

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jiyon Walker

Agenda Item

II. Approval of meeting minutes of December 12, 2024, Finance and Infrastructure Committee meeting

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose raising cost of school lunches; my daughter's in middle school, and the current cost of school lunches prevents some of her classmates from eating lunch daily.□

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sabrina Glidden

Agenda Item

III. Update on Department of Education's capital improvement projects budget request for fiscal biennium 2025-27

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Blade Rickard

Agenda Item

III. Update on Department of Education's capital improvement projects budget request for fiscal biennium 2025-27

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,

I am a student from a DOE high school and am writing to OPPOSE this bill because there is families that struggle just paying the amount that is given now and raising could mean more kids apart of those families not being fed and instead of increasing the amount of the food they pay they should be decreasing the amount to an affordable amount.

Thank you for reading this statement.

Susan Pcola-Davisheittee

Board of Education January 16, 2025

FIC Meeting

III. CIP

As I watched the Committee Meetings at the Capital, in particular the House Committee on Education, the new process of defining the 11 buckets makes sense. Implementing a different way of doing things can sometimes cause confusion. Increasing communication regarding this agenda item needs to be vigilant.

The legislature whether it be the education committees, Finance or WAM need to allow the department to implement as described.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Michelle Kanehe-Hudson

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha, I oppose the school meal increase. I would like to see free meals provided in schools and more while, fresh foods.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lauren Guest

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Melody Halzel

Organization

UH Manoa, Public Health

Position/Title

Graduate Assistant

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose the bill that proposes to increase the cost for school lunches for children. Food and having access to nutritious lunch options is a human right, and our students and community deserve the right to affordable, healthy school lunches. The increased cost will be a high burden for families who already are struggling with the high costs of living, food, and overall expenses at this time. Therefore I do NOT support this proposal.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Tuia'ana Scanlan

Organization

IATSE 665

Position/Title

President

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

My name is Tuia'ana Scanlan, President of IATSE Local 665. Local 665 opposes increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

In Solidarity,

Tuia'ana Scanlan

President, IATSE 665

IATSE International Trustee

He/him/his

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Aukele Badajos

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working 'ohana, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all, not just some schools. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Chris Yim

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Brooke Akaji

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I am in opposition of increasing school meal prices. 1st of all- I do not qualify for food stamps or free lunches for my children and food in general already costs a lot for the families in Hawaii. 2nd- school lunches per my children are not worth \$4.75- they are served expired/warm milk, rotten fruits, hard rice and small portions. I understand that I can send my children with home lunch, but that takes a lot of time and planning that I don't have. 3rd- All children in Hawaii should receive free school lunches, in my opinion. Adequate nutritional meals for children are important for their health, growth, and learning. Mahalo for reading.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Cleo Brown

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

With the high inflation, increasing food costs and high gasoline prices, many families are struggling to put food on the table and find suitable housing. This is not the time or conditions to increase food and educational costs for our children. I propose all meals for students be free.



P.O. Box 392, Kilauea, Kauai, HI, 96754

PHONE: (808) 212-4765 • FAX: (808) 828-2027 • E-MAIL: bbrody1@hawaii.rr.com • WEB SITE: www.getfitkauai.com

Testimony Opposing the Proposed Increase in School Meal Costs

Aloha Chair and Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to strongly oppose the proposed increase in school meal prices for the 2024-2025 school year and beyond. The Department of Education's plan to nearly double the cost of school lunches over the next four years will place a significant financial burden on working families in Hawai'i, many of whom are already struggling with the state's high cost of living.

Hawai'i's working families cannot afford to pay nearly \$5 for a school lunch. This increase will only exacerbate the already difficult choices parents must make between paying for basic necessities like rent, utilities, and groceries or providing adequate meals for their children. For families already living paycheck to paycheck, this additional cost could lead to tough sacrifices that further deepen their financial strain.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, I urge the Department of Education to consider a more equitable solution: implementing free school meals for all students. Studies have shown that when schools provide free meals to all students, it has a positive impact on academic performance. In fact, schools that have implemented free school meal programs have seen gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of schooling. This is a proven investment in our children's future that pays dividends in both their education and their overall well-being.

The decision to raise meal prices fails to acknowledge the broader context of the financial hardships many families face and the proven benefits of providing free meals for all. Ensuring that all students have access to nutritious meals without the barrier of cost would create a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all.

I strongly urge the Board of Education to reconsider the proposed price increases and instead advocate for the implementation of free school meals for all students.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Bev Brody

Get Fit Kauai – Director

H.E.A.L. (Healthy Eating Active Living)
Community Coalition of Kauai County
(808) 212-4765

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

angelina kays

Organization

Malama Pono Health Services

Position/Title

Tobacco Treatment Specialist

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

School Meals should be given to students free of charge. There are so many families who can not afford to pay for school lunch due to outrageous cost of living prices in Hawai'i surely the government can find a way to provide sustenance to the children. School should be a place that provides the necessities for the students to succeed. It is absolutely ridiculous that some children may have to go without and DO currently go without and now they want to RAISE the price of the lunch? I do not in any way support this. Find the money to feed the children rather than spending it on attracting tourists to our islands. The budget for that must be pretty high!!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Uyen Truong

Organization

NA

Position/Title

NA

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system.
This would be a financial burden for my family.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Patricia Blair

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose any increase to school lunch fees. Children learn better fed nutritional food. Any increase cost might cause a child not to eat.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

david derauf

Organization

KKV

Position/Title

CEO

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha:

A healthy School lunch is the only solid meal for many of my patients. Raising the cost for low income and Alice families should not be on the table.. Instead, DOE should provide FREE school meals to all. Learning and healthy eating go hand in hand. The evidence is abundant.

Please reconsider ANY plans to raise meal costs for our keiki.

Mahalo for your consideration.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Rona Mangayayam

Organization

Kokua Kalihi Valley

Position/Title

Youth Services Director

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

As a person working directly with working class families, I strongly oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation. I know a lot of families who are already struggling to pay the current price for school meals, to increase would mean additional burden to families many of them already working 2-3 jobs just to get by.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Roxann Rowe

Organization

Department of Veterans Affairs

Position/Title

APRN

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

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Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Roxann Rowe, APRN

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Belia Paul

Organization

A Honu Space

Position/Title

Owner

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

AT LEAST KEEP THE PRICE THE SAME!

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should work with existing local food supplies to provide healthy, nutritious, meals made from our own food sources.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Susan Marshall

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

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January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jodi Robinson

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Board of Education members,

I am in strong opposition to the proposed increased cost for student meals. As a student who grew up in Hawai'i's public school system, I know how important access was to an affordable lunch was for my family. I strongly oppose increasing these costs for Hawai'i's working families who are already struggling with the high cost of living. Access to nutritious meals at school are foundational to learning and development in children.

I have never testified on a Board of Education matter before, but this is such a disappointing proposal from our educational system leaders.

Mahalo for your consideration of my testimony in opposition.

Aloha,

Jodi Robinson,
Honolulu, Hawai'i

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jordan Smith

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Rialyn Menor

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki. Our keiki is the future.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Joslynn Young

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Inflation and the cost of living is putting a strain on the finances of families in Hawaii. Bad enough is the fact that the cost to purchase or rent a home in Hawaii has significantly increased over the past few years making it harder for families to afford a roof over their heads. Although I no longer have school aged children in my home, knowing that some children barely eat over the summer let alone have a good night's meal at the end of the day, it's difficult for me to even fathom what additional circumstances they will face if the cost of school lunch increases. Therefore, I am asking that the price of school lunch not increase so as not to put additional strain and hardship on a child's everyday life.

Thank You

Joslynn

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Angela Kang

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs. This is an issue regarding food security for the most at-risk keiki of Hawai'i.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school. As well, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs reflects that when basic physical needs, like food, are not available, learning becomes extremely difficult.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Pearl Sheck

Organization

Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services

Position/Title

Public Housing Coordinator

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Support

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the nation's highest living costs. Our children are the future of our island, and it is the leader's responsibility to protect our island's future. I understand it may be just a .25 cent raise, but for some families, that .25 is a portion of the funds allocated for utility, rent, or even food for the family for the entire month. So I OPPOSE the increase in the price of school meals for our school system.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Shannara Maneafaiga

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

The proposed increase in cost of meals for our students is too high. Families are already struggling to put food on the table at home so imagine the additional strain it will cause to have the price of school meals almost double. Multiply that by 2 for families like mine who have their children eat breakfast and lunch in school. Then multiply that AGAIN by the number of children each family has enrolled in DOE schools. It's too much to ask for. Especially from a state that tops the nation with our high cost of living.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Dulce Belen

Organization

Parent of Student, Mililani HS

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Testimony Against the Increase in School Meal Prices

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed increase in school meal prices, as outlined in the Department's recommendation. While I understand the necessity to address rising food and operational costs, the timing and scale of this increase will have significant and detrimental impacts on our students and families.

Equity Concerns

The proposed increase may disproportionately affect low- and middle-income families who do not qualify for assistance but still face financial difficulties. These families often fall into a gap where they earn just enough not to qualify for free or reduced-price meals, yet still struggle to afford daily necessities. As a result, the increase in meal prices would add another layer of financial stress, potentially pushing these families into deeper economic hardship. The equity implications of this decision cannot be overstated, as it creates an additional barrier for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access nutritious meals, thereby widening the gap between socio-economic groups.

Financial Burden on Families

Increasing school meal prices will impose an additional financial burden on families, many of whom are already struggling with the high cost of living. This burden is particularly acute for families with multiple children, who will see their expenses rise substantially. This added financial pressure could lead to difficult choices between providing essential needs and paying for school meals.

Decreased Student Participation

Higher meal prices are likely to lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program. This reduction in participation could have several negative consequences. First, fewer students may have access to nutritious meals during the school day, which are essential for their physical and cognitive development. Second, decreased participation could reduce overall program revenue, creating a vicious cycle of rising costs and declining enrollment.

Impact on Student Nutrition and Health

Nutritious meals are a cornerstone of student health and academic success. By increasing meal prices, we risk denying students access to these important resources. Students who do not participate in the school meal program may turn to less nutritious, more affordable alternatives, which can negatively impact their health and academic performance.

01/17/2025

Potential for Increased Meal Debt

The increase in meal prices could also lead to a rise in negative balances and lunch loans, creating financial strain for both families and the school district. This situation may necessitate revisions to policies managing meal debt, adding further administrative challenges and costs.

Conclusion

Maintaining a high-quality meal program is essential for student health, learning, and overall well-being. However, the proposed increase in meal prices will have far-reaching negative consequences that outweigh the potential benefits. I urge the Board to reconsider this recommendation and explore alternative solutions that do not place undue financial strain on our families and jeopardize the health and academic success of our students.

Thank you for your consideration.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kyra Alcoran

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Mahalo,
Kyra Alcoran

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Paula Morelli

Organization

Hawaii Prison Reform Hui

Position/Title

Community advocate

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Hawai'i State Board of Education

POB 2360

Honolulu, Hawaii 96804 January 13, 2025

Dear Hawaii State Board of Education:

Please, do not increase the cost of student school lunches. Instead, the State of Hawai'i should provide free school lunches and free transportation to school. Providing free public-school lunches and transportation for students who cannot afford them is essential for promoting equity, ensuring academic success, and supporting broader societal benefits. Spending tax dollars upstream in prevention will decrease the costs involved in poor health, poverty, crime, and incarceration to name a few.

BoE can actively promote equity and equal opportunity by:

-> Providing access to Basic Needs: Students from low-income families may struggle to afford meals or transportation, which creates barriers to learning. Free lunches and transportation ensure that all students have equal access to education. For many students, school lunch may be their only reliable, nutritious meal of the day. This is critical for their physical and mental development.

-> Reducing Stigma: Universal access to free lunches and transportation eliminates the social stigma often associated with poverty, fostering a sense of belonging and dignity.

-> Supporting Academic Success: Hunger can severely impair a student's ability to concentrate and perform well in school. Providing nutritious meals ensures students are ready to learn.

-> Reducing Absenteeism: Free transportation ensures students can attend school consistently, regardless of their family's financial situation or access to reliable transportation.

-> Relieving Financial Pressure: For families living paycheck-to-paycheck, the cost of school lunches and transportation can be significant. Free access eases this burden and allows families to allocate resources to other necessities.

-> Ensuring educational Access: Education is one of the most effective tools for breaking the cycle of poverty. Ensuring students have the resources they need to attend and thrive in school sets them up for future success.

-> Promoting a Just and Inclusive Society: By prioritizing the well-being of children, society makes a long-term investment in a more educated, healthy, and productive population.

DoE has a moral responsibility to ensure that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to education and basic needs by executing policies which reflect the values of fairness and compassion.

Free public-school lunches and transportation are fundamental to building a more equitable, inclusive, and prosperous society.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula T. Morelli, MSW, PhD

01/17/2025

808 3724578 1511 Ehupua Place
Honolulu, HI 96821 morelli@hawaii.edu

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Marissa Baligad Orian

Organization

Concerned parent

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I'm opposed to the increase in student lunch fees. It is already financially difficult with rising housing costs, insurances, and cost of living in Hawaii. It would be extremely challenging to ensure our students have enough funds to eat, during school.

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January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Forrest Batz

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Hawaii State Board of Education,

I am writing to ask the Board to reconsider it's position on school meals pricing.

Increasing the price of school meals for our school system would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Respectfully,

Forrest Batz
Keaau, HI

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Holland Henderson

Organization

Doe

Position/Title

Teacher

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Students can barely afford to eat during the day, and many do not meet the criteria for free and reduced lunch. This does not mean they have the money to send their kids to school with enough lunch money, especially larger families. They are scraping by and often the older children skip lunch so the younger kids can buy lunch. Raising the price of lunches is cruel and woefully out of touch. Rent is higher, utilities are higher, groceries are higher, and wages are stagnant. The only relief most families have is the paltry school breakfast or lunch kids get during weekdays. I teach classes at the end of the day and the kids are hungry. It's a disgrace that the most expensive state in the nation, in the richest nation in the world has hungry kids! They cannot learn if they haven't had something to eat, especially considering their growing metabolisms and active lifestyles. We need free lunch, not unaffordable lunch! Most developed nations that care about education have free or extremely inexpensive lunch for all. Please do not worsen our system raising lunch cost even higher. You're literally going to starve our youth.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Brittany Nakawatase

Organization

Castle High School

Position/Title

Teacher

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

This change would have a dramatic impact on Hawai'i's working families, who are already struggling with our state's high cost of living. Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should support the implementation of free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Yuet Mui Kong

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would increase financial burden for the low income families that are already struggling with the high living cost in Hawaii. Food is basic need and essential element for the students to learn and strive, mentally and physically. Please do not increase the basic costs for those families.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Keahi Coria

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

To the Board of Education,

My name is Keahi Coria, and I am a Special Education teacher at Castle High School. I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed increase in school meal prices. Nearly doubling the cost of school lunches over the next four years, as proposed, will have a devastating impact on the students and families I serve.

