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GOVERNOR



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SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
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Date: 02/03/2025

Time: 03:00 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: Senate Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 0868 RELATING TO THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CERTIFICATION SUBSIDY PILOT PROGRAM.

Purpose of Bill: Establishes a one-year School Bus Driver Certification Subsidy Pilot Program within the Department of Education for the 20252026 school year. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates fund.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on SB 868. While we recognize the intent of the proposed pilot program, we would like to respectfully clarify the Department's role in relation to school bus driver certification and compliance.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) is the primary agency responsible for licensing and ensuring compliance of school bus drivers and vehicles in the State of Hawaii, not the Department.

As the Department does not own or manage school bus fleets, we lack the resources or certified staff needed to implement a comprehensive bus driver certification program. At this time, we do not have the staff or positions available to support this new program within the proposed timeline.

Educational pathways for driver training already exist. Community colleges, such as Leeward Community College, offer Commercial Driver's License (CDL) programs, which include school bus driver-specific training. Additionally, local school bus contractors provide on-site CDL certification training for their employees at no additional cost.

The Department appreciates the Committee's commitment to supporting Hawaii's students and thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective.



Testimony of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

Committee on Education

Date Time: February 3, 2025

**Location: Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street**

Measure SB868

RELATING TO THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CERTIFICATION SUBSIDY PILOT PROGRAM

Dear Chair Kidani and Vice Chair Kim,

The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OahuMPO) **supports SB868.**

There is a nationwide school bus driver shortage affecting Hawaii, which in turn affects the efficiency and resilience of the overall transportation system. While the department of education contracts school bus services to various contractors on multiple islands, driver shortages have resulted in the cancellation, temporary suspension, and consolidation of bus routes. The school bus driver shortage negatively impacts student attendance and causes difficulties for working parents who juggle jobs and school drop-offs, and exacerbates traffic impacts on our roadways, especially around schools. A one-year certification subsidy pilot would help to subsidize the costs of training and further encourage capacity building for job seekers willing and able to serve as bus drivers and would benefit the overall transportation industry.

SB868 aligns with the Vision and Goals of the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), by supporting initiatives that would help Oahu move closer to its carbon net negative goals. School buses have the capacity to move students more efficiently, reducing congestion during peak hours and single occupancy vehicles from our roads. However, we not only need an expanded school bus service, but also trained, certified bus drivers.

The OahuMPO is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on the island of Oahu responsible for carrying out a multimodal transportation planning process, including the development of a long-range (25-year horizon) metropolitan transportation plan, referred to as the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), which encourages and promotes a safe, efficient, and resilient transportation system that serves the mobility needs of all people and freight (including walkways, bicycles, and transit), fosters economic growth and development, while minimizing fuel consumption and air pollution ([23 CFR 450.300](#)).

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



SENATE BILL 868, RELATING TO THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER CERTIFICATION SUBSIDY PILOT PROGRAM

