignment:** Standardized testing that is focused on specific state curricular standards also does not fit the broader goal of the program, which focuses on cultural exchange and enhanced mutual understanding. By requiring it, an unnecessary barrier is being established that ultimately has a negative effect on the J-1 Visa Program.
5. **Five-Year Exemption as a Reasonable Timeframe:** A five-year exemption would provide us, J-1 teachers, with sufficient time to get acquainted with the state's curriculum framework, to adjust our teaching methods, and to settle into the school community. We can have our energies concentrated on what is most important - teaching our children. After this period of time, we would be expected to take the testing like everyone else.

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

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

Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:56:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Abigail L Cayabyab | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I highly recommend and support SB 819, SD2 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. SB 819, SD2 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 819, SD2

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 12:57:17 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

My name is Fermainne Antonio and I am a J-1 teacher currently in my second year of teaching at Lāna‘i High & Elementary School. I am writing in strong support of SB 819 SD2, which would establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. This bill is essential in recognizing the qualifications and contributions of international teachers like myself and ensuring that we can continue serving Hawai‘i’s students effectively.

Since arriving in Hawai‘i, I have dedicated myself to my students and school community, working tirelessly to provide quality education and a nurturing learning environment. As an international teacher, I bring diverse teaching methods, global perspectives, and a deep passion for student success. In the past two years, I have seen firsthand how my presence has positively impacted my students—not only in their academic growth but also in their understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

SB 819 SD2 would allow international teachers like me to obtain an international teacher license, creating a clear and fair pathway to continue teaching in Hawai‘i. This is crucial for ensuring stability for students and schools, as the current system forces many J-1 teachers to leave after a short period, disrupting student learning and school communities.

Additionally, this bill addresses the issue of equal pay for equal work. Licensed teachers have access to differentials and benefits that reflect their expertise and qualifications, but many international teachers are currently excluded from these opportunities despite holding internationally recognized credentials and extensive experience. We have already proven our competence through rigorous training, degrees, and professional experience in our home countries, yet we are still required to take burdensome, costly Praxis exams that create unnecessary financial and logistical barriers. These exams do not accurately reflect our abilities as educators and only add stress to teachers who are already navigating the challenges of adapting to a new education system and culture.

By passing SB 819 SD2, Hawai‘i will take a significant step toward addressing the ongoing teacher shortage while also valuing and retaining highly qualified international educators who are already making a difference in classrooms across the state. This bill would allow us to focus on what truly matters—our students, our schools, and the communities we serve—rather than on complicated licensing hurdles.

I urge you to support SB 819 SD2 and recognize the vital role international teachers play in shaping the future of Hawai'i's keiki.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Fermainne Antonio
J-1 Teacher, 3rd Grade
Lāna'i High & Elementary School

Testimony in Support of SB819, SD 2

Aloha, my name is Lyra Bertillo, and I am a 7th-grade Home Economics teacher at Kapaa Middle School on the beautiful island of Kauai, Hawaii. I am here to express my strong support for SB819, SD2 .

This bill is critical for teachers who are on J1 visas, like me, as it eliminates the need to take the PRAXIS exam. For many of us, the PRAXIS exam is a significant financial burden, costing hundreds of dollars, and in some cases, requiring travel to Oahu just to take the test. Given that many international teachers, including myself, hold degrees and professional licenses from our home countries, I believe that the PRAXIS exam is an unnecessary and inadequate measure of our teaching capabilities.

I have been teaching for eleven years and hold a master's degree from the Philippines, in addition to my teaching license from my home country. I am committed to continuously improving my skills, attending seminars, and participating in professional learning communities offered by my school and the Kauai District. I believe my experience and dedication as a teacher should be the focus, rather than a standardized exam that doesn't fully reflect my abilities or the value I bring to my students.

SB819, SD 2 will not only benefit international teachers but also the communities we serve. It will allow us to focus on what truly matters—providing quality education to our students. I strongly urge you to support this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:06:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Jeric S. Galdican and I'm here today to testify in strong support of SB819, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for qualified visa holders. J1 teachers like myself are incredibly passionate about teaching the children of Hawai'i, bringing diverse perspectives and a deep commitment to enriching their educational experience. However, the current licensing requirements, specifically the Praxis exam, create significant obstacles, hindering our contributions and exacerbating the teacher shortage. I believe SB819 offers a vital solution, and here are six key reasons why:

