



JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

Keith Hayashi
SUPERINTENDENT

Kasey Eisenhour
PRINCIPAL

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
KEONEPOKO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
15-890 KAHAKAI BOULEVARD
PAHOA, HAWAII 96778
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Stacey Bello
COMPLEX AREA SUPERINTENDENT

February 24, 2026

Letter in Support of SB2391 – Teacher Salary Step Increases

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

I am writing in strong support of SB2391, which provides for annual salary step increases for public school and public charter school teachers who have completed one year of satisfactory service, contingent upon negotiation through the collective bargaining process pursuant to section 89-9, HRS, and subject to the availability of funds.

As an educator and school leader in Hawai'i, I witness firsthand the challenges our teachers face in one of the highest cost-of-living states in the nation. While Hawai'i's teacher salaries may appear competitive nationally, when adjusted for the realities of housing, transportation, and daily living expenses, our educators often struggle to remain in the profession or in the state. This instability directly impacts students, school culture, and long-term academic progress.

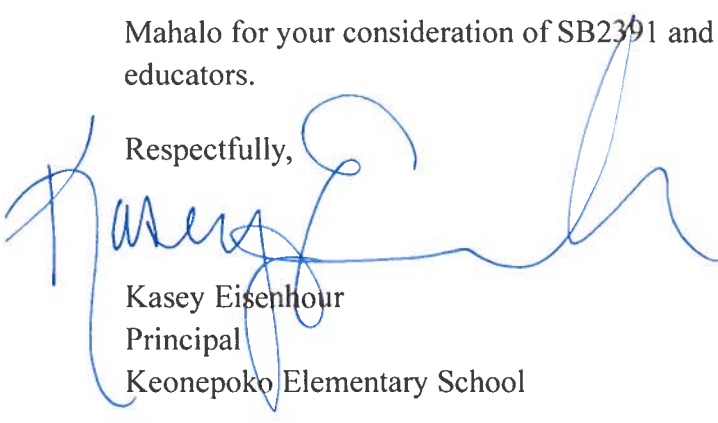
SB2391 recognizes the importance of retaining effective educators by providing a structured pathway for annual step increases and longevity recognition. These provisions affirm that sustained, satisfactory service matters. Teachers who commit to our keiki and communities year after year should see professional growth reflected in their compensation.

At the same time, I respectfully defer to the collective bargaining process led by the Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA). Compensation structures are most appropriately determined through good-faith negotiations under Chapter 89, HRS. SB2391 thoughtfully honors that process by making implementation contingent upon negotiated agreement and available funding. This balance demonstrates respect for both legislative intent and established labor relations frameworks.

Stable, competitive compensation is essential to recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers across Hawai'i's public and charter schools. By supporting step increases and longevity recognition—if bargained and funded—this measure helps strengthen the educator workforce while preserving the integrity of collective bargaining.

Mahalo for your consideration of SB2391 and for your continued commitment to Hawai'i's students and educators.

Respectfully,



Kasey Eisenhour
Principal
Keonepoko Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:43:38 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacey Bello	Testifying for Department of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I do support increased compensation for our hard working teachers. This proposal can be addressed through the collective bargaining agreement process between union and employer.



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

Date: 02/25/2026

Time: 10:55 AM

Location: CR 211 & Videoconference

Committee: WAM

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB2391, SD1, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Provides annual salary step increases for public schools and public charter school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, HRS, and subject to the availability of funds. Effective 1/1/2077. (SD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) respectfully provides comments on SB 2391, SD 1.

The Department appreciates the Legislature's continued efforts to improve the Department's ability to attract and retain quality employees to support Hawaii's K-12 public schools. Providing automatic step increases in teacher salaries for each year of satisfactory service completed has the potential to be a powerful tool to achieve that goal.

The measure explicitly provides automatic step increases for teachers for each year of satisfactory service. Bargaining Unit 5 (BU5) covers more than just teachers; it also includes librarians, counselors, and resource teachers.

If the Legislature proceeds with authorizing this measure, the Department recommends an adjustment to the language to include all members of BU5.

The Department believes that all of its employees serve diverse yet equally important roles to help ensure student achievement. In light of this, the Department encourages the Legislature to consider including all other Bargaining Units, in recognition of the tremendous team effort required to ensure a successful Department. Therefore, the Department urges the Legislature to consider including step movements for the following Bargaining Units in this measure:

- Bargaining Unit 1 - Blue-Collar Non-Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 2 - Blue-Collar Supervisory Employees

- Bargaining Unit 3 - White-Collar Non-Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 4 - White-Collar Supervisory Employees
- Bargaining Unit 6 - Educational Officers
- Bargaining Unit 9 - Registered Professional Nurses
- Bargaining Unit 10 - Institutional, Health, and Correction Officers
- Bargaining Unit 13 - Professional and Scientific Employees

The Department notes that Section 89-9 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes requires negotiations between the employer and the exclusive representative with respect to wages.

Finally, should the Legislature proceed with authorizing this measure, the Department respectfully requests that the Legislature simultaneously include the funds necessary to implement these step movements into the Department's base budget going forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2391, SD 1.

JOSH GREEN, M. D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



J.N. MUSTO, PhD
CHIEF NEGOTIATOR
KE PO'O KUKAKUKA

STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
OFFICE OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
KE KE'ENA MĀLAMA LIMAHAHA AUPUNI
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA
235 S. BERETANIA STREET, SUITE 1201
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2437

Statement of
J.N. Musto, PhD
Chief Negotiator, Office of Collective Bargaining

Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
Wednesday, February 25, 2026
10:55AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 211

In consideration of
SB2391 SD1, RELATING TO EDUCATION

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and the members of the committee:

The Office of Collective Bargaining (OCB) appreciates the intent of SB2391 SD1, which would provide annual salary step increases and longevity increases for public school and public charter school teachers, if those items are negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement under HRS §89-9 and if funding is available. However, OCB must respectfully oppose this measure.

OCB agrees with testimony provided by the Department of the Attorney General that the bill raises legal concerns under Chapter 89. In particular, wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment are subject to negotiations as provided under HRS §89-9; this includes step movement and longevity steps. The Attorney General also noted that similar statutory language was repealed in 2016 because the legislature agreed that these matters must be negotiated through collective bargaining.

OCB recognizes that SB2391 SD1 provides language clarifying that increases would apply only if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement; however, it is important to be clear about what that means in practice: step movement and longevity increases are negotiated each time the parties bargain a new contract. They are not automatic from one contract to the next contract, and they are usually part of larger negotiations that include many other pay and working-condition issues.

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

Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Time: 10:55 AM

Location: Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

Committee: WAM

The Honorable Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
The Honorable Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate
State Capitol, Room 208
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Bill No. SB 2391, SD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

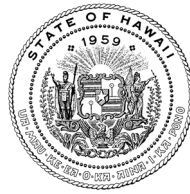
My name is Ernest Muh, and I serve as the Complex Area Superintendent for the Hawaii State Department of Education. I am writing to express my support for the intent of Senate Bill 2391, SD1, which seeks to provide annual salary step increases for our public and charter school teachers.

This measure signals a vital commitment to the teaching profession by ensuring that satisfactory service is recognized as the standard for professional and financial growth. While I strongly support the goals of this bill, I defer the specific implementation and structure of these increases to the collective bargaining process, as outlined in Section 89-9, HRS.

Investing in teachers is directly investing in our students' futures. I respectfully urge the Committee to support SB2391.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Ernest Muh
Complex Area Superintendent
Leilehua–Mililani–Waialua Complex



JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

SETH S. COLBY, Ph.D.
DIRECTOR

SABRINA NASIR
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM
HAWAII EMPLOYER-UNION HEALTH BENEFITS TRUST FUND
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
Ka 'Oihana Mālama Mo'ohelu a Kālā
P.O. BOX 150
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96810-0150

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RESEARCH OFFICE
BUDGET, PROGRAM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DIVISION
FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION DIVISION
OFFICE OF FEDERAL AWARDS MANAGEMENT

WRITTEN ONLY

TESTIMONY BY SETH S. COLBY, Ph.D.
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
ON
SENATE BILL NO. 2391, S.D. 1

February 25, 2026
10:55 a.m.
Room 211 and Videoconference

RELATING TO EDUCATION

The Department of Budget and Finance (B&F) opposes this bill.

Senate Bill No. 2391, S.D. 1, provides an annual increment if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) pursuant to Section 89-9, and subject to the availability of funds, for: 1) public school teachers who have completed a year's satisfactory service and who have complied with the other requirements of Sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642 and 302A-701, as applicable; and 2) public charter school teachers who have completed a year's satisfactory service and who have complied with other specific requirements of Chapter 302D. In addition, the bill provides longevity step increases, subject to the availability of funds, for: 1) public school teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step and who have complied with the other requirements of Sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642 and 302A-701, as applicable; and 2) public charter school teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum

increment step or in any longevity step and who have complied with other specific requirements of Chapter 302D.

B&F opposes this measure because the bill does not appear to impose a mandatory obligation on the Legislature to appropriate funds for the annual salary step increases. The phrase, "Notwithstanding any law to the contrary," would permit the transfer of funds from other Department of Education (DOE) Program IDs to finance annual salary step increases. Because this provision is not explicitly tied to a specific CBA or corresponding legislative appropriation, it raises the possibility that other DOE programs may be required to absorb these costs. Further, the phrase, "and subject to the availability of funds," is ambiguous because it does not specify who is responsible for determining such availability. When read in conjunction with the phrase, "Notwithstanding any law to the contrary," this language could reasonably be interpreted as authorizing the reallocation or transfer of funds from other DOE Program IDs to cover the annual salary step increases. Finally, this bill does not specify the amount appropriated to fund the annual salary step increases; consequently, the overall fiscal impact cannot be determined.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
HILO-WAIĀKEA COMPLEX
75 AUPUNI STREET, RM. 203
HILO, HAWAII 96720

Date: February 24, 2026
To: Senator Dela Cruz and Members of the Ways & Means Committee
From: Kasie Kaleohano, Complex Area Superintendent, Hilo-Waiākea
Subject: **Testimony in Support of SB 2391 - Relating to Education**

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

I am writing to express my strong support for the intent of Senate Bill 2391. This measure represents a vital step in recognizing the immense value our educators bring to the state of Hawai'i. Our teachers are the backbone of our community, and ensuring they are adequately supported is essential for the future of our keiki and the stability of our educational system.

The current educational landscape in Hawaii demands that we take proactive measures to recruit and retain high-quality teachers. By addressing compensation, working conditions, or professional development, we send a clear message that Hawaii values its teachers. However, while the goals of this bill are commendable, the methodology of implementation is just as critical as the intent.

While I stand firmly behind the spirit of SB 2391, I believe it is paramount that any specific changes to teacher compensation, benefits, or working conditions remain subject to the collective bargaining process.

- **Respecting the Union Framework:** The Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) and the employer must have the autonomy to negotiate terms that reflect the nuanced needs of the workforce.
- **Sustainability:** Ensuring that changes are funneled through the established union process prevents legislative "quick fixes" from unintentionally disrupting existing contracts or long-term fiscal planning.
- **Fair Representation:** Deferring to collective bargaining ensures that the voices of the educators themselves, represented by their union, are the primary drivers of the final agreement.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kasie Kaleohano".

Kasie Kaleohano
Complex Area Superintendent

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



MAKALAPUA ALENCASTRE, ED. D.
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>
1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1100, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

FOR: SB 2391 SD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION
DATE: February 25, 2026
TIME: 10:55 A.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Ways & Means
ROOM: Conference Room 211 & Videoconference
FROM: Ed H. Noh, Ed. D., Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission ("Commission") appreciates the opportunity to provide **COMMENTS on SB 2391 SD1** which provides automatic step increases in teacher salaries for each year of satisfactory service completed, subject to available funds.

The Commission appreciates the intent of this measure as it assists in the recruitment and retention of teachers in all public schools, including public charter schools, by increasing teacher pay.

The Commission humbly requests consideration of the following amendment to the measure:

- Section 3, lines 13-14- removal of "*as deemed applicable by the state public charter school commission.*"
- Section 3, lines 19-20- removal of "*as deemed applicable by the state public charter school commission.*"

The Commission is requesting this amendment as each individual charter school is considered the employer of the teachers that work at that school. As such, each charter school governing board and its administration have the authority to determine and set the employment conditions and compensation for the teachers employed at that charter school.

The Commission is available to work with the Legislature and public charter schools on the implementation of this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:32:04 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Richard Fajardo	Testifying for Hawaii Department of Education	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and members of the WAM Committee:

Person Testifying: Richard Fajardo

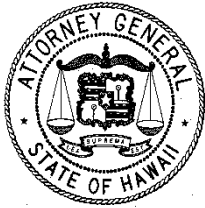
Postion: Comments Only

I support the hard working teachers in the Department of Education and wholeheartedly believe that all teachers need to pay increases to keep up with the cost of living in our state.

I respectfully comment that this measure be deferred to the collective bargaining agreement process.

Respectfully,

Richard Fajardo



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

S.B. NO. 2391, S.D. 1, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

BEFORE THE:

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

DATE: Wednesday, February 25, 2026 **TIME:** 10:55 a.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 211

TESTIFIER(S): **WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY.**

(For more information, contact Fiamma Rago,
Deputy Attorney General, at (808)-587-2900)

Chair Dela Cruz and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments regarding this bill.

This bill seeks to provide automatic step increases in teacher salaries for each year of satisfactory service completed, subject to the availability of funds. However, the bill conflicts with section 89-9(a), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), which makes "wages" a mandatory subject of collective bargaining.

Pursuant to section 89-2, HRS, the term "wages" includes the number of incremental and longevity steps. As written, the bill would therefore conflict with chapter 89, HRS, because wages, including incremental and longevity steps, are subject to negotiation through collective bargaining. Further, where there is contrary legislation, section 89-19, HRS, provides that adjustments made in accordance with chapter 89 shall take precedence over all contrary legislation.

The bill's current wording is similar to section 302A-626, HRS, formerly section 297-34, HRS, which was enacted prior to Hawaii's collective bargaining laws for public employment. Section 302A-626, HRS, was repealed by Act 87, Session Laws of Hawaii 2016. That repeal promoted consistency within the law because section 302A-626, HRS, had been rendered obsolete by the collective bargaining law, which requires longevity steps and movement between salary steps to be negotiated through collective bargaining. Reinserting similar wording in chapter 302A through this bill could again create a conflict with chapter 89.

Additionally, the phrase "**Notwithstanding any law to the contrary**" in the new section of chapter 302A at page 2, line 12, and in the new section of chapter 302D at page 3, line 8, would permit the transfer of funds from other Department of Education (DOE) Program IDs to finance annual salary step increases. Because this wording is not expressly limited to a specific collective bargaining agreement or to a corresponding legislative appropriation, it creates the potential that other DOE programs could be required to absorb the costs of this action.

Further, the phrase "**and subject to the availability of funds**" in the new section of chapter 302A at page 2, lines 13 and 14, and page 3, lines 2 and 3, and in the new section of chapter 302D at page 3, lines 9, 10, and 21, is ambiguous in that it fails to identify the party responsible for determining such availability. Given this ambiguity, and when read in conjunction with the clause "Notwithstanding any law to the contrary," the wording of the new sections may be reasonably construed as authorizing the reallocation or transfer of funds from other DOE Program IDs to cover the annual salary step increases.

Finally, this bill does not specify the amount appropriated to fund the annual salary step increases; consequently, the total fiscal impact of the bill cannot be determined.

To promote consistency with chapter 89, HRS, and to address the above concerns, the Department recommends that the new sections to be added to chapters 302A and 302D be deleted and replaced with this wording:

§302A- Salary increases; annual, longevity. (a) Teachers who have completed one year of satisfactory service and complied with the requirements of sections 302A-601.5 through 302A-642 and section 302A-701, as applicable, shall be entitled to an annual increment if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement under section 89-9, subject to subsection (c).

(b) Teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step pursuant to section 302A-624 and complied with the other requirements of sections 302A-601.5 through 302A-642 and section 302A-701, as applicable, shall be entitled to longevity step increases if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement under section 89-9, subject to subsection (c).

