

EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

House Committee on Finance

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

2:00 p.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 308 and Videoconference

In Support

Senate Bill No. 1300 S.D. 1, H.D. 1, Relating to School Meals

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

The Office of the Governor supports S.B. No. 1300 S.D.1, H.D. 1, Relating to School Meals. This bill expands free school meal coverage to students who are currently qualified for reduced-price lunch and expands free school meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

This bill is an important step toward ensuring that all students, regardless of financial constraints, have access to nutritious meals. The ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) population represents hardworking families who often fall into the gap—earning too much to qualify for traditional assistance but still struggling to meet basic needs.

By subsidizing meal costs for these students, this bill acknowledges the vital link between proper nutrition and academic performance. When students are well-fed, they are better able to concentrate, engage in learning, and perform to their fullest potential.

The Office is mindful of the constraints of the state's finances and would request that this request does not supplant the additional funding request the Governor has made for DOE's food services funding in several Governor's Messages.

Investing in school meals is an investment in our future. Research consistently shows that well-fed students perform better academically, have improved concentration and behavior, and experience better long-term health outcomes. This bill supports not only students but also working families who are striving to provide for their children despite economic hardships.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



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

Date: 04/01/2025

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 1300, SD1, HD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS.

Purpose of Bill: Beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, expands free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch. Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, expands free school meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 1300, SD 1, HD 1.

The Department has always been an advocate for supporting the well-being of the whole child. Ensuring that students have access to healthy school breakfasts and lunches is critical to their ability to focus in the classroom and achieve academic success. The Department currently provides free and reduced-price meals to qualified students through federal reimbursements and remains committed to expanding meal access for students in need.

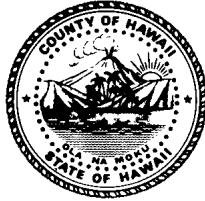
The Department is requesting a tiered implementation to allow for infrastructure and processes to be established. The Department requests an appropriation of \$565,000 for students eligible for reduced-price meals in the 2025-2026 school year and the 2026-2027 school year, and an additional \$2.8 million for students whose families earn up to 300% of the federal poverty level in the 2026-2027 school year. Also, in the 2026-2027 school year, the Department will require funding to study on how to improve participation. Furthermore, every year afterward, the Department would also require funding for implementation of the program such as an upgraded annual tracking system and training administrative costs for school level staff.

The Department believes these amendments will ensure a more effective and equitable implementation of meal subsidies, providing essential nutrition to students while using a clear and

reliable eligibility standard.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor



Benson Medina
Director

Dennis Lin
Deputy Director

County of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
25 Aupuni Street, Room 1301 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4252
(808) 961-8366 • Fax (808) 935-1205
E-mail: chresdev@co.hawaii.hi.us

March 31, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

TUESDAY, April 1, 2025
2:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 308

TESTIMONY ON SB 1300 SD1 HD1
Relating to School Meals

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

I am Benson Medina, Director of the Department of Research and Development, County of Hawai'i. One of the agricultural objectives of this department is to "support collaboration, innovation, resource development, and programmatic sustainability throughout the food system to reduce food waste, improve producer viability and resilience, develop workforce development pathways, or increase access to locally produced food among low-income residents."

The County of Hawai'i provides written testimony in **SUPPORT of SB1300 SD1 HD1 with amendments**, to expand free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch in the 2025-2026 school year and, beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, expand free school meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. Specifically, the County asks that SB1300 SD1 HD1 is amended to ensure that all students receive access to free school meals.

The Hawai'i County Council has demonstrated its commitment to this cause by adopting Resolution 42-25, urging the Hawai'i State Legislature to establish a universal free school lunch program for public school students, prioritizing local sourcing and regional procurement. This resolution highlights the pressing need to ensure that all students have access to nutritious meals essential for academic success and personal well-being, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Hawai'i County faces the highest rates of food insecurity in the State, with one in four Hawai'i County households reporting food insecurity in a 2023 study commissioned by Hawai'i Foodbank. The cost of school meals poses a significant barrier to accessing balanced nutrition for many students; two out of three struggling families in Hawai'i are ineligible for free school meals due to strict eligibility thresholds (HIPHI, 2024). Implementing universal free school meals would ensure that all students receive the nourishment they need, regardless of household income, thereby combating hunger and its associated negative impacts on health and well-being.

Additionally, implementing universal free school meals provides an opportunity to support local farmers through Farm-to-School initiatives. Increasing school meal participation enables the

March 31, 2025

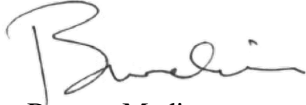
Page 2

HDOE to incorporate fresh, locally grown produce into school meals. Thus, providing students with healthier, more sustainable food options while bolstering Hawai'i's agricultural economy.

Investing in universal free school meals is a cost-effective strategy that addresses food insecurity, enhances academic performance, promotes equity, and supports local agriculture. The County of Hawai'i Department of Research and Development urges you to favorably pass SB1300 SD1 HD1 with amendments to ensure that all students in our state have access to the nutritious meals they need to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT of SB1300 SD1 HD1 with amendments.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Benson Medina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Benson Medina
Director, Research and Development
County of Hawai'i

COUNTY COUNCIL

Mel Rapozo, Chair
KipuKai Kualii, Vice Chair
Addison Bulosan
Bernard P. Carvalho, Jr.
Felicia Cowden
Fern Holland
Arryl Kaneshiro



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK

Jade K. Fountain-Tanigawa, County Clerk
Lyndon M. Yoshioka, Deputy County Clerk

Telephone: (808) 241-4188
Facsimile: (808) 241-6349
Email: cokcouncil@kauai.gov

Council Services Division
4396 Rice Street, Suite 209
Lihu'e, Kaua'i, Hawaii 96766

March 31, 2025

TESTIMONY OF FERN HOLLAND
COUNCILMEMBER, KAUAI COUNTY COUNCIL
ON
SB 1300, SD 1, HD 1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS
House Committee on Finance
Tuesday, April 1, 2025
2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308
Via Videoconference

Dear Chair Yamashita and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT with amendments to amend SB 1300, SD 1, HD 1, Relating to School Meals. My testimony is submitted in my individual capacity as a member of the Kaua'i County Council.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the Department of Education budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend SB 1300, SD 1, HD 1, to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Additionally, please see attached for Kaua'i County Council's Resolution No. 2025-19, which was unanimously adopted on February 26, 2025, and supports the provision of a universal free school breakfast and lunch program at all public schools.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony in support with amendments to SB 1300, SD 1, HD 1. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Council Services Staff at (808) 241-4188 or via email to cokcouncil@kauai.gov.

Sincerely,

FERN HOLLAND
Councilmember, Kaua'i County Council

JY:ss
Attachment

COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY OF KAUAI

Resolution No. 2025-19

RESOLUTION URGING THE STATE LEGISLATURE TO SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAM

WHEREAS, one in ten families in Hawai'i has a child who skips meals due to insufficient food availability; and

WHEREAS, hunger undermines students' ability to focus, engage in the classroom, and reach their full academic potential; and

WHEREAS, food insecure students are at a higher risk of experiencing stress, depression, and chronic diseases throughout their lives; and

WHEREAS, students with insufficient meal account balances are currently denied access to school breakfasts and lunches, exacerbating their hunger and hindering their ability to learn; and

WHEREAS, seventy thousand families in the State of Hawai'i fall into an income gap where their income exceeds the amount necessary to qualify for free school meals, and yet that income is still insufficient to make ends meet at home; and

WHEREAS, studies demonstrate that nutritious school meals can boost test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of learning; and

WHEREAS, offering free, nutritious meals to all students would create a more equitable school environment, remove stigmas associated with free meal programs, and foster the physical and mental health of Hawai'i's children; and

WHEREAS, eight states—California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont—have implemented universal free school meals for public school students; and

WHEREAS, for approximately \$25 million annually—just over 1% of the Department of Education's budget—the State of Hawai'i could implement universal free school meals for public school students statewide; and

WHEREAS, a universal free school breakfast and lunch program would ensure that no student requesting breakfast and/or lunch would be denied; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE COUNTY OF KAUAI, STATE OF HAWAII, that it hereby supports the provision of a universal free school breakfast and lunch program at all public schools.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this Resolution shall be transmitted to Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi, Speaker of the House Nadine K. Nakamura, Representative Daynette "Dee" Morikawa, and Representative Luke A. Evslin.

Introduced by:



FERN HOLLAND

V:\RESOLUTIONS\2024-2026 TERM\Universal Free School Lunch Program CNT_dmc.docx

	Aye	Nay	Excused	Recused
Bulosan	X			
Carvalho	X			
Cowden	X			
Holland	X			
Kaneshiro	X			
Kuali'i	X			
Rapozo	X			
Total	7	0	0	0

Certificate Of Adoption

We hereby certify that Resolution No. 2025-19 was adopted by the Council of the County of Kaua'i, State of Hawai'i, Lihu'e, Kaua'i, Hawai'i, on February 26, 2025.


County Clerk

Dated February 26, 2025


Chairman & Presiding Officer



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1300, SD1, HD1: RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

TO: House Committee on Finance
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai'i
Hearing: **Tuesday, 4/1/25, 2:00 pm; Videoconference and Room 308**

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members, Committee on Finance:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i **strongly supports SB 1300, SD1, HD1**, which expands free meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than 300% of the federal poverty level.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH), a community-based organization, has provided social services in Hawai'i for over 77 years, assisting 40,000 people annually. Our services target the most vulnerable in Hawai'i, including elders, veterans, children, families, houseless individuals, and immigrants. This bill is one of our economic justice priorities.

Food. A basic human necessity. Keiki need it to grow strong and healthy. Keiki need it to be alert and ready to learn. Keiki are our future, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have access to adequate food while in school.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i is one of the partners with the Aloha United Way in their ALICE Initiative to help these families thrive. Many of these hardworking ALICE families have incomes below 300% of the federal poverty level. They may not qualify for free and reduced-price lunches through the federal reimbursement program. Yet providing access to healthy school meals is critical for their children's nutrition and to remain focused in school. These families often struggle with food insecurity, leaving their children vulnerable.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i strongly supports this bill to provide food security for these keiki. Research has shown that free school meals lead to improved academic performance, higher test scores, and better overall well-being. They also help reduce stress and depression—challenges that many students face today.

Take action now! Supporting this initiative will not only help more families and their children thrive but also build a stronger, healthier future for our community. By ensuring our keiki are well-fed, we invest in their education, their health, and their future success.

We urge your support for this bill.

If you have any questions, please contact our Legislative Liaison, Betty Lou Larson at (808) 527-4813.



CLARENCE T. C. CHING CAMPUS • 1822 Ke'eumoku Street, Honolulu, HI 96822
Phone (808) 527-4813 •





Protect Democracy Move Forward

www.indivisiblehawaii.org

info@indivisiblehawaii.org

To: House Committee on Finance
Hearing Date/Time: April 1, 2025 2PM
Place: Hawaii State Capitol, Room 308
Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of SB1300 SD1 HD1

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

Members of Indivisible Hawai'i thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of SB1300 SD1 HD1 which would expand free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch and to students whose family income is no more than 300% of the federal poverty level.

Two out of three struggling working families in Hawaii are not eligible for free school meals and this measure would expand the coverage so additional keiki can eat for free. Please consider universal free school meals so no keiki would be forced to skip meals. The "universal" aspect would remove any social stigma associated with free school meals.

Please pass this important measure to help working families in Hawaii make ends meet. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Indivisible Hawai'i Working Families Team

We're a grassroots movement of thousands of local Indivisible groups with a mission to elect progressive leaders, rebuild our democracy, and defeat the Trump agenda. In Hawai'i, we have eleven groups across four islands, representing over a thousand pro-democracy citizens.



To: House Committee on Finance
Hearing Date/Time: April 1, 2025 2PM
Re: Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of SB1300 SD1 HD1

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

Members of AAUW of Hawai'i thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of SB1300 SD1 HD1 which would expand free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch and to students whose family income is no more than 300% of the federal poverty level.

Equal access to quality education is essential to advancing "equity for all", AAUW's vision. Studies show not only do free school meals are associated with improvement in health of children, they are associated with improvements in academic performance.¹ Please consider universal free school meals because it will remove the social stigma of free school meals being associated with low-income families. Please ensure no keiki would be forced to skip meals.

Please pass this important measure to help working families in Hawaii make ends meet. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Younghee Overly
AAUW of Hawai'i Public Policy Committee

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Hawai'i is an all-volunteer, statewide chapter of a national organization and is made up of six branches: Hilo, Honolulu, Kaua'i, Kona, Maui, and Windward O'ahu. AAUW's mission is to advance gender equity through education, and advocacy. Our goal is financial security for women in Hawai'i .

¹ <https://hspop.uw.edu/universal-free-school-meals-improve-health-outcomes/>



To: The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Finance

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Director of Public Policy
Sarielyn Curtis, External Affairs Specialist

Hearing: Tuesday, April 1, 2025, 2:00 PM, Conference Room 308

RE: **SB1300 SD1 HD1 Relating to School Meals**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support with comments on SB1300 SD1 HD1**. This measure appropriates funds to the Department of Education for meal subsidies for students whose families are classified as asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households; and requires the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 70,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 37 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

Proper nutrition is vital for keiki growth and development and may reduce the risk of health conditions like anemia, asthma, hyperactivity and anxiety.¹ According to the Hawai'i Foodbank, 1 in 4 keiki in Hawai'i may not know where they will get their next meal, and for more than 81,000 keiki, getting the energy they need to learn and grow can be a daily challenge.²

AlohaCare supports the intent of this measure, but as a member of the Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, we are aligned with HEAL's request for an amendment to provide free school meals for all students. Under this measure, many students may be denied meals due to inability to pay and their household's income being even slightly over the income requirements. Providing breakfast and lunch for all students, regardless of household income, ensures they have a consistent source of nutritious food and can focus on learning, while also removing stigma for students accessing free or reduced meals.

¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>

² <https://hawaiiifoodbank.org/keiki/>



By ensuring all students have access to free school meals, we are addressing immediate and basic nutritional needs, combating the numerous health risks that are associated with hunger, and giving kids the energy they need to learn and grow.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support with comments** on **SB1300 SD1 HD1**.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 6:09:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy Redfeather	Ka Ohana O Na Pua	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Considering everything that has happened over the past few weeks to school food, farm to school national program, and food banks, seems like this could be a very good use of taxpayer dollars and would go a long way to not only providing the nutrition needed by our keiki for learning, but also will support our family farms and lessen the stress in our ALICE households around daily food.

Mahalo, Nancy Redfeather

Executive Director: Ka Ohana O Na Pua - A community non-profit founded in 1991, whose mission is to provide agricultural and food education to the community Keiki to Kupuna.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 9:20:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan B Roberts Emery	Green Party of Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice chair La Chica, Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of Committee,

My name is Susan RobertsEmery, as Co chair of the Green Party of Hawai'i, we are in strong support of SB1300 SD1 HD1. Students who are hungry cannot concentrate in the classrooms. By providing free school meals research has shown that students have increased academic success and higher test scores overall. We do urge you to guarantee that ALL students have access to free school meals. This is what it takes to help our communities thrive.

Green Party of Hawai'i asks that you support SB1300 SD1 HD1 with an amendment for free lunches for all students.

Mahalo,

Susan RobertsEmery
Green Party of Hawai'i
Paauilo

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 11:22:38 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
laurel brier	Kauai Climate Action Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Let's make a Hawaii a state who cares for it children and provides for at least the most basic of needs. Free school meals for all especially financially vulnerable families. Too many of our children are going hungry which impacts ability to learn. And make it a win, win but requiring locally grown produce into those meals. Strong support for SB1300 and amendments to include all as well as locally grown ingredients.



HAWAI'I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Phone: (808) 489-9549

Web site: <http://www.hysn.org> E-mail: info@hysn.org

Vonnell Ramos, President
Cyd Hoffeld, Vice President
Sione Ford Naeata, Treasurer
Greg Tjapkes, Secretary

Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

Access to Independence
Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i
Bobby Benson Center
Child and Family Service
Coalition for a Drug-Free Hawai'i
Domestic Violence Action Center
EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.
Friends of the Children's Justice
Center of Maui
Get Ready Hawai'i
Hale Kipa, Inc.
Hale 'Opio Kaua'i, Inc.
Hawai'i Children's Action
Network
Hawai'i Health & Harm
Reduction Center
Hawaii Island Community'
Health Center
Ho'ola Na Pua
Ho'okele Coalition of Kaua'i
Ka Hale Pomaika'i
Kokua Kalihi Valley
Kaua'i Planning and Action
Alliance
Lines for Life Youth Line
Maui Youth and Family Services
Na Pu'uwai Molokai Native
Hawaiian Health Care
Systems
P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.
Parents and Children Together
PHOCUSED
Piha Wellness and Healing
Planned Parenthood of the
Great Northwest, Hawaii
Alaska, Kentucky, Indiana
Residential Youth Services
& Empowerment (RYSE)
Salvation Army Family
Intervention Services
Sex Abuse Treatment Center
Susannah Wesley Community
Center
The Catalyst Group

March 30, 2025

To: Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Finance

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1300 SD1 HD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports SB 1300 SD1 HD1 Relating to School Meals.

Across the islands, tens of thousands of local households make too much money to qualify for free school meals, but are still struggling financially. Those households are considered asset-limited, income-constrained, and employed — also known as ALICE households.

One in three families in Hawai'i are experiencing hunger or food insecurity,

In 2023, one in ten Hawai'i households were going without food for a whole day, some or most months out of the year.

37% of all households felt anxious about running out of food.

Providing free school meals to children from ALICE households will ensure that more public school students will have access to healthy food.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96819
Tel: (808) 833-2711 • Fax: (808) 839-7106 • Web: www.hsta.org

Osa Tui, Jr.
President

Logan Okita
Vice President

Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer

Ann Mahi
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Item: SB 1300, SD1, HD1 – Relating to School Meals

Position: Support

Hearing: Tuesday, April 1, 2025, 2:00 pm, Room 308

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

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

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) supports SB 1300, SD1, HD1 which appropriates funds to subsidize meal costs for public school students whose families qualify as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households.

As educators, we witness far too often students who come to school hungry and struggle to focus on their studies, participate fully in class, or reach their full potential. We believe access to nutritious meals is essential for their overall well-being and is critical to academic success and achievement.

The ALICE report released in January 2025 by Aloha United Way highlights the extent of financial hardship faced by many Hawai'i families. While 12% of households in the state are below the poverty line, an additional 29% are ALICE households. These families earn above the federal poverty level but still struggle to afford basic necessities like housing, childcare, food, transportation, and healthcare.