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

These challenges posed by the Praxis exam not only affect individual teachers but also have a direct impact on the quality of education our children receive. SB819 offers a pathway to address these issues, allowing Hawai'i to tap into a valuable pool of qualified educators eager to contribute their skills and passion. By supporting this bill, you are not only supporting international teachers; you are investing in the future of Hawai'i's children. I urge you to vote in favor of SB819 and help ensure that every child has access to a dedicated and qualified teacher. Mahalo.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:06:28 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Cristel Key Gapas | Hawaii State Department of Education | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

My name is Cristel Key Gapas, a J-1 teacher from the Philippines and currently a Preschool Special Education Teacher at Alvah Scott Elementary School in the Hawaii State Department of Education. As a J-1 visa holder, I am writing in strong support of SB819, SD2.

My experience as a J-1 teacher in Hawaii has been incredibly enriching and has provided me with the opportunity to make a meaningful, lasting impact on the school, students, and community. By working collaboratively with my colleagues, building positive relationships with students, and becoming involved in the community, I've been able to contribute to a better learning environment.

SB819,SD2 will allow qualified J-1 teachers like myself to remain in Hawaii for up to five more years with an international teacher license. This will provide our students with consistent instruction and support their academic success.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass this bill so that Hawaii's students can continue to benefit from the service of international teachers without unnecessary obstacles.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:16:06 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the Hawai‘i State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposal that requires the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. This legislation is vital for addressing critical teacher shortages within our state and enriching our educational landscape.

Creating a streamlined pathway for qualified international educators to teach in Hawai‘i offers numerous benefits. It allows us to:

- **Diversify our teaching force:** Bringing in educators from around the world exposes our students to diverse perspectives, cultures, and teaching methodologies, fostering a more globally aware and inclusive learning environment.
- **Address teacher shortages:** This proposal provides a valuable resource for filling vacancies, particularly in high-need areas where qualified teachers are scarce.
- **Enhance educational quality:** International teachers often bring unique expertise and experiences that can enhance curriculum development and student engagement.
- **Promote cultural exchange:** This initiative strengthens cultural ties between Hawai‘i and other nations, fostering mutual understanding and respect.

Establishing clear criteria for obtaining and renewing an international teacher license ensures that these educators meet high standards of professionalism and competency. I urge the legislature to support this proposal, as it will significantly benefit Hawai‘i’s students and educational system.

Christopher Kanyi

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:17:34 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

I am writing to express my strong support for SB819 SD2, which seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License in Hawaii.

As an 8th-grade special education teacher at Kalama Intermediate School and a holder of a professional teaching license from the Philippines, I strongly advocate for the recognition of international teaching credentials, allowing us to obtain a Hawaii teaching license without needing additional exams.

Granting international teachers the ability to serve the Department of Education for up to five years would be mutually beneficial. Having fully adapted to the norms and school culture, I am committed to continuing my service. The department would benefit from retaining experienced educators without the additional costs and efforts required to recruit and train new teachers.

The current requirement to pass the Praxis test—covering at least five and up to eight different categories—is both time-consuming and financially burdensome. Additionally, international teachers are initially granted only a three-year stay, with the possibility of an extension to five years contingent upon passing Praxis. This limitation makes it difficult for dedicated educators to continue serving Hawaii's students without undue hardship.

If passed, SB819 SD2 would grant international teachers a full teaching license by recognizing the rigorous licensure process we have already completed in our home countries, which aligns with the Praxis assessment standards. Furthermore, it would allow us to stay for the full five years, providing greater stability for our students and enabling us to make a lasting impact in Hawaii's schools.

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

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Joy M. Fernandez

8th-Grade SpEd Teacher
Kalama Intermediate School

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

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that HB 439, HD1 be amended to match SB 819, SD1 - Relating to Education.

The Department's J-1 Visa Program has been a resounding success for Hawai'i's keiki. To date, 218 certified educators with equivalent degrees to U.S trained educators, work in 55 schools across Hawaii, predominately in hard-to-staff locations and in special education. From Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu, international educators employed through the Department's J-1 Visa Program have enthusiastically answered the call to provide the highest quality education to Hawai'i's students while serving as cultural ambassadors in their communities. For school year 25-26, the Department will employ an additional 116 international educators as part of the Department's Strategic Plan to prepare students to be "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed."

