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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE BOARD OF
EDUCATION FINANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, JUNE 21, 2016

RE: AGENDA ITEM IV, A (HEAT ABATEMENT)

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Chun and Members of the Board:

During his 2016 State of the State address, Gov. David Ige called for cooling at least 1,000 classrooms within the next two years. While previous Hawai'i State Department of Education (DOE) estimates put the cost of comprehensive air conditioning at \$1.5 billion, that figure had fallen, this year, as investments in experiments with renewable energy technology proved fruitful. In conversations with photovoltaic companies, advocates for cool schools learned that employing off-grid DC-powered air conditioners, operated from photovoltaic modules that store energy in power-saving batteries, could cost between \$20,000 per classroom or less, a savings of approximately 80 percent from earlier projections.

This April, NextEra Energy Hawai'i donated 33 hybrid solar air-conditioning units to Kaunakakai Elementary and Kilohana Elementary schools on Moloka'i. Installation of the devices doubled the amount of air conditioning at Kaunakakai Elementary, with 14 classrooms benefiting from the units. Kilohana Elementary, for its part, had one classroom with air conditioning prior to the additional four units given by NextEra. Most importantly, Greenpath Technologies Inc., a Honolulu-based renewable energy company, performed the installations at a cost of \$20,000 per classroom, verifying that classroom cooling could be accomplished at significant cost savings.

Accordingly, HSTA and the DOE supported, and lawmakers subsequently passed, legislation providing \$100 million in general funds for classroom cooling during the 2016 legislative session. Specifically, policymakers used general funds for heat

abatement upgrades to: 1) maximize flexibility in managing heat abatement funds; 2) preclude the need for annual debt service payments for taxpayers already paying a monthly green infrastructure fees on their electricity bills; and 3) ensure funds are immediately available for departmental use. In enacting Senate Bill 3126 (now known as Act 47), policymakers stated in the measure's preamble that "there is a need to install air conditioning and other heat abatement equipment in public school classrooms to preserve and promote the health and safety of students and teachers, and to foster a better and more comfortable and productive learning environment."

Teachers, students, and parents alike were understandably excited when Gov. Ige signed Act 47 into law. We were disappointed to learn that companies have increased the price of installing PV-powered air conditioning, with the DOE receiving preliminary estimates as high as \$135,000 per classroom during its most recent round of contract bidding. As Dann Carlson, Assistant Superintendent for Office of School Facilities and Support Services, recently noted in a *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* editorial, this is unacceptable. Greenlighting such bids would prevent the department from meeting Gov. Ige's 1,000 classroom goal, drastically reducing the number of schools served by the DOE's ongoing heat abatement program. And it must be stressed, again, that **this comes after the same contractors suggested that they could install solar air conditioners for much less.**

It's getting hotter in Hawai'i. According to the National Weather Service, our island home set over 50 high temperature records last summer, with oppressive heat and humidity lingering well into fall. Kalaheo High School science teacher Micah Pregitzer recorded temperatures as high as 108 degrees inside his classroom last August, telling reporters, "You're dripping in sweat when you're just sitting there grading papers by yourself with no students in the room. You get the room packed with 36, 38, sometimes 40 students, and it just boosts that temperature up even higher." As the heat in our classrooms rises to dangerous levels for our teachers and students, so must the heat be turned up on contractors to produce acceptable bids and publicly justify their new, unfeasible estimates.

HSTA supports the DOE in soliciting more bids for air conditioner installation. If we return to the \$100,000+ per classroom cost quote, the real losers will be our students. We urge the DOE, this Board, and our community to do what is right for our keiki. We must not hastily adopt solutions that will deny thousands of children a constructive learning environment and jeopardize their well-being. We must, instead, urge private contractors turn their expertise into *reasonable* bids to make our schools as cool as the dreams to which our children aspire.