Alarmingly, 46% of ALICE households experience consistent food insecurity. This means that nearly half of these families are struggling to put food on the table, and their children are likely coming to school hungry.

Expanding the eligibility for school meal subsidies to include ALICE households would be a significant step towards addressing this issue. This would provide much-needed support to families in need and allow students to focus on their education without the added stress of hunger.

By subsidizing meal costs for ALICE households or those whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level, we can ensure that thousands more children have access to the nutrition they need to thrive in school and in life. We urge the committee to pass SB 1300, SD1, HD1 and invest in the future of Hawai'i's children.

Mahalo.



March 30, 2025

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

Hui Aloha Aina o Honolulu strongly supports SB 1300, which expands access to free school meals for Hawai'i's public school students. As an organization committed to justice for Kānaka Maoli and all working families, we recognize the importance of ensuring that every child has access to nutritious meals. We also urge the legislature to amend the bill to include all public school children, ensuring no child is left behind due to financial barriers.

Native Hawaiian students make up the largest ethnic group in Hawai'i's public school system, and their families disproportionately experience economic hardship. The 2025 ALICE report highlights that nearly half of ALICE households in Hawai'i face food insecurity. The high cost of living, compounded by historical injustices, has made basic necessities like food increasingly out of reach for many working families.

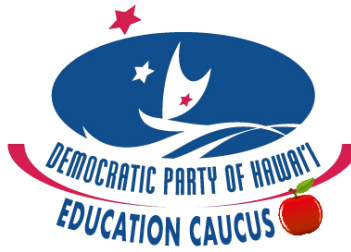
Public education in Hawai'i was institutionalized in the Hawaiian Kingdom, which highly regarded an educated nation. When the public school system was developed in the 1830s, the ali'i and government took responsibility for resourcing schools, including providing food. We stand on this legacy and these values in our support for SB 1300.

Finally, Hawai'i's economic struggles cannot be separated from the ongoing occupation of our homeland. The illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and the transformation of our islands into a profit-driven economy create the conditions of economic struggle Native Hawaiians and working-class residents in Hawai'i. Many families have an uphill battle in a system that often favors wealth accumulation over the well-being of its people. While SB 1300 alone will not resolve these deeper issues, it is a necessary step toward economic justice by alleviating the financial burden of school meals for thousands of families.

Food insecurity is not an individual problem—it is a systemic failure. We urge the legislature to pass SB 1300 and fully fund these meal subsidies. No child in Hawai'i should have to worry about where their next meal will come from, and no family should have to choose between paying rent and feeding their keiki.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Me ka 'oia'i'o,
K. Kamakaoka'ilima Long, President
Joy Lehuanani Enomoto, Vice President
Kylie Noelani Akiona, Secretary



SENATE BILL 1300, SD1, HD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

APRIL 1, 2025 · FIN HEARING

POSITION: Support with amendments.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports and suggests amendments** for SB 1300, SD1, HD1, relating to school meals, which beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, expands free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch; and, beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, expands coverage to students whose family income is no more than 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

Hungry children can't learn.

A recent study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research focused on the federal National School Lunch Program's Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools where many students qualified for free or reduced-price meals to provide a free meal to all students. The study examined whether the provision of schoolwide free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision impacted school suspension rates and **estimated that the chances of being suspended multiple times fell in both elementary school and in middle school.**

Moreover, a 2021 study by the Brookings Institute found that schoolwide free meals improve math performance. This is further bolstered by research conducted by the Food Research and Action Center, which has noted that **students who participate in school breakfast programs have**

improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and achievement. Studies have clearly demonstrated the link between school meals and student success, which is especially important as schools and educators continue to strategize how to combat the lingering loss of opportunity to learn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, improving access to school meals will boost overall health outcomes, both now and in the future. Thirty million students rely on schools to provide them with breakfast and lunch every day in the United States. Those who participate in the school meal program consume breakfasts and lunches of higher nutritional quality than nonparticipants and are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables. Participation in the school breakfast program is associated with lower body mass index (BMI), lower probability of being overweight, and a lower likelihood of obesity. More Americans are sick than they are healthy: half of adults have diabetes or prediabetes; more than half of adults have cardiovascular disease; and 3 in 4 adults are overweight or obese. Healthcare costs account for 29 percent of state budgets and 28 percent of the federal budget.

That said, we urge you to amend this measure to establish free school meals for all public school students in our state. As the National Education Association has stated, through universal free school meals programs, “We can grow generations of healthy eaters and save our country billions.” School meals cost less per student when more students participate in a free meal program. An article in *Nutrients* entitled “Universal Free Meals Associated with Lower Meal Costs While Maintaining Nutritional Quality” found that schools that participated in a universal meal program spent 67 and 58 cents less per lunch and breakfast, respectively, while maintaining the same nutritional quality. **If fully funding free school meals is not affordable at this time, the committee could establish a statutory provision requiring that school meals be made free for all within three years, by the 2027-2028 school year.**

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

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



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB1300 SD1 HD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Finance Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS** SB1300 SD1 HD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS. Pursuant to the State Convention Resolution 2024-26 of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, the Party supports providing free school meals to all public school students in Hawai'i to ensure equal opportunities for academic success and to reduce food insecurity. SB1300 SD1 HD1 takes a significant step towards this goal by implementing expansion of subsidized school meals and free school meal coverage.

The stark reality is that one in five children in Hawai'i experiences food insecurity. This lack of adequate nutrition directly impacts their cognitive and physical development, leading to difficulties in concentration and academic performance. Moreover, food-insecure students face increased risks of depression, stress, and chronic diseases. This issue is further exacerbated by the escalating cost of living, which places immense financial strain on Hawaii's working families. The 2025 Aloha United Way ALICE report underscores this, revealing that 46% of ALICE households, those earning above the federal poverty level but still struggling to afford basic necessities, experience consistent food insecurity. Notably, many of these families earn too much to qualify for federal free school meal programs, yet not enough to adequately provide nutritious meals for their children. Providing subsidized meals for ALICE households and free school meals can help ensure that students have equal opportunities to succeed academically regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in support of SB1300 SD1 HD1, RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE & WAREHOUSE UNION



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The Thirty-Third Legislature
Regular Session of 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hawaii State Capitol

Videoconference - Conference Room 308

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 2:00 p.m.

STATEMENT OF THE ILWU INTERNATIONAL – HAWAII ON SB1300 SD1, HD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

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

The ILWU International stands in **strong support** of SB1300, which aims to expand free school meal coverage to ensure that no child goes hungry simply because of their family's financial situation.

Right now, students in our state live in households that struggle to afford basic needs. While reduced-price lunches help, even small costs add up for families already stretching every dollar. Too often, children go without meals, leading to hunger, shame, and difficulty focusing in the classroom. No child should have to choose between feeling hungry and feeling embarrassed because their family can't afford to pay.

Expanding access to free meals is not just a moral obligation—it is a proven investment in our children's future. Research consistently shows that well-nourished students perform better academically, have fewer behavioral issues, and experience improved physical and mental health. Schools that have implemented universal meal programs report increased participation, reduced stigma, and better overall student well-being.

Hunger should never be a barrier to learning. By passing this bill, we can take a critical step toward ensuring that every child—regardless of their socioeconomic background—has access to the nutritious meals they need to succeed.

We urge you to support this legislation and stand with our students, families, and schools. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Brandon W. K. Wolff
Vice President – Hawaii
ILWU International



INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE & WAREHOUSE UNION

LOCAL OFFICE • 451 ATKINSON DRIVE • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96814 • PHONE 949-4161

HAWAII DIVISION: 100 West Lanikaula Street, Hilo, Hawaii 96720 • **OAHU DIVISION:** 451 Atkinson Drive, Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
MAUI COUNTY DIVISION: 896 Lower Main Street, Wailuku, Hawaii 96793 • **KAUAI DIVISION:** 4154 Hardy Street, Lihue, Hawaii 96766
HAWAII LONGSHORE DIVISION: 451 Atkinson Drive, Honolulu, Hawaii 96814

LOCAL 142

March 31, 2025

The Thirty-Third Legislature
Regular Session of 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hawaii State Capitol

Videoconference - Conference Room 308

Tuesday, April 1, 2025 2:00 p.m.

STATEMENT OF THE ILWU LOCAL 142 ON SB1300, SD1, HD1 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 142, representing more than 16,000 members across Hawai'i, **STRONGLY SUPPORTS SB 1300**, which expands access to free school meals for Hawai'i's public school students.

The majority of our members' children attend public schools, and like many working families here, they face the economic challenges that come with calling Hawai'i home. Hawai'i currently has the highest cost of living in the United States with the lowest disposable income for households. SB 1300 provides much-needed relief to parents struggling to make ends meet.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that our keiki can focus on their education without the distraction of hunger. This bill strongly aligns with our union's values and the economic needs of many of our members. We strongly urge the legislature to support SB 1300 and fully fund these meal subsidies.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Christian West
President, ILWU Local 142

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:56:53 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kasey Crispin	Hawai'i 'Ulu Cooperative	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep. Yamashita and Rep. Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on SB1300, a bill that addresses an urgent and deeply interconnected issue in our state: childhood hunger and equitable access to healthy food.

At Hawai'i 'Ulu Cooperative, we are committed to revitalizing local agriculture and creating a more resilient, sustainable, and food-secure Hawai'i. As a farmer-owned organization representing over 150 small-scale producers statewide, we believe nourishing our keiki with fresh, local food is one of the most powerful ways we can invest in our future.

Currently, 1 in 3 families in Hawai'i experiences food insecurity. Yet many still do not qualify for the free and reduced lunch program due to outdated income thresholds. While the cost of living in Hawai'i continues to rise, the current eligibility cap—set at just 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—leaves too many working families behind. In reality, most households need to be earning 300% or more of the FPL just to make ends meet.

When students are hungry, they struggle to learn. Hunger is linked to stress, depression, chronic illness, and lower academic performance. On the other hand, universal access to school meals has been shown to improve test scores, attendance, and student well-being.

We urge you to amend SB1300 to ensure that all students—regardless of income—have access to free school meals. No child should go hungry in the classroom, especially when we have the opportunity to nourish them with food grown right here in our islands.

This is not just a food access issue—it's a health, education, and equity issue. And it's one that we, as a community, have the power and responsibility to address.

Mahalo nui for your time and commitment to our keiki.

Sincerely,

Kasey Crispin

On behalf of the Hawai'i 'Ulu Cooperative



Cade Watanabe, Financial Secretary-Treasurer

Gemma G. Weinstein, President

Eric W. Gill, Senior Vice-President

March 31, 2025

House Committee on Finance
Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Testimony in Strong Support of SB1300

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

UNITE HERE Local 5 represents 10,000 working people in the hotel, food service and health care industries across Hawaii. We are in strong support of SB1300. Our members, like working families throughout Hawai'i, face enormous and ever-growing economic challenges. The costs of housing, transportation, food, consumer goods, and all necessities of life are growing all the time. Consumer debt is growing too. Everywhere we look, corporations are seeking to take as much "share of wallet" as they can get away with; to the point where even those with good-paying, union jobs with benefits often have a hard time getting by.

SB1300 would help working families with school-age children by expanding coverage for reduced price school meals. Access to healthy meals is critical, especially given the staggering levels of food insecurity in Hawai'i. With proper nutrition, students are healthier and learn more effectively. Many families in need do not currently qualify for the free and reduced lunch program - SB1300 would go a long way toward fixing this problem.

We urge you to pass SB1300. Mahalo.



March 31, 2025

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

BILL SB1300 SD1 HD1

POSITION: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members:

Aloha United Way and the ALICE Initiative strongly support SB1300 SD1 HD1, which expands free school meal coverage beginning with the 2025-2026 school year.

We support SB1300 because it can be pivotal to address growing food insecurity for keiki and for families, many whose incomes are above the federal poverty line.

Food insecurity impacts 1 in 3 households in Hawaii, and the new **2024 State of ALICE in Hawaii report** showed that **46% of ALICE households in Hawaii face food insecurity**. Additionally, **1 in 5 families (22%) ABOVE the ALICE threshold face food insecurity** but do not have access to school meal programs because current income eligibility threshold for free school meals, which for a family of four is less than \$47,000 annually, is far too low. More than double that threshold is needed to cover basic living costs, known as the ALICE survival budget, in Hawaii.

The AUW 211 Statewide Information and Referral Helpline also continues to see “Food” as the 2nd highest requested need from callers, after affordable housing. AUW 211 line is a key entity conducting SNAP prescreening for Hawaii. We track data on needs and connect residents to help with food. For every caller we complete SNAP intake for, 3 others make too much money to be eligible—leaving a huge unmet need.

Please take strong and clear action to strengthen food security for all children in Hawaii. We urge your action on SB1300 SD1 HD1 to help all students in our state thrive.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Michelle Bartell
President & CEO
Aloha United Way

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:46:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joell Edwards	Kauai Democratic Party	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha, Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for expanding access to free school meals for all students in Hawai‘i. Hunger is a pressing issue in our state, with 1 in 3 families experiencing food insecurity. Yet, many families who struggle to afford basic necessities do not qualify for the current free and reduced lunch program. While eligibility is capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, studies show that families actually need at least 300% of the Federal Poverty Level to make ends meet in Hawai‘i.

This gap leaves too many children without reliable access to nutritious meals. Research shows that hungry students face higher risks of stress, depression, and chronic disease, all of which negatively impact their well-being and ability to succeed in school. In contrast, access to free school meals has been linked to improved test scores and better academic outcomes, ensuring that students can focus on learning rather than where their next meal will come from.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to amend this bill to guarantee free school meals for all students. No child should have to go hungry at school, and ensuring universal access to meals will support both student success and the well-being of our community.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.



HIPHI Board

May Okihiro, MD, MS
Chair

John A. Burns School of Medicine,
Department of Pediatrics

Titiimaea Ta'ase, JD
Secretary

State of Hawai'i, Deputy Public Defender

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Kathleen Roche, MS, RN, CENP
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Dina Shek, JD
Medical-Legal Partnership
For Children in Hawai'i

Garret Sugai
HMSA

JoAnn Tsark, MPH
John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native
Hawaiian Research Office

HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &
Evaluation

Community Health
Worker Initiatives

COVID-19 Response

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: March 31, 2025

To: Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

Re: Support for SB 1300 SD1, HD1, Relating to School Meals

Hrg: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 at 2:00 pm, Room 309

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating, Active Living² (HEAL) Coalition is in **support of SB 1300 SD1, HD1, with amendments**, which would subsidize school meals for ALICE students.

Suggested Amendment

Please amend this bill to guarantee that subsidies provide every student with access to free school meals.

Half of Struggling Families are Currently Ineligible for Meal Subsidies

The current federal free and reduced-price school meals programs fail to support all students in need. Eligibility is limited to families earning below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for free meals and below 185% for reduced-price meals, even though a family needs at least 300% of the FPL to meet basic living expenses. As a result, half of the families earning below this threshold receive no meal assistance at all.³

Voters Support Free School Meals for All

A recent Ward Research poll showed that 82% of registered voters support free school meals for all students.⁴ Local voters overwhelmingly support feeding students because they understand that no child can learn on an empty stomach. Ensuring free school meals for our keiki would show that our leaders are listening and responding to the will of the people.

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

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

³ "Poverty Status in the last 12 months." U.S. Census.

<https://data.census.gov/table?q=s1702&g=040XX00US15>

⁴ 82% of Registered Hawai'i Voters Support Free School Meals for All.

<https://www.hiphi.org/82-of-registered-hawai%ca%bbi-voters-support-free-school-meals-for-all/>



Health Risks

Students experiencing food insecurity face a higher risk of stress, depression, and chronic disease.⁵ By failing to ensure they have access to meals during the school day, we are undermining their health, development, and future success.

Improved Academic Achievement

Hungry students can't learn. Providing healthy nutrition to our students will ensure they have the resources they need to thrive. Studies have shown that free school meal programs lead to improved student performance.⁶ Free school meals for all is only estimated to cost around 1-2% of the Department of Education's total budget and provide a 15% increase in test scores, a 15:1 return on investment.⁷ Providing just for those under 300% of the Federal Poverty Level is estimated to cost less than \$5 million.

Federal Funding Increases

Eight other states—California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico and Vermont—have implemented free school meal programs, with data showing increases in their federal reimbursement funding. In California, free and reduced-price lunch enrollment rates have risen alongside the implementation of their program, further maximizing federal support for students.⁸ Hawai'i can follow the lead of these other states by implementing free school meals for all students while also increasing the federal funding we receive to support the program.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nate Hix".

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

⁵"Food Insecurity and Psychological Distress: A Review of the Recent Literature". Candice A. Meyers.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7282962/>

⁶ "Universal free lunch is linked to better test scores in New York City, new report finds"

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2019/10/15/21121847/universal-free-lunch-is-linked-to-better-test-scores-in-new-york-city-new-report-finds/>

⁷ "Equity on the Menu". Hawai'i Applesed.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601374ae84e51e430a1829d8/t/65f390f60a673a7bf3cfeb89/1710461187562/Equity+on+the+Menu_FINAL.pdf

⁸"Free or Reduced-Price Meal (Student Poverty) Data". California Department of Education.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/filessp.asp>



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
Support for S.B. 1300 – Relating to School Meals
House Committee on Finance
Tuesday, April 1, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 1300, with suggested amendments. This bill would appropriate funds to the Hawai‘i Department of Education to cover meal subsidies for students in households under 300 percent of the federal poverty level by the 2026- 2027 school year.

School meals are one of the government’s most powerful tools for delivering good nutrition to children and supporting families. In Hawai‘i, three in ten households with children face food insecurity.¹ While there is a provision for some children to receive free meals, the threshold for eligibility is set at 130 percent of the federal poverty level—so a family of four would need to make under \$47,000 per year to qualify.² This leaves thousands of families still struggling to cover their food costs,³ and results in many children missing meals due to negative account balances. For some Hawai‘i children, school meals are the only balanced, nutritious meals they receive in a day.

While we wholeheartedly support any measure that would expand access to free school meals, this bill could be significantly strengthened by adding a provision requiring the DOE to expand free meals to all students by school year 2027-2028. Income thresholds are not the only barrier to participation in the free or reduced-price lunch program. Challenges like language barriers, difficulty providing paperwork, and fear of disclosing information result in many children who are eligible simply falling through the cracks. One study found that 34 percent of students who were denied free or reduced price meals were actually eligible to receive them.⁴

SB1300 is an excellent step in the right direction, as it gets us much closer to the ultimate goal of expanding meals to all public school students. The cost estimates for these two proposals are as follows:

FY 2026-27	Current participation rates	10% participation increase
Total SB1300 (300% FPL)	\$3,304,347	\$3,634,781.61
Total SB1300 (With suggested amendments)	\$20,479,277	\$22,527,204.59

Table 1. The DOE estimated cost for covering 300% FPL and for Universal Free School Meals

¹ Hawai‘i Foodbank, “The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai‘i,” 2023.