I witness firsthand the struggles many of my students face due to economic hardship. Many families in our community are already grappling with Hawaii's high cost of living, and this proposed price hike will only exacerbate their financial burdens. For many students, school meals are their primary source of nutritious food during the school day. Increasing the cost of these meals will undoubtedly lead to increased food insecurity among our student population.

As an educator, I understand the critical link between nutrition and academic performance. Students who are hungry struggle to focus, learn, and retain information. They are more likely to experience behavioral issues, absenteeism, and lower academic achievement. The proposed price increases will undermine our efforts to provide a quality education for all students.

The research is clear: providing free school meals for all students has significant positive impacts. Studies have demonstrated that schools implementing universal free meals see gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school. This translates to real, tangible improvements in student learning and outcomes. Instead of raising prices and further burdening struggling families, the Department of Education should be prioritizing the implementation of free school meals for all. This is an investment in our children's future and a proven strategy for improving educational outcomes.

Raising the price of school meals is a step in the wrong direction. It will create additional barriers for our most vulnerable students and negatively impact their academic success. I urge the Board of Education to reject this proposal and instead advocate for the implementation of free school meals for all students in Hawaii. This is a matter of equity, student well-being, and educational excellence.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Keahi Coria

Special Education Teacher

Castle High School

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Alice Taira

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Maie Iosia

Organization

Kokua Kalihi Valley

Position/Title

Community Case Manager

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha!

On behalf of all the keiki currently attending school, whether public or private, I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be an additional financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation!

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs. It is truly discouraging to see that the basic needs of a little human come with a price let alone a soon to be heightened one! Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all! Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Mahalo for your time and consideration...

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Alex Narrajos

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I STRONGLY oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. Additionally a staggering 30% of Hawai'i's residents are food insecure, according to the Hawai'i Food Bank's 2023 report.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025
Finance and Infrastructure Committee



Dear Chair Kuraya and Members of the Committee,

The Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance has comments regarding the “Fees for Student Activities, Summer School, School Meals, and Bus Transportation” agenda item:

The Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance (HAA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed agenda item. HAA is a network of individuals and organizations dedicated to advancing sustainable, high-quality afterschool, summer learning, and community school programs that support improved academic, social, emotional, and physical outcomes for children and families across Hawai'i.

The Importance of Summer Learning Programs

Summer learning programs play a critical role in youth development and success. These programs provide opportunities for students to connect with peers and caring adults while accelerating their social, emotional, and academic growth. For many families, summer programs are a lifeline—keeping children safe, healthy, active, and engaged in learning while enabling parents to work.

Without accessible summer learning opportunities, students often experience learning loss, commonly referred to as the “summer slide.” Research highlights three critical findings about this phenomenon:

1. On average, students' achievement scores decline over summer vacation by approximately one month of school-year learning.
2. Declines are sharper in math compared to reading.
3. The extent of loss increases at higher grade levels.

The Financial Impact of Increased Fees

When ESSER funds were available from 2020 to 2024, most summer programs were free, benefiting families. However, increasing fees from \$0 to \$260 will impose a significant financial burden on countless families. Without affordable summer programs, many families face limited options, exacerbating existing inequities and restricting opportunities for children to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Recommendations to Ensure Equity

To address these challenges, we propose the following measures:

1. Waive summer program fees for students eligible for free and reduced-price school lunches.
2. Implement a sliding fee scale based on family income.

3. Introduce a sliding fee scale based on the number of children in the family attending summer programs.

These recommendations will help ensure equitable access to summer programs while alleviating financial burdens on families across Hawai'i.

Conclusion

The Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance respectfully urges the committee to incorporate these recommendations. By doing so, we can make a meaningful difference for Hawai'i's families, ensuring that all children—regardless of socioeconomic status—have access to the resources they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

Sincerely,

Paula Adams
Executive Director
Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance
hawaii afterschool@gmail.com
www.hawaii afterschoolalliance.org

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Nadia Hussain

Organization

Malama I Ke Ola Community Clinic of Maui

Position/Title

Registered Dietitian - Nutritionist

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

As a nutritionist working with 90% and more of Medicaid holding patients who are from low income homes, I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation. This will also significantly worsen keiki's health and increase the rates of diabetes and obesity since food is very expensive, especially fresh fruit, vegetables, whole grains that are vital for good health but unfortunately most of these families cannot afford.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school. Keiki who have access to well balanced meals at school also have better health outcomes and are less at risk for chronic diseases.

Please DO NOT increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to END HUNGER for our keiki.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sarah Veloz

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Families will struggle tremendously with the increase of price of school meals. As a teacher whose salary does not even get a pay increase to match inflation, I can't imagine how other families in similar situations or financial distress will feel- and I don't even have children.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Stacie Hiwatashi

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. As a single mom, who does not qualify for SNAP (because I make just a little over the maximum dollar amount to qualify), this would be a financial burden for my working family, as I am raising 2 teenage daughters (both in high school), and I receive very little child support from their father [only \$360.50 per child per month, which only covers a little over 14% of the cost (approximately \$2,500.00 per month) to raise a child in Hawaii, therefore, 86% of the cost falls on me], in addition to already facing one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46%) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37%) of households have considered leaving Hawaii due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the Department of Education should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school. Nutritious meals significantly impact children's learning by providing the essential nutrients needed for proper brain development, which directly affects their ability to focus, concentrate, and retain information, leading to better academic performance; in essence, a well-nourished child is better equipped to learn effectively.

Please do not increase basic costs for the hardworking families in Hawaii. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki, and improve their learning.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Isaiah Bascas

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha and good morning,

As a student of Castle High, I have seen the hardships of families who are already struggling with the high cost of living, my own family included. So much costs to pay, so little money to pay with. The families already are in a mountain of struggles and adding a higher cost to the school meals only means more trouble for them. If this keeps up, no family will be able to afford any meals for their kids during the school days. But if you drop the costs lower, it will relieve these people, our people, of this burden, and help dozens of families all over Hawaii.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo and have a blessed day!

Please listen to our voices when making the final decision!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Nakoa Vegas-Dutro

Organization

Castle High School

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Support

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,

I'm a student of the DOE high school system, and I support because I don't even eat the school food.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kelton Mahiai

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school and OPPOSE this bill because why raise the price on school lunch if its already taste like garbage and people are still struggling with already paying the fee of the school lunch now, "Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school".

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sophia Morrison.

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE high school and I simply oppose to this agenda item. I believe that there is no need to raise the price of lunch and breakfast. With the increase price of meals will decrease the student engagement in class. Grades and attendance will significantly drop to the a simple and ignorant reason of wanting to raise lunch prices. Even now, the food proportions and quality is the same as farm food. I believe that we need to do better for our generation and the next.

Please listen to our voices when making decision, thank you!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Oriel Morimoto-Perkins

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE high school and OPPOSE this bill because some students won't be able to afford to pay for the cost of the increased meals which is bad because studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school. The school meals taste like garbage anyways so there's no need to increase the prices when the food quality will remain poor.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Broxton Filrang

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE high school and oppose this bill because it would be a struggle for those who can barely afford to live here. I know people who struggle with other expenses but an extra \$2.25 to school meals would make it harder for bigger families. It just seems like a greedy way to take extra money from families of students when the food quality hardly changes.

Mahalo,

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

JHeart Sisra

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because there are people still struggling with the prices now. How are you going to expect us to pay more? But, does that mean you guys will give me more free to reduce lunch? I am a student that struggles paying for lunch and my friends also struggle paying for our breakfast and lunch. Our Mac n cheese are as hard a brick, when we flip the Mac n cheese nothing comes out.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kyson Murphy

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school and I oppose this bill because why are they going to raise the price of school lunch if the quality of food is going to stay the same, most kids I know don't even buy school lunch because it tastes like dog food.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Robert Kealohanui-Correa

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,

I am a student, and I oppose this bill because raising school lunch prices will hurt working families in Hawaii. Many families are already struggling to pay for basic needs, and adding higher lunch costs will make it even harder for them to provide for their kids. Think about it: when students don't have access to healthy meals at school, their ability to learn suffers. Studies show that free meals can boost test scores as much as six weeks of extra school. Can we afford to let our peers fall behind? I urge the Board of Education to reconsider this price hike. Our focus should be on ensuring that every student has the nutrition they need to succeed. Let's support our families, not add to their struggles. Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Elias Teixeira

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school and i oppose this bill because it will not just affect me but my family and my friends family. It will add onto our expensive living costs and will drive away the hawaiian residents because it will be to expensive. Alos the food tastes like dog food and the proportions suck as much as as running through glass shards and showering with tabasco. One example if for lunch they would give us mac and cheese that looks and taste just like concrete. One morning they gave us a stick of cheese for breakfast and that's it. Have you ever tried to eat wet concrete and last a whole day with a stick of cheese in your stomach. Anyways all i have to say is if your going to up the prices at least get better food quality.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Keira Torres

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE High School and I OPPOSE this bill because a big percentage of Ohana's aren't in the best position to be able to continue to afford paying school meals. Especially, with the ohana's with multiple keiki going to public school. The proportions aren't enough for kids these days as well. From the start, when I was receiving school lunches, the food quality was like biting into styrofoam or rubber. Seeing parents struggle and make sacrifices to make sure their kids are able to have a meal and a full stomach, is truly heart broken. Even worse for the ones who don't qualify with getting food stamps or free meals. Please listen to our voices when making a decision. Thank you for your time,

Mahalo Nui.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kapualani Ruiz-Hyde

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school and I entirely oppose this bill. It is absolutely insane to nearly double the cost of school lunches. It is insane to know that the already struggling families of Hawai'i will struggle even more with this bill. And it is completely insane to think that this bill is a good idea. I am enraged that the Board of Education believes that they have the right to raise the prices of our keiki's food and not even have the decency to make it better. If parents have to pay almost double the amount of the current prices, I better see close to double the amount of improvement. In no right world is it okay for parents to be struggling and stressing about their kids being fed, for food that I wouldn't even give my dog. The Department of Education should be going in the totally opposite direction of the cause. They should be focusing on how to decrease the cost, so the average Hawaiian family is ensured that their children are being fed and ready to use their brains during school. Shame on the DOE!
Please listen to our voices!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Zayden Makua

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I am a student at a DOE high school and OPPOSE this bill because of the lunch price increase for our students. The fee that we already have to pay is high enough and doesn't need to be brought up and shouldn't need to be. I can't understand why the prices of school lunches are going up when the quality and portion sizes are small and crappy enough. Residents already struggle with making ends meet and some live from paycheck to paycheck if prices increase this is like a burden for families with enough stress and trouble. The lunch prices are fine and already stressful as it is and doesn't need to be changed or have prices brought up.

Thankyou for taking the time to read this Mahalo!

Mahalo nui!

Please listen to our voices when making this decision!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Peter Padwell

Organization

Castle High school

Position/Title

Student

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at Castle High School, and I oppose this bill. I oppose because I am a part of a family that struggles and know many families that struggle to afford the school lunch at it's current price. I also feel that the lunch is of very poor quality. Foods such as the pizza, everytime that I have eaten it the crust feels like cardboard. Being that the food is of low quality and small proportion, why should I pay more for it?
Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jephthah Miyaji

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am student of the DOE high school, and oppose this bill. In my option this bill is not right for the family's that struggle. Why pay more for a lunch or breakfast that is not well served or poor proportioned. It is severely unjust to people tat stubble with getting food with big family's.

Thank you!

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Alyce Moefu

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Dilyunc Michael

Organization

Roots - Kokua Kalihi Valley

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would cause more financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki. Feeding them nutritious food from our local farmers and producers.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Susan Oshiro-Taogoshi

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Comments only

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I strongly oppose increasing the price of school meals for our Hawaii school system. This will be a financial burden for families already working more than 2 jobs, and who face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki - they are our future.



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Osa Tui, Jr.
President
Logan Okita
Vice President
Cheney Kaku
Secretary-Treasurer
Ann Mahi
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I BOARD OF EDUCATION FINANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Re: Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Thursday, January, 16, 2025

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

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association (HSTA) opposes the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

HSTA firmly believes that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. We strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not

less. We urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. We strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Will Caron

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. Doing so would be unconscionable when 3 in 10 households with children in Hawai'i face food insecurity, and 2 out of 3 of these struggling households are not eligible for free school meals. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals—which are often the only nutritious meals keiki from struggling families receive each day—the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Mailani Aukai

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because local parents don't make enough money to provide school lunch so the kids can't even afford the lunch as of right now. Why would I want to raise the cost of meals? I don't think that's right.
Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

James Friddle

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because a lot of people struggle already to get food and raising the price would make it so much harder for people who already have a hard time and people who are barely getting by.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kaleo Castro

Organization

James B Castle High School

Position/Title

Student

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE high school, and oppose this bill because I know what it is like to have barely enough money to eat and to not have much money, even if I am no longer in financial burdens schools should prioritize students no matter the amount of money they have. If school meals and other things are increased in price many students will miss out on things that they need.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Mavrick Carreira

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha ,

I am a student at a Doe high school, I opposed because the price is outrageous it's already expensive I, as an older sibling I already have to sacrifice my lunch for them. Think to yourself what going to happen people in the same position as me and there little sibling?

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Braedon Bell-Cartajena

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE high school, and I OPPOSE this bill because first of all, there are families out here in Hawaii that have single mother's and single father's that can't afford school lunches. It is sad seeing our own people having to skip meals day-2-day because they can't afford it and there are rumors going around of wanting to help out our people in Hawaii but yet they are doing the opposite and making it harder for us families out here in Hawaii to be able to afford lunches in school.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Emmanuel Ridgley

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE high school, and oppose this bill because a I know a lot of people who already can't afford lunch and raising the price would add more people who can't afford lunch. without food during the day students become like zombies and it gets harder to learn.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Koni Whitney

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I don't think school lunch should be more expensive because people don't have a lot of money.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

keidan uehara

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,
I am a student at DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because I think the cost of living is already so expensive. Also the food they serve is not good at all, if they raise the bill for lunch at school they should at least make the food better.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Carson James Onodera

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha, I am a student at a DOE high school and opposes bill because some people can't afford school lunch. School lunch is like rocket price goes up doesn't go down. The cost of school lunch is like homeless people to get off the streets without giving them resources.

Please listen to our voices when making a decision!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Justus Sasaki-Martin

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE High school, and OPPOSE this bill because as a student who has had to stop getting lunch because of the sheer cost of life in Hawaii. Increasing the cost of price for school lunches will cause more kids to stop eating breakfast and lunch at SCHOOL where the quality of it, isn't worth the price we pay for now.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, mahalo.
Make the right choice for the people. NOT for your wallets.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Akela Rodrigues

Organization

Castle High school

Position/Title

Student

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because we as students sometime find that the school lunch is to scarce and or sometimes looks and tastes like rubber and I think that the fact that we have to pay everytime we get lunch and for something so little When we cant afford that food at home is so shameful and sad.we get to school tired and sometimes down and we don't have a meal we could rely on.Not everyone is fortunate and I think the cost of meals should be lowered.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

Mahalo nui!