However, the State's existing licensing rules hinder the full potential of prospective teachers for the J-1 visa program. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, or North Carolina, which have streamlined/reciprocal licensing processes for international educators without additional exams, Hawai'i classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This designation requires prospective participants to take a series of additional comprehensive examinations that can exceed \$1,000 in costs. Preparing for these exams significantly reduces the time to analyze formative assessments, meet with families, and plan curriculum. Further, J-1 teachers are ineligible for additional compensation offered to educators in hard-to-fill positions despite performing equal work.

The J-1 Visa Program provides high-quality educational and cultural opportunities to schools across Hawai'i. HB 439, HD 1 ensures that qualified international teachers working in Hawai'i's schools can remain for up to 5 years, providing continuity of instruction and high-quality learning and cultural opportunities for Hawai'i's keiki. By creating an international teacher license without additional examinations, the State can fully leverage the skills, knowledge, and experience of international educators and provide a more diverse workforce representative of Hawai'i's global community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 439 HD1.

Mahalo,
Mark Anthony Domingo

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:39:03 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

However, the current licensing requirements create a significant hurdle to us, visiting international teachers. While I hold a valid teaching license in my home country, the process of obtaining a new license here is a substantial burden, not just financially, but also in terms of time. The cost of the exams alone is a significant challenge, but even more so is the time commitment required for preparation. Instead of spending precious time planning engaging lessons, collaborating with colleagues, or simply being with my family, I have to divert countless hours to studying for these exams. This takes away from the time I could be dedicating to my students and my own well-being. More importantly, it puts my ability to continue teaching here and support my students at risk. This proposed bill, SB819, SD2, would be a game-changer. It would allow me, and other international teachers like me, to focus on what truly matters: our students. It would remove the unnecessary financial and time strain and ensure that we can continue to provide stability and enrichment in the classroom. Passing this bill would not only benefit international teachers, but it would also greatly benefit the students who rely on us. It would allow us to continue nurturing their growth and inspiring their potential for years to come.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:41:57 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Raymart Jayson M. Fundal | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Testimony Regarding J-1 Visa Extension Exception for Teaching License in Hawai'i

My name is Raymart Jayson M. Fundal, and I am a Special Education Teacher currently in Hawai'i on a J-1 visa. I am writing to express my sincere desire to extend my J-1 visa and to respectfully request an exception regarding the teaching license requirement for this extension.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Hawai'i and have developed a deep love for the islands and the community. This experience has been invaluable, both personally and professionally. I am passionate about making a positive impact on the lives of children with special needs, and I believe I have made significant contributions to the students I serve here in Hawai'i. I am eager to continue this important work.

My primary motivation for extending my J-1 visa is twofold. First and foremost, I am committed to supporting my family back in the Philippines. The opportunity to work in Hawai'i allows me to provide much-needed financial assistance to them. Secondly, I am deeply invested in building a legacy of positive change in the lives of the children I teach here in Hawai'i. I have formed strong bonds with my students and their families, and I am dedicated to continuing to provide them with the high-quality special education they deserve. Extending my visa would allow me to continue nurturing these relationships and further develop my skills as an educator within this unique and diverse environment.

I understand the requirements for extending a J-1 visa, including the teaching license requirement. I am respectfully requesting an exception to this requirement in my specific case. I know what's needed to stay, the teaching license, the rules. But I'm asking, pleading, for a chance, a break. The license...it's just out of reach right now. Too much, too many IEP meetings, too much on my plate at school. I'm drowning, and this deadline is another weight pulling me under.

I am confident that my skills and experience as a Special Education teacher, coupled with my dedication to my students, make me a valuable asset to the Hawaiian educational system. I am a responsible and committed individual, and I am confident that I will continue to uphold the highest professional standards.

Thank you for considering my request. I am hopeful that I will be granted the opportunity to continue my work here in Hawai'i and contribute to the well-being of its children.

Sincerely,

**Raymart Jayson M. Fundal
Special Education Teacher
Kainalu Elementary School
+ (01) 808-286-8642**

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:43:44 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Freddie Abulencia | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

I'm Freddie Abulencia, and this is my second year participating in a cultural exchange program as an international teacher. One of my goals is to promote cross-cultural collaboration with my colleagues and equip students with global perspectives. As a J1 teacher, I strongly support the SB819, SD2 bill that recognizes our years of experience and teaching certification from our home country without requiring many tests for the purpose of this international visiting teacher program. This will help us to complete our 5-year program, maximizing our contributions as international educators. This bill ensures excellent classroom stability and continuity, benefiting learners through more profound cultural exchange and enhanced global awareness.