² Hawai‘i State Department of Education, “Free and Reduced Price Meals Program,” 2025.

³ <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/HealthAndNutrition/StudentHealthResources/Pages/FreeReducedLunch.aspx>

⁴ United for ALICE, “ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship in Hawai‘i,” 2024.

⁴ United States Department of Agriculture, Third Access, Participation, Eligibility, and Certification Study, September 2021.

As shown in the figure below,⁵ if the price tag for this service is cause for concern, there are other ways the state might consider making up the shortfall that don't place the burden on public school parents.

FUNDING UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS			
How Can Hawai'i Fund UFSM?		How Have Other States Funded UFSM?	
Closing the capital gains tax loophole for individuals and corporations could bring in up to \$84.4M in 2026.	Raising the corporate income tax rate to a flat 9% could bring in up to \$185M in annual revenue.	General Funds (Education Fund Appropriation)	CA, ME, MI, MN, NM
		Voter-passed tax measure that reduces income tax deductions available to households earning \$300,000 or more	CO
		Voter-approved 4% tax on incomes over \$1 million	MA
		\$.03 property tax rate increase	VT

That said, we would like to respectfully suggest that the legislature amend the bill to:

1. Add an additional clause under HRS 302A-404 that reads:

“Beginning with the 2027-2028 school year, free school meals shall be provided to every student enrolled in a department school.”

2. Amend HRS 302A-405, Section 2(a) to read:

“The price for school meals shall be set by the department to ensure that moneys received from the sale of the meals shall be ~~[not less]~~ no more than ~~[one-half]~~ one-quarter of the cost of preparing the meals. which requires parents to pay at least half the costs of meals.”

Across the country, Universal Free School Meal programs have been implemented successfully through the intentional blending of policies and funding mechanisms at the federal, state, and local levels. We are pleased that the Hawai'i legislature is paying attention to this important issue, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.

⁵ **Capitol gains estimates:** Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, January 2025.

Corporate income tax rates: Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law & Economic Justice, Funding Hawai'i's Future, October 2023, p. 8.



2025 Network Members

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

hawaiihungeraction.org

House Committee on Finance

April 1, 2025, at 2:00pm

RE: Support for SB 1300, Relating to Education

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

The Hawai'i Hunger Action Network, a coalition of more than twenty local organizations with the mission to advocate for food security for Hawai'i households, would like to express support for SB1300 which would appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Department of Education to cover meal subsidies for students in ALICE households. We enthusiastically support any measure that would expand access to free school meals, and we are hopeful that this is seen as an incremental step toward the ultimate goal of providing free meals to all students.

For many keiki, school meals are the most nutritious meals they receive all day. Hawai'i households who struggle to afford the rising cost of living often still earn too much to qualify for free meals.

Offering up to two free meals a day would eliminate the stigma associated with unpaid meal balances, ensuring that every student has access to healthy food, regardless of their family's financial situation. Additionally, UFSM has proven to improve academic performance in other states by ensuring children receive proper nutrition necessary for healthy development and learning.¹ **It is for these reasons we ask the Committee to consider expanding free school meals to all students by SY27-28.**

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of this important legislation because keiki cannot learn when they are hungry.

With aloha,
Hawai'i Hunger Action Network membership

¹ Amy E. Schwartz & Michah W. Rothbart, "Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance," Maxwell School Center for Policy Research, July 2019.

https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/working-papers/wp-203-let-them-eat-lunch.pdf?sfvrsn=efae783d_8

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:20:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Faumuina	Hawaii Pacific Advisory Group	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of the Hawai'i Pacific Advisory Group (HPAG)**Before the House Committee on Finance****Tuesday, April 1, 2025****2:00 PM****State Capitol, Conference Room 308 & Videoconference****In Support of SB1300 – Relating to School Meal Subsidies****Position: Support with Amendments****Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee on Finance,**

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB1300, which proposes subsidizing school meals for children from ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) families. My name is James E. Faumuina, and I submit this testimony on behalf of the Hawai'i Pacific Advisory Group (HPAG), a volunteer consortium of interdisciplinary professionals chartered by the Hawai'i Pacific Foundation, a Native Hawaiian Organization. HPAG was formed in the aftermath of the August 2023 Maui wildfires to provide recommendations, advice, and support for system-level solutions to ensure that Hawai'i's people—particularly its most vulnerable—are never left behind during times of crisis or recovery.

Food insecurity continues to affect **1 in 3 families in Hawai'i**, many of whom fall just above the current income thresholds for free or reduced-price school meals. The **185% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) standard does not reflect Hawai'i's high cost of living**, which often requires households to earn at least **300% of the FPL** to meet basic needs. This means many working families—those we refer to as ALICE—are ineligible for food assistance yet unable to consistently afford adequate nutrition for their children.

Access to healthy, free school meals is essential for the well-being, academic success, and emotional stability of our keiki. Students facing hunger are at greater risk of stress, depression, and chronic illness, and they are less likely to perform well in the classroom. Universal school meals have been shown to improve attendance, test scores, and classroom focus while also reducing stigma and administrative burden.

For these reasons, HPAG respectfully urges the committee to pass SB1300 with amendments to ensure that all public school students in Hawai‘i receive free meals, regardless of income. Doing so would send a powerful message: that in Hawai‘i, no child should ever go hungry at school—not now, and not in the future.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to Hawai‘i’s children and families.

Respectfully submitted,
James E. Faumuina, MBA, MPA, Lt Col. (Ret)
Assistant Director
Hawai‘i Pacific Advisory Group (HPAG)



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Joe Carter, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, *Advisor*
Eddie Asato, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*
Gary Okimoto, Safeway, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Finance
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: March 31, 2025
TIME: 2pm

RE: SB1300 SD1 HD1 Relating to School Meals
Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of this measure. As the measure notes for students, access to healthy meals is critical to academic success and achievement. Access to nutritious meals also promotes students' short term and long-term health, improves behavioral outcomes, and improves overall wellbeing.

Ensuring that all keiki have access to enough food should be a top priority of the State.

For some students, school meals may be their only consistent source of food.

We support subsidizing the meal costs for students whose family income is three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. Many families in Hawaii are struggling and food insecurity is at historic levels. For families that are working and can still not consistently provide meals for their keiki this program is vital.

We would also support expanding this program to provide free school meals for all keiki. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



April 1, 2025

Subject: Hawai'i Foodbank in Support of SB 1300, SD1, HD1 Relating to School Meals

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I express our support for SB 1300, SD1, HD1 Relating to School Meals. This bill expands free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch beginning with the 2025-2026 school year and expands free school meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level beginning with the 2026-2027 school year. It also appropriates funds.

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

The recent 2024 ALICE in Hawai'i report, released by Aloha United Way, underscores the broader economic challenges fueling food insecurity. Forty percent (40%) of Hawai'i's families are at the ALICE threshold or below. These households live paycheck to paycheck, and nearly half of those below the ALICE threshold face food insecurity.

As the state's largest hunger-relief organization, Hawai'i Foodbank has been committed to ensuring no one in Hawai'i goes hungry since 1983. We work with over 250 hunger relief partners on O'ahu and Kaua'i to distribute food, and programs like Food 4 Keiki and 'Ohana Produce Plus provide nutritious meals to children and families.

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

With aloha,

Amy Miller
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank



April 1, 2025

RE: Support for SB 1300 SD1 HD1, Relating to School Meals

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Maui Food Bank, I express our strong support for SB 1300 Relating to School Meals beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, expands free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch. Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, expands free school meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level.

For 30 years, Maui Food Bank has provided daily and emergency assistance to those facing food insecurity in Maui County. Maui Food Bank distributes food to families and individuals on Maui, Molokai and Lanai through direct service programs and through our network of 170 agency partners. Last year, we served an average of 45,000 people each month, distributing a total of 8.7 million pounds of nutritious food, including 2.3 million pounds of fresh produce.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony,

Lisa H. Paulson
CEO, Maui Food Bank

Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501c4 nonprofit committed to advocating for children and their families. Our core issues are safety, health, and education.

To: House Committee on Finance
Re: **SB 1300 SD1 HD1 – Relating to School Meals**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
April 1, 2025, 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT with suggested amendments to SB 1300 SD1 HD1**. This bill expands free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, as well as expands free school meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level beginning with the 2026-2027 school year.

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

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

In order to receive federal subsidies for the meals they serve, the Department of Education (DOE) is required to determine if students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. With this bill, beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, the DOE would need to conduct additional income determinations on top of those that they are already doing and add a fourth eligibility tier for school meals, which would add significant administrative burdens.

It would be more efficient to simply provide free meals for all students, and the case for universal free school meals is strong.³ Schools benefit from reduced administrative burdens because they no longer need to collect meal payments. Students see better academic performance and nutrition. Currently 94 DOE schools are already providing universal free meals, and it would make sense to build from there.⁴

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please consider our suggestion and pass this bill.

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

1

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

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

3 <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20220504.114330/>

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



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Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Finance Committee,

The Hawai'i Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFU supports SB1300.**

SB1300's initiative to extend free school meal coverage to more Hawaii students is a thoughtful response to food insecurity and its detrimental effects on educational success and student health. Allowing these families to redirect their limited finances toward other vital needs will create a more stable and enriching environment for their children. Prioritizing student access to nutritious meals is a necessary investment in Hawaii's future, as well-fed students are better equipped to learn and thrive.

Looking ahead, the amendment to provide increased free school meals by the 2026-2027 school year is a commendable step toward inclusivity and equity in education. However, universal access will help dismantle barriers and the stigma often associated with free meal programs, ensuring no student is disadvantaged or distracted by hunger. **We seek establishment of a universal free meal program, which offers a simpler, more equitable solution.** By providing universally free school meals, we can ensure that all students benefit from proper nutrition, which directly supports their education and well-being. A universal program would also reduce administrative burdens on the Department of Education, allowing resources to focus directly on enhancing meal quality and accessibility rather than on complex eligibility verification processes. By addressing the nutritional needs of all students comprehensively, we can foster a more inclusive and nurturing educational environment statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 5:37:30 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Doris Matsunaga	Save Medicaid Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Save Medicaid Hawaii supports SB1300 SD1 HD1 and urges the committee to amend the bill to ensure all students receive free school meals by school year 2027-28.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/28/2025 5:04:03 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mamiko Carroll	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice-Chair, and members of the committee,

I am testifying in SUPPORT of SB1300 SD1 HD1 and ask that you also consider expanding the bill to cover universal meals. All students should have access to school meals no matter what their family or caregiver income statements may say. No child should go hungry, especially if it's just because someone didn't fill out paperwork.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Mamiko Carroll
Kaneohe

Testimony in Support of SB1300 HD1

Tina Young, Science Teacher
Waipahu Intermediate School
March 28, 2025

Aloha Chair and Members of the Education and Finance Committee,

My name is Tina Young, and I am a middle school science teacher in Hawai'i. I am writing in strong support of SB1300 HD1, which seeks to expand free school meal coverage to more students in need.

Every day in my classroom, I see firsthand the impact of food insecurity on my students. Many arrive at school hungry, struggling to focus, and asking me if I have any snacks to share. While I do my best to provide what I can, I know this is not a sustainable solution. A hungry student cannot be expected to learn to their full potential.

This issue is personal to me. Growing up, I benefited from the federal free lunch program when I attended Queen Kaahumanu Elementary, Stevenson Middle School, and Roosevelt High School. My parents immigrated from Vietnam, and we lived below the poverty line, and eating meals at school provided me with the nutrition I needed to focus on school and succeed academically. Without it, I might not have had the same opportunities. Now, as an educator, every day I see students facing the same struggles I once did, and I know that expanding access to free meals will make a real difference in their lives, like it did to mine.

By expanding free school meal coverage to students whose families make no more than 300% of the federal poverty level, this bill acknowledges the reality that many working families still struggle to afford necessities, including food. It ensures that students can focus on learning rather than worrying about where their next meal will come from. I polled my students and more than 90% said that they would eat school meals if it offered freely.

I urge you to support SB1300 HD1 for the well-being of Hawai'i's keiki and the future of our community. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Me ke aloha,
Tina Young
Waipahu Intermediate School

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/28/2025 8:22:56 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tasman Kekai Mattox	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Being well-fed helps our students succeed.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 7:55:10 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Danielle Thompson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am here today to speak in strong support of expanding access to free school meals for all students, regardless of their family's income level. This initiative is not just a matter of nutrition; it is an investment in the future of our children and, by extension, our community.

Children are the future, and their ability to learn and thrive in school depends heavily on their access to basic needs, including nutritious meals. For many students, the meal they receive at school may be their most substantial and balanced meal of the day. Providing free meals ensures that no child is left behind due to circumstances beyond their control, such as food insecurity or financial hardship.

Research has consistently shown that children who have access to regular, nutritious meals perform better academically, have improved focus, and are less likely to experience behavioral problems. By providing free meals, we ensure that every student, regardless of their family's income, is able to focus on learning and developing to their fullest potential without the distractions and challenges that come with hunger and poor nutrition.

Beyond the immediate academic benefits, free school meals also foster inclusivity and reduce stigma. When all students are served the same meals, it eliminates the divide between those who can afford lunch and those who cannot. It promotes unity and ensures that all children feel valued and equal in their school community.

Moreover, this program would alleviate the financial burden on families, particularly those who are just above the eligibility threshold for free or reduced-price meals. Many families in these situations struggle to make ends meet, and the cost of providing nutritious meals for their children can add up. Free school meals would significantly reduce the stress and financial strain many parents face.

Providing free school meals is a smart, compassionate, and necessary step toward ensuring every child has the opportunity to succeed in school and in life. It promotes better health, better learning, and stronger communities. I urge you to support this initiative and make a long-lasting difference in the lives of our children.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 8:29:16 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kayla Marie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this measure kids can't learn when they're hungry

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 8:44:55 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Stayton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cuts would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

Mahalo,

Susan, Lawai, Kauai

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 8:56:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janie McQueen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. You know how important Hawai'i views nutrition for keiki. Please pass this measure so one of Hawai'i's key programs won't be deleted by people who don't even know anyone who needs them.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 9:02:36 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrew Chang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill to subsidize school meals for students from **ALICE families**. Giving more students access to **healthy, consistent school meals** is a **cost-effective way** to improve learning, attendance, and well-being. When children are hungry, it's harder for them to **focus, participate in class, and reach their full academic potential**. This funding removes a **daily barrier** that many students face.

As the program is rolled out, it's important to make sure it is **clear, fair, and works well in practice**. Sometimes programs like this run into problems, such as **confusing eligibility rules, stigma for students, or extra stress on school staff and systems**. **Careful planning and smart execution** will help ensure that the right students get the support they need—**easily, consistently, and with dignity**.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 9:10:45 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JANE TOLLEFSRUD	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 9:16:33 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kathy Shimata	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Representatives,

My name is Kathy Shimata & I live in Honolulu.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Mahalo,

Kathy Shimata

Honolulu. 96822

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 9:23:36 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
DeWaine Tollefsrud	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

A proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry. Having worked at a low income school on the Big Island where most of the kids depended on the school for their only meals I understand the necessity. One student, when I asked if she was looking forward to winter break, sadly shook her head. I asked her why not? She replied, "This [school] is the only place where I get to eat."

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 9:38:59 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robert A Marks	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and members - this is an important measure to protect our keiki. Please pass it.

respectfully submitted,

Robert Marks

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 9:39:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carmela Resuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 10:10:55 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sheila Gallien	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry. Things are going to get very difficult for Hawaii and all over with the attack on federal government, including veterans. We must pick up the slack statewide and do better.

Thank you!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 10:12:12 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shay Chan Hodges	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 10:15:39 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Providing free school meals is only a small portion of the DOE's budget, but it can make a huge difference for our students and is a worthwhile investment of public funds. I support this bill, and encourage an amendment to make school meals free for all students. Let's support our keiki by making sure they are fed at school and help them receive the quality education they deserve. Mahalo.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 10:25:29 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christine Dobrowolski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I'm in support of free school meals for low-income children. I believe the current budget would eliminate this. Keiki can't learn when they're hungry.

Christine

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 10:38:44 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Teresa Parsons	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please ensure children in need have food during school. I urge you to support this measure.

Mahalo

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 10:58:32 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jane Aquino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki won't go hungry

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 11:10:39 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carmen Liberatore	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 11:19:43 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gail Morrison	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 11:22:23 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia Blair	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Free school lunches an absolute must, no excuse. Make them nutritional too.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 12:09:02 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julie and Thomas Pasquale	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki won't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 12:33:45 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
david gierlach	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Fr David Gierlach and I am writing with an urgent request for your support of SB1300, which would appropriate funds to the Hawaii Department of Education to expand meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Expanding school meals to ALICE families supports our keiki's learning and helps keep money in the pockets of hard-working families. This bill would have an enormous impact, providing free meals to thousands of additional students, supporting struggling families, and improving health and academic outcomes.

Having worked closely with the working poor and Kalihi Palama for over 15 years, I am aware of many of our families who are barely making ends, meet and kids who are too often going hungry. That is frankly a disgrace in a nation and state as rich as ours.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this bill.

This bill would be a strong commitment to our shared vision of a thriving, food-secure Hawaii.

- In Hawaii, three in ten households with children face food insecurity. Nine percent of these households report their children sometimes skip meals because they don't have enough food. This means that for some Hawaii children, school meals are the only balanced, nutritious meals they receive in a day.
- Free school meals have been shown to improve student attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes.
- Free meals would reduce the burden on teachers. Many teachers spend personal funds to provide snacks for students who cannot afford school meals.

thank you for your attention to this matter. Thank you for pushing this legislation forward.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 12:33:50 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessie L Gonsalves	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm in fully support of Universal free school meals. This is a must everywhere especially hawaii.
Please pass this bill!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 12:37:10 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kathryn Braun	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support of SB1300. This bill would appropriate funds to the Hawaii Department of Education to expand meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than 300% of poverty.

Expanding school meals supports learning and helps keep money in the pockets of hard-working families. This bill would have an enormous impact, improving the health and academic outcomes of thousands of additional students.