Please listen to our voices when making a decision.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kanaloa Kanoa

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a high school student in Hawaii and I am not able to eat breakfast or lunch so my parents can have enough money for bills and other needs. I am tired and not motivated because I don't have enough energy because I can't eat during school. If we had free food then everything would be different. Mahalo nui

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

kayne bridges

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha

I am a student at a DOE high school, and I OPPOSE this bill because families are already having trouble to pay for their meals. Why would you raise it and make it harder for my parents wheduced meals?.It should also not be raised because the food portions are small, they are like a bodybuilder eating a snack.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kaitlin Tani

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

ALOHA,

I am a student at a DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because increasing the cost of school meals is like making someone work 10 times harder for less pay. Most families also have multiple kids and my family is one of them so if prices increase, it will be harder for those families to be able to provide the money to feed all of their kids.

Thank you for taking the time to read this,
Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Megan Fox

Organization

Mālama Kauaʻi

Position/Title

Executive Director

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

Our families are struggling enough as it is. According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46%) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37%) of households have considered leaving Hawaiʻi due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking ʻohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Michelle Siilata

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement FREE school meals for ALL. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Darius Lee

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE highschool, and OPPOSE this bill because its hard enough already paying what we have to pay now, and they want to increase it. The cost of living is already outrageous and they want us to pay more for our own keiki to even have food in are schools. Personally i hear a lot from my friends how hard it is fir there familys to get the money they need for school lunches. So please i ask you guys not to up the cost of are schools lunches

Please listen to our voices when making a decision!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Camille Rodrigues

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose any increase in cost for school lunch and instead support free lunch for all. Not just because of the relief to already financially strained families living in the state with the highest cost of living and lowest wages. I oppose this also in large part because study has shown the free lunch program correlates to increased learning and test scores.

Families in Hawaii need more food security, not less.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Marie Fitzsimons

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be an additional financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation. There are many families living in poverty and experiencing food insecurity. School should not be a place where children go hungry and parents have to stress about affording food for their children.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

I believe that the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school. Children who are nourished and whose parents are less financially stressed are better able to learn.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Rachael Carrell

Organization

Hawaii Foodbank, Inc

Position/Title

Disaster Strategy Coordinator

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

To the Honorable Finance and Infrastructure Committee,

I am writing today to express my opposition for increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school. Additionally, universal free school meals decreases the stigma many students feel around having free or reduced lunch and not having enough balance on their lunch accounts. Our keiki deserve to go to school in a safe environment that promotes their physical and emotional wellbeing, and free school lunches is an important way we can make that goal become a reality.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Mahalo nui for your consideration.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Nicole Kama'i

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Please consider the hardships that our 'ohana are already having. Raising rates does not help any of us.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jennifer Harper

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha. As a person who works at a local, grassroots food bank in our state of Hawaii, I am definitely opposed to an increase in school meal prices for our keiki. Our organization serves well over 600 keiki nutritious, after school snacks every day as well as provides weekend food packages to supply 5-7 weekend meals for keiki. Food insecurity is nearly 20% in Hawaii for keiki (Feeding America, 2022) meaning that at least 1 in 5 keiki experience food insecurity as part of their daily lives. We see firsthand how difficult it is for families to afford the basics here in Hawaii-food, housing, utilities, & the overall cost of living continues to increase, forcing many families to make the difficult decision to move to the mainland. Food should be considered a "right", not a "privilege" for the wealthy. In the past, I worked as a school nurse in an inner-city district in California which adopted a "free school meals for all" policy during my time there. At 5 years into this policy, schools consistently reported better attendance by students, more engagement in learning, less illnesses, and better overall health outcomes for students. Isn't this something Hawaii schools should aspire to? Access to healthy, nutritious foods is becoming increasingly out of reach for many of Hawaii's families. The pandemic, current inflation, the already high cost of importing the majority of our food here, as well as reductions in SNAP benefits will just lead more families into food insecurity. Let's not put the proverbial "cherry on top of the sundae" by increasing the cost for school-provided meals for keiki. Please be a part of the solution to hunger & food insecurity in Hawaii, not a contributor to it. Mahalo nui for your time & attention to this critically important matter.

Jennifer Harper

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Laurien Nuss

Organization

Conscious Concepts

Position/Title

Founder

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha mai,

As a working class, head of household single mother and climate equity specialist I strongly oppose an increase in school meal fees. The BOE must take into account the stark realities we are increasingly experiencing.

In 29% of households with children, one or more keiki are food insecure. The majority of people in Hawai'i facing food insecurity are keiki, working families and adults living by themselves.

Food insecurity negatively impacts children at every age. Children 3 and younger who experience food insecurity "cannot learn as much, as fast or as well because chronic undernutrition harms their cognitive development during this critical period of rapid brain growth, changing the fundamental neurological architecture of the brain and central nervous system."

At older ages, food insecure children are not only more susceptible to becoming sick, but they can also suffer from other additional physical, developmental and cognitive impairments — resulting in lower academic achievement than that of their peers.

I've heard first hand stories from youth and educators that witnessed and experienced having student meal cards being taken away or meals denied when students ran out of funds on their meal cards.

Choosing to increase school meal fees would create a devastating impact to our keiki's health and wellbeing.

Information source: <https://hawaiifoodbank.org/food-insecurity/>

Mahalo,

Laurien Nuss

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Mary Herbig

Organization

Hawai'i Conference UCC

Position/Title

Justice and Witness Missional Team Chair

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation. These are also among the students at highest risk.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kristen Young

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAII BOARD OF EDUCATION FINANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE
COMMITTEE

Re: Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Thursday, January, 16, 2025

Sarah Milianta-Laffin - Ilima Intermediate School Teacher

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

I stand with teachers around the state, and the Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) to **oppose** the proposed increase in school meal fees.

There's an African proverb that says, "**A hungry belly has no ears.**" Teachers know this proverb, and how it looks in our classrooms, well. We know that students who are hungry are not focusing on learning. We know that hungry students have more behavioral challenges, and I invite any member of this board to support me in trying to coax a hangry teenager through taking notes, or completing assignments.

As a teacher who has spent hundreds of dollars out of pocket to feed my hungry students, so that they can focus on learning, I was disheartened to learn of this plan to raise fees. Teachers like me have tried to add money to student lunch accounts only to be told that "isn't allowed."

Did you know that students with "lunch debt" can't walk for graduation or promotion ceremonies? Did you know they aren't allowed to attend certain field trips or end-of-year celebrations? There is something deeply wrong with claiming a student, too young for a job, and whose only job should be to attend school, has 'debt.'

Teachers like me urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. We strongly recommend the Board of Education keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

With Aloha,

Sarah "Mili" Milianta-Laffin
Teacher, Ilima Intermediate School

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Shazen Matias

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I no believe dis, It ain't right cuz I already stay broke and no can eat lunch cuz it's too expensive, it's like stealing candy from one baby !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Andrew Kahalelehua

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a Student at a DOE high school, and OPPOse the bill because I and my school wants to support the struggling students living in harsh environments.

Thank you for taking time to read this, Mahalo
Please listen to our voices when making a decision.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jerfaith Anama

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school, and oppose this bill because there are already families struggling to get by. Raising the cost to just feed a student lunch could affect the people that don't make as much. With the economy raising in Hawaii, it will only get worse.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

Mahalo nui!

Please listen to our voices when making a decision!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Royce Lown

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school and oppose this bill because I have friends who already struggle to afford school lunch. Raising the cost of school meals is like saying you don't care about the community because the cost to live in Hawai'i is already extremely expensive.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.
Mahalo nui!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sione Tongotea

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because I know some families that are struggling with financial problems and this is making it worse. It's stealing candy from a baby!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Amelia Andrade

Organization

Castle High School

Position/Title

Student

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because some families already struggle with paying for the students lunch as is and they already struggle with bills or being a single parent. So I feel like we should instead of increasing it we should decrease it or make it more affordable to struggling parents.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Logan Castro

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha I am a student at a DOE school and I oppose on the this bill because the food that is being served is almost prison food like and increasing these cost can affect my aunty that makes to much for reduced lunch prices but at the same time doesn't make enough to support her family in Hawaii. Thank you for taking time to read this, Mahalo

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jeighton fafard-duarte

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I am a student at DOE high school, and oppose this bill because school meals is really expensive for my family. There are three of us who my parents have to pay for and we don't qualify for free or reduced meals.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Gwendolyn Kirkland

Organization

United Church of Christ

Position/Title

Clergy

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I am a former educator of primary level (K-3) children. I know the importance of students being well fed and the correlation between good nutrition and learning.

The proposed change to increase the cost of school meals over the next four years is reprehensible.

This change would have a dramatic impact on Hawai'i's working families, who are already struggling with our state's high cost of living. Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should support the implementation of free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

I urge you not to vote to implement this increase and furthermore to move to provide free meals to all students.

Rev. Gwendolyn V. Kirkland

To: Finance and Infrastructure Committee, Hawai'i State Board of Education
Re: **IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation**
Place: Queen Lili'uokalani Building & Via Videoconference
Time: January 16, 2025, 11:30 AM

Dear Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **OPPOSITION to increases in fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation**. Our public school students and parents are already struggling to afford to live here. Increasing fees will make barriers to education even higher for those families

We urge you to consider how these fee increases would disproportionately hurt low-income families. Without access to reliable transportation, nutritious meals, and summer learning, our most vulnerable students may end up missing more classes and falling even further behind academically.

When it comes to school meals, **the proposed higher prices would put Hawai'i at or above the 90th percentile of school meal prices in the nation, according to the School Nutrition Association's 2024 School Nutrition Trends Survey**,¹ which included responses from 1,343 SNA member school districts nationwide.

As you can see in the SNA chart below showing the median prices for school meals in the nation, the proposed increased prices for breakfast to \$2.10 for elementary and middle schools and \$2.20 for high schools, as well as for lunch to \$4.75 for elementary and middle and \$5.00 for high schools, are way out of the norm in comparison with the rest of the nation.

School Meal Prices and Unpaid Meals

School meal prices vary widely across the country. Prices are set by local school districts, usually with school board oversight. The following table lists typical prices for paid meals during the 2023-24 school year. The data was collected in SNA's **2024 School Nutrition Trends Survey**, which included responses from 1,343 SNA member school districts nationwide.

	Lunch	Breakfast
Elementary	\$2.83	\$1.75
Middle	\$3.00	\$1.75
High	\$3.05	\$1.80

With school bus fares, we know that the students who are most likely to need transportation to school are also the most economically vulnerable and the least likely to be able to pay for it. Currently families that qualify for reduced-price school lunch do NOT get free bus passes. And while the income eligibility

¹ <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-Trends-Report.pdf>

Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!

Testimony to the Finance and Infrastructure Committee, Hawai'i State Board of Education

January 16, 2025

limit for reduced-price lunch is about \$66,000 for a family of four,² the “bare-minimum costs of basic necessities” for that same family is nearly \$108,000, according to the *ALICE in Hawai'i* report.³ These families cannot afford higher fees to get their children to school.

For example, a single mom with two children who makes less than \$55,000 a year qualifies for reduced-price school meals, but currently she must pay \$576 per school year for bus passes. The proposed fee increase would raise that cost to \$800. That is a major expense for a family that is already struggling to make ends meet.

In addition, the fact that Hawai'i charges for school bus rides at all puts our district is the minority nationwide. **According to *Education Week*, which surveyed a nationally representative sample of school and district leaders, “84 percent said they offer transportation and that no students pay for it.”**⁴

The pandemic has exacerbated a long-standing problem of chronic absenteeism among DOE students.⁵ Those absences have been concentrated in rural areas and among historically marginalized populations.⁶ Not surprisingly, research shows that access to school bus rides helps vulnerable student populations reduce their absences.⁷

Instead of increasing fees, we urge you to do all you can to make school accessible to students and ensure they have the nutrition and academic support they need to thrive and learn.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please do NOT approve these increases to school fees.

Thank you,

Nicole Woo

Director of Research and Economic Policy

2

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

³ <https://www.auw.org/about/alice-initiative/alice-reports/>

⁴ <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/some-districts-charge-for-school-bus-rides-if-they-offer-transportation-at-all/2024/06>

⁵ <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/ConnectWithUs/MediaRoom/PressReleases/Pages/2021-22-Strive-HI-performance-data-reflect-positive-progress-in-HIDOE-student-academic-recovery-and-acceleration.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.civilbeat.org/2022/01/student-absences-soared-above-30-in-some-hawaii-schools/>

⁷ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED622132.pdf>

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Dylan Ramos

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,

As a lifelong resident, taxpayer, former educator, and K-12 alumnus of Hawai'i public schools, I oppose any increases to fees already impacting our keiki and 'ohana, especially when it comes to school meals and student activities.

Mahalo,
Dylan Ramos
96816

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lucas McKinnon

Organization

Hawaii Good Food Alliance

Position/Title

Managing Director

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ben Sheets

Organization

Lanai Union Church

Position/Title

Pastor

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Kakou,

As a follower of Jesus and a servant of a rural island and a primarily Micronesian congregation, I oppose the the proposed increases to school breakfasts and lunches. While many in my congregation qualify for free or reduced lunches, a growing number of them find themselves on the threshold of qualifying. They are a vulnerable place where as their income increases they lose access to the services and support they once received. Make no mistake, though these increases are negligible as rent and utility costs continue to rise. They find themselves in debt to the school and the utility companies. Increasing the cost for their children to receive meals at school will only further strain their families.

Certainly, healthy and accessible meals are an important part of the mission of public education. However, raising costs by nearly double over the next four years, is not tenable for the families on Lānaʻi. I oppose the proposed increases and encourage the board to do the same.

Mahalo,
Pastor Ben Sheets
Lānaʻi Union Church

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Noellani Dugay

Organization

Hawaii State Board of Education

Position/Title

Parent

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a parent of children who attend public school here in Lana'i City, Hawaii. I believe that the school(s) are lacking healthy nutritional foods. I oppose to the school lunch fees being raised especially if we are paying for food that our kids don't find very appetizing. If the costs are increasing, the state should hire professionals to look into studying "clean ingredient" options for our children instead of "easily" warmed up meals and canned veggies and fruit. Fresh whole foods and homestyle "clean ingredient" cooked meals would be worth paying the price increase. Our children need healthy nutrition in order to concentrate and thrive. FOOD is FUEL. It sets them up for a brighter, more positive future.

I hope you consider options other than just raising the prices.

Thank you,
Noellani Dugay

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Mairi Manley

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose school lunches going up to \$4.75 or \$5.00 per lunch by the '28 - '29 school year.

As of right now, 2 of my 4 children are in intermediate and high school. Although my husband and I should make enough money to pay for regular priced school lunches, we don't have enough money to pay for it on a consistent basis. This is due to the high cost of living here in Hawaii. Look at how much rent or even everyday groceries and utility bills cost in Hawaii.

I can just imagine the other families that either both parents are working but either don't make as much as my husband and or or come from divorced parents and can't count on the other parent or those that are homeless or low income families. I'm hoping that those less fortunate families are still able to get free or reduced meals. Those of us who have the 2 income households should be able to apply for the subsidized meals because the actual cost of living in Hawaii is actually taken into consideration and not based off of a national average because it's not fair, even in this year, to keep it the way is right now.

Please do not raise the prices without taking into consideration the cost of living and how many families are low or no-income and homeless.