(c) Any collective bargaining agreement negotiated pursuant to section 89-9 that provides for annual increments or longevity step increases under this section and requires the expenditure of public funds shall be subject to funding

by a specific appropriation enacted by the legislature. The agreement shall not be effective or enforceable unless and until sufficient funds are appropriated for its implementation. The legislature may reject the agreement in whole by declining to appropriate the funds necessary to implement it.

§302D- Salary increases; annual, longevity. (a) Teachers who have completed one year of satisfactory service and complied with the requirements of this chapter that pertain to the employment conditions and compensation for teachers, as deemed applicable by their employing public charter school, shall be entitled to an annual increment if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement under section 89-9, subject to subsection (c).

(b) Teachers who have served satisfactorily for three years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step, if any, and who have complied with the requirements of this chapter that pertain to the employment conditions and compensation for teachers, as deemed applicable by their employing public charter school, shall be entitled to longevity step increases if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement under section 89-9, subject to subsection (c).

(c) Any collective bargaining agreement negotiated pursuant to section 89-9 that provides for annual increments or longevity step increases under this section and requires the expenditure of public funds shall be subject to funding by a specific appropriation enacted by the legislature. The agreement shall not be effective or enforceable unless and until sufficient funds are appropriated for its implementation. The legislature may reject the agreement in whole by declining to appropriate the funds necessary to implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.



SENATE BILL 2391 SD1, RELATING TO EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 25, 2026 · WAM HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus supports SB 2391 SD1, relating to education, which provides annual salary step increases for public schools and public charter school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, HRS, and subject to the availability of funds.

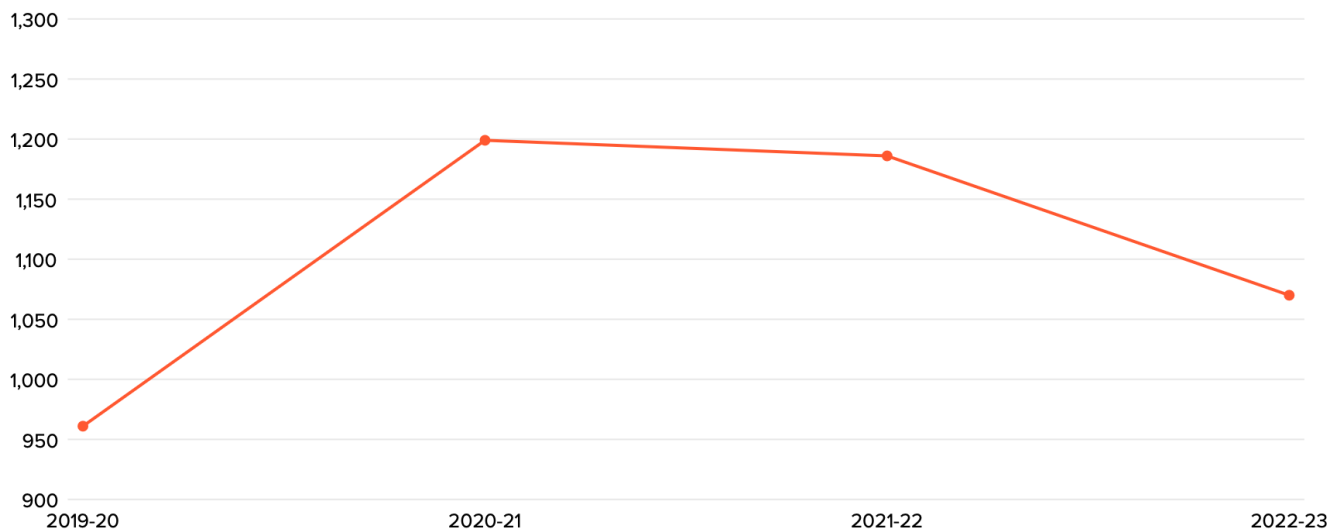
Teachers are the most important professionals in increasing student achievement. According to numerous studies, however, Hawai'i's average teacher salaries are the lowest in the nation when adjusted for cost of living. A 2020 study conducted by APA Consulting on behalf of the Hawai'i Department of Education found that when compared with other high-cost geographic locations, Hawai'i teachers are paid \$7,700 to \$26,000 less than their peers in school districts with similar costs of living, depending on length of service.

While that pay gap is decreasing because of the legislature's effort to fund differential pay increases and resolve salary compression in recent years, teachers are still underpaid compared to other professions that require a similar level of education. Restoring guaranteed annual increments, more commonly known as "step increases," would significantly help to alleviate that gap.

A 2022 survey by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University placed Hawai'i among the 10 states with the lowest teacher-to-population ratio. Moreover, as *Honolulu Civil Beat* reported in August of 2024, voluntary teacher separations remain high, at over 1,000 per year (see chart below).

Voluntary teacher separations, 2019 to 2023

The number of teachers annually leaving the DOE remains high but has started to decline following the pandemic.



DOE has not released data for the 2023-24 school year.

Chart: Megan Tagami/Civil Beat • Source: [Hawaii DOE](#)

These trends are further exacerbated by the aging teacher workforce. The Hawai'i State Teachers Association has repeatedly cautioned against being overly optimistic about positive teacher retention data, with a wave of experienced educators expected to retire in the next few years.

Moreover, the state is over reliant on unlicensed teachers to fill vacant positions. A December report found that 48 percent of new teachers in classrooms statewide are not fully licensed. As the Honolulu Star-Advertiser's editorial board recently wrote, "That is completely unacceptable." Strengthening teacher pay improves workforce retention. A Stanford University analysis found that raising wages by 10 percent reduces high school dropout rates by 3 to 4 percent. Similarly, a Florida study showed that pay raises reduced teacher attrition by up to 25 percent for hard-to-fill subject areas.

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



UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

THE SENATE KA 'AHA KENEKOA

THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE REGULAR SESSION OF 2026

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 AM
Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony on SB2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

The United Public Workers, AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO ("UPW") is the exclusive bargaining representative for approximately 14,000 public employees, which includes blue collar, non-supervisory employees in Bargaining Unit 1 and institutional, health, and correctional employees in Bargaining Unit 10, in the State of Hawaii and various counties.

UPW provides **comments** on SB2391, SD1, which, provides annual salary step increases for public school and public charter school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, HRS, and subject to the availability of funds.

UPW recognizes the issues that this bill is trying to address and strongly supports better compensation for members of Bargaining Unit 5. However, we are gravely concerned by any legislation that could potentially circumvent, or even undermine, the collective bargaining provisions in Chapter 89, Hawaii Revised Statutes. Despite a provision that states the proposed step increases would be subject to collect bargaining and the availability of funds, we remain concerned.

Statutorily codifying annual wage increases could create a precedent where exclusive representatives feel compelled to seek better contract provisions through legislation rather than negotiating with employers.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

HEADQUARTERS

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Toll Free - Molokai/Lanai only



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Osa Tui, Jr.
President

Logan Okita
Vice President

Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Andrea Eshelman
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Item: SB 2391, SD1 – Relating to Education

Position: Support

Hearing: Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 am, Room 211

Submitter: Osa Tui, Jr., President - Hawai'i State Teachers Association

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) **strongly supports** S.B. 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This measure is essential to addressing the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention.

Teachers in Hawai'i are financially struggling under the weight of the state's high cost of living. Once adjusted for these expenses, our educators are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes directly to a staggering turnover rate. Nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state altogether within five years of starting. This high attrition poses a significant problem for our students and the stability of our schools.

Establishing automatic step increases is a priority for our educators and aligns with our current Unit 5 collective bargaining agreement. The collective bargaining agreement explicitly states that "the parties recognize that annual incremental step movements are a viable recruiting and retention tool."

The negotiated language further specifies: "Teachers who are not at the top of the salary schedule and who have effective evaluations shall move to the next highest step of the corresponding class at the beginning of each school year. Annual incremental step movements are subject to funding."

S.B. 2391, SD1 establishes the annual step increases that mirror this negotiated agreement. It provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom by ensuring salary progression is a consistent part of their professional career.

The importance of this stability is also echoed in the *2025 HIDOE Teacher Compensation Report*. This study states: "Automatic annual step progression is the norm across most states and is strongly linked to teacher expectations of fairness...A shift to automatic steps would reinforce trust and potentially improve attrition."

By providing these increases, the State is sending a clear message that it values the experience of its educators. We respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo.

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Name Ann Crawford

School/District King Kekulike High

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 12:04:01 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Channa Uyetake	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for myself and my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Channa Uyetake
Kua O Ka Lā PCS/Ka‘u Kea‘au Paho Complex

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 12:31:12 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jodi Beaty	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate, with nearly half of our teachers leaving the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Jodi Beaty

Mokapu Elementary / Windward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 12:42:19 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Piikea Kalakau-Baarde	Testifying for Teach for America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senator Dela Cruz, Chair, Senator Moriwaki, Vice Chair, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Pi'ikea Kalakau-Baarde, and I work at Teach for America Hawai'i. I'm a former public school teacher and now support TFA Hawai'i's local initiatives, including our corps member programming, early literacy, alumni leadership development, external affairs, and more.

I am in support of SB2391, which relates to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i.

As a State Approved Teacher Educator Program (SATEP), one of the biggest barriers to recruitment that we face year over year is teacher pay, especially when coupled with the high cost of living in Hawai'i. Like the recently enacted and continued hard-to-staff differentials, automatic step increases in teacher salaries would help to attract high-quality professionals into open teaching positions, as well as retain them in years to come.

We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i and look forward to seeing the progress made at the legislature this year.

Mahalo,

Pi'ikea Kalakau-Baarde, EdD

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 12:48:52 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaleinani Rita	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Kaleinani Rita

Ha'aheo Elementary School/ Hawa'i'i District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 12:55:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brittney Hedlund	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Brittney Hedlund

Kohala High School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 1:44:38 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Meilan Akaka Manfre	Testifying for Teach For America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senator Dela Cruz, Chair, Senator Moriwaki, Vice Chair, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Meilan Akaka Manfre, and I serve as the executive director of Teach for America Hawai'i. I'm a former public school teacher and public school parent.

I'm reaching out in support of SB2391, which relates to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i.

As a State Approved Teacher Educator Program (SATEP), one of the most persistent barriers to recruiting and retaining educators in Hawai'i is inadequate compensation, particularly given the state's high cost of living. Establishing automatic annual salary step increases would affirm teaching as a valued profession by providing educators with predictable and transparent salary growth.

Clear and reliable compensation pathways help aspiring and early-career teachers commit to the profession for the long term and support retention during the years when educators are most likely to leave the classroom. Automatic step increases would also help honor the state's investment in teacher preparation and contribute to stable, high-quality learning environments for Hawai'i's students.

We stand on our written testimony and are available for any questions. We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i and look forward to seeing the progress made at the legislature this year.

Mahalo,

Meilan Akaka Manfre

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 1:54:41 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Weber-Yarbrough	Testifying for TFA Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Anne Weber-Yarbrough and I'm testifying in support of SB2391, relating to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As part of TFA Hawai'i, this bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention. Having placed and supported over 1,100 teachers in underserved schools over the past 20 years, and with over 600 alumni and corps members in Hawai'i, all children deserve access to a well-trained and properly supported educator workforce.

We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i.

Mahalo,

Anne Weber-Yarbrough

TFA Hawai'i

Managing Director, Regional Initiatives

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:30:08 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tiffany Edwards Hunt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Senate Committee on Ways and Means**Measure:** SB 2391, SD1**Subject:** Strong Support for Automatic Salary Step Increases for Hawaii Teachers

Honorable Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in **strong support of SB 2391, SD1**, which would establish annual salary step increases for our public school teachers.

As the Student Activities Coordinator at Keaau Middle School, I witness firsthand the dedication our teachers pour into our students every day. However, I also see the immense financial crisis my colleagues face. When adjusted for Hawai‘i’s high cost of living, our educators are currently the lowest-paid in the nation. This is not just a statistic; it is a daily struggle that affects the morale and well-being of the people responsible for our children's future.

The current financial strain has led to a staggering turnover rate, with nearly half of our teachers leaving the profession or the state within just five years. This level of attrition is a direct threat to the stability of our schools and the long-term success of our students. At Keaau Middle, we know that student success is built on the foundation of experienced, consistent mentorship.

Establishing automatic step increases would provide the financial predictability and professional stability educators need to stay in the classroom. This measure sends a clear, powerful message: the State of Hawai‘i values our experience and is truly committed to teacher retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass this vital measure to ensure our teachers can afford to live in the communities they serve.

Mahalo,

Tiffany Edwards Hunt Student Activities Coordinator

Keaau Middle School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:57:06 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susana Roman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo nui loa for your time,

Susana Román

Kailua Intermediate

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:36:05 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Justine M Miyashiro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Justine Miyashiro
Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:44:51 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
joshua noga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Joshua Noga

Farrington HS/ Honolulu District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:44:58 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Summer Ursua	Testifying for HIDOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Summer Ursua
Ewa Makai Middle/ Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:45:08 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Donna Soriano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a high turnover rate, which poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Donna Soriano

Leeward District - Nanakuli-Wai'anae Complex Area

Wai'anae Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:49:16 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rebecca Hadley-Schlosser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

As a public school teacher in Hawai'i for the past 29 years, I have been unfortunate to be in the group who were asked, repeatedly, to agree to contracts that did not really benefit me financially because my step advancement was held up in order to ensure that new teachers were given a fair starting wage. I was fortunate to receive the step increases as a result of the salary decompression we went through recently. However, if we had annual step increases, I would have reached 14BB within the first half of my career in Hawai'i rather than near the end of my career.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Rebecca Hadley-Schlosser
Nanaikapono Elementary School/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:51:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenna Nitahara	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Jenna Nitahara****Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:55:09 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristy Wagatsuma	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Kristy Wagatsuma

Waikele Elementary/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:00:08 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hope McKeen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and members of the committee,

As a 20-year veteran of Hawai'i's classrooms, I have seen firsthand the toll that financial instability takes on our schools. It is a painful reality that when adjusted for the cost of living, our educators are the lowest-paid in the country. This isn't just a statistic; it translates to a revolving door of talent. When nearly 50% of new teachers leave within five years, our students lose the continuity and mentorship they deserve.

S.B. 2391, SD1 honors the language already established in our Unit 5 collective bargaining agreement, which recognizes annual step increases as a vital tool for recruitment and retention. By codifying these increases, this bill provides the "predictability" cited in the 2025 HDOE Teacher Compensation Report as essential for building trust and reducing attrition. After two decades in this profession, I can tell you that a clear path to salary progression is what keeps a teacher in the classroom. I urge this committee to pass this measure and show our educators that their experience is valued.

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Ne

School/District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:23:50 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
nancy hilson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.****Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,****I am writing in support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.****I have been teaching in Hawaii for the past 30 years. I can tell you that the many years we did not receive step increases hurt myself and my family. When I began teaching, I was still tending bar and waiting tables on the side. Beginning teacher pay was dismal, especially 30 years ago. My pay went up when I got several post-graduate degrees, including a Master's in Curriculum Studies, and a Middle Level Literacy certificate. But I found over time, despite my years of service and my graduate degrees, that I could not let go of my restaurant job. 30 years later, I still wait tables to supplement my income! Who would have thought I'd need to work an extra job for my entire teaching career? I few years ago, we realized that teachers with 8 years of service were making the same money I was making because of all the years with no step increases.****I understand why so many young teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years. This is a great loss to the keiki of Hawaii.****I urge you to seriously consider this bill.****Mahalo,****Nancy Hilson**

Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:24:22 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Pauahi Auerbach	Testifying for Teach For America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators:

My name is Erin Pauahi Auerbach, and I am the Head of Development for the Teach For America Hawai'i Region.

I am in support of SB2391, which relates to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i.

In addition to my fundraising role, I have also supported incoming corps members (1st year teachers) as they confirm or decline their TFA offers to teach here in the islands.

Annual salary – and the ability to afford basic living expenses in Hawai'i – is the number one question that is asked, and is the most significant barrier for CMs as they consider their offers.

The ability to thrive as a young adult who is just embarking on their teaching career here in Hawai'i, while also paying student loans, affording licensure costs/fees, etc, remains a burden to many fine leaders who would otherwise truly make deep and lasting impact on our keiki.