I am amazed and appalled by the high prevalence of food insecurity in our children and in our households. This bill would help kids from being hungry and unable to learn.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 12:48:50 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
KATRINA ZAVALNEY	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 12:56:20 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leah Morse	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 12:57:06 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Olderr	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I support this bill. Not only would it support low-income families, but it would also improve student retention in the classroom. Our students will be able to get more out of school and won't have to worry about whether they will have enough to eat. For those who could obtain lunches beforehand, it was the only guaranteed meal they would have all day. This bill would help feed hungry children and improve test scores. So please support this bill.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 1:14:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Luke YM Itomura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a student in Hawaii, I support SB1300 because it supports academic performance. "When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes." Everyone deserves the best opportunity possible to succeed in school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 1:15:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dawn Morais Webster Ph.D.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Families in Hawaii are struggling, with parents holding two and three jobs to make ends meet and feed their children. You can do something about that by passing this bill.

You know that one in three families in Hawai'i experience food insecurity. Many families in need don't qualify for the current free and reduced lunch program. Research shows that free school meals improve students' test scores. Please amend this bill to ensure that all students receive access to free school meals.

Thank you for doing what you can locally to make lives better for our people even as the White House unleashes mayhem. Mahalo nui.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 1:54:58 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Helen Cox	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure
Unfortunately, the proposed budget cut will eliminate free school meals. However, the need for
these meals still exists. A child cannot learn if he or she is hungry. Please pass this measure, so
our keiki will not go hungry. Mahalo

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 2:04:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glenn Goveia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this measure so our keiki will not go hungry. It's the Aloha thing to do.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 2:37:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Calvin Black	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The proposed federal budget cuts are expected to eliminate free school meals. Please pass this so Hawai'i children don't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 2:40:19 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lorna Farnum	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill!!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 2:44:05 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Judith White	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Food insecurity affects a substantial percentage of our keiki. Hunger decreases readiness to learn. There is ample evidence for this, plus it's a no-brainer. Please support this important measure.

Judith C. White, Psy.D.

Clinical Psychologist, Kapaa

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 3:19:29 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Iwalani Castillo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support free school lunches for all keiki.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 3:34:20 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann Dorsey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I urge you to support SB1300 SD1 HD1 and hope you will amend it to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

Thank you

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 3:38:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Leake	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am requesting your support of SB1300 which would require the DOE to expand free meal coverage for thousands of children from ALICE households (up to 300% of poverty level). This bill would have an enormous impact in helping families who are struggling economically, and improving health and academic outcomes for hungry students. This bill would be a strong commitment to the vision of a thriving, food secure Hawaii. Mahalo.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 3:39:17 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry."

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 3:43:08 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keili McEvilly	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kākou,

my name is Ke'ili, I am a native Hawaiian in Waimanalo and I urge you to support SB1300 with amendments. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state. mahalo nui loa,

Keili

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 4:33:36 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shere-khan Smoot	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in support of SB1300 with its amendments to expand free and reduced lunch eligibility to ALL students in Hawaii.

I am a high school classroom teacher. When my students are hungry, genuinely hungry, they do not perform nearly as well as they do when they're not. Feeding our students is the first, but meaningful step towards improving our students chances at success later in life. This measure is an investment in our future as a state and sends a clear message to our families about our priorities.

There are a large number of competing priorities you have to balance, however, supporting our families, students, and public education should be a no-brainer. By supporting this bill and its amendments, it's a clear sign that you value our working families by helping take something off their plates; you support our public schools by giving them a meaningful and tangible tool to improve student success; and you support our students by making sure an essential is taken care of for them.

So I ask of you to show you value the people of Hawaii by making sure everyone of our students -- our future -- are fed every day they are at school. This investment is worth every single penny you put into it, even if we, the adults, won't see its payout for many years to come.

Mahalo.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 4:42:10 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glorianne Garza	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 5:35:46 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Monica Coutoumanos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

- Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals.
- PLS. PASS THIS MEASURE SO NONE OF OUR KEIKI GO HUNGRY.
- No Child Should Go Hungry
- 2 OUT OF 3 FINANCIALLY STRUGGLING FAMILIES ARE NOT ELIGIBLE for free school meals.
- THIS BILL WILL ENSURE that EVERY CHILD CAN EAT for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.
- THIS BILL WILL ENSURE THAT NO CHILD WOULD HAVE the STIGMA of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.
- Hungry students cannot focus on learning.
- ALL CHILDREN DESERVE TO BE FED during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.
- Increased Academic Performance – When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes.
- Improved Health Outcomes – Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 5:43:58 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

There are some students who unfortunately only get 1 full meal a day, school lunches. It is a sad reality that I see time and time again with my students. Their families are too busy working in the evening to make dinner and they simply do not have the funds. Some schools provide free breakfast as well which is so important for students' brains to get started. Instead of thinking of hunger in the morning, they are able to focus on their school work because they were fed adequately in the morning. It is so important to keep free meals for students as well as teachers. Most times, teachers use their own money to provide extra snacks and food for their students just to help them refocus on school instead of their empty stomachs. It is important for all students to think about their school work instead of when their next meal is.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 5:56:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Pokipala	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Children need to be healthy in order to learn academics, social emotional skills, and build hope for the future. When they are unable to eat because the cost of food is too much for their families to purchase, and SNAP benefits are becoming harder to obtain with the new rules, this can leave children missing meals. When a school breakfast or lunch account is behind because a parent can't keep up the payments a child is unable to get a meal. As a cafeteria worker sees this they want to pay for the child to eat, but can't afford to do this for all the children. The economy is getting worst. All of us will be paying higher prices for food, and more children will have school meal accounts that are overdo.

A simple solution is to provide Universal Free Meals for every child in public school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 6:02:10 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita and Members of the FIN Committee:

I'm writing in **support** of SB1300 because of the need to strengthen for Hawai'i's communities. We need to take steps to break the cycle of poverty. As I'm sure you folks know, education is one of the keys to doing this. But for students to learn, they need attend class free of hunger. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. Therefore, in the interest of helping our disadvantaged keiki and the health of our state, I urge you to pass this bill out of your committee with an **amendment** that guarantees all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Mahalo,

Paul Bernstein

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 7:19:29 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
B.A. McClintock	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school. Mahalo.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 7:20:34 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
jacinto kaleo zulueta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I want free school meals for all keiki

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 7:39:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alice Sherer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill for free school lunches! My community in South Kona on Hawaii Island is rural, low income and needs this support. Children are our future and need nutrition to thrive. Thank you for your consideration.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 7:51:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tyla Barnett	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 8:19:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malia Marquez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Kākou,

Our 'ohana are struggling here. Some keiki ONLY eat at school. Please support SB1300 to allow MORE keiki to get a free school meal. We can do better by our 'ohana that need help.

Mahalo,

Malia Marquez

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 8:20:05 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James E Raymond	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 8:24:54 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauren Taijeron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing this testimony in **support of SB 1300 with amendments**. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. **Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.**

Mahalo for your consideration.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 10:23:40 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

School lunch should be available to all. Let's help our keiki get the resources they need to thrive in their learning environments. Making food available to developing children will help teachers, students and caregivers. Allowing lunch to be available for all will help reduce stigma and create a culture of acceptance around the needs of our children and our communities. I support the bill to bring stable food to all students. Mahalo nui loa for your consideration.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 11:47:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Acasio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support free meals for all keiki. Kids cannot learn when hungry. No child should be hungry,

Thank you, Laura Acasio

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2025 11:55:52 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melody Peralta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a former Hawai'i public school elementary teacher, I support SB 1300. Every child deserves access to nutritious meals as it is critical to academic success. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, food is a fundamental physiological need, at the base of the pyramid, alongside other necessities like water, shelter, and sleep. This must be met before individuals can focus on higher-level needs like safety, love, and self-actualization. Hawai'i public schools providing the most basic of needs to children who spend 180 days of the year at school, should not be up for debate.

In my days teaching, I still recall how students were unable to focus due to lack of nutrition, especially in the early mornings. I resorted to purchasing breakfast items (out of pocket) to provide to some of my students, as they would come to school admitting they did not have any breakfast available at home. The burden of food insecurity is preventing our children from reaching their highest potential in the academic setting. With all the societal issues that are our children confront every day at school (social media, school shootings, bullying, etc.), basic access to food should not be one of them.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 6:20:52 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lori Glazebrook	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm writing in strong support of SB1300 because no child should have to learn on an empty stomach. As someone who's worked closely with families navigating food insecurity, I know school meals are often the only consistent source of nutrition for our keiki. What many don't realize is that nearly half of households in Hawai'i experience chronic food insecurity—and those numbers are rising. Free school meals aren't just about food; they're about equity, dignity, and giving every child a real chance to thrive. Access to nutritious meals is directly linked to academic performance. SB1300 is a smart, compassionate investment in our future.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 8:04:57 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Blaine De Ramos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB1300. All children should be eating free school meals and the state should be prioritizing making these meals edible. STOP providing these kids with stale old bread and wet tortillas. If prison inmates get free food, why are the kids not getting free food?

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 8:12:31 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Kuzmier	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I strongly support the basis of SB1300 SD1, but wIould like it to be amended to include enough funding to supply FREE meals to all ALICE students.

One reason why I feel this way is that I believe meals should be free regardless for our keiki, simply because we never know when the financial circumstances of a child's family changes, such as illness or domestic violence and trauma such as this is not the best time to put a children through analysis by public services to determine if they are worthy of free meals or not.

But I do understand that due to the financial constraints the state is facing, that free meals are only being considered at all for ALICE recipients. Using the same logic as before, I also would rather all ALICE applicants receive free meals. It is simpler, and children would not have to go through ongoing analyses based on income fluctuations. Mahalo.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 8:17:37 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
J. Kehau Lucas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is J. Kēhau Lucas and I am here today to urge you to amend this bill to fully fund free school meals for all students in our state. As someone who deeply cares about the well-being and future success of our keiki, I believe this is a necessary investment in both their health and education.

Currently, the eligibility cutoff for free and reduced-price lunch is set at just 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed for families to meet basic living expenses. This means that **two out of three struggling families do not qualify for free school meals**, leaving thousands of children at risk of going hungry during the school day. No child should have to skip meals simply because their family earns slightly above an arbitrary threshold.

No Child Should Go Hungry

Hunger does not take income limits into account. A hungry child cannot focus, learn, or thrive. Research shows that food insecurity in children is linked to **higher rates of stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic health conditions** (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015). By ensuring that every child has access to free meals at school, we can prevent hunger and its long-term negative effects on both health and academic achievement.

Improved Academic Performance

Providing universal free school meals is not just about feeding children—it is about **investing in their success**. A 2021 study published in the *Journal of Human Resources* found that when universal free meal programs were implemented, student test scores improved by the equivalent of six additional weeks of learning (Gordon & Ruffini, 2021). That means better educational outcomes and greater opportunities for our keiki.

Eliminating Stigma and Ensuring Equity

No child should experience the shame of being denied a meal due to an unpaid balance in their school food account. A universal free meal program eliminates this stigma, creating a **more equitable and inclusive school environment** where every child is treated with dignity.

A Smart Investment in Our Future

For just **1% of the DOE budget**, we can provide a **15% increase in student outcomes**—a return on investment that makes both economic and moral sense. Ensuring that all children have access to nutritious meals at school will lead to healthier students, stronger academic performance, and long-term benefits to our community.

I respectfully ask you to **amend this bill to fund free school meals for all students**. The cost of inaction is far greater than the investment needed to ensure that no child in our state goes hungry.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

References:

- Gundersen, C., & Ziliak, J. P. (2015). Food insecurity and health outcomes. *Health Affairs*, 34(11), 1830-1839.
- Gordon, N., & Ruffini, K. (2021). School nutrition and student discipline: Effects of schoolwide free meals. *Journal of Human Resources*, 56(2), 495-524.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 8:38:36 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Kiefer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and members of the committee;

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. **Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues.** Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. **Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.**

Sincerely

Elizabeth Kiefer, MD MPH

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 9:22:37 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
cheryl burghardt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha

I SUPPORT SB1300 HD1 to provide free or reduced priced meals to low-income households who don't already qualify and ask that this bill be amended or adjusted or whatever it takes to bring free school meals to ALL. In our unique Hawaii we should have been the first place to offer this to and for our keiki. Enough is enough with this! ALL KEIKI should have free school meals. Please find the \$\$ and give the support to our keiki.

C. Burghardt

Retired elementary educator who believes you will do the pono thing.

Free lunch!

My name is Gianna Pasaoa or Gigi Pasaoa, I am in 4th grade, in the school ewa elementary. I support this bill, SB1300, however I think it should be improved to be for everyone. We should have free lunch available, even if the family makes a lot of money or just a little bit of money. Let's say you have multiple kids, you might not qualify under the current bill, but you might still be struggling living in hawaii. No student should have to put their school lunch back, just because there is too much debt. And whether you like school lunch or not it's a big part of your day, like one student can ruin the whole class, just because they didn't get a proper meal while the teachers are trying their best. All this comes down to whether they had a proper meal, or not.

And should money be a reason why kids don't get school lunch, No! And if kids are not getting free lunch when they really need it, then they might not be eating at all. So how do school's expect them to be doing well and getting high marks, if they are not getting enough food? There are a lot of kids who can rely on the school giving them free school lunch, but there are thousands, and thousands of students who don't receive free school lunches when they really should get it, when they are in dire need of it.

Parents do their best to pay for school lunch, but everytime it ends up being too much. Parents also have to pay for other essentials like a house, which many parents need to have two jobs to even afford a house, let alone school lunch money. And even if they do make a decent amount of money, taxes are taken out of their paycheck. Which is something schools don't think about regarding how much money the parent makes, and whether they qualify for free school lunches or not.

The amount of food children get is a domino effect, meaning if they don't get enough food it causes a whole, big effect on everyone. Like they could be distracted, then decide to distract another student, making the teacher have to stop the lesson for them. Or the parents are so worried that they didn't get a proper meal that they get too worried, and distracted to do there work.

Now let's talk about a little bit of research I did. Schools also don't think about how the school lunch money all adds up to be really expensive. Since school lunches are around 2.50 dollars, if you multiplied 180 (because that's how many days of school there are) times 2.50 it would be 450, which that's for only one kid. If you have more than one kid it gets really expensive. And school lunches aren't even that good anyway, especially for the big kids, they get less food than the little kids, even though we have bigger stomachs. And every 4th grader I've spoken to about this agrees, and thinks that this is unfair.

All of that just shows how bad we need school lunch to be free for all of us, no matter how much money we make, a lot or a little. Lunch is important for all of us, and it's very impactful and a big part of anyone's day. That's why I'm sharing this with you today.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 10:01:14 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eve Furchgott	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this measure for our keiki and families.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 10:05:08 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
G L Hutchinson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry."

MAHALO for caring for our children and supporting our families.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 10:07:14 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Good Day All,

It has been shown that hunger significantly impacts student academic performance by hindering concentration, memory, and overall cognitive function, potentially leading to lower grades, increased absences, and behavioral issues. By providing meals to students these issues can be lessened. It is important to support the next generations, they will face critical times and need any help we can give them now.

Sincerely,

Donna Buscemi

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 10:25:54 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kasey Arita-Nakamine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please make school meals available to all of our keiki regardless of their family's income. As we know, many families are just one paycheck away from being in a difficult financial situation and on the opposite end, making slightly more money on one paycheck can suddenly disqualify a family who had previously been receiving SNAP benefits. Providing free meals to all children would help many families who may not have met the previous requirements for reduced/free meals, but who struggle daily to have enough food to eat. Consistent nutrition is necessary to help our children learn and grow and no child should have to wonder when they will be getting their next meal. This bill would be an investment in our children's futures and the future of Hawaii as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration.

To: Hawaii State House of Representatives Committee on Finance

Hearing Date/Time: Tuesday April 1, 2025, 2:00pm

Place: Hawaii State Capitol, CR 308 & Videoconference

Re: Judith Ann Armstrong supports SB1300 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

Dear Chair Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Finance Committee

I, Judith Ann Armstrong, support SB1300 RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

I am writing in **strong support** of SB1300.

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki won't go hungry.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB1300.

Sincerely,

Judith Ann Armstrong

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 11:49:37 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Reed Bertollette	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 12:27:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
MANDY CHUN	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry

House Committee on Finance Hearing
Tues., Apr. 1, 2025 at 2 p.m.
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 308
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

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

My name is Christine Andrews and I am from Wailuku, Maui. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

- No Child Should Go Hungry – 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.
- No child would have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.
- Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.
- Increased Academic Performance – When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes.
- Improved Health Outcomes – Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

I request that you support our keiki and vote to pass SB1300.

Mahalo,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:22:38 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

In strong support of SB1300.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:23:10 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noah Campbell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In full support of SB1300

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:23:11 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zorich Palimoo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB1300

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:25:07 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephen Paling IV	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In strong support of SB1300

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:26:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nora Pollard	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kākou House Finance Committee Chairs and Representatives,

My name is Nora Pollard and I am a public high school teacher at Castle High School in Kane'ohe. I am writing to ask that you pass, with amendments to make school meals free for all keiki, food security bill SB1300 in your House Finance Committee.

As a teacher, like many other teachers, I spend my own money to buy snacks for my students so they can eat. It's not regular, it's not constant, and it's not the healthiest, but fed is better than hungry. What our students deserve is regular, constant access to healthy meals. Teachers do what we can, but we know it can never be enough.

As we all know trying to survive in Hawaii, nobody chooses their situation. The hard, necessary work many of our school families do, often at multiple jobs, goes unrewarded by a livable income. One job should be enough, but it often isn't.

In Hawai'i, three in 10 households with children face food insecurity. While some of these children qualify for free meals, any family of four that makes at least \$47,000 does not, leaving two-thirds of the families over this threshold still struggling to cover their food costs. School meals are critical for our keiki's academic success and overall well-being. For some students, they are the healthiest meal of the day.

While we have means-tested relief for families below certain incomes, I know from my experience at Castle that not every family that needs this aid will get it. Though all our feeder schools reached Title 1 designation in recent years, Castle did not reach that, and only this year with extra effort from staff did we reach the number of free and reduced school meal applications required.

Means-tested programs like this will always have those who fall through the cracks, whether because of language difficulties, lack of time from their jobs, or simply forgetting. When we rely on these programs, we decide that the cost of accidentally giving someone a cheaper lunch is a worse price to pay than starving children. Please read that again. Do you personally believe that, Representatives? Eligibility requirements, by definition, will never qualify enough of those who really need simple access to food. Situations change through the year. Paper is slow. Children fall through gaps.

Based on the current costs for school meals, Hawaii Appleseed estimates that it would cost the state \$15 to \$25 million a year to make school meals free for all students. This would be pennies on the dollar of the \$2.18 billion operating budget, only around 1% of the DOE budget. To the State budget it would be fractions of pennies on the total. The cost is negligible.

Imagine that; a negligible amount of money for a world of good change. That is the kind of change most legislators hope to be able to do in their careers. With our students fed, and seeing that the point of society is to feed others, their minds would be able to do the work of helping us create the world we all deserve. Their hearts would know what world to create; one where everyone's struggles are seen and through our unity we can face them.