To The Honorable Members of the Senate

I am Ely Boy B. Antofina, currently a part of the Cultural Teaching Exchange Program of the United States of America. I have personally witnessed the shortage and demand of educators of many of the schools in the United States specifically here in Hawaii, and I believe coming here to teach and serve the State's educational sector is a huge addition to the teaching force whose main goal is shaping the future of the young generation. Hence, I am writing this; to ask favorable support from this respected body on SB 819, SD2, this would enable our Philippine Teaching License equivalent to the Hawaii State Standard Teaching License.

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

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

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

And with SB819, SD2, we believe that we can best exert our effort in providing the best and quality education to the amazing and talented kids of Hawaii. We know that the technical know-how, teaching experiences, rigorous education, and the teaching license that we have with us from our country can be of equivalent qualification for us to be considered as Highly Qualified Educator. Approving our "International Visiting License" will lessen the load that we are carrying every day, hence assuring that we are doing our best in teaching and shaping the future of the Hawaii's future generation.

Thank you Very Much!

Long Live Hawaii!

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

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:47:24 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|--------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Lanz Arana | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Members of the Committee, My name is Lanz S. Arana, and I am honored to write in strong support of SB819 SD2, a bill that seeks to establish an International Visiting Teacher License. As a dedicated educator from the Philippines, I have already earned my teaching license and devoted my career to shaping young minds. However, the additional barriers imposed by standardized tests like the Praxis create unnecessary challenges that hinder my ability to fully focus on what truly matters—my students. Teaching is not just a profession for me; it is a calling. Since arriving in Hawaii, I have poured my heart into ensuring my students receive quality education, cultural enrichment, and unwavering support. Yet, balancing my responsibilities in the classroom while preparing for multiple licensure exams is an overwhelming burden—one that diverts my time and energy away from lesson planning, student engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. While I recognize the need for teacher accountability, I firmly believe that my qualifications, experience, and dedication should speak for themselves. The Praxis exams, aside from being financially and emotionally taxing, do not necessarily measure the passion, adaptability, and commitment that international teachers bring into Hawaii's schools. Additionally, the constraints of our three- to five-year visas make the process even more daunting, as our ability to continue teaching here is often tied to passing these tests within a limited timeframe. Hawaii has become my second home. I have come to love its people, culture, and the vibrant school community that has welcomed me with open arms. My greatest hope is to continue making a difference in the lives of my students without being held back by excessive testing requirements. By passing SB819 SD2, you would not only be supporting teachers like me but also ensuring that Hawaii's students benefit from passionate, experienced educators who can dedicate themselves fully to their success. I respectfully urge you to consider the profound impact of this bill and to support international teachers who are deeply invested in the future of Hawaii's education system. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:47:47 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 819, SD2 – International Visiting Teacher License**Hearing Date:** 03/17/ 2025**Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,**

My name is **Dr. Elvin Valero Bejerano**, and I am a **4th-grade teacher at Kihei Elementary School**. I am writing in **strong support of SB 819, SD2**, which seeks to establish an **International Visiting Teacher License** in Hawai‘i.

With over **25 years of teaching experience**, I hold a **Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Management**, a **Master’s Degree in Elementary Education**, and **42 doctoral units in Educational Supervision**. Additionally, I am a **licensed teacher in Nevada and New Mexico**. My journey as an educator across multiple countries has given me a deep understanding of how to support **multilingual learners** and foster **cultural awareness** in the classroom. Since arriving in Hawai‘i through the **J-1 cultural exchange program**, I have dedicated myself to providing **high-quality instruction and a nurturing learning environment** for my students.

Despite my qualifications, the process of obtaining full licensure in Hawai‘i has been an **unnecessary burden**. While my out-of-state licenses were recognized to some extent, I was still required to take multiple **costly PRAXIS exams**, totaling over **\$1,000**. These exams divert my time and resources away from my students and place an undue financial strain on international teachers who are already fully certified in other states and countries. Furthermore, the current system classifies J-1 teachers as **emergency hires**, restricting our job stability and preventing us from receiving the **same benefits and compensation** as our licensed colleagues—despite performing the same work.

This **lack of a clear pathway to licensure** creates **uncertainty and instability**, not just for international teachers but also for the students we serve. Constantly renewing our eligibility to teach disrupts continuity in the classroom and affects our ability to plan for the future. Establishing a **five-year International Visiting Teacher License** would allow dedicated educators like me to **focus entirely on student learning**—without the added stress of navigating an unnecessarily complex certification process.