Testimony Before the Hawai‘i State Board of Education Finance and Infrastructure Committee

Meeting 16 January 2025

Agenda item IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Item 4. School Meals

Aloha esteemed Board,

I am David Negaard, a resident of Wailuku, HI and a teacher at Henry Perrine Baldwin High School. I am testifying as an individual to oppose increasing the cost of student meals, and urge the Board, the Department of Education, and the Hawai‘i State Legislature to instead act justly by eliminating all meal costs for families.

Public schooling done right is a great democratizer. It can help to bridge the opportunity gap encountered by the marginalized and economically disadvantaged. It can provide the tools and access that are otherwise only available to the privileged and wealthy.

Hungry children are unable to take advantage of the opportunities and access that public schools (done right) offer. And we have students in our schools whose families cannot afford the current price of a school meal, much less the increased cost proposed. This action will price school meals out of the reach of even more families.

We in public education must, if we are to fulfill the implicit promise we make to our students when we compel them to attend school, do better. We must not make access to education “pay to play,” and charging **anything** for school lunches (when students have no choice about attending) does just that.

David Negaard,

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Heather Barfield

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I was saddened to see this agenda item. I know and understand that cost of living have risen across the board, but I also know the reality of so many of our students here in Hawai'i. So many families with children in the DOE are low income and can't afford the cost of the meals at this time. I am a local pastor and we help with weekly food distributions at the elementary school across the street just so families have food to put on their tables at home. It is a known fact that students who are fed well perform better in school. Please, please, please think about this as you vote on whether or not to raise the prices. Again, I understand that the cost of food is rising and the need to make more money to compensate for those increases, but I just worry about our children being malnourished and under fed because families won't be able to afford meals for their children.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lorna Motas

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

This hike in lunch fees will create a huge burden on low-income families who are already struggling to feed their children. I am opposed to any hikes in school lunches.

The proposed idea to use locally grown foods to support the public schools was supposed to provide local nutritious foods to the Hawaii children and it was recently reported to be a disaster with less than 4% of lunches incorporated locally grown items. You need to get your act together before you raise any prices.

An extremely dissatisfied Hawaii resident and former teacher.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Shelly Barfield

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

As a parent on the Island of Lana'i, I don't oppose with the increase of School Meal Prices. Our school doesn't not serve adequate meals and our kids do not even eat the meals! Most of the time the main dish is from a package and not appealing. I understand the required nutritional value but where is the nutritional value in pre-packaged food?!! Most of the time my kids come home hungry because the lunch is unappetizing. There is fresh fruit or veggies but even then it's bruised or brown. If prices for meals are increased then provide meals that's our kids are able to eat and enjoy!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Larisa Patrick

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,

It is so very important our youth get adequate food to help them grow. Raising the school prices will just add extra stress to the parents who are already bogged down by the high cost of living here. Please consider finding different avenues to make money.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Yvonne Mahelona

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Christine Popowski

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Dear Finance Committee:

it has been brought to my attention that within the next few years you are planning on raising the cost of school lunch. I would like to see some sort of justification for this. You know as well as I that this means that many children will go hungry. Hungry children cannot learn. Therefore I would like you to rethink this matter and come up with a better solution to your budget problems.

Sincerely,

Christine Popowski

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Julia Hall

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

To whom it may concern,

This proposal is a failure of our state. Hungry children should not be on the minds of working families in Hawai'i. Period. This will be a HUGE expense for families with multiple children during a an insane inflation. Research shows fed children have better educational outcomes!

I vehemently oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Julia Hall M.A., LMHCA
Hilo, Hawai'i

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Saman Dias

Organization

Maui Bicycling League

Position/Title

Chair Person

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha!

To whom it may concern-

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki. Together, we can make our streets safer for everyone.

Mahalo Nui !

Saman Dias

Chair Maui Bicycling League

808-209-2542

maui@hbl.org

www.mauibike.org

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Zachary Pablo

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

The state of Hawaii has millions if not billions of dollars of mainland/foreign capital tied up in all levels and aspects of local affairs. The notion it somehow has no recourse but to make up public educational budget shortfalls by fleecing local children and their families out of meal money is so cartoonishly evil it makes me f—king sick. Shame on those who support this asinine measure, you're monsters.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Franny Kinslow

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Please do not implement this significant hike to student meal costs. As a former teacher in the DOE, I can only relate how incredibly difficult it is for hungry students to be successful. I had students enter my classroom and ask hungrily if they could have the half-eaten remains of my own lunch. Although I was a science teacher, I began teaching a nutrition class and a culinary arts class so that I could provide healthy snacks to my kids. Yes, many were likely eligible for the free lunch program, but I had students who were English language learners whose parents did not understand how to sign up, I had students whose parents were "anti-government" and refused to fill out the forms, I had students whose parents didn't qualify for the benefit due to higher incomes - but who did not food shop or give the kids lunch money. Kids go without lunch for any number of reasons, but those reasons are not their own. Hawaii should be moving in the opposite direction - working to make lunches free for ALL students, removing the stigma of the subsidization program and ensuring every child has truly equal access to education, not missing instruction because they are distracted by hunger.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ciara Kawano

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Cheryl Burghardt

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

As a retired DOE educator and community member, I OPPOSE any increase in fees for student activities, summer school, transportation and especially any increase in the cost of meals for students. The cost of these things I am sure have increased for the DOE but there have to be other ways to pay for them without putting the cost on people who are already challenged to meet every day life in Hawaii. In the case of the cost of meals, many have been advocating for free meals for all students for the past years and it is hard to understand why the budget from the State has not covered those costs. Who is advocating for these issues at the legislature? We should not be putting barriers to children eating now or ever. How can we feed our keiki should be a high priority. When I was teaching in elementary school, out of 24 students, at least 5 depended on the meals at school daily. The barriers put in their way by "guidelines" and "policies" sometimes made for challenges that were not something the students or families could control. Take the \$\$ from an area that is not essential to our children, apply for more grants and put pressure on the state for the monies needed. It is 2025 and it is unbelievable to me that we continue to have the same issues again. Where is the forethought, the insight to find new paths to make sure that our keiki are taken care of physically and mentally?

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Laura Hughes

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Well. What can I say, 1/3 of keiki in Hawai'i face food insecurity. That should be enough to resoundingly oppose increasing the cost of food. Which, is a human right.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

B. A. McClintock

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.



HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
State of Hawai'i Board of Education
Thursday, January 16, 2025

Dear State of Hawai'i Board of Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to the DOE's proposed increases in fees for school meals, student activities, and summer school tuition.

We understand that the proposal to increase school meal fees is pursuant to [HRS 302A-405](#), which requires students to pay half of the meal program costs. Unfortunately, complying with this statute would raise the cost of school meals for parents more than 80 percent over the next four school years. This would be catastrophic for Hawai'i households, who are already struggling with the cost of living.

A family of four must make less than \$47,000 to qualify for free meals,¹ while Hawai'i's costs of living require that same family to make over \$107,000 to simply survive.² The price increases proposed today would mean the families in this gap—Hawai'i's ALICE population—would be paying nearly \$300 per month just for their children to eat at school. During a time when three out of ten households with children are facing food insecurity, this seems like an ill-considered solution to shore up the DOE's budget.

In lieu of increasing meal fees, we respectfully propose that the Board work with the state legislature this session to strike the clause cited in the proposal. We further propose amending the clause prior, [HRS 302A-404](#), to make one free breakfast and lunch available to all students, and to prohibit denying meals to any student even if they have a negative account balance.

We understand that this is a bold ask and that budget compromises need to be made. However, it is relevant to note that these proposals come just on the heels of a sweeping tax cut that, starting this year, will give \$6,000 in revenue to individuals making over \$1.5 million.³ Instead of asking hardworking public school parents to pay more for meals and other school fees, the Board might consider working with the state legislature to find a more progressive way to pay for school meals, summer school, and student activities.

In closing, please do not increase fees for Hawai'i families. There are a multitude of progressive revenue options the State can explore that would more than cover what is needed to ensure no keiki go hungry during school hours.⁴ Instead of asking public school parents to pay more for meals and other school fees, let's put money back into the pockets of struggling Hawai'i households—money that will ultimately support our local economy. Thank you for your consideration.

¹Hawai'i State Department of Education, "Free and Reduced Price Meals Program," 2025.

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

² United for ALICE, "ALICE in the Crosscurrents: An Update on Financial Hardship iHawai'i," 2024.

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/Attachments/AllReports/2024-ALICE-Update-HI-FINAL-v2.pdf>

³ Analysis of [Hawai'i Department of Taxation report](#) (2025)

⁴ Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice, "The big budget trouble with HB2404's over-broad and sweeping tax cuts," May 29, 2024. www.hiappleseed.org/blog/the-big-budget-trouble-with-hb2404s-over-broad-and-sweeping-tax-cuts

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

John Witeck

Organization

Hawaii Workers Center

Position/Title

Board member

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

The Legislature should be considering a bill to make student school lunches free of charge and NOT a bill doubling the charge for a student meal! This measure if approved would put a significant added burden on working parents, esp. those with multiple keiki enrolled in our public schools! Please get real! Eliminate the student lunch charge—don't double it!!! Our state government has the revenue to cover the cost of all student lunches!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kelsey Amos

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

While I understand that costs to provide school meals have increased in recent years, and I understand that the department seeks to comply with section 302A-405, HRS-- I OPPOSE the recommendation to increase the price of school meals.

The department notes in their recommendation that the price increase would put an additional burden on families, and with that I agree. Many families in Hawai'i today already struggle to pay for school meals, and though there are supports for free and reduced price lunch, some families slip through the cracks, missing enrollment hurdles or not qualifying despite being asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE).

Instead, my wish would be that the DOE work with the legislature to pursue universal free school meals. Hawai'i Appleseed has done a lot of work outlining what universal free school meals would cost in Hawai'i and how to fund it (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601374ae84e51e430a1829d8/t/6750d9b4cc235f1f3b2a5d84/1733351873955/Benefits+of+UFSM.pdf>) and these proposals coming from advocates should be taken seriously and explored in a collaborative manner.

To me, this is clearly the humane and responsible direction to move--no child in Hawai'i deserves to go hungry or to face the stigma of negative balances or feeling less-than their peers because they access supports.

Pursuing and solidifying universal free school meals as a baseline in Hawai'i also builds important disaster preparedness capacity that may help insulate children against future economic and environmental shocks.

mahalo,
Kelsey Amos

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Harrison Seales

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I feel that even though I won't be in school when you guys plan on raising school lunch prices, my younger sister and brother will, knowing this makes me feel uncomfortable thinking in the back of my mind that there will be days they won't be able to eat.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Scott Landis

Organization

Hawaii Conference, United Church of Christ

Position/Title

Minister

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I hope you will consider keeping the lunch fees at the current rate. It is essential our students have a solid meal in order to learn. This can only happen if the fee is low enough for everyone to afford. I implore the DoE to keep the fee at the present level.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

John Witeck

Organization

Hawaii Workers Center

Position/Title

Boardmember and grandfather of two students

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I strongly oppose the proposal to double the charge for s student meal. This would add a significant burden on working families, esp. those with multiple keiki in our schools. You should instead consider not charging at all for studrnt lunches!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jessie Ann Chesnut

Organization

Resident

Position/Title

Registered Nurse

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

You will ABSOLUTELY NOT further burden so many families who are struggling.
The least you can do is keep these young families from utter hopelessness.
Increase grant writing, fundraisers and taxes on alcohol and cigarettes.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jacquelyn Maldonado

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I am writing to strongly oppose any increase in school lunch costs. The impact that such a price hike would have on families like mine is not only concerning but could further perpetuate a cycle of hardship for many in our community.

Growing up, I knew many people who would not have had a meal if it weren't for the free or reduced lunch programs. I was lucky that I didn't need them, but I remember clearly how vital those programs were to so many of my friends. As a single mother working full-time, I've also relied on free and reduced lunch for my own children in previous years. I can tell you firsthand, the reality of trying to balance a full-time job, a household, and the costs of raising kids leaves me with little time or money to prepare home lunches.

If school lunch costs were to increase, it would place even more strain on my family. I would struggle to afford not only home lunches but also to find affordable lunch options for my kids outside the school system. I'm sure many families in similar situations would face the same tough choices. And while I understand that you might raise the income limits for qualifying for free or reduced lunch, it seems that such changes would still only benefit certain families, and could result in the only families paying full price being those with a single child—often two-parent households.

This just doesn't make sense. Why would we increase lunch prices when so many families are already struggling to make ends meet, especially in places like Hawaii, where the cost of living is so high? For many of us, it's not just about a meal—it's about making sure our children are fed, have the energy to learn, and aren't going hungry during the school day.

Now, I'm married with four children in school. I work hard and make a decent wage, but I still qualify for reduced-price lunches because the cost of living here in Hawaii is simply overwhelming. Even with my best efforts to manage our finances, it's hard to keep up with the rising costs of everything. Making lunch prices more expensive will only push more families into hardship. We want our kids to succeed, and feeding them properly is one of the most basic, crucial ways we can help them thrive.

Raising lunch prices may seem like a solution, but it feels like it's targeting the wrong people—the families who are already struggling. The better solution would be to keep lunch prices reasonable for all families and ensure that our children continue to have access to healthy, affordable meals. If you focus on making it affordable for everyone, that might help alleviate some of the pressure and ensure no child goes without a meal.

I urge you to reconsider any plans to increase the cost of school lunches. Families like mine depend on these programs to ensure our kids get the nutrition they need to succeed. Please don't make it harder for us to continue providing for our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Zoe Finn

Organization

n/a

Position/Title

n/a

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I OPPOSE increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would increase the financial burden on families already struggling with food insecurity and potentially force food insecurity upon families not previously experiencing it. As a native Hawaiian and as a mother, my values align with making school lunch FREE for all keiki. Our community needs to care for our keiki by ensuring ALL keiki are fed free nutritious meals while at school because we can never know when disability or disaster may strike and give cause for an 'ohana may need extra assistance paying for meals and that should not be a burden on the child. There is data to prove that free meals are correlated with improved test scores in students but aside from the statistics, we as a community have a moral obligation to (if not make lunch free, then at the very least) NOT create bigger obstacles in feeding children.

Please do NOT raise the price of school meals for any keiki.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Zoe Finn

Mother of 2, Resident of Kaimukī O'ahu

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Alfred Hiona

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha BOE/DOE, as a parent, as a Kānaka and Hawaiian...I think it's absurd that our keiki have to pay for food in general, but to raise fees is just ridiculous! Why not take a piece of the high paid salary that you folks get and cover all cost and why not implement better food for our keiki. What is being fed now, is just not right and what's sad is that the inmates in prison get fed better than the children of Hawai'i and for FREE too! Please do better, because you can do better and the children deserve better. Mahalo nui

-Alfred Keaka Hiona Medeiros

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sheena Lopes

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

As someone who has benefited from cheaper more affordable lunch prices, I empathize with the families that will be deeply affected by this increase. School meals are essential as it will provide nutrition to the students to help produce energy for the school day. Most of the time, school lunches are the only meals that children have. To starve them of this and to force them into a school setting would only set them up for failure in their academics.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.