SB1300 would increase the means-tested threshold, making free meals more accessible to Hawai'i's ALICE families, and putting more money back into the pockets of working families, but we can't stop just there. By amending this bill and making meals free for all students, we would have an even greater, wide-reaching effect on more families that need it but slip through the gaps, and would help other families on the edge of struggling in Hawaii's harsh economic reality.

In this political moment of Federal withdrawal from supporting working people, this legislature should not back away from more spending, but instead step up to make critical changes that can ease people's lives in a time where they are getting more difficult. This bill, with amendments, could do that.

Our society should function to raise our keiki up to our shoulders. I know together we can lift them to great heights.

I urge you to please pass SB1300 with amendments to make all school meals free for all keiki, to strengthen our safety nets and ensure Hawai'i's people have access to the food they need to stay healthy.

Mahalo for your time.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:26:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelsey Beck	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In strong support of SB1300

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:28:17 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brandon Parker	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:54:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenny chang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 1:55:16 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mackenzie Ozoa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing this testimony in support of **SB 1300 with the necessary amendments**. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 2:11:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cynthia M Archibald	North Shore Nutrition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a Nutritionist, I have extensively researched and written on the topic of childhood diet/nutrition, and specifically the correlation with cognitive function. The evidence shows that regular access to healthy and nutrient dense food improves children's' cognitive performance. Making these meals free for every student eases a significant financial and psychological burden on the families, improving the quality of life for the students' and creating a more conducive better learning environment. This bill supports the overall goals/purpose of our public education system and is an investment in Hawai'i's future. I strongly support the bill.

Representative Kyle Yamashita
House Committee on Finance

RE:1300 SD1 HD1
Tuesday, April 1st, 2025
2:00, Conference Room 204

Position: SUPPORT

Aloha Chair Yamashita and Vice Chair Takenouchi,

My name is Christine Russo. I am a teacher at James Campbell High School and a parent of 3 children attending public school. I strongly support this bill however I request the bill be amended so that it provides free school meals for all children in Hawaii public schools.

The current method of applying for free school meals creates barriers for some families. Moreover, according to the current language of the bill, families who do not meet income thresholds would not be eligible for free school meals. While I appreciate that this bill aims to broaden the qualification parameters, we know that all families would benefit from free school meals because it takes at least one expense off the plates of Hawaii families who are already struggling in this economy. Even with the expanded threshold my family would not qualify, yet we, like so many others, have a hard time juggling various expenses, especially as we've seen grocery prices rise. Universal free school meals could benefit families like us too.

Thank you for your consideration. Please pass this measure with amendments for universal free school meals.

Christine Russo

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 2:26:58 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jay Amina III	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support sb1300

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 2:52:45 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacey Alapai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 3:08:19 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dana Ha	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state. No child should be hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 3:11:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tanya Dean	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha and thank you for supporting this measure to expand free school meals so more keiki can thrive. As we watch the federal DOE be dismantled and the Republican attacks on our schools and health initiatives, we ask for Hawai'i's legislators to protect our community at the state level. We all know how difficult it is to make ends meet in Hawai'i and many struggle with food insecurity even if they are not at the current technical poverty line. I recently saw the families who came to the local food bank distribution at our area elementary school. These are families like you and me, not destitute, but certainly struggling. Support them and their keiki and the teachers who see the affects of food insecurity in their classrooms on a daily basis.

I see the affects on my community college students who are parents and are having to choose between food, housing, and their own education. If they can't provide decent meals for their keiki but they don't quite qualify for extra financial support (they're in that gap), they can't persist in their goals to earn their higher education degree or certificate (when they have to work an extra job to buy food or their keiki are poorly nourished and prone to getting sick). The ripple effects of inadequate support for school-age keiki and their nutrition are real.

Help these families, please.

Mahalo!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 3:49:15 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beth Anderson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly support SB1300 because no child should go hungry – 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals. Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.

When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes. This bill would eliminate hungry students in our schools. This will benefit these children and their future success as well as helping ensure a positive future for our state.

Please support a strong start and future success for all of our keiki and support SB 1300.

Thank you,

Beth Anderson

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 3:51:18 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dorothy Zipp Malinski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The state must step up to make sure no child goes hungry in these scary times of federal cuts which are cruel.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 4:21:42 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abbey Seitz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Abbey Seitz and I am testifying in support of SB1300, which would appropriate funds to the Hawai‘i Department of Education to expand meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than 300% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Expanding school meals to ALICE families would support our keiki’s learning and help keep money in the pockets of hard-working families. However, this bill, as written, would not reach everyone. We encourage the committee to consider amending the bill to eventually expand free school meals to ALL students by school year 2027-2028. This would give the DOE two years to ramp up this initiative, improving health and academic outcomes and providing financial relief to thousands more students and families.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,

Abbey

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 5:44:59 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karen A Valasek	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 7:13:48 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelly Ciurej	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry. They need to be taken care of and have safe and available options for food.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 8:04:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cortney Midla	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support SB 1300 relating to school meals. As a registered nurse, I encounter patients every day who make choices about paying for housing, food, and medications, particularly patients who earn a small amount above what would make them eligible for other means of financial support (Medicaid, drug financial assistance programs, etc.). Please expand access to free school meals, so children in these same families have access to at least one nutritional meal per day.

Mahalo,

Cortney Midla, RN

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 8:08:05 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

For some keiki, this is the only meal they get to eat is from schools. I think that, especially now with the dismantling of the Department of Education, it is important to focus on our keiki needs. I think this bill would be a perfect way to do so.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 9:17:51 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support SB1300 SD1 HD1 but with a proposed amendment.

This measure would expand free school meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than three hundred per cent of the federal poverty level. While this amended version of this measure is an improvement, there are still many struggling families who do not meet this income limit, leading to child hunger, food insecurity, negative health outcomes, not to mention impacting their ability to learn.

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

I urge the Committee to amend this bill to guarantee that **all students** have access to free school meals. The legislature always makes sure to put funds towards what it values. Let's make clear that we value all our keiki.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 9:22:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Justin Hughey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Republicans are taking us back to the 1920 by ending all Democratic Party policies from 1930's-1960's. They are also forcing a new economic depression. It should be a priority that our keiki are properly fed.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 9:54:41 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Valerie Clack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Han mitakyepi and aloha,

Many Hawaii families already struggling to keep up with rising costs do not meet the income limits for free and reduced-price lunches at school. Current income limits are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students experiencing hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Published research has demonstrated that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. Spending just 1% of the DOE budget on feeding students would ensure every student gets the fuel they need to succeed at school. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Wopila and mahalo,

Valerie

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 9:57:05 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jesse Hutchison	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki won't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 9:59:53 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Haylee Watson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai,

My name is Haylee Watson and I reside in Honolulu. I would like to mahalo those who have taken the time to push a hearing for SB 1300. Many families struggling to make ends meet do not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, as the income limits are capped at just 185% of the Federal Poverty Level. This is far below the 300% or more needed to cover basic living expenses. As a result, many students face hunger, which increases their risk of stress, depression, and chronic health issues. Research consistently shows that providing free school meals leads to improved academic outcomes, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the Department of Education's budget, we can ensure that every student has access to the nutrition they need to thrive.

Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will not only support their academic success but also promote improved health outcomes. Hungry students are at much higher risk for chronic diseases, and addressing their nutritional needs will help ensure better lifelong health. Please amend this bill to provide funding for free meals for all students in our state.

Mahalo,

Haylee

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 10:54:05 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

As a retired teacher of thirty years, I have witnessed first hand the positive results of students having access to free school meals. Simply put, a full tummy equals a greater ability to learn and grow. The proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki do not go hungry.

March 30, 2025

Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair House Finance Committee
Representative Jenna Takenouchi , Vice-Chair House Finance Committee

Re: SB 1300 Re School lunches

Dear Chair Yamashita, V-Chair Takenouchi and Members of the House Finance Committee

My name is Gail Breakey, and I am testifying in strong support for SB1300.

The proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure to ensure that our keiki won't go hungry."

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation and for allowing me to testify.

Aloha,

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

Gail Breakey RN,MPH

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 11:37:18 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elzadia Kaina	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Sir/Ma'am,

Please support meals for our keiki.

Mahalo,

Elzadia Kaina

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 3:15:12 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony in Support of SB1300–Free School Meals for All Students

I am a parent of children who benefit from free school meals. I’m writing to express my strong support for SB1300 with amendments to provide free meals for all students.

As a parent, knowing that my kids have access to healthy meals at school has made it much easier for me to manage day-to-day stressors and expenses that come along with raising children without worrying about how to provide for their meals every day.

What’s also been amazing is that my kids often share their food with classmates who don’t have snacks. It’s clear that when children have enough to eat, they’re not only healthier and ready to learn, but also more likely to help others and build a sense of community.

Providing free school meals to all students would make sure no child goes hungry, and it would allow every kid to focus on their education without the stress of hunger, and also provide relief to struggling parents who work tirelessly to provide for their children. I urge you to support this important bill that will make a real difference in the lives of many families and benefit our community as a whole.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 5:00:15 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Collin Mansanas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB1300

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 6:25:57 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackie	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Finance Committee,

Please consider the following in your decision-making:

1. Funding from the federal government is highly uncertain. Please be cautious about committing more than \$3 million in the 2026-27 school year, to pay for free lunches for students whose families earn up to 300% of the federal poverty level.
2. Please do not make amendments to make school lunch free for students whose families earn more than 300% of the federal poverty level. Universal free lunch is fiscally irresponsible.
3. Allocation of \$565,000 to pay for free lunches for students eligible for reduced-price meals, is fair and serves a vulnerable population.

Problems with Universal Free Lunch:

1. Food waste: People who work in school cafeterias complain about the huge amounts of food waste that they see every day. Universal free lunch will create more food waste.
2. Waste disposal: School lunches use disposable trays and utensils, which will exacerbate our solid waste problem. Waste disposal is another expense to taxpayers and the environment. Our solid waste problem is already so severe, our government wants to put a landfill above an aquifer.
3. The millions of extra dollars, which would be spent on free lunches for students whose families can afford to pay for lunch, could instead be spent on other areas of higher need, such as hiring more after-school care personnel to help more working families.

Lastly, food waste is a significant contributor to greenhouse gases. As you discuss funding for universal school lunches, please consider the fact that funds for climate change education were cut from the budget due to concerns about the reduction of federal funds.

Mahalo for this opportunity to raise multiple concerns about this issue.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 6:26:26 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Burns	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state. Let Hawaii set an example for what it means to have safe and healthy communities where everyone is cared for.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Sarah Burns

96816

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 6:35:26 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Micah Kahumoku	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong support of SB1300

Testimony on SB1300 – RELATING TO SCHOOL MEALS

Position: Support with amendments

Hearing: April 1, 2025, 2:00 PM

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

My name is Kristen Young. I am a Honolulu resident, a graduate of Hawai'i public schools; and a member of Faith Action for Community Equity, the Justice & Witness Missional Team of the Hawai'i Conference United Church of Christ, and the Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition. While I cannot speak on behalf of all these entities, I want to name them because I believe we're all working toward similar goals which require that kids are fed. I am submitting testimony in **strong support of SB1300 with amendments to expand free school meal coverage to ALL students.**

Our current system discriminates against (and withholds food from) kids and youth based on factors that are out of their control. No Child Should Go Hungry – 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. They do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. This bill would ensure that all students can eat for free and hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.

There are so many reasons to support free school meals from increased academic performance (i.e. higher test scores) and improved health outcomes to ending the social stigma of having to return a meal due to insufficient funds in students' school food account. Please listen to the many teachers, students, and community advocates when they share about the importance of free school meals. The benefits for individual students, their teachers, and working families are huge—and what benefits them is ultimately good for the community as a whole.

With just 1% of the DOE budget, we can make sure every student gets the meals they need while in school. As a taxpayer, this is exactly what I want my tax dollars to fund. Our budget reflects our priorities. **Feeding our keiki today sets them up for success tomorrow. It is an important investment in our shared future.**

Currently the "state" is considering allocating \$30 million in the 2025 budget toward a new jail. Even in jail, people are fed. If students are required to be in school and parents/guardians are required to send kids to school, students should be given food while in school. We should reassess our priorities as a community if we are more willing to spend money on a new jail before we feed our keiki.

Even my faith reminds me of the importance of not just spiritual food but also physical sustenance. When bodies are nourished, brains can be nourished. We cannot expect to provide quality education if we are neglecting to nourish the full person. **Equitable education is only possible if we ensure all students are fed.**

I talked with several youth at Central Union Church in Honolulu about free school meals and here's what they had to say:

I support having free school meals. Food is a basic need of life, and hunger can leave ~~stranded~~ students ~~to~~ distracted and unfocused. Most families struggle to afford due to taxes and living costs.

"I support having free school meals. Food is a basic need of life, and hunger can leave students distracted and unfocused. Most families struggle to afford due to taxes and living costs."

✓ I think its important to have FREE School meals because I think everybody should eat. I think that when you eat it helps you have more energy to learn & focus on in your classes. I also think that its important to have Free meals because some Parents arent able to afford it.

"I think it's important to have FREE school meals because I think everybody should eat. I think that when you eat it helps you have more energy to learn & focus in your classes. I also think that it's important to have free meals because some parents aren't able to afford it."

To Help with Hunger so student's Don't Starve.
AND student's need sometimes I need to eat because they are still going through adolescence ~~and their~~ ~~body need to grow~~
and their body needs to grow.

"To help with hunger so students don't starve. And students sometimes need to eat because they are still going through adolescence and their body needs to grow."

Free school meals would be good because it would really save a lot of money for our parents and also it could also be so cool

"Free school meals would be good because it would really save a lot of money for our parents and also it could also be so cool."

It's important for us to have free school meals because some parents aren't able to afford it. If students don't eat because they have to pay, they won't be able to focus.

"It's important for us to have free school meals because some parents aren't able to afford it. If students don't eat because they have to pay, they won't be able to focus."

I go to King Intermediate School, and in 7th grade. I see my friends sitting on the lunch table without a plate asking for food. ~~I could see the looks on their eyes~~ ^{the} ~~seeing a lunch and~~ We always give our leftovers but the lunch ladies tell us not to share. Today's housings are expensive and their parent don't have enough money to put money into their account. I feel like that school lunches should be free because of it. And to see my friends energetic and alive would not me and my friends happy but also their parents too.

"I go to King Intermediate School, and in 7th grade. I see my friends sitting on the lunch table without a plate asking for food. We always give our leftovers but the lunch ladies tell us not to share. Today's housings are expensive and their parents don't have enough money to put money into their account. I feel like that school lunches should be free because of it. And to see my friends energetic and alive would not [only make] me and my friends happy but also their parents too."

AS a Highschool student, I hate to see students go home starving. ~~Students~~ Some students around me ask's for snack even though they lunch had passed. Those are the students that don't have enough money \$ to afford food/school meal. There are students who also have a lot of siblings that their parents need to provide for but due to low incomes, they don't have enough to provide for school lunch meals. As from what I learn 1/10 students/kids ~~skip~~ skips meal because of the expenses. It's important for kids to eat so * they have enough nutrients to learn and so their bra

- Kids asking others for ~~so~~ snacks
- 1/10 % of kids skips their meals
- expenses
- need for brain to function for learning
- low income for parents to provide for big family
- Having to leave unwanted fruits in a bowl for students that didn't get a chance to eat
- DOE have enough funds

"As a high school student, I hate to see students go home starving. Some students around me asks for snack even though lunch had passed. Those are the students that don't have enough money to afford food/school meal. There are students who also have a lot of siblings that their parents need to provide for but due to low incomes, they don't have enough to provide for school lunch meals. As from what I learn, 1/10 students/kids skips meal because of the expenses. It's important for kids to eat so they have enough nutrients to learn and so their bra[ins]..." This student also shares that they leave unwanted fruits in a bowl for students that didn't get a chance to eat.

Mahalo nui for your consideration. Please pass SB1300 with amendments to guarantee that ALL students have access to free school meals.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 6:57:20 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jean Butel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many families in need do not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch due to stringent income limits, which are set at just 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more required to meet basic living costs. Hunger among students increases the likelihood of stress, depression, and long-term health challenges. Studies have demonstrated that offering free school meals enhances academic achievement, including higher test scores. I strongly urge you to revise this bill to ensure that every student has access to free school meals, so no child goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 6:59:42 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charlotte Frank	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Charlotte Frank and I am writing today in **strong support** of bill SB1300, the ALICE School Meal Subsidy, to ensure that all students in Hawai‘i have access to free school meals. As you know, food insecurity is a significant issue that affects many families in our state. It is estimated that 1 in 3 families in Hawai‘i experience food insecurity, which is a staggering statistic. However, the current free and reduced lunch program only provides support to families whose incomes are below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level. This leaves many families who are struggling to make ends meet without the vital support they need. In reality, families need to earn 300% or more of the federal poverty level just to cover basic living expenses in Hawai‘i.

These gaps in eligibility prevent many students from receiving the nourishment they need to thrive. Hungry students are at a much higher risk for physical and mental health issues, including stress, depression, and chronic disease. When students are not properly nourished, it not only impacts their ability to focus and succeed academically, but also their overall well-being. The evidence is clear: access to nutritious food improves students’ health, behavior, and academic performance.

Studies have shown that providing free school meals for all students leads to significant improvements in test scores and overall academic achievement. This is because when students are not worried about where their next meal will come from, they are able to concentrate better in class and perform at their best.

For the sake of the health, well-being, and academic success of our students, I urge you to amend this bill to ensure that ***all*** students, regardless of their family income, have access to free school meals. Ensuring that every student receives the proper nourishment they need is a crucial step toward building a stronger, healthier, and more equitable Hawai‘i.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Charlotte Frank

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 7:03:08 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christina Libby	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 7:07:39 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Seth Holck	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In strong support of SB1300

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 7:11:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 7:51:31 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
skye barona	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill, all children should be able to eat

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 7:55:53 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katie Folio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of SB 1300 SD1 HD1, with amendments. While this bill is a step in the right direction by expanding access to free school meals, I urge you to go further and make school meals free for all students in Hawai‘i.

No child should have to worry about affording a meal at school. Universal free meals would remove the stigma some students face, ease the financial burden on working families, and ensure every keiki has the nutrition they need to learn and thrive. Other states have successfully implemented similar policies—Hawai‘i can and should do the same.

Please support a fully inclusive approach and ensure that every student has access to free, healthy meals at school.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Katie Folio

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:04:17 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Mahalo for supporting this important bill.