Another critical issue is **fair compensation**. My wife, **Arlene M. Bejerano**, and I are both **full-time teachers in Hawai‘i**, yet we struggle financially because we are paid only as **emergency hires**. With the **high cost of living in Hawai‘i** and **two children to support**, we constantly face financial challenges, despite our deep commitment to educating Hawai‘i’s keiki. **Passing this bill would ensure fair pay and differentials for international teachers**, helping us achieve financial stability and continue serving Hawai‘i’s students without additional hardship.

Hawai‘i’s schools **greatly benefit** from the **dedication, experience, and global perspectives** that international teachers bring. We help **address critical teacher shortages**, particularly in **hard-to-staff schools**, while **enriching students' learning experiences** through diverse cultural perspectives. However, without policies that support and retain us, many highly qualified educators are forced to leave despite their unwavering commitment to their students.

SB 819, SD2 presents an opportunity to create a fairer and more sustainable system—one that values international educators, strengthens teacher retention, and ultimately ensures better educational outcomes for Hawai‘i’s keiki.

For these reasons, I **respectfully urge** you to **support and pass SB 819, SD2**, ensuring that international teachers can continue making a meaningful impact in Hawai‘i’s classrooms.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Elvin Valero Bejerano

Doctor of Educational Leadership and Management
4th Grade Teacher, Kihei Elementary School

TESTIMONY

As a current SPED teacher of Kahului Elementary School, Maui, Hawai'i, may I humbly express my strong support for the passage of SB No. 819 – International Visiting Teacher.

I am Rosa Mae Felida Lumbo from the Philippines who had been qualified to be a part of the Teacher Exchange Program of Hawaii.

Generally, I strongly believe that having passed with my fellow foreign teachers, the high qualifications set by the department of Education of Hawaii, we are generally equipped with the skills, competencies and capabilities, acceptable by your international standards. Thus, we are globally competitive.

Personally, with the rich and substantial professional experience that I gained in my country, I would humbly say that I have the attributes of a teacher, specifically a SPED teacher demanded by international standards and guidelines. My exposure as Head of the Values Education Department of one of the biggest public schools in our locality coupled with my degree in the Masteral program major in in Special Education together with my more or less 20 years of teaching experience in the graduate, tertiary and secondary levels of our educational system, and as a Guidance counselor, I am optimistic and confident that I have the international qualifications set by the standards of your educational system.

As a teacher for the past six (6) months in Kahului Elementary School, I am handling young learners with Special Educational Needs. With such limited time that I have handled these kind of learners, I know that I have created, to some extent, an impact in the lives of my learners as evidenced by the various comments, remarks of the parents of my learners during IEP meeting sessions. Parents would overwhelmingly and gratefully tell me that their children have tremendously incurred positive changes through my guidance and competence in dealing, training and responding to

the needs of their children. One major duty that we do as SPED teachers is to prepare IEP. This is the Individualized Educational Plan/Program (IEP) of a certain learner with special educational needs. It is with humility that I say that the IEP's that I prepare are mostly commended by our school vice principal as "well written" and "well prepared." This is reflected further by the positive results on the behavior of our learners as professed by their parents through their open comments. Furthermore, one of my learner has been even awarded as "EAGLE of the month" in our school for the month of January. "EAGLE of the month" is an award given to our learners who exemplifies the THREE (3) core values of our school which are, ALOHA, KULEANA, and 'IMI NA'AUAO. This positive result, I believe, is made possible by applying the appropriate techniques in dealing with my learners that resulted to a consistent and harmonious relationship that I have established with my special learners. Inspired by these feedbacks, I am further motivated to continue with this endeavor in my professional life, that is to continuously touch lives of other people in my own little way. And this could only be done through a longer working relationship that I will forge with my school. One way therefore to establish such working relationship is by allowing us to exercise our profession as SPED teachers without undergoing additional examination administered by your State. Allowing us to continue with our profession without requiring us to undertake an additional examination is a way of nurturing further a strong bond and relationship that we have with our special learners. As special learners, they need, consistency, stability and tranquility in dealing with them. By requiring us to undertake additional examination for us to further qualify to continue as their teachers might distort and stir negatively the already stable orientations we have built with our learners, leading our learners to a more traumatic and adverse behavioral conditions.

Moreover, I believe that such positive results would not also be realized if we are not professionally qualified to handle these kinds of learners in our school.