While recent increases have made entry level salaries more palatable at ~\$52K, this is less than \$8,000 above ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained) Household Survival budget of \$44,292, as projected for a single adult in 2023.

Hard-to-staff differentials and automatic step increases in teacher salaries would indeed help us to attract high-quality leaders to fill open teaching positions. And, it will help our teachers to stay in their roles year over year allowing them to progress in their career HERE, rather than in a more affordable market on the continent.

We stand on our written testimony and are available for any questions. We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i and look forward to seeing the progress made at the legislature this year.

Me ka mahalo nui,

Erin Pauahi Auerbach

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:30:12 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
elisabeth onekea	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

During the beginning of the Covid Pandemic, I was in the classroom with students in one of the least vaccinated areas of the state. I also teach an automotive shop class, which requires me to regularly get more physically close to students than the average teacher in order to properly demonstrate the trade practices that they are learning, or assist them with hands-on projects and repairs. Besides putting my own physical well-being at risk, teachers were required to teach both in person and online, at times simultaneously. Suffice to say, that was above and beyond a reasonable ask.

At home, I have elderly parents who are and were at high risk of serious and even deadly complications of a Covid Infection. My 4 children were all also further exposed because they were ineligible to even protect themselves with a vaccine for much longer than adults, and they all have histories of respiratory concerns. I myself, have lung damage from my military service, which is serious enough to warrant a disability rating from the Veterans Administration. Contracting Covid without a vaccine could literally kill me. The last time I got a simple respiratory infection I was almost hospitalized and I was 10 years younger and healthier at that time.

I do not share this for sympathy, and my colleagues have stories that were far worse than being at risk, overly stressed or overly worked. Many did have permanent injuries or lost loved ones, or both.

Our contract "protects" us teachers from working in hazardous conditions but that is clearly not what happened.

Getting Hazard Pay is quite literally the least that our employer should be doing to compensate us all for the breach of contract that we suffered and in fairness to the precedent that was set by the HGRA Employees who did receive Hazard Pay.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:35:06 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Fitzpatrick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Committee,

My name is John Fitzpatrick, and I am a Science Educator at Kūlanihāko‘i High School on Maui. I stand in **strong support of SB2391, SD1**.

As this committee weighs the State’s fiscal priorities, I urge you to view this measure not as an "expense," but as a workforce stabilization strategy. Our current system—which has denied annual steps for over thirty years—is a primary driver of a costly and inefficient revolving door in our schools.

1. The "J-1 Cycle" and the Loss of ROI

The state often cites the \$25 million price tag for annual steps as "unaffordable," yet we ignore the massive "sunk costs" of our current staffing model:

- **The Revolving Door:** In my department, 50% of the science department are J-1 cultural exchange teachers from the Philippines. They work incredibly hard, care about our students while often leaving their own children in the Phillipines, and are paid starvation wages. The school invests heavily in our training and integration, yet they are required to leave after 3–5 years. This helps no one; certainly not our students.
- **Sunk Costs:** When these trained professionals leave because Hawaii lacks a predictable career ladder, the State’s "return on investment" (ROI) vanishes. We are essentially paying to train teachers for other markets.

2. Fixing the "Broken Ladder" and Wage Compression

The current salary schedule is a 12-step design. In any healthy professional industry, a 12-step climb takes 12 years. In Hawaii, it takes **24 to 30 years**.

- **The "Repricing" Failure:** While the State recently "fixed" wage compression through repricing, the lack of annual steps has already caused me—and many others—to be compressed by three years again.
- During the life of this contract, if we had annual step increases, I would have earned \$22,000 more than I will earn for the life of our current contract. A brand new bright

eyed teacher figuring out how to teach in Hawai'i and anticipating a 25 year career will not make over \$158,166 during the life of their career.

- **Fiscal Predictability:** SB2391 provides the financial transparency educators need to stay. When teachers can forecast their income, they buy homes and build lives in Hawaii. When they can't, they leave.

3. The "Rainy Day" Fund vs. the Current Emergency

Hawaii maintains over \$1.6 billion in the Emergency Budget Reserve Fund. While fiscal prudence is vital, **a 1,000-teacher vacancy rate is a current emergency**. Utilizing a fraction of these reserves to stabilize our workforce is a more prudent use of taxpayer funds than allowing our educational infrastructure to erode further.

4. Maui's "Impossible Puzzle"

On Maui, principals are playing a losing game. When a colleague left for a higher-paying private school two weeks into this school year, I had to scramble to cover their biology and AP-Biology classes so there would be no long term substitute or emergency hire. This "impossible puzzle" leads to:

- **STEM Deficits:** Students being taught by long-term substitutes without subject-matter expertise will not get the education that sets them up for college or STEM careers.
- **Systemic Burnout:** The remaining staff must absorb the vacancies. We are often working double time to support the emergency hires or new hires who have no teaching experience. This leads to a secondary wave of resignations.

Collective bargaining has failed to fix this cycle because the "no funding" excuse is used every biennium. It was even used during the last contract negotiation when there was a \$700,000,000 surplus. The Legislature has the power to codify these steps and ensure that our tax dollars are used to **retain** talent rather than constantly **recruiting** to fill a leaky bucket.

I respectfully ask you to pass **SB2391, SD1**.

Mahalo,

John Fitzpatrick Science Educator, Kūlanihāko'i High School

February, 24, 2026

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of **SB 2391, SD1**, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. We all see how high the cost of living is here in Hawai'i and as a public educator, I know first hand how it can be a struggle to afford basic necessities yet alone maintain financial stability. Taking into account the average amount of money one would need to earn to live comfortably along with the current teacher salary schedule, Hawai'i's teachers are paid proportionally less compared to other states in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where many new teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students, which I've witnessed first hand due to the consistent change and loss of teachers over the last few years who have cited financial hardships as being a major factor in their decision to either leave the state or and even the profession,

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott Harano". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Scott Harano

University Laboratory School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:48:52 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cody Fisichelli	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION -Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Cody Fisichelli

University Laboratory School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:50:01 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janis Tolentino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public educator and I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai‘i’s teachers.

While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i has created a persistent financial crisis.

The result of this financial strain is a staggering turnover rate: nearly 50% of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition:

- Destabilizes our school communities.
- Hinders student success and consistency.
- Forces the state into a constant, expensive cycle of recruitment.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability educators need to build a long-term career in the classroom. It replaces uncertainty with a predictable growth path, sending a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 to ensure our teachers can afford to stay and our students can thrive.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Janis Tolentino

Kipapa Elementary/Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:15:13 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alex Tam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Alex Tam
Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:25:00 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa Madela	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Lisa Madela****Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:28:26 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samarra B Lehman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an educator in the system for 20+ years I fully support better pay for our teachers. I see many teachers leave the profession not because they want to but because financially they are not cutting. We work hard and while our contract says 35 hours a week most educators dedicate 50-60hrs.

Allowing for yearly step increases to help with the cost living increases is appreciated. Increasing pay may help to secure that good teachers stay in the classroom and we maintained those who have strong experience that will support our Keiki. Mahalo for your time and understanding in this matter.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:50:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherrice Munechika	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public educator and I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai‘i’s teachers.

While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i has created a persistent financial crisis.

The result of this financial strain is a staggering turnover rate: nearly 50% of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition:

- Destabilizes our school communities.
- Hinders student success and consistency.
- Forces the state into a constant, expensive cycle of recruitment.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability educators need to build a long-term career in the classroom. It replaces uncertainty with a predictable growth path, sending a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 to ensure our teachers can afford to stay and our students can thrive.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Name

Sherrice Munechika

Kindergarten Teacher/Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:01:18 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amelia Keefe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,
I am writing in support of SB 2391, SD1, to establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As public school educators, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates financial challenges for my colleagues and myself.

Due to this there is a high turnover rate, nearly half of the teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This make it hard to have stability in our schools and is detrimental to the success of our students.

These automatic step increases will help to provide the stability and predictability that educators need to remain in this profession. This sends the message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Amelia Keefe
Ilima Intermediate/ Leeward

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION
Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

I am a public school educator with 17 years of experience and a master's degree. Despite nearly two decades in this profession and advanced education, I struggle to afford basic living expenses in Hawai'i. Rent, food, utilities, and transportation consume the majority of my income. In order to remain financially stable, I have had to work three jobs.

I am currently placed on Step 11 because I entered Hawai'i's system from out of state. When I came to the state, I was placed on Step 8, and that was 9 years ago. While I understand there are policies governing placement, it is deeply discouraging that nearly two decades of professional experience does not fully translate into compensation recognition here. That disparity compounds the financial strain many of us already face.

When experienced teachers cannot afford to live in the communities they serve, it sends a troubling message about how our work is valued. Annual, automatic step increases would provide predictability and stability. They would allow educators to plan for the future, reduce financial stress, and remain committed to the classroom long term.

Teacher retention is not just a workforce issue—it is a student stability issue. Our keiki deserve experienced, dedicated educators who can afford to stay in Hawai'i.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 and demonstrate a clear commitment to retaining qualified, experienced teachers in our public schools.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Tara Spencer
Leeward District Teacher
Hawai'i Department of Education

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:34:51 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacquelyn Hashimoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public educator and I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai‘i’s teachers.

While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i has created a persistent financial crisis.

The result of this financial strain is a staggering turnover rate: nearly 50% of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition:

- Destabilizes our school communities.
- Hinders student success and consistency.
- Forces the state into a constant, expensive cycle of recruitment.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability educators need to build a long-term career in the classroom. It replaces uncertainty with a predictable growth path, sending a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 to ensure our teachers can afford to stay and our students can thrive.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Jacquelyn Hashimoto

Kīpapa Elementary/Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:37:30 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ella OBrien	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Ella O'Brien
Nanakuli-Wai'anae Complex

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:41:47 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicole H. Stensgaard	Testifying for Kipapa Elementary School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill is important to me and my family because I would like to some day buy a home in Hawai'i. This automatic step increase will allow me to save more money toward that goal. I feel I deserve that through my dedication and commitment by serving my community and state through public education. Mahalo for your consideration.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:44:23 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nohea Goo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Nohea Goo

Dole Middle School

Honolulu District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:47:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kori Oros	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Kori and I teach at Kipapa Elementary. I am writing to you today to express my strong support for SB 2391, SD1, which would establish essential annual salary step increases for our teachers.

It is no secret that Hawai‘i is a beautiful place to live, but for those of us on the front lines of education, the "paradise tax" has become an unsustainable burden. When you adjust our salaries for the state's exceptionally high cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers are effectively the lowest-paid in the nation. We aren't just talking about a lack of "fun money"; we are talking about a genuine financial crisis. I see colleagues working second and third jobs, or living in multi-generational homes just to make ends meet. When a professional educator cannot afford a home, the entire system begins to fracture.

Nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within their first five years. This revolving door of talent is devastating for several reasons:

1. **Student Achievement:** Students thrive on consistency. High turnover disrupts the mentorship and stability that are foundational to learning.
2. **School Culture:** Constant attrition drains the "institutional memory" of our schools, leaving fewer veteran teachers to guide the next generation of educators.
3. **Economic Waste:** The state spends significant resources recruiting and training new teachers, only to lose that investment to other states with more predictable pay structures.

Establishing automatic step increases is not just about a paycheck; it is about stability and predictability. Currently, the uncertainty regarding if or when a "step" will be granted makes it nearly impossible for a young teacher to plan a future here, —to buy a home, start a family, or commit to a thirty-year career. **By making these increases automatic, the State sends a clear, powerful message: We value your experience, and we want you to stay.**

For the sake of our educators, our students, and the future of Hawai‘i’s workforce, I respectfully urge this committee to pass SB 2391, SD1. **Let’s provide our teachers with a clear path forward so they can focus on what they do best: teaching the next generation.**

Mahalo for your time and for your support of public education.

Kori Oros

Kipapa Elementary / Central District

HSTA Central Chapter President

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:07:04 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kari A Stagno	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Kari Stagno

Lehua Elementary/ Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:07:41 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shantell-Tiare Tom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I'm giving my testimony as an individual and as a home-grown public school teacher on the Leeward Coast! I would like to add my name to the many teachers that will be testifying of the need for this bill. We have been patiently waiting, even during the pandemic when our step increase were taken away from us - we didn't complain or go on strike; we knew the economy was struggling. Yet, we've been waiting over five years since being back in the classroom to get what was taken, restored back to us. I sincerely plea to let this bill be passed, so home-grown teachers like myself will continue to live and thrive in the homeland we were born to live and teach in. Mahalo Nui Loa.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:08:01 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ethan J. Roesler	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Ethan J. Roesler, and as a public educator, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai‘i’s teachers.

While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i has created a persistent financial crisis.

The result of this financial strain is a staggering turnover rate: nearly 50% of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition:

- Destabilizes our school communities.
- Hinders student success and consistency.
- Forces the state into a constant, expensive cycle of recruitment.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability educators need to build a long-term career in the classroom. It replaces uncertainty with a predictable growth path, sending a clear message that the State values our experience, values our keiki, and is committed to retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1, to ensure our teachers can afford to stay and our students can thrive.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Ethan J. Roesler

Wheeler Middle School / Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:09:15 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ashley monden	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Ashley Monden, and as a special education teacher, I see firsthand how difficult it is to make ends meet in Hawai‘i. Even with a full-time teaching position, I am unable to afford a home of my own. The cost of living continues to rise, while our salaries do not keep pace. When adjusted for the realities of living here, Hawai‘i’s teachers are effectively the lowest paid in the nation.

I have considered numerous times moving to the mainland, where the cost of living is more affordable and homeownership feels possible. But I was born and raised on O‘ahu, and as a fifth-generation local, I feel deeply rooted in this community. I want to continue teaching the next generation of Hawai‘i’s students without living under constant financial strain.

The financial pressure many of us face contributes to the alarming number of teachers who leave the profession or move out of state within just a few years. This instability hurts our schools and, most importantly, our students.

Establishing automatic annual step increases would provide the stability and predictability educators need to stay in the classroom long-term. It shows that the State values our commitment, experience, and dedication to Hawai‘i’s keiki.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

mahalo,

Ashley monden

Mililani Mauka Elementary School/Central district

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:15:55 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Verona Holder	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB 1890, HD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

As a public educator in Hawai‘i, I see firsthand how the high cost of living creates ongoing financial pressure for teachers. Many of my colleagues work second jobs, delay major life decisions, or ultimately leave the profession because they cannot sustain a career in education here. When salaries are adjusted for cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers rank among the lowest-paid in the nation. That reality does not reflect the responsibility, education, and dedication this profession requires.

This is not theoretical for me—it is personal. After a full workday serving students, I go home, change my clothes, and begin Door Dashing. I deliver food in the evenings to make ends meet. I hold a master’s degree and am currently pursuing my doctorate, yet I still have to hustle to maintain financial stability. One job should be enough. A career in public education—especially with advanced education and years of experience—should provide a livable wage.

I have also served as a mentor teacher for six educators who moved to Hawai‘i hoping to build lives for themselves and their families. They came ready to commit to our schools and our communities. Yet within one or two years, each of them had to leave—not because they lacked passion or skill, but because they simply could not make the finances work. They wanted to stay. Our students wanted them to stay. But our current compensation structure and cost-of-living realities made it impossible. Our infrastructure does not support long-term retention.

I have remained committed to serving our keiki through shifting mandates, curriculum changes, leadership transitions, and even a global pandemic. I have stepped into leadership roles, supported colleagues, and continuously adapted my practice to meet student needs. Yet despite years of service and professional growth, financial stability remains uncertain for many educators across our state. That uncertainty makes it difficult for teachers to plan for their futures, support their families, or confidently build long-term careers in Hawai‘i.

The high attrition rate—nearly half of teachers leaving within five years—is not just a workforce issue. It directly impacts student achievement, school culture, and community trust. Stability

matters. Experience matters. Relationships matter. When teachers leave, students lose mentors, schools lose institutional knowledge, and remaining staff absorb additional strain.

Establishing automatic annual step increases provides predictable, structured growth that recognizes experience and encourages retention. It communicates that the State values professional longevity and understands that teacher retention is essential to student success. Stability in compensation fosters stability in our schools.

