

To: House Committee on Education
Re: **HCR 111 / HR 107 – Urging the Department of Education to provide a detailed report to the Legislature on the true cost of producing school meals to ensure transparency and avoid unnecessary price increases**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
March 20, 2025, 2:00 PM

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of HCR 111 / HR 107**. These resolutions urge the Department of Education to provide a detailed report to the Legislature on the true cost of producing school meals to ensure transparency and avoid unnecessary price increases.

Hawai'i public schools receive federal reimbursements from the USDA when they provide student meals through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Currently, students qualify for free meals if their families earn up to 130% of the federal poverty level and for reduced-price meals if their income is between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level.

Unfortunately, many families that have to pay the full price for school meals cannot make ends meet. For example, a family of four that makes \$67,000 per year does not qualify for free or reduced-price meals,¹ while the ALICE household survival budget to afford the “bare-minimum costs of basic necessities” for that same family is nearly \$108,000.²

If that family has two students eating breakfast and lunch at school, they currently need to pay about \$1,300 per year for those meals. In January, the Department of Education proposed nearly doubling the prices charged for school meals, citing high costs of production, but did not provide a cost breakdown.³

Due to advocacy by our Congressional delegation and local anti-hunger groups, two years ago Hawai'i received a 13 percentage point increase in the level of federal reimbursements for school meals.⁴ However, that increase is inadequate, and the USDA is requiring itemized meal cost breakdowns in order to consider further reimbursement increases.⁵

In other words, providing the information requested by this resolution would also move us closer to increasing the amount of federal funds that come into our state to support child nutrition. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please pass these resolutions.

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

¹ <https://hawaiipublicschools.org/school-services/school-food-services/free-and-reduced-priced-meals-program/>

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

³ https://boe.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-01-16_FIC_fees.pdf

⁴ <https://hiappleseed.org/press-releases/usda-increase-hawaii-school-meal-reimbursement-rates-after-40-years>

⁵

https://assets.nationbuilder.com/goodbeginnings/pages/2185/attachments/original/1661908583/Feed_Our_Keiki_Print_Final.pdf



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Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: March 19, 2025

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

RE: Support for HR 107/HCR 111 Urging The Department Of Education To
Provide A Detailed Report To The Legislature On The True Cost Of
Producing School Meals To Ensure Transparency And Avoid Unnecessary
Price Increases

Hrg: Thursday, March 20, 2025, at 2:00 PM, Conference Room 309

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating, Active Living² (HEAL) coalition is in **support of 107/HCR 111**, which urges the Department of Education to provide a report on the cost of producing school meals.

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

Cost Clarity

State law currently mandates that half of meal production costs be recovered through meal prices. As production costs rise, so do the prices that students and families must pay. Accurate and transparent cost assessments are essential to prevent families from shouldering unnecessary financial burdens.

Risk of Higher Prices for Families in Need

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

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

² The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.



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

Please take the necessary steps to improve meal cost accounting, ensuring transparency and fairness so that families receive full value for what they pay.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nate Hix". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

LATE



2025 Network Members

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

hawaiihungeraction.org

House Committee on Education

March 20, 2025, at 2:00PM

RE: SUPPORT for HCR111 & HR107, URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO PROVIDE A DETAILED REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE ON THE TRUE COST OF PRODUCING SCHOOL MEALS TO ENSURE TRANSPARENCY AND AVOID UNNECESSARY PRICE INCREASES.

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

The Hawai'i Hunger Action Network, a coalition of more than twenty local organizations with the mission to advocate for food security for Hawai'i households, would like to express strong support for **HCR111 & HR107**. This bill would urge the Department of Education (DOE) to provide a detailed report on the true cost of school meals to ensure clarity and avoid unnecessary price increases.

One of the biggest obstacles in prior years to passing universal free school meals legislation has been the confusion around the DOE's meal costs. Experts have determined that the cost of this program would be somewhere in the ballpark of \$20 million, but the DOE has other costs that they would incur regardless of the bill's passage that they have lumped together in their testimony. This resolution is a formal request that the DOE provide a full, transparent reporting of their food service costs, so that the legislature can make informed decisions about the budget.

Mahalo for your leadership and for your consideration of HCR111 & HR107.

LATE



HAWAII APPLESEED
CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for HCR 111 – Urging the Department of Education to Provide a Detailed Report to the
Legislature on the True Cost of Producing School Meals to Ensure Transparency and Avoid
Unnecessary Price Increases.
House Committee on Education
Thursday, March 20, 2025, at 2:00pm

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **HCR 111**, which urges the Department of Education (DOE) to provide a detailed report on the true cost of school meals to ensure clarity and avoid unnecessary price increases.

Confusion surrounding the DOE’s school meal costs has caused a number of concerns in recent years. It has been one of the biggest obstacles to passing universal free school meals legislation, legislation funding farm to school programs, and even past efforts to increase Hawai‘i’s federal reimbursement rates.

For example, experts have determined that the cost of covering breakfast and lunch for all paid and reduced price students would be somewhere in the ballpark of \$20 million. However, the DOE has repeatedly included other costs in their estimates—costs that would be incurred whether or not meals are paid, reduced-price or free—causing confusion around the true cost of passage of such a measure.

Understanding the actual costs associated with producing school meals is essential for the legislature to effectively plan the state’s budget and allocate resources. A detailed report will provide clarity on expenditures, helping legislators and the public to understand the current state of school meal costs before additional funds are requested or programs are proposed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HCR 111. We are pleased that the Hawai‘i legislature is paying attention to improving food security.

HR-107

Submitted on: 3/18/2025 5:26:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Will Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support HCR111/HR107 -

One of the biggest obstacles in prior years to passing universal free school meals legislation has been the confusion around the DOE's meal costs. Experts have determined that the cost of this program would be somewhere in the ballpark of \$20 million, but the DOE has other costs that they would incur regardless of the bill's passage that they have lumped together in their testimony. This resolution is a formal request that the DOE provide a full, transparent reporting of their food service costs, so that the legislature can make informed decisions about the budget.

HR-107

Submitted on: 3/18/2025 8:17:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ted Bohlen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I **SUPPORT** for greater transparency!

HR-107

Submitted on: 3/18/2025 9:49:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha e,

I suport this resolution.

Mahalo,

Isis "Izzy" Usborne (96815)

HR-107

Submitted on: 3/19/2025 7:14:27 AM

Testimony for EDN on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Candace Vizcarra	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this resolution that again seeks transparency of ALL school meal costs and allocations to ensure unnecessary spending and price increases!!

HR-107

Submitted on: 3/19/2025 1:59:41 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha House Committee on Education:

I strongly support this resolution. Good for the public and the Legislature to understand the true cost of school meal production to ensure transparency, unnecessary meal price increases, and guidance on efforts to provide free lunches to all students.

Mahalo,

Daniel C. Smith

Pearl City

LATE

HR-107

Submitted on: 3/19/2025 9:28:45 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ted Meehan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HCR111/ HR107.

In reviewing the House Resolution, it is abundantly clear that the Department of Education needs to provide and itemized cost breakdown for the current cost of providing school meals **before any decision is made to increase the cost to students.** It is unreasonable to state you want to charge more for something unless you can provide a detailed breakdown of existing costs to initiate a discussion on why an increase is needed.

As well, the adverse effect to families that a cost increase would create needs to be a factor in determining if a price increase is warranted.

I urge you to support HCR111/HB107. Mahalo.

Ted Meehan