On the other hand, taking the examination demands additional cost on our part. The examination is expensive, and it is also a fact that we have our respective families that we are supporting back in our home countries. The cost to be incurred, the fees, the transportation going to OAHU and accommodation expenses shall mean a substantial economic burden for us, who have families who are economically depending on us.

With all the foregoing, we beg for your consideration and understanding, we fervently pray that our plight as foreign teachers under this program shall be favorably considered. We vow that we shall continue to render our services with much fervor, and utmost competence and efficiency. May our substantial academic qualifications, robust professional work experience, and positive manifestations of our services as SPED teachers, be sufficient to be considered, for us to be no longer required to hurdle an additional examination. We fervently pray that this bill shall be passed and approved, for us to be able to continuously provide quality and excellent educational service to our learners. The approval of this bill shall be a strong indication of the high standards already set by your State's educational system and a recognition of our substantial qualifications to those high standards.

Again, may we sincerely appeal for your profound consideration and deepest appreciation on this matter.

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:55:23 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Cherrie Lou Mendoza | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to wholeheartedly support Senate Bill 819, which proposes the International Visiting Teacher License. As a second-grade teacher at Kahului Elementary School, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges of staffing shortages in our schools.

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

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

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

By supporting SB819,SD2 you can help international teachers like myself make a long-term commitment to Hawaii's schools. You can provide us with the recognition and support we deserve, and help address the staffing shortages that plague our schools.

I urge you to consider the benefits that international teachers can bring to our schools and communities. By supporting SB819,SD2, you can help promote diversity and inclusion, and provide international teachers with a clearer path to continuing our important work in Hawaii's schools.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cherrie Lou Mendoza
Second-Grade Teacher, Kahului Elementary School

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:55:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|----------------|--|--------------------|------------------------|
| Annie Baltazar | DOE - Lanai High and Elementary School | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am Annie Baltazar, a second grade teacher at Lanai High and Elementary School for two years. I am writing to express my strong support for the establishment of an international visiting teacher license and to recommend amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1.

The J-1 Teacher Exchange Program has been instrumental in addressing teacher shortages across the United States, including here in Hawai'i. By bringing qualified international educators into our classrooms, we not only fill critical teaching positions but also enrich our students' learning experiences with diverse cultural perspectives. We educators serve as cultural ambassadors, fostering cross-cultural understanding and preparing our students to thrive in a global society. Our presence encourages the exchange of innovative teaching methodologies and ideas, benefiting both students and faculty.

Currently, Hawai'i requires us J-1 visa teachers to pass the Praxis exams in basic skills, pedagogy, and content knowledge to obtain licensure. While these exams are designed to ensure teaching competency, they present significant challenges for us. The financial burden of these exams can exceed \$1,000, a substantial expense for many. Additionally, the time and effort required to prepare for these exams detract from our primary responsibilities, such as lesson planning, student engagement, and community involvement. This process can be particularly daunting for those who have already demonstrated their qualifications and teaching proficiency in our home countries.

International educators participating in the J-1 program like me are required to have our academic credentials evaluated by recognized agencies to ensure we meet U.S. educational standards. We also provide valid copies of our current teaching licenses from our home countries. These steps confirm that we possess the necessary qualifications and experience to teach effectively. However, despite these verifications, the additional requirement of passing the Praxis exams in Hawai'i creates an unnecessary barrier, potentially discouraging highly qualified teachers from contributing to our education system.

By amending HB 439, HD1 to align with SB 819, SD1, Hawai'i can establish an international visiting teacher license that acknowledges the existing qualifications of J-1 educators. This change would not only alleviate undue burdens to us j1 teachers but also enhance our ability to attract and retain diverse, talented educators who enrich our students' learning experiences.

Mahalo for considering my testimony on this important matter.

Respectfully,

Annie Baltazar

LATE

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 2:04:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| JEFFREY C. DEL ROSARIO | Department of Education | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Honorable Chair Woodson and distinguished Members of the Committee:

I, Jeffrey C. Del Rosario, Inclusion Teacher (SPED) of August Ahrens Elementary School, firmly support the establishment of an international visiting teacher license. Significantly, I strongly support the passage of SB 819, SD2.

Embracing each student's individuality has always been important to me as a special education teacher. In Hawaii for over 6 months now, however, I have been learning how important diversity in culture is to forming my teaching style. The rich blend of different cultures influences has given me a new insight into how different cultures affect teaching and learning methods. And the Cultural Exchange Program for Teachers has made me more passionate about engaging learners especially the ones with special needs, school administrators, colleagues, parents and stakeholders.