HB 1890, HD1 is a necessary and reasonable step toward strengthening Hawai'i's public education system. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure in support of teacher retention and the long-term success of our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Verona Holder

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:23:40 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Logan Okita	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Logan Okita, MEd, NBCT

Nimitz Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:29:05 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Garofalo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

I've been a teacher in Hawaii for over 20 years and am nearly at the top of the pay salary. I live month to month, paycheck to paycheck and can hardly afford my daily living expenses. If it wasn't for my husband, I would not be able to stay on hawaii or afford to live. I have my masters degree and 20 years commitment working as a special education teacher, getting a raise of 2.5% every other year does not keep up with the cost of living. My salary does not reflect my education or years of service. My father works for the postal service and receives better pay and the only education he has is a high school diploma. Ever year he gets a raise and an additional COLA- Cost of living adjustment which is an additional pay increase for living in Hawaii.

It's so hard on our keiki to have new teachers come and go, uncertified teachers, emergency hires, long term substitutes because teachers will come and go where they can make a living and support themselves. Given the teacher salary in Hawaii independence is really difficult. You have to have a significant other to share the load and make ends meet.

Mahalo,

Michelle Garofalo

Iroquois point Elementary/ Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:31:03 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alison Agena	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Alison Agena
Pearl City Elementary/Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:33:38 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bernadette I. McGill	Testifying for DOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a high turnover rate, which poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Bernadette I. McGill

WES

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:37:15 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tiffany Hirota	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator for 21 years, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for myself and my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. I have seen schools struggle to find qualified teachers and many administrators are tasked with filling positions with emergency hires or long-term substitutes. The quality of instruction is compromised when you have unqualified staff teaching our students. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Tiffany Hirota

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:42:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Desiree Piercy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Desiree Piercy
Koko Head Elementary/Honolulu District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:54:31 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pua Bingo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a high turnover rate, which poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Pua Bingo

Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:55:09 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Landes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Committee,

My name is Mike Landes, and I am a social studies teacher at Lahainaluna High School. I stand in strong support of SB2391, SD1.

This bill is a vital workforce stabilization strategy to end the "leaky bucket" of teacher turnover. While the state holds over \$1.6 billion in the Rainy Day Fund, our schools are facing a staffing emergency. It currently takes Hawaii teachers 24–30+ years to climb a 12-step salary scale—a broken ladder that results in a massive loss of state "Return on Investment" when trained educators leave for mainland districts with predictable, annual raises.

This instability forces our principals into an "impossible puzzle" every summer just to staff classrooms. They even work into the school year praying they will find a good teacher to fill classrooms. Collective bargaining has failed to fix this cycle even in surplus years.

We need the Legislature to codify these steps to ensure our tax dollars go toward retaining talent, not just constant recruiting. I respectfully ask you to pass SB2391, SD1. Our Haumāna deserve a highly qualified teacher in their classroom that can afford to stay in Hawaii.

Mahalo,

Mike Landes

Kihei

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:00:56 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kyle Hall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION -Wednesday, February 25, 2026,
10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Kyle Hall

Kaiser High School / FKK

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:01:33 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry

Comment 2391 SB RELATING TO EDUCATION.

STEM TEACHERS AND CERTIFIED/QUALIFIED TEACHERS FROM THE U.S.A.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:09:25 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin N.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a public educator, it is in the best interest of our Keiki, Educators and State budget to give teachers Automatic Annual Step Increases that has already been bargained for and is stated within our contract.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:12:07 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aaron Bronson	Testifying for Hsta	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill

As a special education pre school teacher and as a special needs parent i have a hard time working outside of school hours to do unpaid PD to get steps to advance.

My son is fully disabled and I am his caregiver parent. When home I have to dedicate my time and energy into him. I should not have to take time away from him or my family to do professional development courses so I can increase my pay

I work very hard as a special education pre school teacher. I get into my room when its dark just to prep for my day. It's burns me out day in and day our to know I will get the same check for years to come.

I went through stage 3+ cancer treatment last year and that also took a financial tool on my family. Knowing that I have to rush back to work for my same minimal pay. Do get me wrong I love what I do and it brings me joy. Joy doesn't feed my family, joy doesn't give me financial stability so I can care for my child

Thank you

Please please pass this bill

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:15:44 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malaea Spencer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. It provides stability to educators and keiki, is more cost effective than constant recruitment and training, and sends a clear message that Hawaii values Education.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:23:08 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natalia Sandoval	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a HiDOE special educator for the past 21 years, I support this bill. It provides stability to educators and keiki, is more cost effective than constant recruitment and training, and sends a clear message that Hawaii values Education. It also honors the years of service and teaching excellence that those of us who have worked tireless to achieve, are acknowledged and rewarded. I would love to continue to give 20+ years of service to HiDOE and the students of my community, but that cannot be possible without proper compensation in an ever inflating society.

Resepctfully,

Natalia Sandoval, MASpED, NBCT

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:42:59 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chi Fung Lanai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawaii's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate, with nearly half of our teachers leaving the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Chi Fung Lanai
Waikele Elementary School/Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:52:47 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Todd Hayashi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues and my family. My wife and I are both teachers and we worry about providing for our two children in the future as everything increases in costs. However, we love our work as teachers as we help students grow in the same ways our teachers helped us. We want to be able to continue doing it without having to consider finding a second job or a new career.

This financial strain contributes to a high turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Continuity is very important to the well-being of students and without competitive salaries, that becomes more difficult. Students look forward to visiting or keeping in touch with their previous teachers that they have a connection with. When those teachers leave, it only hurts the students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure. It will keep effective teachers in the profession longer and that ultimately benefits all of us. The more we educate and prepare students, the brighter our future becomes.

Mahalo,

Todd Koji Hayashi

August Ahrens/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:13:52 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rain K. Kahula Yong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public school educator in a Hawaiian language immersion program, I see firsthand how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a serious financial crisis for teachers across our state. When adjusted for these costs, Hawai‘i’s teachers are effectively the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain directly contributes to an alarming turnover rate, with nearly half of teachers leaving the profession or the state within their first five years. For kaiapuni programs, this impact is especially severe. Hawaiian language immersion teachers carry the added responsibility of sustaining our language, culture, and ‘ike kupuna for the next generation. I for always question if teaching can allow for a sustainable lifestyle and consider going back to school for another career. When we lose teachers, we lose continuity, relationships, and critical cultural knowledge that cannot be easily replaced.

Establishing automatic step increases provides much-needed stability and predictability for educators and affirms that the State values experience, commitment, and long-term service. Passing this measure is a concrete step toward retaining highly qualified teachers and honoring our shared responsibility to Hawai‘i’s keiki and to the future of public education.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391.

Mahalo,
Kahula Yong
Ka Waihona o ka Na‘auao PCS, Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:15:33 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gerald Dar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Gerald Dar, and as a public educator, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai‘i’s teachers.

While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i has created a persistent financial crisis.

The result of this financial strain is a staggering turnover rate: nearly 50% of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition:

- Destabilizes our school communities.
- Hinders student success and consistency.
- Forces the state into a constant, expensive cycle of recruitment.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability educators need to build a long-term career in the classroom. It replaces uncertainty with a predictable growth path, sending a clear message that the State values our experience, values our keiki, and is committed to retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 to ensure our teachers can afford to stay and our students can thrive.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Gerald Dar

Wahiawa Middle School / Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:24:33 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Press	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

Speaking as an individual, I strongly support SB 2391 SD1. Built-in annual step increases help sustain a stable and experienced teacher workforce.

Bill SB2391 SD1 notes that when adjusted for cost of living, Hawai‘i teachers rank at the bottom nationally and that retention declines significantly within the first five years. UHERO’s January 2026 report, *Beyond the Price of Paradise*, similarly documents Hawai‘i’s high-cost environment and ongoing outmigration among working-age residents. While compensation is only one factor influencing retention, consistent step progression supports workforce stability in a state where real purchasing power is constrained. High turnover incurs operational costs, including recruitment and onboarding, as well as the loss of experienced personnel, all of which affect system capacity and long-term fiscal efficiency. Strengthening salary progression helps mitigate those pressures and supports a more stable public education workforce. I respectfully urge your support for this bill.

Mahalo.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:43:27 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacqueline Beckman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Jacqueline Beckman

Waianae Intermediate/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:48:16 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emily Bute	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Emily Bute

Wai'ala'e Elementary PCS

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:48:17 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jasmine Chin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

As a public educator, I see how the astronomical cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a major financial strain for my co-workers. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This financial burden contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition rate negatively impacts the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Jasmine Chin
Ali‘iolani Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:54:42 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
christopher castillo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing in **strong support of SB 2391, SD1**. As a public school teacher with over 10 years of experience in our classrooms, I have seen the system fail its educators time and time again. This bill is a necessary step toward stability, allowing us to shift our focus from *whether* we receive step increases to the actual negotiation of *how much* those increases should be.

The Human Cost of the Teacher Shortage

Behind every statistic about "vacant positions" is a classroom of students losing out on stability and a group of overworked teachers trying to fill the gaps. We currently face a persistent shortage of over 1,000 qualified teachers across the islands.

This isn't just a staffing issue; it's a community crisis. When we lack specialized teachers, our remaining staff takes on more, leading to faster burnout. I see it every day in my colleagues' eyes—the constant "survival mode" that prevents us from truly thriving in our vocation.

Why Teachers Are Leaving

The "revolving door" of education in Hawaii is spinning faster than ever. Data shows that roughly **50% of new teachers leave the profession or the state within their first five years**. The reasons are consistent and heartbreaking:

- **The Cost of Living:** Hawaii consistently ranks as the state with the highest cost of living. When our pay doesn't keep up, we are essentially asking teachers to pay a "paradise tax" just to serve our keiki.
- **Financial Stagnation:** Without guaranteed steps, teachers remain stuck at pay levels that do not reflect their growing expertise or the rising cost of rent and groceries.
- **Lack of Professional Respect:** Negotiating for basic step increases every cycle feels like a dismissal of our value.

A System at a Crossroads

I have spent a decade dedicated to this profession, but I am watching my peers reach a breaking point. Many are currently weighing a heavy choice: is it early enough in my career to switch paths entirely, or am I close enough to the end to just hold on until retirement? We shouldn't be a profession of people just "holding on."

We cannot expect people to grow roots in Hawaii if they cannot afford to live here. We need to support our schools and our teachers to set a precedent. A win for one of us sets a path for victory for all public unions.

I urge you to **pass SB 2391, SD1**, to ensure that our teachers can afford to stay, live, and lead in the communities they serve.

Mahalo,

Christopher Castillo

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:57:15 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steven Kam	Testifying for Pearl City High School / Leeward District	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Steven H.Y. Kam

Pearl City High School / Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 11:02:27 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Makalani Sunn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Makalani Sunn, and I am public school educator from Wai‘anae. I am writing in strong support of this measure that provides annual salary step increases for public school and public charter school teachers who have completed one year of satisfactory service and meet the specified requirements, when negotiated through collective bargaining and subject to the availability of funds.

Providing predictable and equitable step movement is essential to retaining experienced, high-quality educators in Hawai‘i. Our schools continue to face challenges with teacher recruitment and retention, and the rising cost of living makes it difficult for many educators to remain in the profession long term. Step increases recognize the value of experience, professional growth, and continued commitment to our students and communities.

For many teachers, these incremental salary adjustments are not bonuses but expected progressions that help offset inflation, housing costs, and other basic living expenses. Ensuring that step movement occurs when conditions are met promotes fairness, stability, and morale across both public and public charter school systems.

This measure also respects the collective bargaining process by making implementation contingent upon negotiated agreements under section 89-9, HRS, while acknowledging fiscal realities through the availability of funds. In doing so, it balances responsible budgeting with the urgent need to support and retain educators.

Investing in teachers is an investment in student success. When educators feel valued and supported, they are more likely to remain in the classroom, build strong relationships with students and families, and contribute to positive school communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this measure. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill.

Sincerely,

Makalani Sunn

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 11:55:09 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steffany Pacheco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Steffany Pacheco, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1. Establishing automatic step increases allows teachers to have predictable income growth. It also allows them to have an ability to plan a long-term career in education. This may be a simple solution to retain some of the almost 50% of teachers who leave the profession or the state within their first five years. More financial stability leads to more experienced teachers that provide a stable educational environment to support student success.

After being a part of the Native Hawaiian diaspora for over a decade, I was fortunate to move home a few years ago. While I was happy to return to my *one hānau* and be with my family, I struggled as a teacher transitioning back from the continent. I lost my reclassification status, my years of experience did not transfer over completely, and I didn't get automatic step increases like in my previous school district. With the same years of experience and post-degree credits, I would make more money as a 10 month teacher in my previous school district than I do in my current 12 month position with the HIDOE. While I know I made the right decision for myself and my family to move home, I understand why many teachers find difficulty staying in the profession when they can make a living wage by changing careers or moving away.

I respectfully ask the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 to show teachers that they are valued. By investing in our teachers, we are investing in our keiki by providing them with a stable educator workforce that will help them thrive.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Steffany Pacheco

Non-Classroom Teacher, Mililani Middle School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:34:49 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Richard Stange	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Richard Stange, and as a public educator, I am writing in *strong support* of SB 2391, SD1. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai‘i’s teachers.

While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i has created a persistent financial crisis.

The result of this financial strain is a staggering turnover rate: nearly 50% of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition:

- Destabilizes our school communities.
- Hinders student success and consistency.
- Forces the state into a constant, expensive cycle of recruitment.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability educators need to build a long-term career in the classroom. It replaces uncertainty with a predictable growth path, sending a clear message that the State values our experience, values our keiki, and is committed to retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 to ensure our teachers can afford to stay and our students can thrive.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Richard Stange

Mililani Middle School / Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:58:49 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jordan Kapono Nakamura, I'm a Nu'uano resident, former teacher, and I'm testifying in strong support of SB2391, SD1 which provides a pathway for a more viable and materially valued education workforce within some of our most vital sectors within education: our public and charter schools via step salary increases for teachers, as well as potentially all workers within the Bargaining unit-4. This will address a crucial and long-overdue issue of retention within the educational instructor labor sector, crucial to all aspects of a functioning and healthy society. Our high quality education must be at the forefront of our ambitions as a people, and it should be codified that teachers in Hawai'i will be compensated for their time in this essential role. Our teachers already have the designation of being the lowest paid in the nation. Step-increases for our public and charter school educators and staff are already a feature well-established in other states and similar countries, and the future of our education depends on the sector being a viable field that can promise a living wage and a well-compensated salary for what is increasingly a challenging role. Please consider that education is the bedrock of our social function and well-being, and teachers are the arbiters and backbone of that educational system. Mahalo for your work and attention to this matter, and for the opportunity to testify!

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 5:44:21 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Juanita Mayeda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Juanita Mayeda

Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 5:59:38 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Briann Starkey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.****Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,****I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases****for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i****creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘is teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.****This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers****leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem****for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.****Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to****remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.**

Mahalo,

Briann Starkey

Kualapuu Public Conversion Charter School, Moloka'i

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:03:11 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Oda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Rachel Oda

August Ahrens El

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:06:12 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carrieanne Martinson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Carrieanne Martinson
Waikele Elementary, Pearl City/Waipahu Complex Area

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:12:55 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lizchel Ugalde	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a public educator, it is in the best interest of our Keiki, Educators and State budget to give teachers

Automatic Annual Step Increases that has already been bargained for and is stated within our contract.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:13:30 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Yamauchi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Leilani Yamauchi

Waiākea Elementary

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:49:21 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aimee Matsuura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Aimee Matsuura

Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:01:58 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sydney	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Sydney Young
August Ahrens Elementary School, Leeward District

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 am

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Christine Christe, and I am a Bargaining Unit 5 educator. I am submitting testimony in **strong support of SB 2391, SD1**, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

Automatic step increases help retain experienced teachers in Hawai'i's classrooms, which directly benefits students. When pay progression is predictable and protected, schools are more stable, and educators are more likely to stay.

Step increases recognize years of service and professional growth. Automatically honoring them shows respect for teachers and ensures fair, consistent compensation. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass **SB 2391, SD1**, and vote yes on this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Christine Christe



TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB2391 SD1, RELATING TO EDUCATION

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

February 25, 2026

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **strongly supports SB2391 SD1**. Our party platform is rooted in the belief that a high-quality, free public education is a fundamental right for every child in our islands. However, that right is being undermined by a systemic failure to recruit and retain a professional, certified teaching workforce.