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

State of Hawai'i Board of Education

Thursday, January 16, 2025

RE: Opposition to school meal price and other fee increases

Aloha State of Hawai'i Board of Education members,

The Hawai'i Hunger Action Network, a coalition of more than twenty local organizations dedicated to improving food security for Hawai'i families, would like to express opposition to the proposed increase in fees for school meals, student activities, and summer school tuition.

Many of our members represent food banks and other service providers that partner within the public school system to provide resources that school budgets cannot cover. We are deeply concerned that this proposal will have a disastrous impact on an already precarious situation for Hawai'i families. For many keiki, school meals are the most nutritious meals they receive all day.

School meals are an essential component of a well-rounded education. Benefits go beyond improved nutrition to include improved academic performance, and as such we believe they should be free, just like any other school supply.

Instead of increasing meal prices, Hawai'i should be providing free school meals to students, through the Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) proposal the legislature will be considering this session (SB43). This proposal would keep money in the pockets of the two-thirds of families who are not eligible for the free school lunch program, yet still struggle to make ends meet.

Increasing school fees will only further burden parents struggling to put food on the table. We urge you: please don't pass this cost onto Hawai'i's hardworking parents. Mahalo for considering our testimony.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Malia Delacruz

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I am an elementary school teacher who sees the impact of school meals on my students and their families first-hand.

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Danielle White

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sherrill Futrell

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Increasing the price of school meals in a state in which nearly half of the population is food insecure is absurd and insulting. These people need free school meals. I taught history and civics in California for 35 years and we RELIED on free school meals TO KEEP OUR KIDS IN CLASS.

Why are you not trying to end hunger for our kids?

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Elizabeth Pa Nakea

Organization

James B Castle High School

Position/Title

Teacher

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

TESTIMONY OPPOSING THE INCREASE OF SCHOOL MEAL PRICES

Aloha Chair and Members of the Board of Education,

I stand here today, not just as an educator but as a voice for the thousands of keiki and 'ohana who call Hawai'i home. I am here to urge you to reconsider the proposal to increase school meal prices—a decision that could place an insurmountable burden on the backs of families who are already struggling under the weight of our state's high cost of living.

"I have a dream," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said. Today, I echo his call for justice, but my dream is simpler. I dream of a Hawai'i where no child sits in a classroom with an empty stomach, where every keiki can focus on their lessons and not their hunger, where we recognize that education and nourishment are inseparable pillars of a thriving community.

Let us not forget: a hungry child cannot learn. A hungry child cannot focus. A hungry child cannot thrive. And when our children cannot thrive, our entire community suffers. To nearly double the price of school meals is to build a barrier between our students and their potential. It is to widen the gap between privilege and need, between opportunity and despair.

Let me remind you of the numbers: 46 percent of Hawai'i households struggle with consistent food access. 37 percent of households have considered leaving our islands, not out of desire but out of necessity. Each number represents a family. Each statistic represents a child. Each percentage point represents a future at risk.

But we can choose a different path. Instead of increasing the cost of school meals, let us implement free school meals for all. Let us recognize that this investment in our children's well-being is an investment in our state's future. Studies show that free school meals lead to measurable gains in academic performance, equivalent to six additional weeks of instruction. Imagine the impact this could have on our classrooms, our communities, our economy.

We can do better. We must do better. Not because it is easy, but because it is right. Not because it is convenient, but because it is just. Let us be the generation that looks hunger in the eye and says, "No more." Let us be the leaders who prioritize the needs of our keiki above all else.

I ask you today to hear not just my voice, but the voices of the students and families who rely on your decisions.

Reject this proposal to raise meal prices. Instead, let us work together to ensure that every child in Hawai'i has access to the nourishment they need to succeed.

Let us feed our keiki. Let us nourish our future. Let us build a brighter tomorrow.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration. Elizabeth Pa Nakea, Castle High School, Kaneohe, HI.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lilia Mathias-Schwenke

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE high school, I OPPOSE this bill because I believe this will only make things worse than they already are. I am a student who currently receives free meals and I'm sure that I will continue to receive free meals but what happens with other kids who can't afford those outrageous new prices? What will the requirements be to qualify for the new meal plan? What happens to the families who don't qualify for the free or reduced meals but are just about making the cut? These are questions that the board should think about before passing a bill that raises school fees.

Mahalo for taking the time to read this!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

David Leake

Organization

University of Hawaii at Manoa - Center on Disability Studies

Position/Title

Specialist (Retired)

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I was frankly astounded that HIDOE is aiming to double the cost of school lunches over just a few years!

It might seem like nothing to folks who have nice salaries, but it would truly be a burden on the large proportion of residents who struggle to survive in Hawaii with such a high cost of living. Especially hard hit will be the many unfortunate children who, through no fault of their own, come from families that have nobody working or are homeless.

Increasing the lunch price seems “penny wise but pound foolish” because around the rest of the USA, it has been found that schools starting free meals show gains in Math and English test scores equal to six additional school weeks. That’s a worthwhile investment!

Let’s have a truly supportive school lunch program that ensures ALL children have at least ONE MEAL a day that is HEALTHY. Maintaining (preferably reducing) the current price is possible when we realize that this would require only a fraction of the school repair/construction funds that HIDOE is never able to fully expend.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ana Hernandez

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawaii due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki!



January 14, 2025

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
FINANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE MEETING

**RE: Testimony in Opposition to the Proposed Increase in School Meal Prices
Submitted on Behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank**

Aloha Chairperson and Members of the Board of Education,

On behalf of Hawai'i Foodbank, I am submitting testimony to express our strong opposition to the Department of Education's proposal to increase the price of school meals.

Hawai'i is already home to one of the highest costs of living in the nation, and this proposal would place an undue financial burden on working families. According to a [recent study](#) by the Hawaii Foodbank, 29% of children and 38% of adults in households with children are food insecure. Furthermore, in the most recent ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report, nearly half (46%) of ALICE households struggle with consistent access to food and many do not qualify for free or reduced lunch. Therefore, this proposed increase puts the greatest burden on those who are already unable to afford healthy food for their kids but make too much to qualify for free or reduced lunch. Adding to these concerns, the ALICE study also found that over one-third (37%) of households in Hawai'i have considered leaving the state due to high living and housing costs.

Instead of increasing the cost of school meals and adding an additional burden to our already stretched working families, the DOE should prioritize implementing free school meals for all. Research shows that schools offering free meals see significant academic gains, including improvements in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of learning. Such benefits underscore the importance of accessible, nutritious meals for every child in our public schools.

At Hawai'i Foodbank, we see firsthand the impact of food insecurity on our keiki and their families. Through our network of 55 school pantries on O'ahu and Kaua'i, we serve thousands of children and their families who struggle with consistent food access at home. These pantries aim to address the lack of food at home, not in schools. Increasing meal prices would exacerbate this crisis by further burdening families already at their financial limit, many of whom may not qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

This proposal would also lead to increased meal debt, which many families may never be able to repay. Rather than adding to this financial strain, we urge the DOE to take proactive steps to ensure no child in Hawai'i goes hungry at school.

We respectfully ask the Board to reject the proposed meal price increases and instead work toward policies that end hunger for our keiki. Let us come together to ensure that all students in Hawai'i have the nourishment they need to thrive academically and personally.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this critical issue.

With aloha,

Amy Miller
President and CEO, Hawai'i Foodbank

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Linda Kaauwai-Iwamoto

Organization

HCHCC

Position/Title

Pulpit Supply Kahu

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families who already face one of the highest costs of living (COLA) in the nation; this is ridiculous.

Perhaps one of the many reasons parents with more than two children that can't afford to send the kids to school is because of the cost of the lunches they need to put out. And who carries the burden seeing the children not eating, the TEACHERS.

All you do at your meetings is BITCH, BITCH, BITCHING MORE. It's about time you think of the children rather than yourselves and be productive with your time sitting on the tables and BITCHING.

GOD BLESS OUR CHILDREN and IMPORTANTLY, OUR TEACHERS that have hearts rather than bitching with the keiki's. "GOD BLESS US ALL".

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Brianne Williams

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I am against the increase for school lunches, families are already struggling and the food they are getting is the same as what was 20 plus years ago.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Tanielle Tokoro

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha, I am a parent of four children and I oppose this bill. The cost of living is very high as you all know. I barely can afford my children's school lunch now. If you decide to pass this bill, my children will not have nothing to eat at lunch simply because I cannot afford it. Should Hawaii's school children be punished, left with an empty stomach, and filled with anger?

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Christy Shaver

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I encourage you to reevaluate the raising of fees for school lunches and instead focus on making school lunches available to everyone. These are our children and hope for the future of Hawaii, they deserve a healthy lunch.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ian Dennis

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jesse Lipman

Organization

Kokua Kalihi Valley, CFS

Position/Title

Roots Program Director

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha, I am writing as Program Director of Kokua Kalihi Valley's Roots community food program. I wish to state my opposition to the proposal to raise fees for school meals. In my experience as both a high school teacher and non-profit food program manager I've seen the value of well fed students. They learn better, relate better with teachers and peers, and have more energy for extra-curricular activities. Increasing the cost of school meals will mean fewer well fed students in schools. This is not how we create a stronger future. I suggest a universal free meals strategy with a more concerted effort to meet local food sourcing benchmarks and goals. Let's make it easier for our keiki to be fed and healthy and do it in a way that supports our farmers and food producers.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Geneva Leong

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Zeus Gean Paul Miguel

Organization

Namnama Farms

Position/Title

Farmers/Owner

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I strongly oppose the proposed increase in school meal prices. This increase would place an undue financial burden on families already struggling with one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

Recent data from the ALICE Report reveals that nearly half of Hawai'i households, despite employment, face challenges with consistent food access. Furthermore, over one-third of households are considering leaving our state due to the exorbitant cost of living and housing. This alarming trend underscores the critical need for affordable and accessible meals for our children.

The Hawaii Food Bank's 2024 report paints an even starker picture, indicating that 37% of Hawai'i households experience food insecurity, with a staggering 6% of households with children going a full day without food due to lack of funds.

Instead of increasing costs, I urge the Department of Education to implement universal free school meals for all students. Numerous studies have demonstrated that schools providing free meals experience significant academic gains, with students achieving the equivalent of six extra weeks of learning in Math and English.

Let us prioritize the well-being of our keiki and their families. Raising prices for essential school meals is counterproductive. We must work collaboratively to eliminate hunger among our children and ensure they have the nourishment they need to thrive academically and socially.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Joseph Hernandez

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawaii due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Crystal Hilario

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Hi I am a parent of 2 children attending school here on Lana'i and I am not okay with paying for meals and the increase of the prices. I think and feel that all children should be free regardless of the income situation here in hawaii everyone is struggling at this time and to not feed a keiki because they have negative balance is very heartbreaking please treat all keikis equal and take away all this and please make it free for all keikis Mahalo.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Rachel Stucke

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Please DO NOT raise the prices for school lunch and activities. Family are already struggling to keep up financially with rising inflation and child care cost.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Syl Cabral

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

In the past, I have given testimony about kids being refused lunch for not having lunch money. My suggestion was to get the kids breakfast, lunch and snack, and charge the parents monthly or yearly. I am very much against raising the school lunch prices first inflation is no excuse, and only a means for the rich to get richer I cannot even afford a five dollar lunch . Mostly single parent with two or three children now we're talking \$20 a day for lunches is outrageous. The schools must find ...the state must find... the counties must find monies to feed that kids at school. It causes, anger, rage, sadness, inability to learn,. delinquency. all because the state of Hawaii doesn't have money for kids school lunches which is a lie and it's up to legislature to take the money out of some pork and beans and give the beans to somebody else . I wouldn't mind a pork chop today. it will also causes kids to drop out of school from embarrassment, sadness, in ability to cope to not be able to have lunch with their friends. It's not right we're talking about students students going to school ..reduce some of the salaries of the school presidents principles making half 1 million a year. Stop the legislative raises feed the kids legislatures do something good for the kids feed them

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Susan McCorry

Organization

Member of the public

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Please do not raise fees for school meals. We will have more hungry children who will be unable to learn. Thank you,
Susan McCorry

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ann Dorsey

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please reconsider your proposal and find a way to help children succeed instead.

Thank you

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jaylen Ramos

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I strongly oppose the proposal to nearly double the cost of school meals over the next four years. This increase would place an even greater financial strain on Hawai'i's working families and worsen an already critical issue. According to the 2024 ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report, 46% of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. Similarly, the Hawai'i Foodbank reports that nearly 1 in 3 households in our state are food insecure.

Food is a basic human right, and hungry kids can't learn.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school. Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Midi Cox

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation. As I remember Eleele School in the 1950s, there were many who didn't buy lunch but the community found a way to provide lunch, especially when the lunch came from the community, like fishermen who contribute from their catch.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. School is a positive experience for all students when all eat lunch. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Adam Pellegrin

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

As someone who has studied Neurobiology, I can attest to the relationship between nutrition and activity in the brain. The most obvious example is how the so called "Keto diet," eliminates seizures in patients with Epilepsy.

As someone who has both attended Punahou and educated "at-risk" students, I know we should not be making the playing field even more slanted against working families, who must compete with students from affluent or better off families who have the resources to pay for expensive lunches and private education generally.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Maya Calilao

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I am testifying in opposition to the proposed fee increases for school meals, student activities, summer school programs, and transportation. As a future educator of Hawai'i, I am deeply committed to supporting equity and access for all current and future students.

These fee increases threaten to create additional barriers for families struggling to make ends meet. Hawai'i's keiki deserve access to a well-rounded education that supports their academic, social, and emotional growth, regardless of their financial circumstances. School meals provide the foundation for learning, ensuring students have the energy and focus to succeed. Student activities foster creativity, collaboration, and leadership, while summer school programs offer vital opportunities for academic support and overall enrichment. Raising fees for these essential resources disproportionately impacts low-income families and undermines our shared commitment to educational equity. Finally, transportation is a lifeline for many students. It ensures students can access all of these opportunities. Increasing transportation fees risks leaving vulnerable students behind, limiting their ability to attend school consistently and benefit from vital resources.

As someone preparing to serve Hawai'i's diverse student population, I see firsthand the importance of removing barriers to participation. I firmly believe that all children deserve the chance to thrive, free from the stress of financial strain or exclusion from opportunities that shape their future. Rather than increasing fees, we should prioritize funding solutions that ensure these programs remain accessible and affordable for all families. I urge you to reject this proposal and instead explore ways to invest in the future of our community.

Mahalo for considering the voices of those most affected by this decision.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Dave Mulinix

Organization

Our Revolution Hawaii

Position/Title

Cofounder, Community Organizer

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

On behalf of Our Revolution Hawaii's 5,000 members and supporters statewide we strongly oppose increasing the price of school meals for Hawaii students. This would be a financial hardship for Hawaii's working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the U.S.

According to a recent ALICE report, 46% of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access, and 37% of households have considered leaving Hawaii due to the high cost of living. With one in three households with children struggling to put food on the table, now is NOT the time to raise the price of school meals. Instead, HDOE should support universal free school meals.