The Cultural Exchange Program for Teachers has strengthened my conviction in the value of cultural competence in education while also improving my teaching methods. Learning from an environment that values diversity and interacting with educators who share my enthusiasm for helping all learners gave me a newfound sense of purpose and a wider range of resources to help my learners.

Thankfully, August Ahrens Elementary School in Waipahu has been providing me trainings and first-hand experience to better comprehend Inclusive Education, an integral part of the SPED Curriculum. It has been my joy, inspiration and motivation to nurture my learners with disabilities with so much love, care, willingness, and enthusiasm. I want to create an atmosphere where each student here in Hawaii, feels seen, heard, and appreciated for who they are—regardless of their difficulties or skills—is what I believe real inclusion is all about.

Thus, it is my fervent prayer that the wellbeing of the learners here in Hawaii most especially the SPED learners must be a priority. Therefore, I strongly support whatever initiative or move to strengthen this program.

It is with fervent prayer, that everyone of us should work hand in hand for our learners, the urge hope of the present and next generations to come.

Mahalo in advance!

LATE

Hon. Members of Committee,

I am writing to request a waiver from the Praxis exam requirement for teacher certification in Hawaii. I am currently teaching 5th Grade at Lihikai Elementary School in Kahului Hawaii. Under a J-1 visa sponsored by Aliance Abroad Group. My qualifications include a Bachelor's Degree in Education Major in English from University of Pangasinan, Philippines. With 17 years of teaching experience at Pogo Elementary School. I have been promoted from Teacher 1 to Master Teacher III. This experience, combined with my educational background, demonstrates my competency to teach English in Hawaii. As a J-1 visa holder, the Praxis exam creates a financial and logistical burden. Because I am still currently paying my loan in a financing company. I am dedicated to my students and committed to remaining in the US to contribute to its education system. And to be able to share my knowledge and experience in my home country.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

ONALEE L. PINGUL

Elementary Teacher, Lihikai Elementary School

LATE

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 2:15:37 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Princes Joy Calingangan | Department of Education | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

I strongly support the creation of an international visiting teacher license. I recommend that SB819, be amended.

I am Princes Joy V. Calingangan, a Special Education Teacher at August Ahrens Elementary School. I strongly support SB819, which would establish an international visiting teacher license for Filipino teachers. This legislation is crucial in addressing the critical teacher shortage, particularly in special education, and offers mutual benefits for both Filipino teachers and American students.

Teaching in Waipahu, with its strong Filipino community, has been a truly heartwarming experience. The predominantly Filipino student population has created a sense of belonging, making it feel like a home away from home, especially for special education teachers like myself. We've been deeply touched by the appreciation from parents, who often commend our patience and dedication to their children with disabilities. The strong rapport we've built with families here is incredibly rewarding and reinforces the positive impact we're able to make.

This positive experience underscores the eagerness of many qualified Filipino teachers, like myself, to contribute to addressing the critical teacher shortage and ensuring all students have access to a quality education. The establishment of the proposed international visiting teacher license, as outlined in SB819, would streamline the process for us to share our expertise and fill these vital roles.

My time teaching in the US has been invaluable, providing me with the opportunity to immerse myself in a different educational system, explore diverse teaching methodologies, and adapt to new classroom environments. This professional growth has significantly enhanced my skills and broadened my teaching repertoire, ultimately benefiting my students.

In turn, Filipino teachers bring unique skills, knowledge, and perspectives to American classrooms. We offer specialized expertise in various subjects and teaching approaches, enriching the learning experience for all students. Moreover, we foster cross-cultural understanding by sharing our cultural heritage and perspectives, promoting global citizenship and broadening students' worldviews. The interaction between Filipino teachers and American students creates a rich learning environment that benefits everyone involved. SB819 would facilitate this vital exchange and ensure a more equitable and enriching educational experience for all students.

Princes Joy V. Calingangan

SPED-FSC Teacher

August Ahrens Elementary School

Waipahu, Hawaii

LATE

SB-819-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 3:27:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/18/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support SB 819, SD2 - Relating to Education. which proposes creating an international visiting teacher license.

The J-1 Visa Program has proven invaluable, bringing 218 qualified educators to 55 Hawaiian schools. These teachers, comparable in qualifications to their U.S.-trained peers, are essential in addressing staffing shortages, particularly in special education. They provide high-quality instruction and serve as cultural ambassadors for keiki from Waimea to Lahaina to Naalehu. Looking ahead, the Department will welcome 116 more international educators in 2025-2026, reinforcing its commitment to developing "Globally Competitive and Locally Committed" students.