Hawai'i is currently facing a "mess" caused by radical shifts in federal priorities. The recent federal budget—touted as a "Big Beautiful Bill"—has instead resulted in deep cuts to the federal funding Hawai'i relies on for social services and education. This federal abandonment makes it more urgent than ever that we stabilize our internal workforce by asking those who have benefited most from the current economy—the wealthy—to pay their fair share to protect our public institutions.

The crisis in our classrooms is undeniable:

- **The Compensation Gap:** When adjusted for our state's astronomical cost of living, Hawai'i teachers are the **lowest-paid in the nation**. A teacher in Honolulu faces a pay disparity of roughly **\$75,000** compared to their peers in Los Angeles. This "paradise tax" is driving our local talent to the mainland.
- **De-professionalization of Teaching:** Because we cannot retain certified staff, the DOE is forced to rely on "emergency hires." It is unacceptable that current policies allow individuals with as little as a high school diploma to lead a classroom. All of our students deserve certified experts, not stop-gap measures.
- **Reliance on J-1 Visas:** The Department's increasing dependency on J-1 visa teachers creates a revolving door of educators. While we value these international partners, a stable education system cannot be built on temporary visas; it must be built on a permanent, local workforce that understands our community.

SB 2391 SD1 provides a clear, structural solution: **automatic salary step increases**. In nearly every other state, salary steps are a predictable reward for experience. In Hawai'i, they have been subject to

the whims of the bargaining table, leading to stagnant wages and "salary compression" that insults our veteran educators.

If we care about the future of Hawai'i, we must provide the basic incentives required to keep teachers in the profession. We cannot afford to lose 40% of our teachers within their first five years. By ensuring predictable raises and professional pay, we can end the era of emergency hires and ensure every classroom is led by a qualified professional.

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i urges this committee to pass SB 2391 SD1 and reinvest in the educators who are the backbone of our democracy.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB2391 SD1. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:30:29 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Grant	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION -Wednesday, February 25, 2026,
10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Every year, my school has long term subs as well as my own children in their respective schools, due to this high attrition. Students miss out on a highly qualified teacher and therefore miss content and skills for years to follow.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. I have friends who teach in other states who automatically move up every year they are in the classroom which makes sense at any job really.

This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Jennifer Grant

Farrington High School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:32:51 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Dunn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support bill SB2391 SD1. This bill will help with recruiting and retaining teachers. With step increases codified into law, it will provide a clear message that teachers are valued for the work they do. It will also provide assurance to teachers that they will receive raises independent of contract negotiations. This is necessary to match the rising cost of living in the most expensive state to live in. This bill supports our communities, our families, and our keiki. Please vote yes to advance SB2391 SD1. Mahalo.

February 24, 2026

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Holu Tamashiro", written in a cursive style.

Larrilynn Holu Tamashiro

Leeward, O'ahu District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:40:45 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Courtney Lau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. It provides stability to educators and keiki, is more cost effective than constant recruitment and training, and sends a clear message that Hawaii values education.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:43:19 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lola Ito	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Lola Ito, and as a public educator, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai‘i’s teachers.

While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i has created a persistent financial crisis.

The result of this financial strain is a staggering turnover rate: nearly 50% of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition:

- Destabilizes our school communities.
- Hinders student success and consistency.
- Forces the state into a constant, expensive cycle of recruitment.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability educators need to build a long-term career in the classroom. It replaces uncertainty with a predictable growth path, sending a clear message that the State values our experience, values our keiki, and is committed to retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 to ensure our teachers can afford to stay and our students can thrive.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Lola Ito

Wahiawa Elementary/Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:44:05 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
jordan stephanos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support **SB 2392 SD1** because the reality is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for working families—and especially educators—to survive in Hawaii. The cost of housing, food, transportation, and basic necessities continues to rise, yet educator pay has not kept pace with the true cost of living. Many teachers are forced to work second jobs, commute long distances, or leave the profession altogether simply to make ends meet. The pay gap between Hawaii and other states with lower living costs has not been adequately addressed, and without meaningful action, we will continue to lose talented professionals who are essential to our children's success.

Our keiki deserve stability and excellence in the classroom. Unfortunately, test scores are falling, and one contributing factor is the state's failure to consistently invest in highly qualified, fully certified professional teachers. Instead of building and retaining a strong workforce, schools are increasingly relying on emergency hires to fill vacancies. While these individuals may be well-intentioned, emergency hiring is not a long-term solution and does not replace the experience, training, and instructional expertise that credentialed educators bring to students every day.

Passing SB 2392 SD1 would represent a commitment to valuing educators as professionals and investing in the future of Hawaii's children. By addressing compensation and strengthening support for qualified teachers, we can stabilize our schools, improve academic outcomes, and ensure that every student receives the high-quality education they deserve. Supporting this bill is not just about salaries—it is about protecting the future of education in Hawaii and strengthening our communities statewide.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:46:59 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Akiko Miyata	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB2391, SD1, which establishes annual step increases for public school teachers. As a public school educator supporting a family I feel the negative impact of the high cost of living in Hawaii. My colleagues and I often talk about "how we'll make it" living here because there is an unfortunate, large gap when looking at living expenses vs. teacher wages.

This financial strain contributes to a high turnover rate, which poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and success of our students. Though prior to having children I never thought of moving away, however in thinking about providing the best possible life for our children, my husband and I talk more frequently about moving to the mainland. My children are of Native Hawaiian ancestry and removing them from the place of culture and the history in which they are naturally tied to is extremely disheartening, but we also want to be able to live without financial anxiety.

I believe that establishing automatic step increases provides the beginning steps for stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Akiko Miyata

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:50:58 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Committee Chair,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, regular annual salary step-increases for teachers. As a public school teacher on Hawaii Island, we are working above and beyond for our students, as we try to compensate for additional vacancies at our local school, on our complex, and for resource teachers. You can support teachers, students, and the vibrancy of our communities by voting in favor of stabilizing the educator workforce with predictable and reliable salary step increases.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Joy Paul

HIDOE Public School Educator

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:52:53 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nara Takakawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.****Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee:**

My name is Nara Takakawa, and I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As it stands right now, step increases are not consistent and unfair. As an example, I remained at Step 9 for five years and only increased a step after the implementation of the current contract. A colleague of mine who was a first year teacher at the time received the same step increase after only one year of service! Needless to say, I was incredulous at the unfairness of the system. She and I received the same step increase when I had worked 5 times as many years!

In addition, reliable step increases will enable public educators to financially plan for their futures. Off the top of my head, I can think of five former teachers (colleagues and family members) who now reside in Washington, Utah, and South Carolina because living in Hawai'i was just too expensive for the actual amount that public school teachers are paid.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Respectfully,

**Nara Takakawa
Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani Middle School/Honolulu District**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:54:12 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniel Patrick Lopez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Danny Lopez and I am writing in support of this bill. I am a teacher on Maui. I have been teaching in the DOE since 2018. I am hoping to be a career long teacher here on Maui, but it is getting harder and harder. Even with spending thousands of dollars and countless hours on a master's degree, and then 30 additional credit hours, I still am barely scraping by. It seems like everytime I earn a bump on the payscale, my rent goes up. This month, I got my pay bump, and then my apartment complex called me to tell me they've been undercharging me on rent and that I owe nearly \$800. It's hard to keep up. Automatic pay increases would make a huge difference for me and for many others. I would give incentive to stay in Hawaii, earn experience, and become more committed to the local community. Teachers would come and be able to stay at least a bit longer, or justify staying longer. Students would benefit, and we would have an easier time raising our future workforce at our schools.

Please support this bill.

Mahalo,

Danny Lopez

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:00:47 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tricia Ho	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public school teacher and I strongly urge you to pass **SB 2391, SD1** for three critical reasons:

1. **High Attrition:** Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. This turnover destabilizes our schools and directly harms student success.
2. **Stability & Retention:** Automatic step increases provide the predictability we need to stay in the classroom. It proves the State values our experience and is committed to keeping us here.
3. **Financial Crisis:** Adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This creates an unsustainable financial burden on educators.

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

Tricia Ho

Kipapa Elementary & Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:02:46 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Freedom Fallin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii is facing a serious teacher retention crisis. Each year, too many qualified educators leave our classrooms due to high cost of living, limited salary income, and the lack of financial stability. The result of this is persistent vacancies throughout our state and an over reliance on long term substitutes or emergency hires. Some of which are not qualified to be teaching our students.

When we cannot retain certified experienced teachers, our students pay the price. Student achievement and standardized test scores continue to struggle in part because of consistent, high-quality instruction is disrupted. As a teacher, I have seen first hand how an over reliance on emergency or long-term substitutes are a great short term solution but this cannot be our long term solution. We need to think about our students and what we are taking away from them, an education they deserve and our state desperately needs.

Hawaii's cost of living is among the highest in the nation. Many of our teachers work second jobs or leave the state entirely because their salaries cannot keep up with housing, food, and transportation costs. This bill if passed, demonstrates that Hawaii values its educators and recognizes their commitment through a reasonable, performance-based effort.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:03:00 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacie Maeda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **STRONG SUPPORT** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawaii creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawaii's teachers are the lowest paid in the nation.

The financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. I have considered leaving the profession multiple times due to the low pay. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Students deserve a qualified teacher in the classroom, and one way to do that is through this bill.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. Many teachers, including myself, hold master's degrees either in education or in our respective field of study. Our pay should reflect that. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Stacie Maeda

Honolulu District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:08:07 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janette Snelling	Testifying for HIDOE, HKKK Complex Area	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am submitting my comments in favor of SB2391 regarding annual step increases for teachers. Teachers serve as the critical architects of student learning and achievement. Their commitment and experience considered. In implementation, I defer to the collective bargaining process.

Respectfully,

Janette Snelling

CAS, HKKK

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:15:59 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Guy Lopez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill. Providing regular, predictable step increases ensures stability for educators and the keiki and communities we serve. Retaining experienced teachers is significantly more cost-effective than the continual cycle of recruitment, hiring, and training caused by turnover. This bill is not just about compensation — it is about sustaining a stable, high-quality workforce for Hawai‘i’s students. Passing this measure sends a clear and powerful message that Hawai‘i truly values education and the professionals who dedicate their lives to our children.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:26:11 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Yukari Oda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes automatic step increases for public school educators.

Research consistently shows that teacher effectiveness increases with experience, particularly during the first decade of teaching, and continues to grow over time. Veteran teachers develop stronger instructional practices, classroom management skills, curriculum knowledge, and the ability to differentiate for diverse learners. Students benefit academically and socially when experienced educators remain in the classroom.

Automatic step increases recognize this professional growth and encourage retention of highly skilled teachers. In a state with a high cost of living, predictable salary progression is essential to retaining experienced educators who directly impact student achievement.

Investing in experienced teachers is an investment in student success. I respectfully urge you to pass SB 2391, SD1.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Yukari Oda

Honolulu

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:31:35 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Breanne Asuncion	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Breanne Asuncion
Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:42:04 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katy Parsons	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

As a classroom teacher in Hawai‘i, I have dedicated my career to serving our students and strengthening our schools. I love what I do, and I believe deeply in public education. However, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i makes it increasingly difficult for educators to remain in the profession long-term. When adjusted for living expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are effectively the lowest-paid in the nation.

I have watched talented, passionate colleagues leave the classroom; not because they lacked commitment, but because they could not afford to stay. Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. This constant turnover disrupts relationships, weakens school stability, and directly impacts student learning.

Automatic step increases provide more than just financial movement on a salary schedule! They provide predictability, dignity, and a reason for educators to build lasting careers here at home. This measure affirms that the State values experience, professional growth, and the long-term commitment required to serve our keiki well.

For the sake of teacher retention, school stability, and student success, I respectfully urge you to pass SB 2391, SD1.

Mahalo for your leadership and consideration,

Kathryn Parsons
Castle High School/Windward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:46:49 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karrin Hauanio	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a school principal, I see firsthand the dedication our educators bring to the classroom every day. I fully support significant pay increases; they are essential for recruiting top talent and retaining the experienced teachers our students deserve.

However, compensation is a cornerstone of the collective bargaining process. While the intent of this legislation is commendable, codifying raises into law risks bypassing the established systems designed to balance district budgets and educator needs. I believe this measure should be deferred to the existing bargaining process, ensuring that salary adjustments remain a collaborative decision made at the negotiating table rather than a fixed legislative mandate.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:46:57 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrew Scot	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am in support of an annual payrate increase for teachers, provided that it is deferred/incorporated into teachers' collective bargaining agreement. I currently serve as the principal of Kea'au Elementary School on Hawai'i Island. One of the crucial duties of the school principal is to recruit and retain a capable workforce, but this effort is hampered by the relatively low payrate for teachers in Hawai'i. Teachers deserve an annual pay increase in order to maintain parity with inflation and the increasing cost of living in Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Andrew Scott, Principal

Kea'au Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:47:24 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cherie Yamashiroya-Ching	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Cherie Yamashiroya-Ching

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:48:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelley Konishi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Ways and Means**Re:SB 2391, SD1 - Relating to Education -****Wednesday, Febraury 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Morikawa, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Shelley Konishi, and I am a general education teacher born and raised in Hawai‘i. I have proudly served for 18 years in the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. I respectfully submit this written testimony in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes automatic step increases for teachers.

Hawai‘i is a special place. Our schools are deeply connected to our communities in ways that are unique to our islands. Throughout my 18 years of teaching, I have built lasting relationships with families — not just with one child, but often with multiple siblings, cousins, and extended ‘ohana. I have had the privilege of teaching brothers and sisters over the years, and in some cases, members of the same family across generations. These relationships do not happen overnight. They are built through consistency, trust, and long-term commitment to the community.

In areas like Kalihi, where I serve a beautifully diverse population of students from many cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, the role of a teacher extends far beyond academic instruction. We are educators, yes — but we are also mentors, counselors, advocates, and sources of social-emotional support. Many of our students face challenges outside of school that directly impact their ability to learn. Teachers step in daily to help bridge those gaps.

It is not uncommon for educators to provide basic everyday essentials — school supplies, snacks, hygiene items, even clothing — when students come to school without what they need. Much of this support comes directly out of our own pockets and is not covered by school budgets. We do it because we care deeply about our students and understand that a child cannot focus on learning if their basic needs are unmet.

Automatic step increases are about more than salary progression. They are about stability and recognizing the value of experienced educators who remain committed to their communities. Retaining teachers who have built strong, multigenerational relationships with families strengthens school culture and student outcomes. When experienced teachers leave due to financial uncertainty or the high cost of living, it disrupts not just classrooms, but entire community networks.

SB 2391, SD1 acknowledges the dedication of teachers who choose to stay, serve, and invest in Hawai'i's children year after year. It sends a message that the State values long-term commitment and understands the importance of sustaining a stable and experienced workforce within the Hawai'i State Department of Education.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass SB 2391, SD1. Supporting our teachers means supporting our keiki, our families, and the future of our islands.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

Respectfully,
Shelley Konishi
General Education Teacher (Farrington Kalani Kaiser Complex)
Honolulu, Hawai'i

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:48:52 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patrick Whalen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Patrick Whalen

Lahaina Intermediate School

To: **WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE** Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

DATE: Wednesday, February 25, 2026

TIME: 10:55AM

LOCATION: Conference Room 211 & Videoconference, State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

Committee: WAM (Ways and Means)

BILL: SB 3334 SD1, Relating to Education Elimination of Complex Area Superintendent Positions

TESTIFIER(S): Adria Medeiros, Principal Mountain View Elementary School

POSITION: OPPOSITION AND COMMENTS

Aloha Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair,

My name is Adria Medeiros, and I serve as the principal of Mountain View Elementary School in the Ka'u-Kea'au-Pāhoa Complex Area on Hawai'i Island. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of SB 2391 SD1.

I write in support of this measure recognizing the critical importance of teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i. Providing annual and longevity step increases for beginning teachers who demonstrate satisfactory service in their first year reflects a commitment to valuing and sustaining our educator workforce, particularly in a state where cost of living continues to present significant challenges.