This change would have a dramatic impact on Hawaii's working families, who are already struggling with our state's high cost of living. Studies have shown that schools that implement free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Dave Mulinix, Cofounder, Community Organizer
Our Revolution Hawaii

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lauren Stovall

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sherry Pollack

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha

I strongly oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This ill-advised plan would create a significant financial strain for many families, leading to child hunger, food insecurity, negative health outcomes, not to mention impacting the ability to learn.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, 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.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments on this important issue.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

India Buchanan

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation. As a recent high school graduate who didn't qualify for free and reduced lunches, my family still wasn't able to afford homemade lunches. I went without lunch at school and many others did as well, if the price of school lunch increases more kids will be going without food in school.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Reef Godfrey

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,

I am a student at a DOE high school, and OPPOSE this bill because Some families are already having trouble trying to pay for school lunches because they don't meet the requirements for free school meals. If you were to raise the prices how do you expect these families to pay the cost for meals. Maybe you should go back to the drawing board and try thinking of a solution to this problem

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo!

Mahalo nui!

Please listen to our voices when making a decision!

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Atheena Arasoo

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.



January 15, 2025

To: Chair Ken Kuraya, Vice Chair Elynne Chung and the State of Hawai'i Board of Education
Finance and Infrastructure Committee

Subject: **Relating to Agenda Item IV. School Meals**

Aloha,

I strongly oppose any increase in the price of school meals for our students. Raising the cost would further strain working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

The DOE itself acknowledges that the proposed increase may impose additional financial burdens on families, particularly those with multiple children. Higher meal prices could lead to decreased student participation and increased student meal debt, potentially impacting both program revenue and student nutrition. While assistance is available for students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals, it is not enough to meet the needs of many families.

According to the Hawai'i Public Schools website, a family of four earning \$47,000 annually does not qualify for free school lunch. Considering the high cost of living here in Hawai'i, \$47,000 is far from sufficient to cover even basic necessities for one person, let alone an entire family.

Rather than raising school meal prices, the DOE should implement free school meals for all students. Research shows that schools offering free meals see significant benefits, including gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

We should not be increasing financial hardships for families who are already struggling. Instead, let's ensure that every keiki has access to nutritious meals and an equal opportunity to succeed in school.

Mahalo,
Janine Mariano
#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2025, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Paul Bernstein

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Board Members:

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. As you know from recent studies and news articles, Hawaii has an affordability crisis. This proposed increase would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation and thus exacerbate an already very bad situation.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Not only would this help alleviate the financial burdens faced by low- and moderate-income families, but it would also result in gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school as studies have shown when schools implement free school meals.

As for the necessary funds to take this action, I recommend that the personal income tax rates for high earners be returned to their 2023 levels.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Mahalo,

Paul Bernstein

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Judith Keith

Organization

Nuuanu Congregational Church

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Kids cannot learn when they are hungry. We need ALL our kids to be able to learn. Some kids will qualify for free lunches. Some kids' families will have no difficulty affording a more expensive lunch. And then are the others. The families who make too much to qualify but will have to figure out what else they can cut out of their budgets in order for their kids to eat lunch - those are the kids I am writing for. Did we not have a budget surplus this year? Did we not receive a tax cut this year? And yet the BOE is seriously considering increasing the cost of school lunches? What is wrong with this situation? Please vote down this proposed rate increase for school lunches. Thank you.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Mia Onorato

Organization

Behavior Analysis No Ka Oi Inc.

Position/Title

Behavior Analyst

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose the increase in school lunches because many families are already burdened by the high cost of living. Every one should have access to affordable food.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jun Shin

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Members of the BOE Finance and Infrastructure Committee,

My name is Jun and I OPPOSE increasing the price of school meals for our school system. We are living in very difficult times, Hawai'i's working people are truly struggling to deal with Hawai'i's high living and housing costs. This also means that for many working class families, it's going to be difficult to even get enough to eat from time to time. I'm sure that even if you don't have statistics on this already, you'll find that for many of the students in the DOE system, school meals are sometimes the only meals they know for sure that they will be able to eat. Instead of increasing the price of school meals, please work with advocates and stakeholders to instead implement free school meals for all. I'm sure that even under current prices, there are many kids who would really benefit from getting schools meals that are still unable to participate in the program.

Let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Jun Shin
808-255-6663

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Linda Shigeta

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the school lunch price. Working families are having a difficult time as it is. Moving out of state has become a necessity for many families in Hawaii. Our need to realize nutrition for our child in this difficult time for our working families is a necessity for good health. I realize prices have risen. The DOE should understand nutrition goes hand in hand with brain health. The shape of many facilities in our schools are not up to par & indeed underfunded but the health of our children can not be denied. The price of lunch can not be increased. I ask for your hard work to keep our children given their nutrition properly without hardships to hard working families.

Sincerely,

Linda Shigeta

2105 Ehu Place

Lihue, HI 96766

olas@hawaiiantel.net

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Francis Petrus

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Respectfully I oppose increasing the fees on school meals. Hawaii is already expensive as it is. Parents are already trying to make ends meet to ensure that our Keikis have a roof over their heads and food at home. Increasing fees on school meals isn't right, it's just adding another expense that could by all means be avoided with the amount of tax that the government takes from us here in Hawaii. Give us some room to breathe, stop adding on to the expenses please.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Noel Shaw

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Keiki should be the last to have to pay for their essential needs. There are much more appropriate spaces to address increased cost of food and to raise revenue to meet the need- like increasing property taxes on vacant or second homes or the \$1 for sixty fire year lease the military has over thousands of acres of Hawaii or a tourism tax or even charging cargo shipments that are bringing in food we already grow here in Hawaii to encourage more be invested in local agriculture.

Increased cost doesn't make sense while so many families are struggling AND the kids need to eat in order to learn.

Please do better to care for our keiki and their families. Please advocate to get the best care for them possible.

Mahalo,
Noel

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jennifer Odriscoll

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

It's funny you want to talk about increasing the price with no mention of increasing the quality. The food served at our cafeteria for the past 2 years at least has been of poor quality I don't care if it meets nutritional values it's gross.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sebastian Penate

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ivory Quintal

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha, my name is Ivory Quintal, and I oppose fees for student activities, summer schools, school meals, and bus transportation being increased throughout the next four years. With Hawaii being one, if not the most expensive state in the nation, our keiki should not be the ones who suffer because the state is trying to balance their check books. As a mom of 3 growing boys aged 4, 6, and 12 and all going to different schools, with all different lunch plans, I can personally say the free lunch and breakfast has been a blessing for my 12-year-old. My 4-year-old goes to Kamehameha preschool, and it is mandatory for us to pack his lunch daily. At times it is a struggle to consistently pack his lunch Monday through Friday, as we run out of food and time to shop throughout the week due to everyone's busy schedules with sports and work. My 6-year-old goes to a DOE school and unfortunately like many families in Hawai'i we are not rich enough to live comfortably and not poor enough to qualify for any state assistance. Because we don't qualify for reduce or free lunch we have accumulated almost \$100.00 tab for my son's school meals, which is an additional bill for our household of five.

I have been personally learning and working on Hawai'i Island to understand the process of how things come to be. The Hawai'i County Council has introduced a resolution urging the state Legislature to implement a universal free school meals program for public school students statewide. The state and county should be working together to ensure our keiki are feed by local farmers and local food sources rather than outsourcing our keiki's school meals. The amount of process food we are serving the kids are not just bad for their mental and physical health but also creates so much waste. We know that the school lunches given to the kids goes to waste most of the time. There has to be a better system and meals that encourage kids to enjoy their locally grown foods, support farmers, and help our island become more self-sufficient. Raising prices is not the right thing to do in this economy. Do better for our families that live here.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lisa Galloway

Organization

University of Hawaii

Position/Title

Asst. Specialist

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I have tried to teach hungry children which does not work, and I have seen the difference on Lana'i when all children had free meals. Instead of raising the cost of school meals, let's work on reducing the waste of food and packaging to better manage the costs, and ensuring all students have free meals that are locally sourced, nutritious and what children like eating. I believe this can be done, and there are people willing to make it happen if the BOE establishes the right policy and recommendations.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Cara Ann Maeda

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

This is an outrageous price increase. I have 3 children so it will cost out family \$15 a day to feed them school lunch from a public school. Public school was supposed to be offered so that all children can have access to education for free. But it is becoming more and more costly with school supplies costs and meals. This price increase will also make families have to bring home lunches more, adding more stress to families who are already stretched thin. And possibly affecting the kid's nutrition. There has to be another way....there should be access to food for every child and it should not be kept for those who can afford \$5 a day for only 1 meal. This is adding more pressure on parents and making the kids also have to feel the unnecessary burden of being hungry or unable to focus due to lack of food. Every child should have access to free or highly reduced meals in our public school system. I, as a parent of 3 children who feels the constant on-going pressures of raising children in today's world, oppose this price increase.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Andrew Boyle

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I strongly oppose the proposed price increase of school meals. Providing children with sustenance should be a priority of our society and increasing barriers to food should never be countenanced. If the money is truly necessary, then it should be taken from those with plenty instead of those with little.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Joy Puckett

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha, I Joy Puckett oppose this bill to increase meal fees in our schools. Today families can barely afford groceries with the influx of prices rising on everything. This increase will add more stress on so many families who are right now struggling. And also leaving many of our keiki's without a meal to eat that can cause more problems. DOE, I 100% percent OPPOSE the meal increase.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Sven Sorge

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Thank you very much!

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Chris Brun

Organization

DOE/BOE/DOT

Position/Title

School Bus Driver

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose the raising of fees for school breakfast or school lunch. Many of the children are turned away when the lunch account is zero. Something needs to be corrected and children given a meal and not refuse a meal to a child/children. I have seen it with my own eyes while in the school cafeteria and the children have told me themselves.

January 14, 2025

Aloha members of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee,

The costs of goods and services, especially post-pandemic, have continued to rise. However, funding via student activity fees have not changed to meet this since before 2011. The 2011 memo that is often referred to is not the date when the fees were last increased; rather, it served as a reminder of the cap with which fees and its collection could be done at the school. **I am in support of the proposed fee increases** by the Department of Education.

We have seen over the years that schools have been able to raise the price of event bids and graduation participation fees since that could be done at the school level. We need your help (and approval) to do the same for student activity fees, which is the sole source of funding for our schools' student activities programs. These funds could help provide leadership training opportunities for student leaders, bring in guest speakers, provide more funding for giveaways or student recognition, hire vendors, and so much more. Just this past year, school bus prices have more than doubled (for example, a bus that was once \$250 now costs \$550 to rent for a group to do a field trip, limiting many clubs and organizations, let alone classes, ability to complement learning and opportunities via off campus excursions). This is just one example of many areas that have seen a cost increase.

The student fees increase can also help smaller schools that bring in even less money through fee collection. It will increase the capacity of our clubs and grade level organizations to provide more for their peers. As a co-advisor at Mililani High School, we exhaust our budget annually through numerous events ranging from school wide assemblies to Homecoming, Award Recognition, Spirit Weeks, Appreciation days, giveaways, and so much more to increase student and staff morale and keep our school community engaged. We've had to work really hard, seek donations at times, and fundraise to stretch our dollars. This fee increase is long overdue in supporting our school programs and the students we serve. It will alleviate some of the cost constraints we face and allow our schools to redirect efforts and focus back on implementation of activities for our students.

This memo includes many other fees in areas that have seen production costs go up (ie. Graduation Cap and Gown, Yearbook, Newspaper, School Lunches). I support the Board of Education increasing these fees to meet the economic realities we are facing.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danielle Castro', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Danielle Castro
Mililani High School

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lillian Coltin

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increase in school meals

All students need affordable high quality nutritious meals in order to successfully perform well academically and socially in school.

Children are our future

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Treytin Cabral

Organization

Mililani High School

Position/Title

Student

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Support

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Members of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee,

I am Treytin Cabral, a Junior at Mililani High School, and I am in strong support of the proposed increases of student activities fees as outlined in table 1 of Superintendent Hayashi's Memo. As a student council member myself who participates in the planning of various activities for the student body of Mililani High School, I myself have seen the financial constraints that the cap of the current student fees creates. It is increasingly apparent that commodities and goods no longer cost the same as they did when the last cap for student fees was enforced. As a member of the student council there are times throughout the year where we are forced to make some difficult decisions when it comes to planning events. On the student body council which I am proud to be a part of, we have the privilege to plan a variety events for our entire school. From events ranging from Spirit Weeks, Homecoming, Appreciation days/weeks, giveaways, leadership development events and even events where we interact with our mililani complex schools. The work done by student activities programs across the state goes beyond just the students. We also have the unique opportunity to give back to staff members, teachers, and entire communities too. We value our bond with our Mililani Community, and we enjoy the opportunities we get within student activities to interact and give back to our community we grew up in. The relationship and bond between the schools and communities becomes even tighter with these kinds of events and interactions. The reality is quite apparent to all of us know. Things are simply becoming unaffordable. Which is exactly why an increase in student activities fees is necessary. We would like to keep these crucial events and relationships intact for years to come. We wouldn't want to lose these important events because we can't afford it. Working to meet this shortfall has been exhaustive, and I firmly believe that an increase in these fees is overdue. As a student myself, I know how important it is to keep these student activities organizations well funded. It is crucial for organizations like these to keep morale up and create a much tighter relationship within and between our school communities. Furthermore, I support more than just the proposed increase for student activities, but all other areas as proposed. The cost to supply only increases with each day, and it crucial to meet that need with this very increase in funds. I sincerely thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Treytin Cabral

Mililani High School

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Logan Riehle

Organization

Mililani High School

Position/Title

High School Student & Hawaii State Student Council Officer

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Support

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Chair Kuraya and Members of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for the proposed increases in fees for school-related activities. These changes are essential to ensure the sustainability of co/extra curricular programs. With the last fee adjustment occurring in 2011—and some fees reportedly unchanged since 1998—the strain caused by rising costs is evident. Over the past 15 years, prices have effectively doubled in many areas, making it difficult to maintain the quality of these programs without updated funding.

The flexibility in how schools apply these changes is a positive aspect of the proposal. While schools may choose to increase fees, it is reassuring to know that the Board of Education is only raising the cap and not mandating a fixed increase. This approach allows schools to consider their unique circumstances and students' needs.

In the long term, these adjustments will also enhance services across schools. I am the Senate President for my school's Advisory Senate program, and I see every day how our students are unable to do the things they wish they could do with the funding they are getting. Us in Student Government have needed to rely more on fundraising, because student dues are unable to cover the costs that previously were entirely covered by student dues.

Thank you for considering these changes and for supporting initiatives that benefit Hawaii's students.

Logan Riehle

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jotis Russell-Christian

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

John Fitzpatrick

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Honorable Hawaii Board of Education,

I strongly oppose any increase in the price of school meals and urge this body to consider making school meals free for all students.

Providing nutritious meals to our keiki is not a privilege, it's a necessity. Hunger hinders a child's ability to learn, focus, and thrive. Studies have shown that children who lack access to adequate nutrition struggle academically, exhibit higher rates of behavioral problems, and are more likely to experience health issues.