Sincerely,

Jordan

Honolulu, 96817

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:10:30 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joni Kamiya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs and Committee members,

Iam writing to you in support of this bill. Given the u know consequences happening at the federal level, this bill is going to help support our keiki in need of meals to be prepared for school. i urge you to pass this bill to ensure our children in need can be school ready.!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:20:03 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jermy Domingo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

RE: Support for SB1300, Relating to School Meals**Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,**

I am writing in **strong support of SB1300**, which would appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Department of Education to expand school meal coverage to students whose family income is no more than **300% of the Federal Poverty Level**.

As a **parent of a special needs preschool child who eats school lunch with his classmates**, I see every day how important it is for keiki to share a meal together. Eating together isn't just about nutrition—it's about **connection, inclusion, and community-building**, even at a young age. For my child, school lunch is an important part of his routine and a meaningful way he builds relationships with peers.

Expanding access to free school meals supports our keiki's health, learning, and social development. It also helps **put money back into the pockets of hardworking ALICE (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) families** who are doing their best to make ends meet but still face difficult choices when it comes to basic needs.

That's why I also urge the committee to consider **amending SB1300 to expand free school meals to all public school students by school year 2027–2028**. This would give the DOE two years to prepare, while eventually ensuring that **no child is left out** due to paperwork or income eligibility gaps.

The need is real and growing. In Hawai'i, **3 in 10 households with children face food insecurity**, and **9% of those families report their children sometimes skip meals** because they don't have enough food. For some keiki, school meals are the only nutritious meals they get all day.

We know that universal free school meals lead to **better attendance, improved behavior, and stronger academic outcomes**. This is a smart, compassionate investment in our children and in our future.

Please pass SB1300—and consider setting a path toward **universal free school meals for all Hawai'i students** by 2027.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit written testimony and for your continued commitment to our keiki,

Jermy Domingo

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:28:49 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

This bill is so important because many children in Hawai'i rely heavily on school meals. The thought of Hawaiis Keiki not being fed is heartbreaking. Children need food to fuel their bodies and their minds so that they can be able to learn effectively and not worry about when is their next meal. As an educator, I have used my own money to feed students in my classroom due to them being hungry. I have 5 children of my own, but be bf sure that my students have food in their bellies for learning was a must for me. No child/student should be denied a meal in school due to insufficient funds. Hawai'i needs to step up and take care of our Keiki!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:46:07 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather Barfield	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Providing meals for our keiki is of utmost importance, PERIOD! It has been a proven fact that children who are lucky enough to get fed at home perform better in school than those who do not. We have parents who work multiple jobs and still cannot afford to provide food for their keiki. This is not the fault of any child. We have an obligation to feed our children and provide nutritious meals. There are organizations (like my church) who put together food for families to take home on a weekly basis. This is because we know the importance of keiki having nutritious food in their bellies. It not only supports their growth physically, but mentally. A child who is unfed is unfocused and not able to learn at a rate that is expected. Hawai'i has made some progress in recent years as far as where we rank nationally, but depriving our keiki from food will not help us continue on that upward trajectory. Depriving them of food is inhumane and simply evil. When we talk about aloha, it includes ensuring our keiki have nutritious meals while they are in school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:51:38 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jack Edward Belsom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support SB1300. It will make a major impact on the state.

With inflation, rising prices, and economic instability, many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Thank you for considering this.

Jack E. Belsom, Wailuku, Maui

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:52:19 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lindsey Ilagan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

One in three Hawai'i families experience food insecurity. This is not just a number, but rather our own 'ohana, friends, and neighbors. Many families might be able to scrape by, but then are excluded from free and reduced-price lunch because they do not meet the income eligibility limits. This does not mean they do not continue to struggle to put food on the table--income limits are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level to be eligible, yet the income that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses in Hawai'i is 300%. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that ALL students have access to free school meals, ensuring no keiki goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 9:01:40 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

I am a mother and teacher. I am also one of those families that could not afford school lunches for my children, and I was barely making a living, living paycheck to paycheck. I am part of the statistic listed below and, sadly, so many of our families have to suffer.

Many struggling families like myself in our state do not qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The current income limits, capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, are far too restrictive. In reality, families often need 300% or more of the poverty level to cover basic living expenses. This leaves a significant gap, where children from working families are still experiencing food insecurity.

No Child Should Go Hungry. Two out of three struggling families are not eligible for free school meals under the current guidelines. This means that many of our hungry *keiki* are forced to skip meals, impacting their ability to learn and thrive. This bill, as amended, would ensure that every child has access to nutritious food, eliminating the stigma of being turned away due to insufficient funds in their school food account.

Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day so that they are ready to learn. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. In fact, implementing universal free school meals elsewhere has resulted in student test scores rising to the equivalent of six additional weeks of school. For just 1% of the Department of Education budget, we can provide a 15% increase in student outcomes.

Improved Health Outcomes. Hungry students are at much higher risk for stress, depression, and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our *keiki* will result in lifelong benefits to their health. By providing universal free school meals, we are investing in the future health and well-being of our children.

For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

School meals are a school supply.

Mahalo,

Hope McKeen

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 9:02:47 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kate McLean	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! I am Kate McLean, a social work student who is writing in strong support of SB 1300 which seeks to expand free meals to student in Hawaii. Going to school is mandated by law and this bill would ensure that our keiki have access to nutritious meals while at school. Expanding free meals would reduce stress for the families, children, and faculty all while supporting the growth and overall health of our future generations. Going forward with this bill is an important investment into our children's health and happiness. We can help alleviate the financial burden that many families in Hawaii are already tasked with. This proposed expansion would make sure that no student is left behind, that all are properly cared for which would only further build up our community. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support SB 1300 as this state takes additional steps to fight food insecurity and poverty in our beloved state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 9:22:43 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jillian Meinecke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello,

I support this bill with amendments. Please amend bill to ensure free school meals are available to ALL students.

Students need access to free meals if we want them to succeed in schools. Eight other states have successfully implemented a free school meals program. We should be next. We need to prioritize and take care of our keiki so that they can thrive in the classroom and eventually in our communities.

It would be wonderful if NO child had to face the stigma of receiving reduced or free lunch. Free meals for all would ensure all children are treated as equals. Plus, when children are fed, educational outcomes are higher, which bodes well for our communities and the state.

Let's set a positive example and push this thing through the finish line once and for all. We won't stop fighting.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Jillian Meinecke

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 9:35:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bryan Mih	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As a parent and community pediatrician, I strongly support SB 1300. Ensuring sufficient food and nutrition for all our keiki helps them learn better. When they skip meals, our keiki cannot focus as well on learning or participating in other school activities. Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

Sincerely,

Bryan Mih, MD MPH FAAP

Pediatrician

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 9:58:58 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tanielle Tokoro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. As you all know, living in Hawaii is very expensive. I have 4 children going to school right now. Having my childrens meal free would help our family out a lot. Paying for their food in school is a struggle. Supporting this bill will make a difference in our lives and in others as well. Please think of Hawaii's families and our childrens future. No student in Hawaii should go hungry! Thank you for taking time to read my testimony.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:03:57 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kekoa Kealoha	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Kākou,

My name is Kekoa and I am writing in strong support of SB1300.

This bill ensures that all students are able to receive a meal without having to meet strict and prohibitive eligibility requirements. I support this bill because meeting those eligibility requirements is not as straightforward or fair as it may seem. Parents who are currently on the cusp of the eligibility requirements are likely living paycheck-to-paycheck because our cost-of-living is so outrageously high. Parents may have to make sacrifices in order to afford meals, and one bad pay period may lead to a child suffering the consequences.

Hunger is very closely linked to poor educational and health outcomes. Students are not likely to perform well when they are hungry, and hunger ultimately leads to poorer developmental experiences. The most profound and immediate positive impact we can make is to ensure our students are fed and ready to learn. This bill ensures that the environment for learning is optimal, that cost is not a barrier to hunger (and, by extension, learning), and reinforces our commitment to our communities.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my testimony, and I strongly urge you to vote yes on SB1300.

Mahalo piha,

Kekoaopololū Kealoha

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:07:36 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Strong Support SB1300 with an ammendment

Aloha Chair Yamashita and Vice Chair Takenouchi,

My name is Lisa Darcy and I am a resident of Kula, Maui, HI. I work with adults and children who are forced to live in unhoused conditions due to the lack of inventory in both sheltering programs and in the inventory or affordable housing. As you know, there are way too many children in conditions where eating a nutritious meal is out of reach.

There is no way they can compensate for the financial and structural conditions they exist in and this bill is critical to their health and safety. Hawai'i must invest in the health and safety of all residents to grow a stronger work force and keep locals able to reside here.

I am also requesting to ensure this healthy trend by supporting an ammendment to continue this by expanding this to all students in need for school year 2027-2028. It's a no brainer and I'm so happy to see it in your committee.

Mahalo,

Lisa Darcy

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:08:17 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Support

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:11:02 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keila Paahana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

For many families, the cost of school meals can be a barrier to accessing the balanced diet their children need. Hunger and inadequate nutrition are associated with stress, depression, and chronic disease. Two out of three struggling families are ineligible for free school meals. Universal free school meals can provide meals to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

Not only were all children assured they would have daily food, but schools that implemented free school meals saw their Math and English test scores increase at a rate equivalent to attending six additional weeks of school. While six additional weeks of school would cost Hawai'i \$300 million annually, universal free school meals would cost Hawai'i only \$25 million annually.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:21:09 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Reeser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Honorable House Committee Members on Finance,

I am writing in SUPPORT of SB 1300 SD1 HD1 WITH AMENDMENTS.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state. Hawai‘i’s keiki should not go hungry and this is one means to support our students and families.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Cheryl Reeser
Makawao, Hawai‘i

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:23:00 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hanako Heine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:27:08 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Isabelle Enriques	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Isabelle Enriques and I am a Junior at Mililani High School. I am in support of S.B. No. 1300, SD1 HD1, which would provide meals to all Keiki at school. Growing up in the HIDOE system, I have always been on the free or reduced lunch program, because of the income status that my parents make. For my peers, I believe that they should have the same opportunity to have free meals at school because having a meal to eat shouldn't be a privilege, it should be a given right.

I, like many other students living in Hawai'i, have suffered the consequences of living under the poverty line for most of my life. I haven't always been able to afford field trips, hanging out with my friends, and even questioning if the grocery store is going to accept my family's EBT card for our next meal. If I think back to 6 years ago when all of my family's food relied on food stamps, I would hope that at least I wouldn't have to worry if I could have school lunch. Now that I have the opportunity to afford my own groceries without EBT, I can now have the knowledge and experience to advocate for the thousands of students suffering from the same problem, which is wondering how they would get their next meal.

Mahalo,

Isabelle Enriques

Mililani High School

isa.v.enri@gmail.com

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:35:48 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ke'alohi Naipo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Mahalo for taking time to read this testimony in support of SB1300.

It's appalling to hear that our communities are (still) struggling with hunger, especially our most vulnerable- keiki and kupuna. As a mother of two, I believe no ONE should be hungry, especially our keiki. We know that 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals. Also, no keiki would have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.

As a Hawaiian Registered Dietitian working for 10 years with our communities, I understand the relationship of proper nutrition on current and future health outcomes, and that starts with being fed first. Hunger and inadequate nutrition create barriers for keiki to learn, limiting nutrients to feed their bodies, especially their brain. All keiki deserve to be fed during the school day, so they are ready to learn and their brain can focus on learning, not hunger. Hungry students may also be at higher risks for stress, depression, and chronic health conditions. Investing in nutritious foods for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits for their health.

I believe that we thrive when our EVERYONE in our communities are well. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school lunches free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:38:28 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lara OConnor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawaii families, and the precious keiki of our state, often do not meet the impractical income limits for free and reduced-price school lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses.

Keiki who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

I, along with every registered adult voter I know, fully support offering every keiki in our state a free lunch program. This should be extended to free breakfast as well. This is an investment in our children. And every child deserves to be fed healthy. This is a wonderful investment in our children and education system. While proving children's concentration, test, scores, school, performance and health, the free lunch program also invest in our local food distributors and food growers. It also takes away any stigma from children, whose families can't afford school meals, or are very tight funds. The children will all be equal. It also shows that The adults of our state prioritize, Keiki, safety and health. That focus shows the integrity of our state. Leaving children to go hungry or be ashamed of not having money for school lunch, would represent our state horribly. As well, it needs to be illegal across the state to ever decline a child for lunch, because they don't have money in their account. Sometimes busy parents, even that can afford it have forgotten or a a notice has not been given to them. No child should ever be declined for a school breakfast or lunch when they come with a tray. That leans on child cruelty to try to leave them in hunger. Please take care of this.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:45:21 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Miranda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

House Finance Committee

Tuesday, 04-01-25 2:00PM in House conference room 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Support for S.B. No. 1300, SD1 HD1 Relating to School Meals

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

My name is Sarah Miranda and I am a teacher at Mililani High School. I am in support of S.B. No. 1300, SD1 HD1, which would provide meals to all Keiki at school.

Everyday I have multiple students stop by my classroom to ask me for food. Knowing that students are hungry has spurred me to keep food in my class for students to eat. Students can't learn if their brains aren't working, and brains don't work without food. There are many reasons why students might not have breakfast or lunch on any given day, not all are financial reasons. Students need to be able to eat while at school, regardless of their parents' financial situation. I am in support of school meals being one of the provided services that all students receive as part of their public school education. Please consider supporting this bill so that all keiki in Hawaii have access to breakfast and lunch each day that they are in school.

Sincerely,

Sarah Miranda

Mililani High School

sarah.miranda@k12.hi.us

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:48:32 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jaeda-Mackenzie Morris	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

House Finance Committee

Tuesday, 04-01-25 2:00PM in House conference room 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Support for S.B. No. 1300, SD1 HD1 Relating to School Meals

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

My name is Jaeda-Mackenzie Morris and I am a Junior at Mililani High School. I am in support of S.B. No. 1300, SD1 HD1, which would provide meals to all Keiki at school.

Coming from a low income family with a lot of kids free lunch would be a blessing. Having the ability to walk in to the cafe without someone saying you need to refill your card with money. No matter what native Hawaiians should have free lunch.

Thank You for taking the time to read

Jaeda-Mackenzie Morris

Mililani High School

2121300166@k12.hi.us

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:48:49 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
gabrielle davidson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry. Thank you!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 10:56:10 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jingwoan Chang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita and Vice-Chair Takenouchi,

As a veteran educator, I want to express enthusiastic support for universal free school meals for our keiki. Students cannot learn if they are hungry, and the current system and income requirements do not adequately support all working families who need it. Students who do not have adequate funds in their accounts for lunch at school can find themselves in humiliating and frustrating circumstances due to no fault of their own. Teachers sometimes spend their own money to provide snacks so their students' basic needs are met. Guaranteeing meals for children is a worthy investment in academic learning outcomes and college and career readiness, which have broad positive impacts for our communities. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:07:01 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaley Mayo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support with Amendments for SB 1300 SD1 HD1

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 1300 SD1 HD1, with amendments to ensure universal free school meals for all students in Hawaii. As a paraprofessional aide at Ke’elikolani Middle School and a social work student at Hawaii Pacific University, I see firsthand the challenges that hunger poses for our keiki.

At my school, we are fortunate that all students receive free lunch due to the overall income levels of our community. This policy not only alleviates the burden of food insecurity but also creates an environment where every child can focus on learning without the distraction of hunger. Because all students receive free meals, no one feels singled out or stigmatized; they are free to enjoy their meals alongside their peers, fostering a sense of community and belonging. This experience reinforces the idea that school is a safe space where every child’s health and well-being are prioritized, allowing them to fully engage in their education.

However, we must acknowledge that many families across the state still face barriers to accessing school meals, as two out of three struggling families are ineligible for free meals. Universal free school meals would ensure that no child in Hawaii is left behind due to financial constraints. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to significant improvements in academic performance, with student test scores rising at rates equivalent to six additional weeks of school—a tremendous benefit that costs about \$300 million annually to implement through extended school days. In comparison, universal free school meals can provide the same advantages for only \$25 million a year, representing a wise investment in our children’s futures.

Moreover, hungry students struggle to concentrate and perform at their best. By providing every child with access to healthy meals during the school day, we enhance their ability to learn, grow, and succeed. This is particularly vital given the mental and physical health risks that accompany food insecurity, including stress, depression, and chronic disease.

Current income limits for free and reduced-price lunch—capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—fail to account for the true costs of living for many families, many of whom would benefit from universal access to nutritious meals. By amending this bill to provide funding for

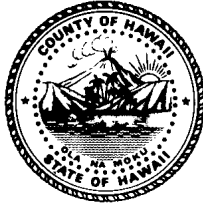
universal free school meals, we can ensure that all students receive the essential nutrition they need to thrive academically and personally.

I urge you to support and amend SB 1300 SD1 HD1 so that every student in our state can receive the nutritious meals they need to succeed. Together, we can ensure that no child goes hungry and that all keiki are positioned for success in their education.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Kaley Mayo

Jennifer Kagiwada
Council Member District 2 South Hilo



Office: (808) 961-8272
jennifer.kagiwada@hawaiiicounty.gov

HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL - DISTRICT 2

25 Aupuni Street • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

DATE: March 31, 2025
TO: House Committee on Finance
FROM: Jennifer Kagiwada, Council Member,
Council District 2
SUBJECT: SB 1300 SD2 HD2

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

I am testifying in support of SB 1300 SD2 HD2 to expand free school meal coverage to students who currently qualify for reduced-price lunch.

Nutrition is essential to all growing children and teenagers. It has been shown to vastly improve academic outcomes. However, there are still up to one in four children in Hawai'i that regularly go without enough nutritious meals at home. This means that for many children in Hawai'i, school breakfast and lunch are the most nutritious meals they get in a day. SB 1300 SD 2 HD2 as currently written extends free lunch to our ALICE families, who don't earn enough to make ends meet in Hawai'i. Passing SB 1300 would expand free school meals to more than 10,000 students, allowing them to receive the nutrition they need to thrive throughout the school day and beyond.

I am also in support of amendments to SB 1300 SD 2 HD2 to give **all** students access to free school meals. Being able to feed students regardless of need at no cost to the family allows us to remove the stigma of being on "Free/Reduced Lunch" programs and will remove a huge burden from parents who will no longer have to worry about making sure their children are able to eat while at school.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jenn Kagiwada", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jenn Kagiwada

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:16:50 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Misty Figueira	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1300

Misty Figueira

Special Education Teacher

March 31st, 2025

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Misty Figueira, and I am a Special Education Teacher at Kea‘au Middle School. I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 1300, which seeks to expand free school meal coverage to students whose family income is less than 300% of the federal poverty level by the 2026-2027 school year.