However, our current state licensing rules create unnecessary obstacles for these valuable educators. Unlike states like Nevada, Minnesota, and North Carolina, which have streamlined licensing processes for international teachers, Hawaii classifies J-1 teachers as "emergency hires." This requires them to take additional, costly comprehensive examinations (over \$1,000!), diverting crucial time from analyzing student assessments, meeting with families, and planning effective curriculum. Furthermore, they are ineligible for additional compensation offered to other educators in hard-to-fill positions, despite performing the same essential work.

SB 819 offers a solution. By creating an international teacher license without these burdensome additional examinations, we can fully leverage the skills and experience of these international educators. This will not only provide continuity of instruction for our keiki, as these teachers can remain for up to five years, but also enrich our schools with a more diverse workforce that reflects Hawaii's global community. The J-1 Visa Program offers exceptional educational and cultural opportunities for our schools. SB819, SD2 will ensure its continued success and maximize its positive impact on Hawaii's keiki. I urge you to support this important measure.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Mahalo,

Gretchen Cacao

To Chair Justin H. Woodson and Members of the Committee,
My name is Vicdona Reyes, and I am a J-1 teacher and a 2nd-grade teacher in an inclusion class at Mauka Lani Elementary. I am writing in strong support of SB819, SD2, which seeks to establish an international teacher license for certain visa holders. Teaching in an inclusion classroom has allowed me to work closely with diverse learners, ensuring that every child, regardless of ability, receives the education, support, and encouragement they need to succeed. My experience in Hawaii has been deeply fulfilling, and my passion for teaching is fueled by my compassion as both an educator and a mother. I strive every day to create a nurturing environment where my students feel valued, capable, and inspired to learn. However, the current licensing restrictions pose challenges for international teachers like myself, despite our qualifications, dedication, and the critical need for educators in Hawaii. Passing SB819, SD2 would not only recognize the contributions of international teachers but also help address the ongoing teacher shortage, particularly in high-need areas like special education and inclusion classrooms. Stability in the classroom is crucial for student success, and allowing experienced international teachers to continue serving Hawaii's schools ensures that students receive consistent, high-quality instruction. I have seen firsthand the positive impact that international teachers bring to Hawaii's education system, from enriching classroom diversity to fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. I urge you to support and pass SB819, SD2 to ensure that passionate educators like myself can continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of Hawaii's keiki. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

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

Mabuhay!

May I take this opportunity to extend my deepest gratitude to the Chair of the Board, esteemed members of the committee and/or legislatures for giving us the opportunity to provide testimonies in support of SB 819 SD2.

My name is Florante D. Romero a J1-Teacher at Mauka Lani Elementary School, Kapolei. I am submitting this testimony in support to the said Bill. This testimony emphasizes the importance of supporting international teachers, not just for our own benefit, but for the overall improvement of the educational system in the State particularly in Hawaii.

It cannot be denied that we, the J1 teachers, sacrificed our teaching positions in the Philippines to provide enough needs for our own families and of course our 'will' to serve as an international teacher. As an international teacher in the State, I don't just serve as a teacher but also to be an exemplary in all aspects - from a classroom teacher and to participate significant activities in school, district and to the Department of Education as a whole and being committed to provide the best education possible for our students as my top priority. Hence, I put more time to prepare developmentally appropriate activities for my students that would help them improve both in their academics and other necessary skills that will help them develop holistically. However, many of us faces significant barriers such as taking the Praxis Tests to continue serving the students. This is so because taking the said test requires time, effort and money especially in the application process. I would say that our qualification should be recognized without undergoing state's standardized tests, and financial constraints. It cannot be denied that we, the J1 teachers, can perform the best of the bests as we are the 'seasoned teachers' in the Philippines considering our number of years in teaching. Nonetheless, I am certain that we can still meet standards of the State even without taking the said exam.

May I humbly request the Chair, members of the committee, legislatures and other significant individuals to support this Bill to provide international teachers like me with a clear and fair path to licensure. This bill is not just an investment in international teachers for today's generation but in the future of education itself. Consequently, this Bill is an essential step toward strengthening the quality of education that may benefit the students because international teachers bring unique perspectives, skills, and expertise that enrich the learning environment in the State as a whole.

Thank you for your time and effort in this endeavor.

Mahalo!

Florante D. Romero
Elementary Teacher
Mauka Lani Elementary
Kapolei, HI