At the same time, I respectfully defer to the collective bargaining process to determine the specific terms and implementation of any salary adjustments. Compensation structures are most appropriately negotiated between the State and the exclusive bargaining representative to ensure fairness, fiscal responsibility, and alignment with broader contractual agreements.

Mahalo for your continued efforts to support Hawai'i's educators and the students they serve.

Respectfully,



Adria Medeiros

Principal, Mountain View Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:53:04 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janelle Kawakami	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Name**

Janelle Kawakami

Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:03:14 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeffrey Uyeda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Jeffrey Uyeda

Pearl City High School/ Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:04:44 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rick Yamashiro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION
Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator and as a public school parent, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure. This measure is important for the future of our state.

Mahalo,

Kim Virtudazo

Kim Virtudazo

National Board Certified Teacher
James Campbell High School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:12:08 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicole Kiona	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Nicole Kiona

Wai'anae High School/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:13:28 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Inger Stonehill	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Inger Stonehill

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:14:12 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grace Brown	Testifying for Teach for America Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

My name is Grace Brown, and I work at Teach for America Hawai'i. I'm a proud product of Hawai'i public schools and a former public school teacher. I now support TFA Hawai'i's local initiatives and external affairs.

I am in support of SB2391, which relates to annual salary step increases for public school teachers. This bill is essential to improving teacher recruitment and retention in Hawai'i.

As a State Approved Teacher Educator Program (SATEP), we understand that compensation plays an important role in who is able to enter and remain in Hawai'i's public school classrooms. With the state's high cost of living, predictable salary growth can make a meaningful difference for aspiring and early-career educators.

Establishing automatic annual salary step increases would reinforce teaching as a profession worthy of long-term commitment by providing stability and clarity in compensation. For those who choose to learn, teach, and build their lives in Hawai'i, reliable salary progression supports retention, honors the dedication educators bring to their schools, and helps sustain strong, consistent learning environments for students across the state.

We stand on our written testimony and are available for any questions. We appreciate your continued support of public education in Hawai'i and look forward to seeing the progress made at the legislature this year.

Mahalo,
Grace Brown

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:14:53 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jiena Marquez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Jiena Marquez

Teacher

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:18:02 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Akeyo Garcia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, my colleague and I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Akeyo Garcia

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:18:25 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Avniel Naidu	Testifying for HI DOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is unfair that we have to guess when our next raise is going to be there should be a set schedule. We are constantly being evaluated so there shouldnt be problems with people deserving or not. We are already underpaid this is just another way to help us get paid what we deserve

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:20:40 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Matthew Fisher	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:22:11 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Donna Lyn Baguio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

As I complete my 20th year as a public school educator in the Hawai‘i Department of Education, I have seen firsthand how the high cost of living places tremendous financial strain on teachers. According to the findings in SB 2391, once teacher salaries are adjusted for Hawai‘i’s cost of living, they rank lowest in the nation, even compared with other high-cost states.

This financial pressure contributes directly to a serious retention problem in our schools. The bill text notes that close to half of teachers in Hawai‘i leave the profession or the State within five years of starting. That level of turnover disrupts school culture, weakens instructional continuity, and ultimately impacts student achievement.

After 20 years of service, I never imagined I would consider leaving Hawai‘i. Yet I am now seriously considering moving to Washington State within the next five years to continue my teaching career because of the high cost of living here and the significantly more competitive salary schedule there. Several colleagues I know have already made that move. Hawai‘i is at risk of losing experienced educators who have invested decades into our students and communities.

When experienced teachers leave and classrooms are staffed with short-term or emergency hires, students lose the benefit of stable relationships and consistent, high-quality instruction. Predictable salary progression is not a bonus. It is a basic structure that allows educators to plan for housing, family, and long-term financial stability in Hawai‘i.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability teachers need to remain in the classroom. It sends a clear message that the State values experience, professional growth, and teacher retention as essential to student success.

For the sake of our students, families, and the future of public education in Hawai‘i, I respectfully urge you to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,
Donna Lyn Baguio
English Teacher
James Campbell High School
Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:23:37 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackie Chung	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Name: Jackie Chung

School/District: Kapalama Elementary School/Honolulu District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:24:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brandon Cha	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. It provides stability to educators and children, is more cost effective than constant recruitment and training. It sends a clear message that Hawaii values education.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:27:11 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chanel Wong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As a public education school teacher I strongly support Bill 2391. Teachers deserve automatic yearly pay increases. It is long overdue. With the multiple responsibilities they have to carry along with the mental and emotinoal load, they are more than deserving of the passing of this bill. Automatic pay increases could also mean stronger teacher recruitment and teacher retention. Again I fully spport HB 2391.

Mahalo nui,
Chanel Wong

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Kylie Gambill

Baldwin-Kekaulike-Kūlanihāko‘i-Maui Complex Area

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO EDUCATION.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that average salaries for
2 teachers in Hawaii generally fall in the middle of national
3 rankings of teachers' pay. However, once the salaries of
4 teachers in the State are adjusted for the cost of living, they
5 are the lowest-paid in the nation. The national average salary
6 for all teachers stands at approximately \$30,086, when cost of
7 living is considered. However, the average starting salary for
8 teachers in Hawaii is \$24,409, when adjusted for cost of living.

9 Furthermore, the legislature finds that close to half of
10 teachers in Hawaii are leaving the profession or the State
11 altogether within five years of starting, posing a significant
12 problem for students. Slightly more than nine hundred teachers
13 were hired in 2013, but as of 2018, fewer than four hundred
14 seventy of them remained in the classroom. Within the last five
15 years, the number of teachers leaving Hawaii has increased to
16 seventy-one per cent. Only fifty-one per cent of teachers hired
17 during the 2013-2014 school year were still teaching in Hawaii



1 five years later, a decrease from fifty-four per cent during the
2 previous year. As the State continues to address matters of
3 teacher recruitment and retention, it is crucial to support
4 current teachers now.

5 The purpose of this Act is to provide automatic step
6 increases in teacher salaries for each year of satisfactory
7 service completed, subject to available funds.

8 SECTION 2. Chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
9 amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated
10 and to read as follows:

11 **"§302A- Salary increases; annual, longevity. (a)**
12 Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, if negotiated into a
13 collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, and
14 subject to the availability of funds, teachers who have
15 completed one year's satisfactory service and who have complied
16 with the other requirements of sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642,
17 and 302A-701, as applicable, shall be entitled to an annual
18 increment.

19 (b) Teachers who have served satisfactorily for three
20 years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step
21 pursuant to section 302-624 and who have complied with the other



1 requirements of sections 302A-601.5 to 302A-642, and 302A-701,
2 as applicable, shall receive longevity step increases, subject
3 to the availability of funds."

4 SECTION 3. Chapter 302D, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
5 amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated
6 and to read as follows:

7 "§302D- **Salary increases; annual, longevity.** (a)
8 Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, if negotiated into a
9 collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, and
10 subject to the availability of funds, teachers who have
11 completed one year's satisfactory service and who have complied
12 with the other requirements of this chapter that pertain to the
13 employment conditions and compensation for teachers, as deemed
14 applicable by the state public charter school commission.

15 (b) Teachers who have served satisfactorily for three
16 years in their maximum increment step or in any longevity step,
17 if any, and who have complied with the other requirements of
18 this chapter that pertain to the employment conditions and
19 compensation for teachers, as deemed applicable by the state
20 public charter school commission, shall receive longevity step
21 increases, subject to the availability of funds."



- 1 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.
- 2 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on January 1, 2077.



Report Title:

Salaries; Teachers; Annual Increases

Description:

Provides annual salary step increases for public schools and public charter school teachers who have completed one year's satisfactory service and comply with specified requirements, if negotiated into a collective bargaining agreement pursuant to section 89-9, HRS, and subject to the availability of funds. Effective 1/1/2077. (SD1)

The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.



SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:32:17 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniel Liloa Pavao	Testifying for HSTA/HIDOE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Daniel Liloa Pavao. I am a proud product of the Hawai'i Department of Education, and today I have the privilege of serving as a teacher at Leilehua High School. I am writing to you in strong support of SB 2391, SD1.

My path to the classroom began with the foundation I received as a student in our public schools. The teachers I had growing up did more than just teach me academics; they mentored me to be the best person I could be. They consistently modeled the values of grit and pride, teaching me that the right thing to do is to give my absolute best effort in everything I pursue. Through the HIDOE, I was given opportunities to volunteer in environmental services and participate in school functions that showed me the importance of being an active, contributing member of our community.

These early lessons in service and integrity are what led me to the City & County of Honolulu Parks and Recreation. I started as a child participant in the Summer Fun program, transitioned into a teen volunteer, and have served as a Summer Fun leader since I was 18 years old. Working in our parks and guiding our keiki gave me the hands-on motivation to turn those values into a career. This lifelong connection to our community is why I chose to return to the HIDOE as an educator. Even now, after a demanding school year at Leilehua, I go straight into leading Summer Fun because I am committed to passing on that same grit and pride to the next generation year-round.

However, I am reaching a physical and financial breaking point. Because I care about my students' success, I consistently reinvest my own income back into my teaching spaces to provide the supplies and activities they deserve. As the cost of living in Hawai'i continues to rise, it is becoming impossible to sustain my professional dedication and my own livelihood on my current salary.

Lately, I have had to seriously consider finding an additional part-time job just to stay afloat. But I am aware of my own human limitations. Between the high-stakes environment of the classroom and the energy required for Summer Fun, I am already pushed to my limit. I worry that the added stress of a third job would lead to burnout, hurting my mental health and my ability to be the present, effective teacher my students at Leilehua deserve.

I want to be the veteran teacher that our students can rely on for decades. I want to stay because I believe our local children deserve teachers who understand their culture and see their potential. My goal is to make a lasting, positive change for future generations in Hawai'i, but I cannot do that if the system makes it a struggle just to survive here.

Establishing automatic step increases would provide the financial security I need to plan for a future family and remain in the profession I love. Passing SB 2391, SD1 sends a message that the State values experience and wants to keep local educators here at home. I urge you to pass this measure so that I can continue to give my best to the keiki of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your time and for your consideration.

Aloha,

Daniel Liloa Pavao

Science Teacher, Leilehua High School Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:35:01 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Macadangdang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This stability would also encourage individuals from our state to pursue a career in education. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Jennifer Macadangdang****Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:35:12 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leandra Pasion	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Leandra Pasion

Kapalama Elementary School/Honolulu

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. In my first year as a teacher in a hard-to-staff school, there were five of us new teachers who started at the same time. One teacher quit before the year was over, one teacher had to change grade levels, and one teacher left the profession after two years. After going through at least four years of college to earn their education degree, two teachers quit because the pay was not worth the work they were being asked to do. The difficulty of being a new teacher combined with the unique difficulties of working in a hard-to-staff school serving families who live below the poverty line was simply too much. Reclassification through extra coursework is one way to earn higher pay as an educator, but this process requires too much time, especially for new teachers who are working in the most challenging schools. When I was working at a hard-to-staff school, I did not have time to take any reclassification courses to increase my pay because I was already doing extra work to help my struggling learners. Especially during the pandemic, I was working through the night to create online learning material for my students to stay engaged. If I had taken courses during my time at that school to reclassify and increase my pay, I would not have had any time to take care of my family. Ultimately, I decided to change to a different school after four years because the work was not healthy for my family and I, and the pay was not equivalent to what I knew I deserved. For the first time after 8 years in the classroom, I have been able to reclassify to earn higher pay. However I regret leaving behind the students who deserve the education that can only come from a seasoned teacher. These examples of high attrition pose a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students, especially the ones who need it most.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Cara Muraoka

Mānoa Elementary / Honolulu District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:36:37 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexis Evans	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am Alexis Evans and I am writing in support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. The education of our youth should be the highest priority, and teachers who take on this responsibility deserve to earn a livable wage. We shouldn't have to pick between a profession that helps countless children and affording rent. If we supported teachers and showed them they are valued, perhaps we wouldn't have such a shortage here on the islands.

Mahalo,

Alexis Evans

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:38:30 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Alves	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Anne Alves
James Campbell High School

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of **SB 2391, SD1**, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

As a public educator, I see firsthand how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for me and my colleagues. When adjusted for these costs, Hawai‘i’s teachers are effectively the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate, with nearly half of our teachers leaving the profession or the state within five years. Such high attrition undermines the stability of our schools and directly impacts student success.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values teacher experience and is committed to retaining qualified educators.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Lori Inouye

Molokai Middle School / Maui District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:39:36 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rockwell Bounos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this bill into law to ensure annual step movements for Hawai‘i educators.

As a public school educator in Hawai‘i for the past 11 years, I have been grateful for the annual raises provided under our most recent contract—particularly during periods of economic fluctuation. Those step increases have allowed me to remain in Hawai‘i and continue serving our students, including those with special needs who rely on consistency and experienced educators.

Given the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the economy and potential changes to federal funding, predictable annual step increases are essential. They provide educators with financial stability and allow us to plan responsibly for our families while continuing to focus on our students. Reliability in compensation is not simply a benefit—it is a key factor in retaining committed, qualified teachers in our public schools.

Additionally, annual step increases are standard practice in most mainland school districts. In exploring professional opportunities in states such as Oregon and California, I have observed that teachers routinely receive annual raises based on years of service. When Hawai‘i does not maintain comparable structures, it risks diminishing the perceived value of our certificated professionals and placing us at a competitive disadvantage in recruitment and retention.

Providing annual step movements affirms the professionalism of Hawai‘i educators, strengthens morale, and demonstrates a clear commitment to sustaining a stable, high-quality public education system for our keiki.

Mahalo e

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:41:54 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Fredeelyn Freeman-Koepke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

Monday, February 22, 2026,

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Fredeelyn Freeman-Koepke and I teach at Honaunau School. I am writing to you today not just as an educator, but as someone living the "financial crisis" mentioned in the briefings for SB 2391, SD1. I strongly support this measure to establish annual salary step increases.

While the data shows Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation when adjusted for cost of living, the reality on the ground is much more personal. For many of us—especially single teachers trying to make it on a single income—the "Hawai'i tax" isn't a statistic; it's a daily stressor.

In my own life and the lives of my colleagues, we are frequently forced into impossible trade-offs. It is a heartbreaking reality that a professional educator in this state often has to choose between:

- Paying rent on time.
- Buying nutritious groceries rather than just getting by on the basics.
- Seeking medical care or filling a prescription.

We love our students and our schools, but passion doesn't pay for a doctor's visit or an inflated electricity bill.

We are losing the heart of our schools. I see brilliant, qualified new teachers enter the profession with fire in their eyes, only to realize within two years that they cannot afford a future here. There is currently very little incentive to bring the best and brightest into our classrooms when they can see the math doesn't add up.

Even more concerning is the "mid-career exodus." I have watched seasoned, expert teachers—the ones who should be mentoring the next generation—leave for the private sector or the mainland simply because they deserve a wage that reflects their years of experience.

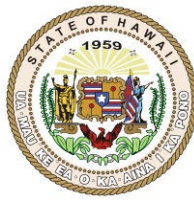
Automatic step increases provide more than just money; they provide hope and predictability. Knowing that our experience is valued and that our pay will reliably grow allows us to plan a life in Hawai‘i rather than planning an exit strategy.

If we want stability for our students, we must first provide stability for their teachers. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure and show Hawai‘i’s educators that we are worth the investment.

Mahalo for your time and for your support of our schools,

Fredeelyn Freeman-Koepke, Resident District 4

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

STACEY BELLO
COMPLEX AREA SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
KA'Ū HIGH and PAHALA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
96-3150 Pikake Street / PO Box 100
Pahala, Hawaii 96777
Phone: (808) 313-4100 Fax: (808) 928-2092

To: **WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE** Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

DATE: Wednesday, February 25, 2026

TIME: 10:55AM

LOCATION: Conference Room 211 & Videoconference, State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

Committee: WAM (Ways and Means)

BILL: SB 2391 SD1, Relating to Education Annual Salary Step Increases

TESTIFIER(S): Sharon Beck, Principal Ka'ū High and Pahala Elementary School

POSITION: OPPOSITION AND COMMENTS

Aloha Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair,

My name is Sharon Beck and I serve as the Principal of Ka'ū High and Pahala Elementary School in the Ka'ū-Kea'au-Pāhoa Complex Area on Hawai'i Island. I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to SB2391,SD1.