As a Special Education Teacher in a Title One middle school, I see firsthand the impact that access to nutritious meals has on student learning, behavior, and overall well-being. Many families in our community struggle to make ends meet, and expanding free meal eligibility would ensure that thousands more students receive the nourishment they need to focus in class and succeed academically. Sometimes, the only meal students see that is the one that schools provide. I myself attended a Title One school and am a proud graduate of Pāhoa High and Intermediate School. Having come from a single parent household, there were days where I couldn’t afford to eat lunch. Instead, my friends and teachers fed me. This bill would have drastically changed things for me.

No child should have to learn on an empty stomach, and this bill is a crucial step toward reducing food insecurity and creating a more equitable learning environment. By passing this legislation, we are investing in the future of our students and removing barriers that hinder their ability to thrive. We are investing in Hawai‘i.

I urge you to support this bill and prioritize the well-being of Hawai‘i’s children. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Misty Figueira

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:17:24 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Serhenetee Tonumaipea	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill with amendments to free lunch for all stufents.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:26:54 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zoe Vela	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a high school teacher, I care deeply about the haumana I have the privilege of teaching. My first year in the classroom, I quickly realized that something had to change with our school lunch program. The food was awful, and weirdly expensive considering its poor quality. Students would come see me at lunch, and when I asked where their food was they would tell me they weren't planning on eating; their family's income was limited, and they didn't want to "waste" money. So I went to Costco and started buying snacks and food to give to students, because even if all they have all day is a bag of goldfish, at least they had *something*. I was a brand new, untenured emergency hire, making less than 40k a year, coming out of my own pocket so my students could eat.

It is our kuleana to take care of our keiki. Schools should be a place for them to feel safe and taken care of, and that means being able to eat. For some, school lunch will be the only meal they get each day. Food IS a school supply. This is our opportunity to ensure our keiki thrive, to build a better future for our islands and our people.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:27:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Martin Devey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Children should by no means go through a day without food. Every child should have a free meal/s.

Yes, and it's embarrassing for the child who is standing in line for food and then rejected because there isn't any money in their lunch account. Humiliation and emotional stress/trauma from elementary school, junior high and high school. Teenagers gotta eat too.

Teachers are already under paid yet many spend their own money buying snacks from Costco cause they see the hunger in the students eyes and how it affects their ability to focus in school and feel at least they have a little something in their

Feed our children.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:27:21 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carli Gardner-Lomont	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and the Committee on Finance,

I am a high school teacher on O'ahu and I have seen firsthand how important school lunch is for my students. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores.

I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Mahalo nui for your time and consideration.

Aloha,

Carli Gardner-Lomont

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:28:59 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
shayna esteban	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Now more than ever, we need to come together to build healthy, resilient communities, and what better way than to provide free school meals for our precious keiki?

Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. Aside from test scores and numbers, it's our moral duty to make sure every child does not suffer from hunger, regardless of their background.

For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state. Mahalo nui!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:29:56 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kalena Dawson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Growing up in Milwaukee, WI, I was acutely aware that I was privileged to have food everyday. My mother was a second grade teacher at the most dangerous school in the city, and my father was a police officer. After work they would come home and recount stories from their days, always involving people less fortunate than we were. My mom would often bring snacks to her classroom that my sister and I would help her pick out; crackers and pretzels and other things. At the time I assumed it was for the same reason we got snacks at our private school: as a reward for good behaviour, good scores or simply for the sake of it. Later I understood it was because my mom's students often times didn't eat at home. They would come to school hungry, and as the day inched towards lunch--where most of them received free lunch provided by the State--their hunger would grow and their attention and focus would waver. For most of them, that lunch was their only guaranteed meal of the day.

The cost of living in Hawaii is significantly greater than the cost of living in Milwaukee, and every time I go back to visit my family I'm floored at how cheap groceries are there compared to here on island. For low-income families, being able to afford food is a very severe and serious burden. Every child needs food, and children whose families can't consistently afford this basic and fundamental requirement deserve to have access to food without worry. At an academic level, ensuring that each child is adequately fed for the day helps to ensure they are ready to learn and not distracted by the physical pain of hunger or the emotional pain and humiliation that also comes with not being able to afford food. It goes without saying that I fully support SB 1300 and wholeheartedly believe every under privileged child on Oahu and in the state of Hawaii deserves free school meals.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:41:06 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth A. Ho'oipo Pa Nakea	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony in Strong Support with Amendments for SB 1300 SD1 HD1
Elizabeth Pa Nakea, Teacher – Castle High School****Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the House Committee on Finance,**

My name is Elizabeth Pa Nakea, a teacher at Castle High School—recently placed on sick leave, yet still here, still fighting, because I care about my students. I care about their future. I care that no keiki in Hawai‘i should sit in a classroom with an empty stomach, struggling to learn while hunger gnaws at their focus.

I am here because hunger is a classroom issue.**I am here because hunger is a keiki issue.****I am here because hunger is a Hawai‘i issue.**

For too many families, the price of a school meal is the difference between eating and going without. Two out of three financially struggling families in Hawai‘i do not qualify for free school meals under current federal guidelines. The cost of living here is among the highest in the nation, yet our eligibility thresholds remain too low, forcing many working families to make impossible choices.

A hungry child cannot learn.**A hungry child cannot thrive.****A hungry child should not have to ask whether they will eat today.**

This is not just about food; this is about equity. It is about ensuring every student, regardless of their family's income, has access to the basic nutrition needed to succeed. Studies show that schools providing universal free meals see higher test scores, improved attendance, and better overall health outcomes. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can give every student in Hawai‘i the meals they need to focus, grow, and achieve their potential.

We must do better.**We can do better.****And with your leadership, we will do better.**

I urge you to SUPPORT SB 1300 SD1 HD1 WITH AMENDMENTS to ensure school meals are free for all students in our state. No child should feel the stigma of returning a meal tray because their account is empty. No family should have to choose between paying rent and feeding their keiki. We have a responsibility to act, and we must act now.

Mahalo for your time, your service, and your commitment to Hawai'i's future.

**With deep respect and urgency,
Elizabeth Pa Nakea
Castle High School Teacher**

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:47:55 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Wendy Bauske	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello my name is Wendy Bauske and I have two children currently enrolled at Maunawili Elementary School. Their father and I are going through a divorce and he had lost his job last year. He was ashamed and refused to sign up for unemployment. Our financials have been a huge stressor and principal Tanaka was able to award our family with lunch assistance. The food assistance that my children have received this year has been a great help and I am forever grateful. I know that my children are the next generation and I stress raising them to be excellent stewards of the world. Getting assistance for something as basic as food is something small, but those small things are what is the most meaningful. By investing small things for the future of our society makes a huge impact later down the road. Showing our children that they are cared for by our government is something that I am proud to support. With the current federal administration trying to dismantle the department of education, their actions do it sit well with me. It shows that they do not have public safety in mind. I support SB1300 to provide something small to nurture the future of Hawaii.

Committee on Education
Support for SB 1300
March 31, 2025

Aloha e Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, a me Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 1300, which seeks to expand access to free school meals for students in Hawai‘i. As an individual and a dedicated educator with ten years of experience teaching in both public and private schools in Hawai‘i, I have seen firsthand the crucial role that nutritious, reliable meals play in student success.

Ensuring that students have access to free meals is not just a matter of physical well-being but also one of academic success and social-emotional stability. Hunger in the classroom creates barriers to learning, impacting students’ ability to focus, engage, and retain information. Beyond academics, access to food fosters a sense of dignity among students, ensuring that no child feels singled out or has to worry about where their next meal will come from.

I have personally had students ask me roughly once a week if I had extra food to give to them. In fact, I keep tens of Top Ramen packets in my desk for this very reason. No child should have to rely on their teacher’s snack drawer to get through the school day. Expanding access to free school meals through SB 1300 is a necessary step toward ensuring every child in Hawai‘i has an equal opportunity to succeed.

SB 1300 represents an investment in our keiki and our collective future. The money spent on this program is well worth it, as it reflects our values as a society regarding children, education, and basic human dignity.

I urge the committee to pass this measure. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Yours in Service,
Charles M. Clausner
Educator & Citizen

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:56:32 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann V Saffery	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha All,

Proposed federal budget cut would eliminate free school meals. Please pass this measure so our keiki wouldn't go hungry.

Mahalo for all you do,

Ann V Saffery

Honolulu, HI

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:03:43 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caroline Azelski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support. Thank you.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:04:41 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

As a mother and a community member I see the ups and downs of our small economy on Kauai. It is our duty as mothers to feed any children who are hungry. And it is the duty of a school to realize the needs of its students.

Schools are a place of learning, but also a place of nourishment and growth, which includes food.

So many families need support to feed themselves. Schools should be a safe haven for all kids, even hungry ones.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:06:11 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ana Hernandez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Our keiki deserve access to nutritious meals at school not only because hunger should never be a barrier to learning, but also because universal free meal programs have already been implemented in other states and have improved academic performance. Free meals ensure that no keiki has to struggle through the day on an empty stomach, reducing stigma and inequality while supporting families facing financial hardships. States like California, Maine, and Minnesota have already implemented free school meals for all students, and report significant benefits, such as improved test scores, fewer absences, and reduced stigma around school lunch programs. In California alone, over 70% of schools saw higher meal participation, ensuring more kids had the energy to focus in class and succeed. Studies have also shown that universal free meals reduce childhood food insecurity while easing financial strain on families. By providing meals to all students across Hawai'i, we create a fairer, healthier learning environment where every keiki can thrive and reach their full potential.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:13:18 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelsey Amos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB1300 and urge the committee to expand its scope to not just the children of ALICE families but to all children.

Feeding our kids no matter how much money their parents make is something we should all be able to agree to.

We as adults need to step up to make this happen. We need to prioritize this by putting money behind it, and we need to make it as simple as possible by eliminating paperwork and requirements.

With federal uncertainties and destabilization, we need to put this basic precaution in place to make sure that the kids in most need will have access at least to breakfast and lunch every school day.

mahalo,

Kelsey

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:16:52 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alyssa Masuda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:18:20 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jayley Arikawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300 because I believe that free school meals can really help students do better in school and can also help ALICE families that don't qualify for free meals.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:19:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

aloha rep yamashita

i am a concerned high school student who is in support of sb1300 because i dont have money to put on my lunch card and i get hungry in class and have to wait till i get home until i can eat. Also can tell them make the school lunch better that fukka taste terrible

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:29:20 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brizen Wong-Schlemmer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300 because some of my friends and a lot of students go without food in school. This makes me feel bad that they have to starve because they do not qualify for free or reduced meals. Most of the time if I'm not that hungry then I offer my food to my friends who don't qualify. It makes me a little bit better that they have food to eat to continue on with their day. **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

Mahalo,**Brizen Wong-Schlemmer**

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:30:02 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Davis Mitchell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerend highschool student who is in support of SB1300 because many families in need dont qualify the current free and reduced lunch programs. Families are only eligable with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty level, but 300% or more that is needed to cover that actual amount needed. **I urge you to amend this bill to gaurentee that all students have access to free school meals, Ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:30:04 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thomas-Joe Yukio Onodera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who SUPPORTS SB1300 because many families in need don't qualify for the current free and reduced lunch program. I do not qualify for free and reduced lunch because both my parents work. But we are not loaded and don't have a lot of extra money, so if we can qualify after this bill passes, it would be a big help and would feed me and my brothers. I couldn't get pepperoni pizza once because I never had enough money. **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:30:46 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zion Madeyski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300 because I see my peers who are not motivated in class and always asking for food from the teacher's, student's, or other people around the school. thank you for taking the time to review

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:31:28 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keewe Shaw	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Will provide testimony in person.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:32:50 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christina Puakea Busby	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Christina Busby. I am a resident of Honolulu and a former public school teachers. I am submitting testimony in support of SB1300 with amendments.

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state. No child should go hungry. Two out of three struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry students would not be forced to skip meals. No child would have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account. Hawaii must lead by example and ensure that all public school students, regardless of income, have access to free meals. This is the pono thing to do and will provide the first basic step to greater student achievement: eliminating hunger and starvation.

Mahalo nui

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:33:56 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Darius Lee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned highschool student who is in support of SB1300 because of the amount of people/ my peers that I have heard complaining about wanting food and always asking the teachers for food to eat. Ive also seen the lunch ladys achually take away the food from my classmates because they didnt have enought money in there accounts for the food, leaving them embarrassed and without food to consume. No student should go through the day without proper nutrituion and being hungry. Hunger affects focus, engergy, and ones acedemic performance, making it harder for my classmates to suceed. Sometimes school meals are the only reliable source of food for some students. Denying them only worsens the effects. **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:35:46 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauren Pokipala	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

As a high school teacher I am in SUPPORT of SB1300 because it is ALL of our kuleana to take care of the keiki!!

If we want them to become the next leaders for Hawai`i, feeding them should be a priority.

If we want them to perform their best and produce exceptional work, feeding them is necessary.

Our kupuna taught us to take care of one another, this is what ALOHA is, so we need to make sure we feed our keiki because not all have access to food on a daily basis while in school. **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to FOOD, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

Mahalo,

Lauren Pokipala

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:35:50 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita, I am a concerned high school student who is in support of SB1300 because many families in need dont qualify for the current free and reduced lunch program. Two of my friends does not have enough money for lunch and can not eat lunch everyday. Thank you for reading this.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:36:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Belle Higa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep. Yamashita,

I am a concerned highschool student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300 because many families in need dont qualify for the current free and reduced. Its hard for some families especially because my dad "makes too much money" were not qualified to have free and reduce breakfast and lunch. My dad and mom barely have money because most of it goes to house bills and food to eat and drinks. With the prices raising for housing and food families struggle more to help their children get food in school or even school supplies and sports.

Mahalo, Belle Higa

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:36:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Koa Hawelu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300 because many families in need dont qualify for the current free and reduce program for school lunch , **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

Mahalo,

Koa Hawelu

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:36:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in support of sd1 1300 because don't qualify for the free redo lunch

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:37:10 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Taylor Li'i	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned High School student who is un SUPPORT of SB1300 because I don't qualify for free or reduced breakfast and lunch. It's only me and my mom, my mom works 2 jobs that put her yearly salary over the range that the DOE allows. We don't own housing we rent and rent in Hawai'i is already \$3k-\$7k on average for a decent 2 bedroom house or apartment. The survey they give to our parents only ask about their salary or how much they make a year, they don't ask for rent/owning, debt, and bills. Most of the time after my mom's paychecks we have around \$500 left to buy groceries, gas and necessities. For example I've seen and have in a position where the lunch ladies take away kids food. What's even worse is that they don't care or show sympathy they just give us an "idk how to help" look. I 100% support this bill and **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to FOOD, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

Mahalo,

Taylor Li'i

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:37:26 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300

Most Famililes in need dont qualify for the current free and reduced lunch. I witness a student getting his plate taking away just because he didn't have money on his account he looked so ready and happy to get food just for it to be taken away. I seen him sad and embarresed that he walked away empty handed while he watched other students walking away with plate of food. Most family couldn't afford it because they have to deal with bills first. I would want you to do something about this because if you want strong workers you would need to feed these students so the hunger doesn't get in there way of there brains and they couldn't focus.

Maholes

James Maeda

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:38:03 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jilian McFadden	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300 because it could help a lot of families financially. I see students that ask their friends or teachers if they have food because their parents didn't have enough money to put on their account. I've seen students get their meals taken away from them because they didn't have enough money on there account. I qualify for reduced lunch and my family and I can say that it does help us save money. It's not much money but with all of the high cost of living, every dollar counts. By passing this bill, you can help ensure that more students, regardless of their financial situation, have access to the resources they need to succeed.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jilian McFadden

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:38:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300 because in many families throughout the State of Hawaii the students do not qualify for free or reduced lunch even if they only make a few dollars more than the limit. Many students who do not qualify for free and reduced meals go home hungry or are hungry throughout the day. These students experience low motivation, lack of focus, and much more. Many of my peers ask one another if there are any snacks or food available. Many students are dealing with their own financial struggles, and they should not have to worry about where they will get their next meal. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to meals in schools to ensure that no child has to go hungry.

Mahalo

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:39:16 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nai Kalauokaaea	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita

I am concerned high school studen who is in support of SB1300 because feeding students in school is a good way to keep students focused and function properly in class. **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access too free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:39:16 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonelle Rezendes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned highschool student who is in support of SB1300 because in my experience my family was able to get free and reduced meals and it did help a lot with saving some money to pay our bills and what not. Recently my mom had gotten a new job where it pays a little more than the amount she used to get payed, so this has affected our ability to recieve free and reduced meals because we are over the qualifying amount. This now affects our financial problems and our physical health. I have two younger sibilings that aren't always able to get lunch sometimes because my mom has difficulty trying to put extra money into our accounts. She is a single mother who has to pay the bills and help provide for her three children, & doing everything by herself. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Mahalo,

Jonelle Rezendes

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:39:46 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned highschool student who is in SUPPORT of SB1300 because there are many families who are in need of free or reduced school lunch, but don't qualify for it. For example there are families who don't meet the eligibile requirements but still struggle to afford school lunch for their kids alongside their other bills and other financial issues. Students need to eat while they are in school to fuel their mind and body. I have whitnessed kids getting their lunch taken away because of insufficent money on their card. Students are also in debt from not being able to pay for lunch. I have friends who don't qualify for free and reduced meals because they are just a little above the strict qulaifying requirements and when they aren't able to get lunch, I share my lunch with them. Students don't deserve to starve a whole school day because they cant afford school lunch, I urge you to amend this bill to guarentee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry to school.

Mahalo,

Lyric

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:39:49 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lincoln Acevedo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita

I am a high school student who supports SB1300 because all students need to eat to have energy through out the day. When some kids don't have money for the food the staff will take it away. **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals to unsure that all students have energy through out the day.**

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:41:52 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rolly Gamez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Rep Yamashita,

I am a concerned high school student who is in support of SB1300 because if students don't get to eat or don't have anything in them, then it can cause them to not want to work or be sleepy. **I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.**

Mahalo,**Rolly**

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:47:38 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aubrey Nera-Carvalho	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Aubrey Nera-Carvalho, supports SB 1300. I believe that every keiki deserves meals while at school. Our keiki cannot focus on the materials or lessons being taught if they're too concerned with finding their next meal. Growing up, my parents did all they could to ensure we never experienced hardships. Although my siblings and I were very fortunate, I did witness classmates and neighborhood friends struggle with food insecurity. I had classmates ask to eat my leftovers and neighborhood friends ask my parents for food. They would say they were hungry. I gave my leftovers freely and my parents shared what we had. I wonder, now as an adult, how many of those childhood friends only ate at school? I hope the state will protect our youngest and most vulnerable population by expanding the food subsidy for Hawaii DOE keiki. Keeping our keiki nourished both physically and mentally. Mahalo.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:51:23 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keola Morgan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Just saying that our kids need to eat for their brain to work so it would be great if all children could have lunch everyday...