The recent success of Minnesota's universal free school meals program provides compelling evidence for this approach. Since implementing free meals for all students, Minnesota has seen a significant decrease in student hunger and food insecurity. This has translated into:

Reduced student absenteeism: When children aren't worried about going hungry, they are more likely to attend school regularly.

Improved academic performance: Studies have shown a correlation between access to nutritious meals and improved test scores, grades, and overall academic achievement.

Enhanced social-emotional well-being: Free school meals contribute to a more equitable and inclusive learning environment, reducing the stigma associated with receiving free or reduced-price meals.

Furthermore, the administrative burden of processing applications for free and reduced-price meals is significant for schools. Universal free meals would streamline this process, freeing up valuable resources for educators to focus on instruction. I have seen students be denied lunch because they had a delinquent school lunch balance and it breaks my heart to give students slips that tell them they need to pay or they do not get lunch.

Investing in our children's health and well-being is an investment in our future. Making school meals free for all our haumāna is a wise and necessary step to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed.

Mahalo,
Fitz

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Laura Pokipala

Organization

Community member

Position/Title

Oahu resident

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose the increase in price of school lunches. Families are struggling with the high cost of living as it is. Please look more toward universal free lunch.

School meals are often the only meal for some children. There are so many families working multiple jobs to pay the rent and food scarcity becomes so real when housing takes up almost 50% of a families net income.

Please consider easing one stressor for Hawaii Families by supporting Universal School Lunch rather than this current bill.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Tayli Kahoopii

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,
I am a student at a DOE high school and oppose this bill because Hawaii is already a state that struggles. I have seen firsthand, kids who can't afford school lunches. I know people who had asked me to get them school lunches because I have free meals. The increasing cost of school meals is like telling families the DOE doesn't care about our students needs and only how the DOE would benefit.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, Mahalo.
Please listen to our voices when making a decision. This is my future cost.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Melissa Lahti

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Many are struggling already to pay for school lunches , let alone extra activities or bus fees. School lunches should be free! Our keiki deserve a meal at school, a lot do not get much to eat at home! Too many families struggling already! Do not raise the fees please!



Queen Emma Hawaiian Civic Club
Pō‘akolu, Ianuali 15, 2025 (Wednesday, January 15, 2025)



Testimony in Opposition to Agenda Item IV – Proposed Increases in School Fees

Dear Chairperson Ken Kuraya and Members of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee,

I am writing to strongly oppose the proposed increases in fees for school meals, student activities, and summer school under agenda item IV. These changes would have devastating effects on Hawai‘i’s keiki and families, particularly those who are already struggling with food insecurity and high living costs.

Personal Experience as an Educator

As a teacher in the Hawai‘i Department of Education, I have personally witnessed the effects of hunger on students. Children who come to school without eating often struggle with lethargy, difficulty concentrating, and lower academic performance. Hunger not only impairs their ability to learn but also impacts their emotional and social well-being. For many of my students, the meals provided at school are the only consistent source of nutrition they receive.

Food Insecurity in Hawai‘i

Hawai‘i is already grappling with alarming rates of food insecurity:

- Nearly **1 in 3 households** were food insecure in 2023, and among households with children, 29% faced food insecurity.
- **6% of households with children** reported that a child went an entire day without food due to lack of resources.
- Food insecurity is disproportionately higher among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander households, affecting over 40% of these families.

The proposed increases in school meal prices—from \$2.50 to \$4.75 for lunch and \$1.10 to \$2.10 for breakfast over the next few years—will only worsen this crisis.

DOE’s Responsibility and Missed Opportunities

The DOE has failed to meet its state-mandated farm-to-school target of 10%, with only 5% of food spending on local ingredients in the last school year. This included counting bottled water as "local food," which does little to nourish students or support Hawai‘i farmers. Such systemic failures highlight the urgent need for reform, not additional burdens on families.

Call to Action

Rather than imposing fee increases, I urge the Board to:

1. Implement **universal free school meals**, ensuring every child in Hawai'i has access to nutritious food.
2. Strengthen and fully commit to **farm-to-school programs**, aligning menus with locally available agricultural products to support both students and farmers.
3. Advocate for **alternative funding** through legislative appropriations, public-private partnerships, and federal grants to subsidize summer school and student activities.

Conclusion

As an educator who has dedicated my career to serving Hawai'i's students, I believe it is our collective responsibility to ensure that no child goes hungry or is deprived of opportunities due to financial barriers. The proposed fee increases will disproportionately harm our most vulnerable keiki, undermining their health, education, and future potential.

I respectfully urge the Board to reject these fee increases and instead prioritize equitable, sustainable solutions that invest in the well-being of our keiki and communities.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Josann Meyer Parker Jenks
President, Queen Emma Hawaiian Civic Club

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Robb Kojima

Organization

Wailuku Union Church

Position/Title

Reverend

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I am against the increase charge of a school lunch. Like most my age we remember when a school lunch was 25 cents. On shoyu chicken Fridays we would buy 2 lunches for our growing bodies.

Today I write, compose, read, study and create for a living. When I work I get hungry and usually snack. When I am hungry, I cannot think. I cannot imagine having the meals at school being so expensive that a student couldn't afford the price of a lunch everyday.

This most vulnerable segment of our population need to be protected and provided for by adults rather than raiding funds to support and ensure their success in order to balance our 'adult' budgets.

Surely the money to do that can be found some where else, along with more funds to make school lunches free.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Terri Russell

Organization

Kawaikini NCPCS

Position/Title

Grants Accountant

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the cost of school meals for our Keiki. This is already a financial burden on our families who live in one of the highest cost states in this nation.

Our keiki need good nutrition to focus and learn during the school day. If raising the cost of their school lunches prevent them from their nutrition they will not learn! Most of them already suffer from lack of proper meals and nutrition!

Students should get free meals! This will help them in their growth and learning process. Do not raise school lunch prices for our hardworking families who already have the burden of feeding their families.

Mahalo nui loa!

Terri Russell



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

Carissa Holley, MEd
Treasurer
Hale Makua Health Services

Debbie Erskine
ARCH-MEPS Consulting LLC, Owner

Camonia Graham - Tutt, PhD
University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu

Jennifer José Lo, MD
Hawai'i Health Partners

Misty Pacheco, DrPH
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

Justin Puckett, CPA, MBA
Humana

Kathleen Roche, MS, RN, CENP
Kaiser Permanente

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: January 14, 2025

To: Ken Kuraya, Chair
Elynne Chung, Vice Chair
Members of the BOE Finance and Infrastructure Committee

RE: Opposition to Item IV, fees for student activities (school meals)

Mtg: January 16, 2025, 11:30am, Queen Lili'uokalani Building, Room 404

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ is opposed to agenda item IV, in which the Department of Education (DOE) is proposing to increase fees for a range of student services, including school meals.

All students, regardless of income, are given the opportunity to attend school. Everyone has access to a free public education, it is not just provided to those who can least afford it. The same should be true of the food needed to thrive in the classroom. Food is an absolute necessity for families and students regardless of income.

Under its proposal to the BOE, however, the DOE is seeking to nearly double the price of school meals over the next four school years. School lunches would increase from \$2.50 for elementary and middle school students and \$2.75 for high school students to \$4.75 and \$5.00 by the 2028-2029 school year.

Hurting Those in Need

The proposed changes would drive our prices significantly higher than the national 90th percentile, which currently stands at \$2.50 for breakfast and \$3.75 for lunch. Adopting this would be financially harmful for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation. According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access.²

The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs. These statistics reflect the growing economic precarity faced by our state's residents, which gets worse with each passing year.³

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 <https://www.auw.org/auw-alice-report-2024>

³ <https://schoolnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-Trends-Report.pdf>



Free School Meals for All

Instead of increasing school meal prices for students, the DOE should support free school meals for all, which would expand access to food security for children who may not otherwise be able to eat. Two out of three families that struggle with Hawai'i's cost of living are currently ineligible for free school meals through the federal free lunch program.

Moreover, studies have shown that educational institutions that implement free school meals experience gains in test scores of up to 15 percent.⁴ This significant boost is one of the best and most cost-effective academic interventions our state can make. At roughly one percent of the DOE budget, free school meals would provide a 15:1 return on investment. In addition to helping hungry students get fed, the program would improve the performance of the department itself.

Students need to be fed in order to learn. Nutrition helps overall physical and mental health, and eating allows students to concentrate on school, not on their hungry stomachs. This concept is so well supported that eight states and New York City Schools all provide free meals.⁵ Every child should know that when in school, they will have access to basic food services.

Please reject the proposed school meal fee increases suggested by the DOE. Rather than exacerbating the financial burden of local 'ohana, let's work together to support policies that will empower our keiki to receive the nourishment they need to succeed.

Mahalo,

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

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy
Hawai'i Public Health Institute

⁴<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>

⁵<https://apnews.com/article/free-school-meals-0c927f491b2ee9d4ce7e04b44da79e51>



Maui Food Bank
Nourishing Lives, Feeding Futures

January 15, 2025

Aloha,

I strongly oppose raising the price of school meals for our school system. Such an increase would place an additional financial burden on working families, who are already grappling with one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

A recent ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report reveals that nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle to consistently access food. The report also highlights that over one-third (37 percent) of households are contemplating leaving Hawai'i due to the high cost of living and housing.

Instead of raising meal prices, the Department of Education should prioritize implementing free school meals for all students. Research shows that schools with free meal programs see measurable academic improvements, with gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of schooling.

Raising the cost of school meals would only add to the challenges faced by our hardworking families. Let's work together to eliminate hunger and support our keiki, ensuring every child has the nourishment they need to succeed.

Sincerely,

Lisa H. Paulson
Chief Executive Officer
Maui Food Bank

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kristin Mills

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Hi,

As a parent and health educator I am strongly opposed to raising the cost of school meals. Kids need to be fed in order to learn, to grow, and to thrive. Especially with inflation and already high cost of living in Hawaii, many families are struggling to afford lunch prices as they are. Many families are struggling to feed their families at home. Many youth depend on school meals as their main source of food. And there is a big gap group of families who are struggling financially who don't qualify for free-and-reduced-lunch.

Rather than raise the cost of school meals, we really need to adopt a Free Lunch for All program. Please do NOT raise the price of school meals

Sincerely, Kristin Mills

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Blake Glasser

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I strongly oppose raising the price of school meals. It is common knowledge that the cost of living in Hawaii is exorbitant, and is driving those who are able, out of the state and away from where they were born and raised. While the main issue is the cost of housing, food is a close second. Subsidies for school meals are available to low income folks, but the ones who take the brunt of price increases are the middle class. Generally, the middle class in Hawaii are college graduates, have full time jobs and cannot afford to get ahead. When you have children, it makes it even harder. The middle class does not qualify for any subsidies, but must continue to eat rising prices. This continues to cut into their barely existent bottom line. At a time when studies have shown that free school meals have multiple benefits, the optics of a price increase are horrible, and the actual implementation of that increase would be just another blow to the working people of Hawaii who are already down. Be champions of our keiki and our working families. The working families who dutifully pay taxes, use whatever spending money they have in our economy, and prioritize the health and well-being of all people. Be bold, leave a legacy you can be proud of, and not only deny price increases, but work to provide free meals for all students.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jennifer Lum

Organization

Pearl City High School

Position/Title

Teacher

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I have been a teacher in the Hawai'i Department of Education for the last 20 years. Two of my children attended HIDOE school until they graduated (2010 and 2017).

I teach at a non-Title 1 school. When students first returned to school after lockdowns and school lunch was free, many more students than usual ate school lunch. Most students actually ate school lunch. Once they had to start paying again there was a significant drop in students eating any lunch at school. Students don't want to pay for lunch. They shouldn't have to. I know many households that do not fill out the free lunch forms at the beginning of the year for various reasons. Some are because they don't understand the forms. Some don't fill them out for pride reasons. They have been told that it is a handout to the poor and they don't want to fall into that category. They would rather their child go hungry than admit they are poor.

If all students received free school lunch then we would be ensuring our students are fed and able to focus. We would be removing the stigma of free lunch being only for the poor because everyone gets free lunch regardless of income.

I was a free lunch recipient. I know what it feels like. As a state, we should be taking care of all of our keiki. What would Hawaiians do? They would take care of each other.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Stacey Alapai

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha, I oppose this idea to increase the price of school meals. In all honesty, school meals and feeding Hawai'i's children should be FREE for all. Don't make this short sighted decision that will result in more children going hungry. I support HIPHI and other organizations who oppose this bill.

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Mahalo,
Stacey Alapai
Makawao, Maui 96768



To: Ken Kuraya, Committee Chairperson
Elynne Chung, Committee Vice Chairperson
Board of Education Finance and Infrastructure Committee

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

Hearing: Thursday, January 16, 2025, 11:30 a.m., Queen Lili'uokalani Building

RE: **Item IV. Fees for school meals**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **opposition** of the proposed **fee increase for school meals**. The Department of Education requests that the Board of Education approve increases to school meal prices beginning in school year 2025-2026.

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

Increasing the fees for school meals will increase the financial burden on families and will exacerbate the existing barriers to student nutrition. And while assistance may be available for students who qualify, many students will be denied meals due to inability to pay and their household's income being even slightly over the income requirements to participate in the free or reduced school meal program.

Rather than increase the fees for school meals, AlohaCare urges the Board of Education to consider the implementation of free school meals for all students.

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

² <https://hawaiifoodbank.org/keiki/>



ALOHACARE

Providing free school meals ensures access to a consistent source of nutritious food and removes the stigma for students accessing free or reduced meals. Increasing the fees for school meals is a step in the wrong direction. We need to invest in long-term solutions to support our 'ohana and most vulnerable populations.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **opposition** of the fee increase for school meals.

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Bruno Y

Organization

Hawaii Mobile Air Conditioning

Position/Title

Owner

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

We live on the west side of Oahu on homestead. With the population living with much hardship

Funding for meals After school programs

Are so needed for the children of Hawaii to live a normal life. Please reconsider your priorities for the children.

Thank you

Bruno

Nanakuli

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Joell Edwards

Organization

Small Business Owner

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Cristin Waldrop

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Cristin Waldrop. I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I firmly believe that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. I strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,
Cristin Waldrop

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Marissa Baptista

Organization

Hawai'i State PTSA, Community Children's Council, He'e Coalition (I sit on the boards of these organizations, but my testimony is my own and does not reflect the opinions of the listed organizations)

Position/Title

Parent, Moanalua High School, Moanalua Middle School, and Hawai'i Tech Academy

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee

My name is Marissa Elizabeth Ku'uipo Baptista and I am a Native Hawaiian mother of three Hawai'i public and charter school haumana. My children attend Moanalua High, Moanalua Middle, and Hawai'i Technology Academy public and charter schools. I am vehemently opposed to Superintendent Keith Hayahi's proposal to the Hawai'i State Board of Education (Board) to approve an increase in fees for: (1) student activities;(2) summer school tuition; and (3) school meals. I also oppose the Hawai'i Department of Education Department) actions to recommend changes to its administrative rules to allow for changes to bus transportation fees.

At this time, I've read through at least 40 pieces of testimony submitted by the community across our State (and islands) in opposition to the Department's fee increase proposal and plans to increase bus transportation fees.