Being in a Title I, rural, school our teachers face many challenges. I support the hard work of our teachers and believe they can be best supported through the Collective Bargaining Agreement process.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to reconsider advancing SB2391, SD1 in its current form.

Mahalo for your time and for your commitment to the students and communities we serve.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sharon Beck".

Sharon Beck
Principal, Ka'ū High and Pahala Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:45:51 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chandra Vaidya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. I am a low-level educator; each time contract renewal comes up, I am forced to seriously consider leaving the position. Whenever the topic of my profession and salary comes up, friends and family ask me, "Why?" I love my job, but not to the point where I am willing to starve for it, with the cost of healthcare, housing, and other expenses often leaving me with under one hundred dollars for food each month.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Chandra Vaidya,

James Campbell High School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:47:02 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Slotter Clawson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Jennifer Slotter Clawson
James Campbell High School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:51:07 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Kamikawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is disgraceful that this is even up for discussion. The teachers should have been compensated at the same time as the EAs, front office, and security. We were on the front lines: in the classroom, greeting students, trying to maintain a sense of normalcy and do our jobs, but had to also become sanitation agents for everything in our classes. Using the minutes in between classes to clean the desks, chairs, laptops, supplies - everything that the students touched. All while bearing the weight and responsibility that if we didn't sanitize well, we could be putting ourselves, our family and friends, and the students, at risk for this life-threatening disease. This is your chance to make it right. Fix this injustice.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:52:14 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Danielle Smith****Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:55:20 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Horie	Testifying for State of Hawaii, Dept of Education	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Erin Horie

Kahului Elementary School/Maui District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:01:02 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anya Ciarniello	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support annual increases in teacher pay in Hawai‘i. Currently, many teachers’ salaries do not consistently keep pace with the rising cost of living, making it increasingly challenging to manage everyday expenses and long-term financial stability. Teachers play a critical role in shaping our students’ futures and supporting our communities, and ensuring competitive, predictable, and cost-of-living–adjusted compensation is essential for attracting and retaining high-quality educators. Investing in our teachers is an investment in Hawai‘i’s education system and the success of our students.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:02:00 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Miguel Loayza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Miguel Loayza, and I am a teacher at Farrington High School in the Hawai‘i Department of Education. I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual automatic salary step increases for public school teachers.

As a public school educator serving students and families in our community, I witness firsthand the financial realities teachers face in Hawai‘i. The cost of living in our state — including housing, groceries, utilities, transportation, and healthcare — continues to rise at a pace that far exceeds salary growth. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are effectively among the lowest-paid educators in the nation in terms of purchasing power. Many teachers work second jobs, postpone starting families, delay homeownership, or ultimately make the difficult decision to leave the profession or relocate to states where their salaries provide greater financial stability.

This financial strain directly contributes to Hawai‘i’s alarming teacher turnover rate. Nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This level of attrition creates instability in our schools, disrupts student learning, increases class sizes, and places additional burdens on remaining staff. Students, especially those in high-need communities, suffer most when experienced teachers leave and are replaced by long-term substitutes or inexperienced educators still learning the profession.

Automatic step increases are not simply about compensation — they are about stability, retention, and respect for the teaching profession. Predictable annual step increases allow educators to plan for their futures with confidence. They recognize years of service, experience, and professional growth. In a state where housing costs alone can consume a large percentage of a teacher’s salary, predictable salary progression is essential for long-term financial planning.

Furthermore, automatic step increases strengthen recruitment efforts. When prospective teachers see a clear and reliable salary schedule, it signals that Hawai‘i values and invests in its educators. Without guaranteed step movement, teachers face uncertainty that discourages long-term commitment to our public school system.

Our students deserve stable, experienced, and committed educators. Supporting automatic step increases is a concrete step toward improving teacher retention, strengthening our schools, and ensuring continuity of instruction for Hawai‘i’s children.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Miguel Loayza
Teacher, Farrington High School
Hawai‘i Department of Education

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:04:10 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelsi Lei Nitahara Moses	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Kelsi Nitahara Moses

Waiakea Elementary

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:04:54 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Krysta Gallagher	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. It provides stability to educators and keiki, is more cost effective than constant recruitment and training, and sends a clear message that Hawai'i values Education.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:07:18 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Remotap	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.****Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,**

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Jessica Remotap****Kapalama Elementary School/Honolulu**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:07:22 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laverne Moore	Testifying for O`ahu HSTA-Retired Teachers	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Laverne Moore. I am speaking on behalf of the O`ahu HSTA-Retired Teachers.

As retired educators with years of experience in our public school system, we are in **strong support** for SB 2391, SD1.

This bill is a critical step toward ensuring that our teachers are fairly compensated for their dedication and professional growth. Providing annual salary step increases for teachers who complete a year of satisfactory service, **which we had when many of us started teaching in the 1970's**, is not just about a paycheck; it is about respect, retention, and the long-term health of our education system.

Throughout our career, we saw many talented educators leave the profession or move out of state because the compensation structure did not reflect their commitment or the rising cost of living in Hawai'i. When we fail to provide predictable, fair increases, we:

- **Undermine Morale:** Teachers deserve to know that their experience and satisfactory service will be recognized financially.
- **Impact Student Learning:** High teacher turnover is disruptive to students. Stability in the workforce leads to better educational outcomes.
- **Hinder Recruitment:** To attract the best and brightest to the classroom, we must offer a competitive and reliable career path.

By supporting SB2391, this committee has the opportunity to invest in the people who are shaping the future of Hawai'i. Our teachers are our most valuable resource, and it is time their salary structures reflect that.

We respectfully urge the committee to **pass** SB 2391, HD1.

Mahalo for your time and for your support of Hawai'i's educators and students.

Sincerely,

Laverne Moore, O`ahu Hawaii State Teacher Association-Retired President

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:10:33 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Sandvig	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a public educator dedicated to the success of Hawaii's students, I am writing in **strong support of SD1**. This measure, which provides annual salary step increases for satisfactory service, is a vital investment in the stability of our education system. This bill ensures that the promises made during contract negotiations are kept. When step increases are already bargained for and stated in our contracts, failing to fund them undermines the collective bargaining process and erodes trust between educators and the State. Hawaii continues to face a teacher shortage. Automatic annual step increases provide a clear, predictable professional trajectory. By rewarding "satisfactory service," we encourage our best mid-career teachers to stay in the classroom rather than leaving for higher-paying jurisdictions or different industries. Teacher turnover is expensive and disruptive to student learning. Stability in the workforce directly translates to stability in the classroom. When teachers feel valued and compensated fairly, our *keiki* receive the consistent, high-quality instruction they deserve. While this is subject to the availability of funds, proactive investment in teacher retention is more cost-effective than the perpetual cycle of recruiting, hiring, and training new staff to replace those who leave due to stagnant wages. Reliable pay increases should not be a yearly question mark; they should be a guarantee for those of us who show up every day for Hawaii's children. Passing this legislation ensures that our compensation reflects our commitment and our years of service. I respectfully urge the committee to **pass SD1**. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:12:24 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa-Ann Barton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Mrs. Lisa Barton
Campbell High School/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:14:05 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katrina Souza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of **SB 2391, SD1** (Automatic Step Increases).

I have been a public school teacher in the State of Hawaii for 22 years. I was born and raised in the islands and am firmly committed to educating our children because the future of Hawaii is on their shoulders. However, my commitment should not be taken for granted. Every day is a struggle to survive as a single parent of two children. I have to work summer jobs to make ends meet. This is not right. I am already at the top of the pay scale. I have no where else to go to make sure I can keep my family financially secure. Automatic step increases is literally the only way I can make sure my paycheck keeps up with inflation. Please pass this bill.

Mahalo!

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:19:49 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jerome Crisostomo	Testifying for HSTA	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure. Mahalo,

Jerome Crisostomo
Farrington High School/Honolulu

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:26:47 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Season Paniku	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.****Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,**

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Season Paniku****Hilo-Waiakea Complex**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:28:28 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erik Tanaka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Step increases are critical to teacher retention & to new teacher hires. Thank you so very much for stepping up for us <3

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Shannon K. Garan

Honolulu Chapter President

Linapuni Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:29:40 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Kato	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,**I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.****As a household where both my husband and I are proud public school educators, we see firsthand the vital role that automatic step increases play in the health of our schools and our personal lives. We are writing today to urge you to codify these increases as a permanent, non-negotiable fixture of our compensation.****For us, step increases are not "raises" in the traditional sense; they are a necessary mechanism for keeping pace with inflation. Without them, our financial stability diminishes every year we remain in the classroom. Automatic steps allow us to plan our future. Knowing our income will predictably rise based on experience provides the stability required to stay in this profession long-term.****Currently, these increases are often subjected to grueling annual negotiations. This process creates an environment of uncertainty and anxiety. When our basic livelihood is treated as a bargaining chip, it breeds a culture of "us versus them." Having to fight every year for a standard cost-of-living adjustment perpetuates a feeling of disrespect toward our profession. It sends the message that our growing experience and commitment are only valued if the budget allows for it after a fight.****By making step increases automatic, you remove a significant source of burnout and demonstrate a concrete commitment to the people who power our district. Let's shift the focus away from the stress of the boardroom and back to the success of our students.****Sincerely,****Jessica Kato, MEd, NBCT**

Kevin Kato, MEd

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:32:08 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kara Iopa	Testifying for HSTA	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION -Wednesday, February 25, 2026,
10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Kara Iopa; Teacher

Waiakea Elementary School / Hilo-Waiakea District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:40:21 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Adrian Waterman-Reilly	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday,

February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Thank you,
Adrian Waterman-Reilly
Farrington High School, Honolulu, HI

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:41:49 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Khriscel Mina	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Khriscel, a new public special education teacher, I am writing today to express my **strong support** for the proposed automatic pay increases for Hawaii's educators. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai'i's teachers, especially for new educators like myself. While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai'i has created a persistent financial struggle. When we don't have a clear, guaranteed path for salary growth, it becomes difficult to see a long-term future in this profession, despite my love for my students.

An automatic pay increase is an investment in the stability of our classrooms. It sends a message to new teachers that Hawaii values our contribution and wants us to stay. For the sake of my students and the future of Hawaii's education system, I urge you to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your time and for your support of Hawaii's educators and keiki.

Khriscel Mina

Mililani Mauka El / Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:42:40 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janelle Rogers	Testifying for HSTA	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Janelle Rogers
August Ahrens Elementary School, Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:43:35 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Mark	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honourable Members of the Legislature,

As a teacher at a Title 1 school, I support SB2391 wholeheartedly.

The reality: Hawai‘i teachers earn the lowest adjusted salaries in the nation—around \$24,409 for new teachers after cost-of-living adjustments. This isn't sustainable, and it shows: 71% of teachers leave the state within five years.

Why this matters for students: High teacher turnover destabilizes classrooms and disrupts learning. Students deserve experienced educators who can stay.

Why SB2391 works: Automatic annual salary increases and longevity bonuses create predictability and reward dedication. This simple step helps teachers afford to stay in Hawai‘i and continue serving our communities.

The ask: Pass this bill. Our students—especially those in under-resourced schools—need stable, experienced teachers in their classrooms.

Mahalo for your consideration.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:51:31 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alison Hartle	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator of 23 years, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for myself and my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘is teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Alison Harlte

Teacher, University Laboratory School, Honolulu

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:51:36 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ryden Noguchi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues.

When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Ryden Noguchi
Farrington High School / FKK District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:52:44 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Armina A Wrice	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Armina A Wrice
James Campbell High School/HIDOE

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:53:50 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alan Arimoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a DOE public school educator, I see firsthand how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates real financial hardship for teachers. When adjusted for cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers rank among the lowest paid in the nation. Nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years, creating instability in our schools and negatively impacting our students. We need to value our teachers here in Hawai‘i. Not just in words, but through worthy, acceptable compensation that reflects both our experience and the realities of living in our State.

Hawai‘i is my home. I was born and raised here, and I want to stay to raise my family and continue serving our community. However, the high cost of living compared to our income makes it difficult to make ends meet.

I respectfully urge you to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Alan Arimoto

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:53:53 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lori Sasan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a retired teacher of 40 years in the state of Hawaii I can attest to how difficult low pay made it on my family. I am in support of SB2391 SD1 automatic step increases for our public school educators.

Lori Sasan

Kalaheo Elementary, Kauai District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:54:34 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jon Fia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. It gives the teachers certainty that they can earn a decent income to support their families. 50% of the teachers have to work a second job. If you think it doesn't affect the quality of their teaching, you are mistaken.

Passing this bill will not only increase retention and attraction of new teachers, it will improve the quality of education in the classroom. In the end, isn't that what we all want?

Thank you for your time.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:54:49 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kareen Takushi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public school teacher and I strongly urge you to pass **SB 2391, SD1** for three critical reasons:

1. **High Attrition:** Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. This turnover destabilizes our schools and directly harms student success.
2. **Stability & Retention:** Automatic step increases provide the predictability we need to stay in the classroom. It proves the State values our experience and is committed to keeping us here.
3. **Financial Crisis:** Adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This creates an unsustainable financial burden on educators.

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

Kareen (Kalina) Takushi, Special Education Teacher

Kipapa Elem./Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:55:28 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Derek A Scarlino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a public educator, it is in the best interest of our Keiki, Educators, and State budget to give teachers Automatic Annual Step Increases that have already been bargained for and are stated in our contract.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:55:51 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sierra Johnson-Settles	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public school teacher and I strongly urge you to pass **SB 2391, SD1** for three critical reasons:

1. **High Attrition:** Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. This turnover destabilizes our schools and directly harms student success.
2. **Stability & Retention:** Automatic step increases provide the predictability we need to stay in the classroom. It proves the State values our experience and is committed to keeping us here.
3. **Financial Crisis:** Adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This creates an unsustainable financial burden on educators.

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

Sierra Johnson-Settles

Kipapa Elementary, Central Oahu Distract

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:10:45 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April Kalt	Testifying for Hawaii State Teachers Association	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
April Kalt
Ka Waihona PCS Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:23:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brenn simonen	Testifying for HSTA	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Brenn Simonen

RHS

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:26:33 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nadine Ferber	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

S.B. No. 2391, S.D. 1 – Relating to Education

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

I am a public high school special education teacher in Hawai‘i and the mother of a child with disabilities. I strongly support S.B. No. 2391, S.D. 1.

Teacher retention in Hawai‘i is a student stability issue. When nearly half of teachers leave within five years, students lose continuity, teachers face increased workloads, and IDEA compliance risks rise.

In special education, I directly witness service delays and strain when experienced teachers cannot be retained. Students with disabilities are legally entitled to consistent, appropriate services. That becomes difficult when staffing is unstable.

This affects all classrooms. High turnover disrupts learning and undermines school climate statewide.

Automatic annual step increases are not extras. They are a basic structural commitment to retaining the educators who remain dedicated to Hawai‘i’s students.

Retention is not a perk. It is a prerequisite for student success.

I respectfully urge your support.

Mahalo,

Nadine Ferber
Public High School Special Education Teacher
Honolulu, Hawai‘i

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:35:13 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gabriel Boynay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of this bill because all educators deserved to be compensated fairly and well. I don't understand how an 18% salary increase from \$249,600 to \$294,674 is appropriate for the superintendent when I as an educator have to work a second job to pay all my bills. It is ridiculous, their salary increase is almost my entire annual salary. The least the state can do is offer and provide livable wages for all teachers.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:36:38 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shela Buyukacar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha and mahalo for your continued support for one of the most important jobs in our community - being a public school educator.

I am writing in strong support of establishing an annual salary step increase for public school educators.

You already know that when adjusted for our high costs of living, Hawai‘i has the lowest paid educators in the nation. As important, most of us are not public school educators for the money. Our hope is that we provide valuable impact as our youth strive to reach their potential as productive and mindful citizens.

We cannot ignore the consequences of being the lowest-paid educators in the country. This financial burden fuels a crisis where nearly 50% of our teachers depart the state or the profession within five years. This high attrition rate undermines classroom stability and disrupts vital relationship-building during our students' most formative years.