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:51:36 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melisa Orozco Vargas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Welina,

I am writing in support of SB 1300, which extends free school meals to all Hawai'i keiki. I write as a makua, kumu, and program coordinator and understand firsthand the effects of the availability and provision of food for keiki regardless of income and status. Children, who are dependent on adults for food, spend most of their day at a campus and do not have free access to places where they can get food. So often, I see keiki with food and when they do have it, the choices are not pono. Expanding school lunch programs to include free lunch and breakfast for all, means that keiki will be fed AND they will be fed well.

There are so many benefits attached to this accessibility matter, including job creation, sustainability with reduced packaging and lunch bags around, higher academic performance, mental health stability for kids, parents, and kumu, and it also creates more community. Plus, kids will perform better during afterschool programs, including athletics.

We all win when kids are fed!

I look forward to my kids going to school with ease and not having to wonder what--or if--they will be eating while at kula.

Mahalo!

Melisa

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 12:58:42 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kealii Pooloa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To our esteemed leaders in the Finance committee,

You hold the power RIGHT NOW, to make the decision that will greatly affect the lives of our very own keiki, here in Hawaii, and that is with FREE SCHOOL LUNCH FOR ALL KEIKI. It is absolutely deplorable that if a student does not have money on their account, they are denied food. As representatives of our communities here in Hawaii, you are well aware of the extreme financial struggle families face every single day. They make enough to barely scrape by. But it's not low enough to meet the strict income limits to receive any aid, such as SNAP or in this case, for the free and reduced price lunch. Which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level - far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. We all see that inflation keeps rising and rising, but the job income levels to match these heightened prices on EVERYTHING, from rent, to the cost of buying a home, to buying food, to buying gas, to buying everyday household goods is not rising to meet these inflated prices. A trip to Walmart yields over a \$100 every single time and that's just for basics. Faced with an extremist fascist regime in the Federal government right now, there are massive changes that are affecting families as we speak. And so far, none of these changes are positive changes to the average tax payer in America. I beg you, please act on the best interest of our local families in Hawaii.

Who suffers the most from situations they have no control over? Our keiki. Our innocent children who are the future, the next generation. They deserve the very best we can provide. Studies show that students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long term health issues. Research has also shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performances, including higher rates of academic success. For just 1% of the DOE budget, we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. It also takes away the terrible, horrible stigma that comes with not being able to eat while everyone else gets to eat. Can you imagine how that must feel?! That alone is as anti Hawaiian as you can get in Hawaii.

If we want Hawaii to be great, and wonderful, we must invest in our keiki. We must provide FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL KEIKI.

Mahalo nui for reading my testimony.

Keali'imakamana'onalani Po'olua

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:12:02 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marc-Anthony Gamboa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

People live above the poverty line yet still struggle with food insecurity. Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

- No Child Should Go Hungry – 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.
- No child would have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.
- Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.
- Increased Academic Performance – When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes.
- Improved Health Outcomes – Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

Let's protect our keiki's physical and mental health to ensure that they have a better chance at being successful in their educational endeavors. Please support this bill!

Mahalo,

Marc Gamboa

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:12:36 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ROY HANNU	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state. I see students in my classroom everyday that are hungry. Schools can and must be a place where students can feel safe and taken care of. If we can have fully fed students it will make a huge positive impact on them. Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.

Mahalo,

Roy Hannu

Mililani High School

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:24:26 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Henry Poorman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Representative Yamashita, Kyle T., Chair
Representative Takenouchi, Jenna, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Henry Poorman

Subject: Support of SB1300 SD1 HD1, Relating to School Meals

Hello! My name is Henry Poorman and I am a student at Kalaheo High School. I strongly support SB1300 SD1 and would like to ask you to vote yes on this bill. People in need are not invisible and need our help.

The ALICE program is a step in the right direction, but sometimes a step is not enough, we need a jump. For students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, their parents meet a money income of around 22,503-70,785 annually. But what about the students who make just above that? It is very important for children to eat lunch because eating food gives you the energy to do stuff, helps you grow the way you should, and can even keep you from getting sick, and taking these away from people can make them severely unhealthy. Many families struggle just above the federal poverty line, making it difficult for them to afford essential things like healthy and nutritious food. By providing financial assistance to the ALICE program, we can help bridge the gap for these families, allowing them to access healthy meals for their children. When children receive the support that they need, they are less likely to experience the effects of food insecurity, such as chronic illness and developmental delays. This investment not only benefits the individual children but also contributes to a healthier future workforce. By ensuring that all children have the opportunity to thrive, we promote social stability and equality for all.

If SB1300 SD1 HD1 is passed, I believe that this will better children's growth and even their school experiences. For many children school lunch is their only source of food and broadening the gap will benefit the starving families in need here in Hawai'i.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:28:15 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ruth Coules	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of SB1300 which expands access to a free school meals for Hawai'i's public school students. Native Hawaiian students make up the largest ethnic group in Hawai'i's public school system, and their families disproportionately experience economic hardship. The latter is most certainly a product of 100+ years of occupation. In the Hawaiian Kingdom all children had access to meals and that should continue. Indeed food insecurity is not an individual problem but a systematic failure. The consequences of hungry students are poor attention span, inability to concentrate, inability to work to their potential. This bill cannot resolve all issues around food insecurity but it can make an enormous difference in the daily lives of thousands of young students in Hawai'i. Please vote to pass this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Ruth Coules, Member and Programs Chair of Hui Aloha 'Aina O Honolulu

RE: SB1300

Members of the Committee,

My name is Jacie Miyashiro. I am a teacher at 'Aiea High School in the Central District on O'ahu. I am submitting testimony in support of SB1300, which seeks to expand free school meal coverage to a greater number of public school students in our state.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill to ease the financial burden on parents and caretakers of school children in Hawai'i. I hope that this bill can serve as a first step toward making school meals free for all students, regardless of their financial status. While I would like to see free meals for all of our students, expanding the coverage to include a wider range of students would definitely provide some relief for families. Due to our high cost of living in Hawai'i, we know that many people are working full-time hours and still have difficulty earning enough to provide for their basic needs. For my whole teaching career, I have worked at a Title I school, and many of my students have had to get jobs in order to help provide for their families. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this problem and drove even more students to need to work long hours into the night. I have had many students showing up to school absolutely exhausted because they were up late working the night before. At other times, I have had students falling asleep in class because they are hungry and cannot focus while working through their hunger and the heat of my non-air-conditioned classroom. In both situations, having a free meal option at school would have helped to ease some of this burden. Kids cannot learn when they are hungry. If we are going to legally require that students attend school all day, then we must, at the bare minimum, make sure they are able to eat. Please help to expand access to free school meals so that our students can be nourished in both body and mind.

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

Respectfully,

Jacie Miyashiro, NBCT

English Language Arts Teacher, 'Aiea High School

To: Kyle Yamashita
Vice Chairperson Jenna Takenouchi
Members of the FIN Committee

From: Nyla B.

Subject: Support of Senate Bill SB1300, RELATING TO THE EDUCATION

Aloha. I would like to ask for your support for Senate Bill 1300. I strongly believe that this bill is important as school meals for students should be available to everyone including those who struggle financially. While the free and reduced meal programs that are already established do good work in providing those meals to those who qualify, they are also very restrictive for those in need who do not qualify, but still need the assistance. Living in Hawai'i means that even if your family is middle class, it remains a struggle to afford the cost of living. A majority of families living here fall short of middle class, yet not short enough to qualify for these programs. This bill will ensure that these ALICE families are able to make ends meet while not having to worry about their children having meals to eat at school. That's what it's all about, giving children the option to eat regardless of monetary circumstances. By implementing this program, we are investing in the future of our students and in their wellbeing.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:33:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashton C Awaya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chairperson: Yamashita, Kyle T.**Vice-Chairperson: Takenouchi, Jenna****Position: Support of SB1300****Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and House Members of the Finance Committee,**

My name is Ashton, and I am a senior at Kalaheo High School. I wanted to express my strong support for SB1300, which addresses the critical issue of food insecurity among Hawaii’s working families and students. This bill is a vital step toward ensuring that all students, regardless of their family’s economic circumstances, have access to nutritious meals essential for their academic success, physical development, and overall well-being.

The findings in this bill highlight the harsh realities faced by many families in our state. With 29% of households classified as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) and 46% of these households experiencing consistent food insecurity, it is clear that too many of our neighbors are struggling to make ends meet. For many students, school meals are their only reliable source of food. By subsidizing meal costs for ALICE households and providing free or reduced-price meals to students in need, SB1300 directly addresses this crisis and offers a lifeline to families who are working hard but still falling behind.

This bill is not just about food—it’s about opportunity. When students have access to healthy meals, they are better equipped to focus on their education, participate in extracurricular activities, and pursue their dreams. By investing in meal subsidies, we are investing in the future of Hawaii’s keiki and ensuring that no child is held back by hunger.

I urge you to vote YES on SB1300 and pass this bill. Let's take meaningful action to support our working families, uplift our students, and build a stronger, healthier Hawaii for generations to come.

Mahalo for your consideration and your commitment to the well-being of our community.

Sincerely,

Ashton Awaya

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:39:46 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Hawaii is in desperate need to improve the education and learning abilities among our students. Many families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. This is especially true among Hawaii resident families. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that **all students** have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:40:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha my name is Monica Erlenbach and I have first hand the devastation of hunger and its direct effect it has on our Keiki. I volunteered during lunch and recess at my daughter's school, and I wish every politician would do the same. Kids are not learning if they are hungry. They act up even more so during recess because, WHO WOULDN'T? Empty tummies in schools are such a shame when you have the ability to help OUR MOST VULNERABLE KEIKI. Food security at school should be a human right. We are a moment in time where parents are struggling to afford the bare minimum. Feed all the Keiki and watch test scores go up and crime rates go down. Struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need. Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:49:37 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
gayle goodman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please dont let the children go hungry.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:50:26 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hali'a	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Hali'a. I go to Castle highschool and I'm in support of SB1300 because many families in need don't qualify for the current free and reduced lunch program. Families are only eligible if their incomes are below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, but 300% or more is needed to make ends meet. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to food, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:52:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chloe Kumai-Kahalewai	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Chloe Kumai - Kahalewai and I am a student at Castle high school, Im insupport of Sb1300 because I have a friend that always ask me to buy them lunch because their parents aren't able to put money on their account.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 1:57:03 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kekuawela Tauala	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai, my name is Kekuawela Tauala. I support SB1300 SD1 but ask that there is an ammendment made where we can include all meals to be made free for all students regardless of their income. It is crucial we nurture and feed all keiki that are attending school. Mahalo for your consideration.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:05:41 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lilia Mathias-Schwenke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to express my SUPPORT of SB1300 because we should not have to struggle with finding a meal in school. Many of my classmates has asked me for food because they do not have enough money on their accounts. We must prioritize the nutritional needs and academic success of all Hawai'i's students.

Mahalo Nui!

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:07:41 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Bellamy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. For just 1% of the DOE budget we can ensure every student gets the meals they need.

Please amend this bill to provide funding to make school meals free for all students in our state.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:10:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Faith Reed	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Faith Reed and I'm a student at Castle High School. I am in support of SB1300 because many families in need don't qualify for the current free and reduced meal program. Families are only eligible with incomes below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, but 300% or more is needed to make ends meet. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to FOOD, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

Mahalo

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:13:45 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alfred Medeiros	Kuleana Ka 'Aina	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou 'O Alfred Keaka Hiona Medeiros kou inoa no Wai'anae mai au...mahalo nui for the time to speak in support of SB1300 as I believe all students regardless of their families income, should be eating breakfast, lunch, etc. meals at school for FREE! I would like to ask that amendments be made to include FREE MEALS for all keiki, no matter the income of their parents or guardians. If you've been to schools in Hawai'i, you'll notice the meals aren't good at the moment and DOE isn't providing nutritional healthy or quality meals in any way...but, those meals are the only meals for many keiki in Hawai'i, as there's many that aren't eating at home and regardless if any politicians may believe that or not, it's the truth and reality of how it is in Hawai'i and it's only getting worse in this overpriced paradise we call home. As a farmer I'd love to help provide more nutritional 'Āina based meals for our keiki and we can discuss that another time. But what I'd like to say in closing, is...if we can pay taxes to feed inmates and those incarcerated, we should've been doing the same for our keiki. So please support and pass SB1300 and let's help feed our keiki throughout ko Hawai'i pae 'Āina. Mahalo nui oukou e mālama pono.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:33:40 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Kerber	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Hawaii Legislators,

I want to write to you today in support of SB1300. We agree that all children have the right to an education, and without proper nutrition many will face a disadvantage at school as they pursue that education that is their right. Please help ensure that Hawai'i's children can focus on learning and growing by passing this measure and providing free lunch for all students.

Mahalo,

Mary Kerber

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:37:18 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Moore	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sarah Moore and I strongly support SB1300 SD1 HD. Please consider amending this bill to include free meals for ALL keiki. I believe you all entered public service to help support your communities and this is your chance to do exactly that. Please consider these factors:

- No Child Should Go Hungry – 2 out of 3 struggling families are not eligible for free school meals. This bill would ensure that anybody can eat for free and our hungry keiki would not be forced to skip meals.
- No child would have the stigma of having to return a meal because of no money in their school food account.
- Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day, so that they are ready to learn.
- Increased Academic Performance – When universal free school meals has been implemented elsewhere, student test scores rose the equivalent of 6 additional weeks of school. A 1% increase in the Department of Education budget can provide a 15% increase in outcomes.
- Improved Health Outcomes – Hungry students are at much higher risks for stress, depression and chronic disease. Investing in nutritious food for our keiki will result in lifelong benefits to their health.

Please support our keiki and community by including free meals for all keiki, then passing SB1300 SD1 HD1.

Mahalo,
Sarah Moore
Mother, Community Member, Voter

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:37:54 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear Chair Yamashita and Vice Chair Takenouchi and members of the finance committee,

As a teacher in a Title I school, I strongly support this bill. Students should be provided meals if we require them to be in school. If we did not, most of them would show up with a bag of Takis or a can of Pringles. Help us do better!

Mahalo,

Kori Oros

Elementary Teacher

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:41:23 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Finance Committee,

I am in SUPPORT of this bill.

I am a public school teacher in a Title I school. Students should be required with meals if they are required to be in school. Most of the students who come to school either do not eat breakfast, and having unhealthy, unnutritious snacks to eat. It is important to have nutritious meals for ALICE AND LOW income students. Hungry students cannot focus on learning. All children deserve to be fed during the school day so they are ready to learn. Hungry students at much higher risks for stress, depression, and disease.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:43:17 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannon Bragg	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Finance Committee,

As a teacher in a title 1 school, I strongly support this bill. No child should go without meals. Children who's families can't afford to buy school lunch will come to school with homelunches that have very little nutritional value. Sometimes their lunch only contains snacks like, chips, cookies, etc. When the students are hungry they have a hard time concentrating on learning. I also feel like no student should be turned away or have their lunch taken away for insufficient funds. It's embarrassing for the child and could destroy their self esteem. We need to do better for our keiki. They are our future leaders.

Mahalo,

Shannon Bragg

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 2:45:26 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kiana Wong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Finance Committee,

As a teacher at a Title I school, I strongly support this bill. Some students would not eat a proper nutritious meal if it were not for the school lunches. Students would have a hard time focusing on learning without food and I don't think any child deserves to be hungry or distracted. I think every child should be able to come to school knowing they will be able to eat a healthy delicious meal.

Thank you for your consideration!

Kiana, teacher at Kipapa Elementary

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 3:26:44 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John A. H. Tomoso	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

03-31-25

RE: SB1300 SD1 HD1

Aloha,

For many of our 'ohana, the cost of school meals is a barrier to accessing the balanced diet their children need. Hunger and inadequate nutrition are associated with stress, depression, and chronic disease. Two out of three struggling families are ineligible for free school meals. Universal free school meals can provide meals to students who may otherwise not eat at all.

Not only are many of our keiki not assured of having daily food, but school test scores are low. Schools that have implemented free school meals saw their Math and English test scores increase at a rate equivalent to attending six additional weeks of school. While six additional weeks of school would cost Hawai'i \$300 million annually, universal free school meals would cost Hawai'i only \$25 million annually.

Please support and pass this Bill.

Mahalo

John A H Tomso+, MSW, ACSW

51 Ku'ula St., Kahului, Maui, HI 96732-2906

john.a.h.tomoso@gmail.com

808-280-1749

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 3:55:11 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Many struggling families do not meet the strict income limits for free and reduced-price lunch, which are capped at 185% of the Federal Poverty Level—far below the 300% or more that is actually needed to cover basic living expenses. Students who experience hunger face greater risks of stress, depression, and long-term health issues. Research has shown that providing free school meals leads to improved academic performance, including higher test scores. I urge you to amend this bill to guarantee that all students have access to free school meals, ensuring no child goes hungry at school.

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 4:14:39 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
melissa tomlinson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha nui,

Food for children is an automatic yes from me everytime. I agree with many others that this should be expanded upon and an amendment added for it to be free school meals for all keiki. I personally feel free school meals should be for all children to be provided at every grade level. Making sure our communities our fed proper nutrition will only allow everyone more opportunities to prosper beyond subsitance. It really seems like a great path forward and I hope you all agree. Please support this Bill and please add an amendment to expand free meals to all keiki.

mahalo

melissa tomlinson

SB-1300-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 4:40:37 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/1/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason Monson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Jason Monson and I'm writing as a long-time resident of Hawaii and a parent who has raised kids in our public schools. I'm writing to support SB1300, which would give more students access to free school meals by expanding the income eligibility to families earning up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level. This bill would make a real difference for so many families in our community.

The cost of living in Hawaii is no secret—it's one of the highest in the nation. Even families with both parents working full-time struggle to cover basic needs like rent, food, and childcare. I've seen firsthand how this impacts our kids. Too many of them come to school hungry because their parents make just a little too much to qualify for free meals but still can't afford to buy lunch every day. Hunger doesn't just affect their health—it affects how they learn, focus, and thrive.

By making school meals available to more students, SB1300 could help ease some of that burden. It's hard enough being a parent in Hawaii without worrying if your child is going to feel left out or embarrassed because they can't afford lunch. This bill would not only put food on the table but also give families some much-needed breathing room in their budgets.

When kids have access to healthy meals, they can focus on being kids—learning, playing, and growing. I truly believe this is something we owe to every child in Hawaii. Please support SB1300 and help ensure that no student in our schools goes hungry.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jason Monson