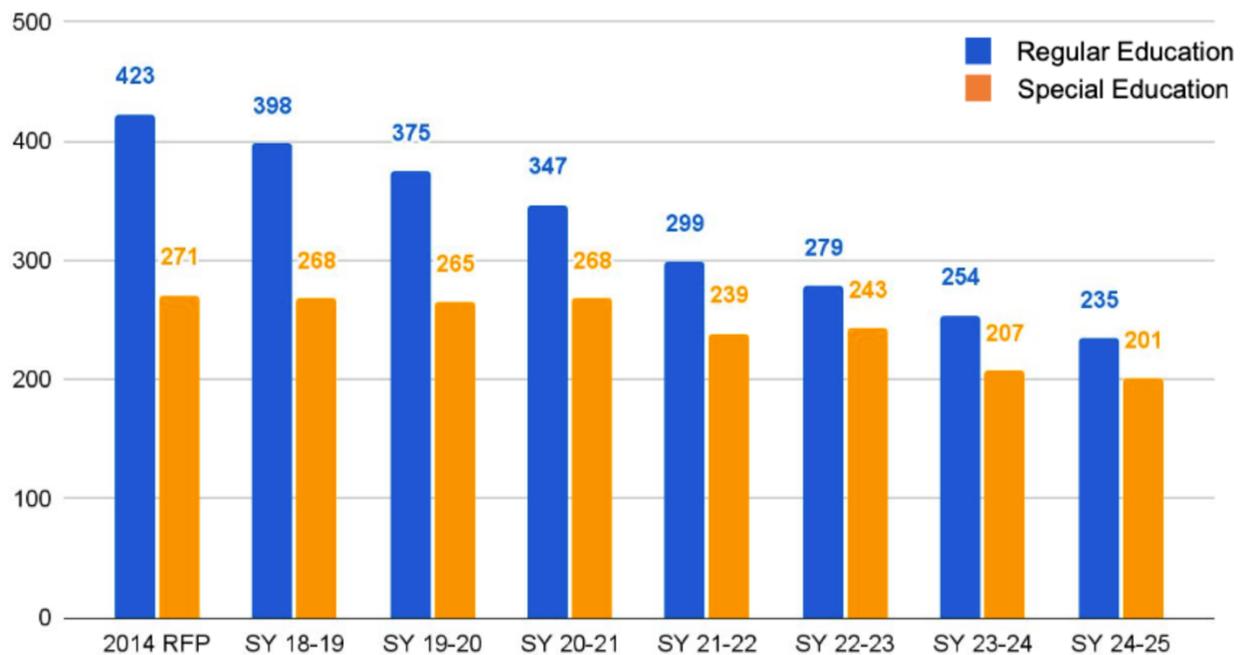
FEBRUARY 3, 2025 · EDU HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports SB 868, relating to the School Bus Driver Certification Subsidy Pilot Program, which establishes a one-year School Bus Driver Certification Subsidy Pilot Program within the Department of Education for the 2025-2026 school year.

School bus service is essential for getting students to and from school, particularly for students who lack other transportation options or face hardship in obtaining school transportation services due to economic difficulty. Yet, chronic bus driver shortages have led to the cancellation or consolidation of many school bus routes, especially in West O'ahu and in rural and remote areas of the neighbor islands, reducing transportation options for local families.

Over the last ten years, the number of bus drivers serving DOE students has fallen from 423 serving general education students and 271 drivers serving special education students in 2014 to just 235 drivers serving general education students and 201 serving special education students for the 2024-2025 school year.



This decline has led to dramatic service disruptions, the most recent of which occurred in August of last year when department officials unexpectedly announced that they were temporarily suspending 108 bus routes serving middle and high school students in central O’ahu and students of nearly all grade levels on the southern and eastern portions of Hawai’i Island.

Similarly, in July of 2023, the department cancelled or suspended school bus service for fourteen schools statewide, which impacted nearly 1,400 students across O’ahu and Kaua’i. The bus driver shortage has severely impacted Hawai’i Island school communities, where county bus services do not operate as frequently as on O’ahu and where many students face commutes that can exceed one and a half hours each way.

A lack of adequate school bus transportation service exacerbates chronic absenteeism. Rates of chronic absenteeism are highest in rural, remote, and socioeconomically disadvantaged school communities. In the 2022-2023 school year, 30 percent of Hawai’i students were chronically absent from school, meaning they missed fifteen or more days of class. That was a significant jump from two years before, when only 18 percent of students were counted as

chronically absent, and far exceeds the national average of only 10 percent. Numerous studies show that chronic absenteeism hampers student achievement and lowers graduation rates.

Governor Josh Green announced an emergency proclamation related to the school bus shortage on August 17, 2023, which allows the department of transportation to grant exemptions for the use of vehicles other than school buses to transport students and allows commercial driver's license holders with a "P" endorsement for driving passenger vehicles to operate student transportation vehicles. More needs to be done, however, to sustain critical bus service programs for Hawai'i's public school students and their 'ohana.

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