

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

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

Date: 03/11/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 0789, SD2 RELATING TO SCHOOL CAFETERIA MEAL COSTS.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education to charge not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing a school meal for each school meal. Effective 7/1/2050. Repealed 1/1/2031 if DOE fails to meet statutory Local Farm to School Meal goal. (SD2)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 789, SD 2.

The Department supports reducing the requirement of minimum student meal payments from one half to one quarter. This would also align with language in the Department's administrative package.

Reducing the requirement of a minimum payment will allow for the Department to not have to raise the prices it charges families for school meals to meet statutory requirements. However, the rising cost of food and the push towards purchasing more locally-grown produce will increase the cost of preparing school meals and is something the Department will continue to monitor.

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



HIPHI Board

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*Medical-Legal Partnership
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HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &
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Community Health
Worker Initiatives

COVID-19 Response

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: March 10, 2025

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

RE: Support for SB 789 SD2, Relating to School Meal Costs

Hrg: Tuesday, March 11, 2025 at 2:00 pm, Room 309

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating, Active Living² (HEAL) Coalition **supports SB 789 SD2**, which repeals the requirement that the Department of Education set school cafeteria meal prices at no less than half the cost of meal preparation.

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 removing this provision and providing free school meals for all students.

Meal Revenues Make Up Only a Tiny Fraction of the Education Budget

The Department of Education has an annual budget of over \$2 billion, with meal revenues totaling less than \$20 million per year, or just 1% of the overall budget. Collecting meal prices from students is not necessary to keep the Department of Education functioning. Students receive free education regardless of income level and the nutrition they need to learn should be free too.

Half of Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the

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.



FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.³

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

Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.⁴ By failing to ensure they have access to meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success. Removing the cost provision will expand access to nutritious meals, helping students receive the nourishment they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

Please support SB 789 SD2, and pave the way for free school meals for all keiki.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nate Hix", written in a cursive style.

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

³ "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702&g=040XX00US15>

⁴ "Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7282962/>



SENATE BILL 789, SD2, RELATING TO SCHOOL CAFETERIA MEAL COSTS

MARCH 11, 2025 · EDN HEARING

POSITION: Support with amendments.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports and suggests amendments** for SB 789, SD2, relating to school cafeteria meal costs, which requires the Department of Education to charge not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing a school meal for each school meal, effective 7/1/2050 and repealed 1/1/2031 if DOE fails to meet statutory Local Farm to School Meal goal.

Hungry children can't learn.

Currently, under HRS §302A-405, the DOE is required to set school meal prices at an amount that covers half of total student meal costs. This led the department to propose significant increases in student meal prices earlier this year (along with proposals to increase a range of other student fees). HIDOE requested approval from the Board of Education to nearly double the cost of school meals over the next four years. School lunches would have increased from \$2.50 for elementary and middle school students and \$2.75 for high school students to \$4.75 and \$5.00 by the 2028-2029 school year. This would be tremendously harmful for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs. **As we repeal the statutory provision that compels the DOE to raise student meal prices, we should also support free school meals for all, which would expand access to food security for children who may not otherwise be able to eat.** Two out of three families that are struggling with Hawai'i's cost of living are currently ineligible for free school meals through the federal free lunch program. Studies have shown that schools that implement free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

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

That said, we urge your committee to strike language from this measure that would repeal the 25 percent price-to-cost ratio for school meals if the DOE does not meet local farm-to-school goals. While we agree that the department should increase its use of local and sustainable agricultural products, we note that the DOE has lagged behind in meeting this objective for many reasons, including a lack of resources, and that it is only sourcing just below 6 percent of meals products today from local farmers. The current federal instability only further complicates the department's pursuit of its local farm-to-school and food production requirements. **Working families should not be penalized with school meal price increases if the DOE is unable to meet these objectives in future years.**

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

Contact: educationcaucusdph@gmail.com • 808-679-7454



March 11, 2025

Subject: Hawai'i Foodbank in Support of SB 789 SD2 Relating to School Cafeteria Meal Costs

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for SB 1789, SD2 Relating to School Cafeteria Meal Costs. This bill requires the Department of Education to charge not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing a school meal for each school meal.

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

As the state's largest hunger-relief organization, Hawai'i Foodbank has been committed to ensuring no one in Hawai'i goes hungry since 1983. We work with over 225 agency partners on O'ahu and Kaua'i to distribute food, and programs like Food 4 Keiki and 'Ohana Produce Plus provide nutritious meals to children and families.

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

With aloha,

Amy Miller
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank

LATE

To: House Committee on Education
Re: **SB 789 SD2 – Relating to School Cafeteria Meal Costs**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
March 11, 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 SB 789 SD2**. This bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) to charge not less than one-quarter of the cost of preparing a school meal for each school meal.

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

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

This bill addresses a **problematic provision in current state law that the DOE cited to justify raising school meal prices even higher** at a Board of Education meeting last month,³ to levels that would put Hawai'i at or above the 90th percentile of school meal prices in the nation.⁴

There is NO federal mandate about the full price level for school meals, yet current state law sets that level at not less than one half of the cost of preparing the meals. **Rather than further burden students and their families with higher school meal prices, it makes sense to simply lower or remove the state price mandate altogether.**

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

Thank you,
Nicole Woo
Director of Research and Economic Policy

1

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

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

3 <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/01/hawai%ca%bbi-families-could-face-big-price-hike-for-school-meals/>

4 <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-Trends-Report.pdf>

SB-789-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/7/2025 4:49:53 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB789. Any action that reduces the cost to students and their families. I hope the goal in the future is to have free meals to all students. Please pass SB789.

SB-789-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 10:59:24 AM

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

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

Comments:

I support SB789 **SD1**, which repeals the requirement that the Department of Education set school cafeteria meal prices at no less than half the cost of meal preparation. Moreover, Hawaii can ensure **all students are able to eat** by removing this provision **and** providing free school meals for all students.

Regarding the SD2 amendment, while I fully support the DOE working to meet the statutory Local Farm to School Meal goal, I do not support the SD2 amendment as it would be counterproductive to achieving this important objective.

The DOE should implement free school meals for **all**. Nutritious school meals support education by providing food to ensure that children are not distracted by hunger during class. **No child should go hungry**. Every student should be provided access to cost-free nutritional meals. Universal school meals can improve this access.

I urge the Committee to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, in addition to removing language added from the SD2 version of this measure. The legislature always makes sure to put funds towards what it values. Let's make clear that we value all our keiki.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.