Establishing automatic step increases sends a clear message that the State truly understands our value within our community.

Passing this measure will be a clear indication of your measurable commitment to reducing the financial stress and improving educator retention in the classroom where it can have the greatest impact.

Mahalo,
Sheila Buyukacar
James Campbell High School

Campbell-Kapolei

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:04:37 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rosa Bell	Testifying for HSTA	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public school teacher. I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i #39's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. I am testifying in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers.

As an educator working every day in a Hawai‘i public school, I personally experience how the high cost of living here creates a real financial crisis, not just for my colleagues, but for me as well. When adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the entire nation, and I feel that reality every month.

I have watched talented, dedicated colleagues leave the profession or move to the mainland because they simply cannot afford to stay. Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years, and this constant turnover directly impacts the stability of our schools and the success of our students, students I see and care for every single day.

Automatic step increases would give educators like me the financial stability and predictability we need to stay in the classroom and continue doing the work we love. This measure would send a powerful message that the State of Hawai‘i truly values our experience, our dedication, and our commitment to its children.

I respectfully urge this committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

James Campbell High School

Leeward Distric

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:13:18 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jamielynn Quisano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Jamielynn Quisano
Campbell High School/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:21:20 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexander Collias	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Alexander Collias

Maui High School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:52:18 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Teri-Ann Dorman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an educator, I support this bill as it provides stability to all educators and our keiki. When compared to constant recruitment and training of new educators, this is a cost effective measure that will help the DOE to retain experienced, veteran teachers, and it sends a clear message to all that Hawai'i values education of our keiki. Providing automatic step movements to our educators shows that we are valued as we will no longer need to bargain for these step increases in our contract.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:04:50 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nellwyne Young	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘iis teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Nellwyne Young

James Campbell HS/Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:28:10 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tony Kim	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am one of the teachers at Farrington High School that had to provide in-person instruction during COVID to provide support to students without internet access at home. Therefore, I believe teachers like myself who were put in danger should be compensated and treated fairly since other government employees who were in similar situations are being compensated.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:49:35 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kalle Sonsona	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. It provides stability to educators and students, and is a more cost effective method of bringing educators to the profession than constant recruitment. This bill sends a clear message to Hawaii educators that they are valued.

Mahalo for your consideration.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 2:29:55 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lori Hoover	Testifying for HSTA	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, we were denied our 21 hours credits during COVID which affects our step increases. Plus, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Lori Hoover****Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 3:11:44 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Lum	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Jen Lum
Pearl City High School/Leeward District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 3:46:13 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

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

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.****Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,**

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,**Joy Nekomoto****Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:33:23 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tammy Holt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB 2391

Relating to Education – Teacher Salary Step Progression

Chair DelaCruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

- I support SB 2391, which establishes a statutory framework recognizing teacher salary step progression.
- Placing annual and longevity step movement into statute affirms the State’s commitment to structured, predictable salary advancement for educators.
- Hawaii’s history shows that when compensation is conditioned on “available funds,” step movement can be delayed or withheld. We have seen the consequences of this before. For example. Our veteran teachers have faced salary compression, teachers not being compensated for their years of service, and increased teacher attrition.
- If step progression is established in statute, it should not be treated as discretionary when revenues decline.
- Step movement should be treated as a structural obligation of the salary system, not as a negotiable benefit that disappears in difficult years.
- Any increase in available funding should be subject to negotiation under existing collective bargaining law and should not be used to offset or weaken the obligation to provide annual step progression.
- Step progression is not a bonus or discretionary raise. Step progression is earned. It reflects professional growth, years of service, and experience in the classroom.
- Stability in salary advancement is critical for teacher retention and recruitment, particularly in our cost of living climate.
- While the bill appropriately acknowledges compliance with Chapter 89 and funding considerations, I respectfully urge the Legislature to prioritize consistent appropriations so that the implementation of this statute results in stability that teachers can trust and rely on. A

statutory framework paired with consistent funding as is provided in House Bill 1890 HD2 demonstrates Hawaii's commitment to honoring the professionals who serve our students and their 'ohana.

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

Tammy Holt

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:35:54 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arianna Shultz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Arianna Shultz and as a public educator, I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1. This measure is a critical step toward addressing the systemic financial challenges facing Hawai‘i’s teachers.

While we serve with passion, the high cost of living in Hawai‘i has created a persistent financial crisis.

The result of this financial strain is a staggering turnover rate: nearly 50% of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition:

- Destabilizes our school communities.**
- Hinders student success and consistency.**
- Forces the state into a constant, expensive cycle of recruitment.**

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability educators need to build a long-term career in the classroom. It replaces uncertainty with a predictable growth path, sending a clear message that the State values our experience, values our keiki, and is committed to retention.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2391, SD1 to ensure our teachers can afford to stay and our students can thrive.

Mahalo for your consideration**Arianna Shultz****Hickam Elementary School/Central District**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:37:37 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

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

Comments:

I support this bill. It provides stability to educators and keiki, is more cost effective than constant recruitment and training, and sends a clear message that Hawaii values Education.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:39:27 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Freddie Dy, Jr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members.
please pass this measure support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

Freddie Dy, Jr.

Waimalu Elementary and Central District.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:39:38 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brad Kusunoki	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Honorable Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of this bill to implement automatic step increases for Hawaii's educators.

As a teacher dedicated to the students of our islands, I see firsthand the passion and hard work required to maintain our education system. However, the current salary structure often fails to keep pace with the significant cost-of-living increases inherent to living in Hawaii.

Many educators, myself included, find it increasingly difficult to balance a commitment to this profession with the rising costs of housing, utilities, and basic necessities. Automatic step increases provide more than just a paycheck; they offer:

- **Financial Predictability:** Allowing families to plan for the future in an expensive economy.
- **Retention:** Encouraging experienced teachers to stay in the classroom rather than leaving the state or the profession for more affordable options.
- **Recognition of Expertise:** Ensuring that years of service and increasing professional mastery are reflected in our compensation.

Supporting this bill is an investment in the stability of our schools and the well-being of the educators who serve Hawaii's keiki. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Thank you for your time and for your support of Hawaii's teachers.

Brad Kusunoki, Alvah Scott Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:41:39 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristin Villalobos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public school teacher in the Central district and I strongly urge you to pass SB 2391, SD1.

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

Kristin Villalobos

Daniel K. Inouye Elementary School, Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:42:07 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cindy Deuz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,**I am a public school teacher and I strongly urge you to pass SB 2391, SD1 for three critical reasons:**

- 1. High Attrition: Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. This turnover destabilizes our schools and directly harms student success.**
- 2. Stability & Retention: Automatic step increases provide the predictability we need to stay in the classroom. It proves the State values our experience and is committed to keeping us here.**
- 3. Financial Crisis: Adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This creates an unsustainable financial burden on educators.**

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.**Mahalo,****Cindy Deuz****Red Hill Elementary / Central District**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:42:39 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauren de los Reyes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a public school special education teacher and I strongly support this.

Many teachers leave our profession in Hawaii. Automatic step increases should occur to help support teachers who continue to teach in our state year after year. The increases help to keep teachers in our schools. Please pass this measure.

Much aloha,

Lauren de los Reyes (Mililani Ike, Central Disttict)

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:43:17 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

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

Comments:

I am a public school teacher and support this bill. I was born and raised in Hawaii and have been a special education for over 20 years. It has been difficult raising 3 children in Hawaii with the high cost of living and rising costs. The automatic step increases will help recruit and retain teachers over time. Many are leaving the field or not entering the field at all due to concerns with pay. This bill will help improve the lives of educators across the state.

Thank you for your time,

Joy Nakamura

Mililani, Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:43:48 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rainelle	Testifying for HSTA member	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

My name is Rainelle Matsuoka, and I am a 3rd grade teacher at Aliamanu Elementary in the central district. I am writing in strong support of the measure that provides annual salary step increases for public school and public charter school teachers who have completed one year of satisfactory service, when negotiated through collective bargaining and subject to available funding.

Providing predictable step increases is essential for retaining dedicated educators and maintaining stability in our schools. Teaching is a profession that requires long-term commitment, ongoing professional growth, and significant personal investment. When salary progression is uncertain or inconsistent, it becomes difficult for educators to plan for their futures, remain in the profession, or continue serving their communities long term.

In today's economic climate, the cost of living continues to rise while the demands on educators grow. Teachers are expected to meet diverse student needs, adapt to changing standards, support families, and often use personal resources to support their classrooms. Regular, structured salary advancement recognizes this work and affirms that experience and continued service are valued.

Stable compensation systems also directly benefit students. When schools retain experienced teachers, students gain consistency, stronger relationships, and higher-quality instruction. Teacher retention is not just a workforce issue — it is a student success issue.

I respectfully urge you to support this measure to ensure that educators who dedicate themselves to our public schools are fairly compensated for their continued service and professional growth.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Rainelle Matsuoka

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:44:38 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelly Yamada	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a special education teacher who works at Salt Lake Elementary School who supports this bill. I have 23 years in the DOE and I am already at the top of scale. But in order to retain young teachers and be able to recruit new teachers to our profession, automatic pay increases will tremendously help our students attain and keep the most qualified people.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:44:53 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samantha Deuz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public school teacher and I strongly urge you to pass SB 2391, SD1 for three critical reasons:

- 1. High Attrition: Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. This turnover destabilizes our schools and directly harms student success.**
- 2. Stability & Retention: Automatic step increases provide the predictability we need to stay in the classroom. It proves the State values our experience and is committed to keeping us here.**
- 3. Financial Crisis: Adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This creates an unsustainable financial burden on educators.**

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

SD

Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:46:37 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lilian Reynolds	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public school teacher, a specialized teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing in Wahiawa, and I strongly urge you to pass SB 2391. I have seen a dramatic turnover and need for specialized teachers like myself, and this impacts our most vulnerable learners and their families. Our deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) students are the most significantly impacted by the teacher shortage here, and the more stability and financial support we can provide our teachers means more retention of our high quality teachers. I moved back to Hawai'i from Washington because I tremendously value the education for our keiki and I know the need for teachers of the deaf like myself, even though I took a pay cut of nearly \$20,000 per year. It's increasingly difficult to justify the cost of living with the current pay structure here. This measure would be a positive step in the right direction.

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

Lilian Reynolds

Iliahi Elementary School, Central District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:47:29 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hanah Yahng	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am a public school teacher and I strongly urge you to pass SB 2391, SD1 for three critical reasons:

1. Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. This high turnover rate destabilizes our schools and directly harms our keiki, who are our future.
2. Automatic step increases provide the predictability we need to stay in the classroom. It proves that the state values our experience and is committed to keeping us here.
3. Adjusted to the cost of living. Hawai'i teachers are the lowest paid in the nation. This creates an unsustainable financial burden on educators.

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

Hanah Yahng

PreK Special Education Teacher

Salt Lake Elementary School

Mahalo,

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:48:38 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Odle	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a public school teacher and I strongly urge you to pass SB 2391, SD1 for three critical reasons:

1. High Attrition: Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. This turnover destabilizes our schools and directly harms student success.
2. Stability & Retention: Automatic step increases provide the predictability we need to stay in the classroom. It proves the State values our experience and is committed to keeping us here.
3. Financial Crisis: Adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation. This creates an unsustainable financial burden on educators.

Please pass this measure to support our teachers and our students.

Mahalo,

Jennifer Odle

Aliamanu Elementary & Central district

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:51:17 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
grace giletti	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. It provides stability for educators and students, is more cost-effective than constant recruitment and training, and sends a clear message that Hawai'i values education.

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:30:43 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Xiaochen Gong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i’s teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students. Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure. Mahalo,

Xiaochen Lily Gong
Ali‘iolani Elementary School

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 7:40:33 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shirley Fusato	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I strongly support SB 2391, SD1, establishing annual step increases for public school teachers.

Education is one of the few professions in which employees may serve decades yet face stagnant compensation without structured advancement. Step increases are standard professional mechanisms that reward experience, encourage retention, and strengthen workforce stability.

Nearly half of our teachers leave within five years. Recruitment efforts alone cannot solve this issue. Retention requires systemic support.

Automatic step increases send a clear message that the State of Hawai‘i values teacher expertise, institutional knowledge, and long-term commitment. Experienced educators improve instructional quality, mentor new teachers, and build strong school communities.

Passing this bill is a concrete step toward stabilizing Hawai‘i’s public education system.

Mahalo for your leadership and consideration.

**Shirley Fusato
Ewa Makai Middle School / Leeward**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 10:53:47 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marissa Yamamoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello, my name is Marissa Yamamoto, and I am writing in strong support of providing hazard pay to teachers who worked during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic, we were asked to report to classrooms to virtually teach. Then as students were coming back by their alphabetical last name about 1/3 of the student body at a time, teachers were exposed to students with COVID-19. I personally got the vaccines. I didn't want to because there wasn't any long term effects/ research on how the vaccines would be later on/ long term. I got the vaccines to still be able to teach and even having gotten the vaccines, I still got Covid-19 3 times. I was exposed to students who came to school with COVID-19 who came to school with it because they had it but because they only came to campus 1-2 times a week they didn't want to miss class.

I believe that teachers did not simply just "return to work" because cleaning protocols were higher and we had to take on so much more work. We were asked to physically rearrange our desks to accomodate for social distancing and then as students came to class we were asked to clean their desks between classes. We assumed significantly elevated health risks to ensure continuity of learning, stability, and had to support students more emotionally.

I found that many students came back to school depressed because of the increased screen time and were now much more dependant than the students I had before COVID-19.

Teachers like myself had to keep adapting and rolling with the rapidly changing mandates and health protocols to ensure student safety. And while hazard pay is traditionally reserved for workers who perform their duties under dangerous conditions involving an increased risk to their health and safety, I believe that the conditions during the height of COVID-19 clearly met the threshold where teachers who taught during that time should be compensated for.

Recognizing teachers with hazard pay isn't simply just a financial compensation, it is an acknowledgement. It affirms that their labor during a public health crisis was essential, high-risk, and above and beyond normal expectations. It sends a message that when society relies on educators during emergencies, their sacrifice will be recognized with tangible support.

Failing to provide hazard pay risks reinforcing the perception that educators' contributions during the pandemic were taken for granted. At a time when teacher retention and recruitment remain critical challenges nationwide, I believe that meaningful recognition matters.

We showed up, we adapted, we protected, we educated. While conditions got worse and times challenged us, we stayed. Under unprecedented conditions, we stayed... Hazard pay is a fair and reasonable measure to honor that commitment.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Marissa Yamamoto

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

RE: SB 2391, SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION - Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

This financial strain contributes to a staggering turnover rate where nearly half of our teachers leave the profession or the state within five years. This high attrition poses a significant problem for the stability of our schools and the success of our students.

Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

Betty Skiles

University Laboratory School

Honolulu District

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 1:51:10 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mariana Solis Martinez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai‘i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai‘i teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

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Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Mariana Solis Martinez
Campbell, Leeward

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 2:11:27 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Juliette Schmidt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2391, SD1, which establishes annual salary step increases for public school teachers. As a public educator, I see how the high cost of living in Hawai'i creates a financial crisis for my colleagues. When adjusted for these expenses, Hawai'i's teachers are the lowest-paid in the nation.

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Mahalo,**Juliette Schmidt****Ewa Makai Middle School/Leeward**

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 6:44:14 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laurie	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

So you feel that it is part of your job as a Senator, to write laws on what assignments teachers need to assign? That's what this is. You want to tell fifth grade teachers that they need to publish a book. And then you want the teachers to show up at the legislature to report on if they completed the assignment. Principals cannot even change a grade once a teacher submits it. The HSTA contract covers this. But now the Hawaii Legislature wants to tell teachers what to assign? Are you guys going to grade all the books too? Don't Colleges of Education teach future teachers how to determine how students are doing or do they dictate what assignments to make? This bill is dictating the assignments teachers will have to assign. And what happens if they don't do it? Will teachers be arrested, fired? Why are you doing this?

SB-2391-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 8:47:01 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jane Pedro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the committee,

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Establishing automatic step increases provides the stability and predictability educators need to remain in the classroom. This measure sends a clear message that the State values our experience and is committed to teacher retention. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,
Jane Pedro
Kanoelani Elementary