I encourage the Board to request further information and analysis details from the Department on other viable options to address any funding shortfalls from a lack of ESSR funds. This issue will exist and worsen each year for many years to come.

I encourage the Board to request that the Department perform further analysis of the existing and Board-approved Strategic Plan to confirm the fee increases are not in direct conflict with the current goals and action outlined in the existing Strategic Plan. If conflicts occur, further action to deconflict and find suitable substitutes are needed in the Strategic Plan. The Core Values of the Strategic Plan support a public education system, that is accountable to itself, to the students and families it serves, and to communities that support and depend on public schools.

Futhermore, one of the Desired Outcomes (1.1.4) of the Strategic Plan states, " all student groups perform equally well academically and show continued academic growth, irrespective of background and circumstances." A fee increase will be a barrier for haumana with income-specific challenges/circumstances.

I strongly recommend the Board of Education keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students. I also encourage more collaboration between the Board, Department, and community concerning the legislative and financial budgetary actions in discussion. We can find points of need and support if we work more closely together and stated and per the Strategic Plan Goal 3.3 to ensure, "all families (community) and staff can easily learn about and participate in feedback processes that inform decision making at the school, complex area, and state levels."

01/17/2025

Mahalo for your time, Marissa EK Baptista

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Leslie Medina

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

As parents of two Hawai'i Public School graduates, we write in opposition to an increase in school lunch fees for students and their families.

Further, we encourage the Hawaii Department of Education and the Hawaii State Legislature to pursue legislation providing universal free school meals as California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont have done.

Richard and Leslie Medina

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kristen Young

Organization

Faith Action for Community Equity

Position/Title

Board Member

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Board Members,

I am a member of Faith Action for Community Equity. On behalf of the organization, I am submitting testimony in opposition to the price increase of school meals for our Hawai'i school system. This would be a financial burden for many working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

I attended public school here on O'ahu throughout my youth. I remember going from carrying lunch money each day to switching to meal cards that had to be filled with funds. I was fortunate to be able to buy school lunch most days, but if I ever forgot my money or didn't realize my funds were running low in time, not being able to buy lunch would be a major disruption to my day. For some kids, that is their reality more often than not. All kids should be able to eat while in school, regardless of how much money their family has.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

As members of Faith Action, we are called to act justly and speak boldly for all creation, which includes caring for children and those who are underserved and oppressed. We know that Christ freely fed the crowds not just with spiritual food, but with physical food too. When bodies are nourished, brains can be nourished. We cannot expect to provide quality education if we are neglecting to nourish the full person. Ensuring our keiki are fed today is an important investment for our future.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Mahalo nui,

Kristen Young

Board Member

Faith Action for Community Equity

01/17/2025

Honolulu, Hawai'i

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kaila Kutaka

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Support

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I think this change, increase in fees for the general funds throughout a school year would be very beneficial. I am an officer on the Student Body Council at Mililani High School, coming from a large high school, where students expect certain activities to be held, I know there are many ways that we can benefit from this increase. The extra funding would allow us more leeway when planning events. Right now we are very restricted in what we plan and can only do so much, with the extra funding for student dues, we would be able to host much more that would increase pride in the student body. I believe the increase in student dues would only help our school community. And if there are those that are opposed to this idea, the increased fee is only a cap or maximum amount, therefore schools can choose to keep it lower if that is what fits their community norms. All around I agree with this memo and think that an increase in these numbers is long overdue. With the increased prices of the world and economy, the school funds and everything surrounding that should mirror this increase. I think that this increase would allow much more freedom and less scarceness in school's around Hawaii.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Gabrielle Edwards

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 15, 2025

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

I, Brandy Ader opposes the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I, Brandy Ader firmly believes that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. We strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school. The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. We urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. We strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,



Brandy Ader
brandyb@hawaii.edu

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lauren Nelson

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in OPPOSITION of this measure. The Act requests that the Board approve of increases to school meal prices beginning in SY 2025-26.

I OPPOSE this measure for the following reasons:

1. Increasing the price of school meals would result in catastrophic rates of hunger for students who could not afford the price increase but do not qualify for free and reduced school lunch.
2. Working families in Hawai'i endure the highest cost of living in the nation. Aloha United Way's latest ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report found that 46 percent of ALICE households struggle to consistently access and afford food. The report also found that 37 percent of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to the high cost of living.
3. These increased fees for school meals will therefore contribute to child food insecurity and will harm local families. To protect students' access to food and ability to learn, we instead urge the Board of Education to implement free school meals for all students. School breakfast and lunch have a big impact on learning, and free school meal programs have been shown to increase Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Mahalo for your consideration.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Maya McKeown

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Support

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha members of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee,

I am a senior in high school I am involved in several extracurricular activities such as student government and clubs on campus. With inflation continuing to rise over the years, it is getting harder for schools to maintain funding for different activities. This is why I am in support of the proposed fees increases by the Department of Education.

Being as involved as I am in school, I have first-hand witnessed the extent of the low costs for dues of clubs and student activities. I am involved in MICC (Mililani-Inter Club Council), and many of our clubs at school are capped at \$8 to charge their members. This is not enough money to host different activities they would like to do. Some clubs such as Key Club have higher dues due to being a part of the Kiwani's, needing district level fees as well as other fees for their club. They are not able to get charge students enough money to cover all of this. Other clubs want to do extra activities such as our Aviation Club or Science Club and taking field trips. Bus costs are way too high for many clubs to be able to attend outside events with their club members dues. Most clubs at Mililani High School have been asking for the club dues cap to be raised for a long time, and we are not able to help them raise it due to the current cap. This new proposal will help the clubs get the money they need to provide their club members the best experiences.

From the Student Activities side, with only being able to charge students \$10 at the start of the year, we find ourselves not having the budget to provide students with fun gives (candies, sunglasses, etc.) during spirit weeks. We also find ourselves not having the funds to get our student leaders on campus unique training opportunities without extra fundraising. Many of our events such as Homecoming, are staying afloat by funds from PTSO (Parent Teacher Student Organization). Without PTSO's help, it would be difficult to provide students with the full experience of Homecoming. The dues cap being raised would help support our student activities program in this effort to make student life the best it can be. Our student activities program is now having to do extra fundraising in order to afford to buy things for different events. For other appreciation or awareness days, we often have to use leftover materials in our room from old events to be able to give different staff appreciation gifts, or give students awareness day gear.

Overall, the proposed fees increase by the Board of Education will benefit our clubs and students experiences on campus, which is why I am for the proposal.

Thank you for your consideration.

Maya McKeown

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Alana Reyes

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Comments only

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Since the fees have not been updated and increased since 2011, I think it is necessary for them to increase, especially with the recent years of inflation. Looking at the Student Activity Fees, I do believe that these prices are reasonable for families. And as a student who is very involved with my school's student body council, I think these fee increases will help benefit our school and allow more budget room to fund better planned out activities and events. However, looking at the Other Student Fees from a student/family member perspective, I think the price increases are a little overwhelming. I know that paying student dues in general can be a lot when they all add up, so increasing the price of an already expensive yearbook might discourage families from purchasing one. Which in the overall view of things, could potentially hurt the school. Same thing goes for the cap and gown. The way schools handle the money for cap and gowns vary but increasing the price by \$100 does not seem very reasonable, especially for the families who do have struggles. It is a well thought out plan but maybe if there was a way to help struggling families pay through financial aid or some form of help then it would be better.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Avery Tanaka

Organization

Mililani High School

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Support

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha members of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee,

My name is Avery Tanaka, a senior at Mililani High School and I am in support of the proposed fee increase. I have held various leadership positions, such as the Class of 2025 President and the Student Body President. By giving the option to increase student fees, such as the student activities fees, it will benefit all the organizations we have on our campus. We have 40+ clubs, a variety of sports teams, and a population of about 2,200 students.

During events, we give out free prizes to celebrate our students. With an increase in our fees, we will be able to do more for our student body. We currently have a tight budget which restricts us in many ways. We have to reach out to our PTSO, asking if they can help fund certain pieces of our school wide events because we cannot do so. This goes along with our Homecoming, Winterball, Assemblies, Teacher Appreciation Week, and so much more.

Overall, I believe by giving the opportunity to increase their fees, a large public high school, like Mililani High School, will be able to benefit from this change. It will give the student body a chance to do more.

Thank you for your consideration.

- Avery Tanaka

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Rachel Morgan

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Rachel Morgan . I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I firmly believe that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. I strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that

01/17/2025

we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,
Rachel Morgan

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January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jenn Kagiwada

Organization

County of Hawai'i

Position/Title

Council Member

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha,

I am writing in opposition of any increase to school fees, including but not limited to bus or lunch fees, during this time of income insecurity for many of our most vulnerable families. Please consider other options for raising necessary revenue to provide the best education possible while remaining equitable for all.

Mahalo,
Jenn

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Hammond Kealakai

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I am writing to express my strong opposition to increasing fees for school lunches, summer school, bus transportation, and student activities in Hawai'i's public schools. Such fee increases would disproportionately harm Hawai'i's families who are already struggling to make ends meet, particularly those categorized as ALICE households (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, and Employed).

Currently, one in three families in Hawai'i experience hunger or food insecurity—a number that is already far too high. Raising fees for essential student services would only exacerbate this issue, further marginalizing families who are ineligible for free or reduced-cost school meals but still lack the financial means to cover basic living expenses. These families are the backbone of our community, yet they are being placed in an impossible position.

Advocates and research consistently highlight the critical role of school meals in supporting student well-being, attendance, and academic performance. Many students rely on school meals as their sole source of nutritious food, and increasing fees for these essential services risks widening educational and health disparities among our keiki.

A recent Hawai'i Appleseed report found that 46% of students in our public schools qualify for free or reduced-cost meals. However, due to barriers like a burdensome application process, meal debt, and social stigma, many eligible students are unable to access these benefits. Rather than increasing fees, I urge our leaders to prioritize solutions like universal free school meals, which would ensure that no child goes hungry and would benefit all families, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Programs that eliminate barriers to student success are investments in our state's future. By keeping school lunches, transportation, and activities affordable—or better yet, free—we can empower students to thrive academically and personally, creating stronger, more resilient communities.

I strongly encourage you to reject any proposals to raise fees on these vital services. Instead, I urge you to support policies that alleviate financial burdens on families, promote equity in education, and ensure every child in Hawai'i has the resources they need to succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kealakai Hammond, LMHC

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Julia Hall

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

To whom it may concern,

This proposal is a failure of our state. Hungry children should not be on the minds of working families in Hawai'i. Period. This will be a HUGE expense for families with multiple children during a an insane inflation. Research shows fed children have better educational outcomes!

I vehemently oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

Julia Hall M.A., LMHCA
Hilo, Hawai'i

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Tasha Minami

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Tasha Minami . I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I firmly believe that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. I strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that

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we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,
Tasha Minami

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kelsie Neves

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our public school system. A meal price increase would add to the already exorbitant financial burden on working class families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jacob Yamada

Organization

UH West Oahu

Position/Title

Student

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose to increasing school meal prices, the cost of living, and other burdens of living here is weighing down a lot of the working class.

From my personal experience in highschool, I found my parents facing financial hardships. My younger sister goes to Waianae High School and we have witnessed many of us our fellow classmates struggle to have lunch.

There is a free meal program that I know of going on at some schools. I believe that continuing this support would benefit our future adults in the long term. It should be in our best interest to avoid our community from starving.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jennine Sullivan

Organization

The Pantry by Feeding Hawaii Together

Position/Title

Executive Director

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

To: Hawai'i State Board of Education

From: Anna N. Ezzy, Agriculture Research and Policy Specialist, County of Hawai'i

Date: 1/15/25

Re: Testimony Opposing Agenda Item IV. Increase of School Meal Fees

Aloha Board,

I am an Agriculture Research and Policy Specialist with the County of Hawai'i Department of Research and Development. The County of Hawai'i provides written testimony in **OPPOSITION** to Agenda item IV., to increase school meal fees.

Although section 302A-405, HRS, requires that meal prices cover at least half of the meal production costs, higher meal prices will negatively affect student food access, learning and health outcomes. The County of Hawai'i urges the Department of Education to support universal free school meals, a crucial initiative to address food insecurity, enhance academic performance, and promote equity among students.

Hawai'i County faces the highest rates of food insecurity in the State, with a 2023 study commissioned by the Hawai'i Foodbank finding one in four Hawai'i County households reporting food insecurity. Yet, two out of three struggling families in Hawai'i are ineligible for free school meals due to strict eligibility thresholds. For many children in our communities, the cost of school meals poses a significant barrier to accessing balanced nutrition. 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.

The Hawai'i County Council has demonstrated its commitment to student school meal access by adopting Resolution No. 42-25, urging the Hawai'i State Legislature to establish a universal free school lunch program for public school students. This resolution highlights the pressing need to ensure that all students have access to nutritious meals, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this matter.

Sincerely,

Anna N. Ezzy
Agriculture Research and Policy Specialist
County of Hawai'i Department of Research and Development

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ana Malia Kia

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

I oppose the proposed increase in school meal costs. This change would place an unnecessary financial burden on families, particularly those already struggling with the rising cost of living. Higher meal prices risk leaving more children hungry, hindering their ability to learn and succeed in school.

Instead of increasing costs for families, I urge you to explore alternatives like state or federal funding, public-private partnerships, or universal free meal programs. Reviewing current expenditures for inefficiencies could also help manage costs without compromising access.

Our schools should prioritize equitable access to nutritious meals for all students. Please reconsider this proposal in favor of solutions that support families and children.

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January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Samantha Alvarado

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,

I would like to write in opposition of the fees increase for students. As an educator, I can see first hand everyday how food security directly impacts my students quality of life and quality of education. Please help to keep things affordable for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jessica Dela Cruz

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Jessica Dela Cruz. I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I firmly believe that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. I strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,
Jessica Dela Cruz

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Terilyn Carvalho Luke

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

I, Terilyn Carvalho Luke, oppose the proposed increase in school meal

fees. As a grandmother of 6, most who attend public school, I see their families struggling with daily/monthly expenses such as rent/mtge, gas, food and other household expenses and to think that this burden of making sure the keiki receive adequate nutrition to fuel their brains/bodies is going to be added to this is unimaginable.

This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I, Terilyn Carvalho Luke, firmly believes that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. We strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that

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we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. We urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. We strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,
Terilyn Carvalho Luke, BSN, RN
45-475 Holomakani Place
Kaneohe, HI 96744
tcl.hnhp@gmail.com

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jaime Cabuag

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

I, Jaime Cabuag, strongly opposes the proposed increase in school meal

fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high

inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income

Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant

portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working

families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

*I, Jaime Cabuag, firmly believes that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health,

academic performance, and overall well-being. We strongly support free universal school meals

for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry

and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income

families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased

student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall

program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that

we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not

less. We urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee

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increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. We strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free and nutritious school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,

Jaime Cabuag

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Jennifer Yeban Paseuth

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

I, Jennifer Yeban Paseuth oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden my household with public school children and other hard working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I, Jennifer Yeban Paseuth firmly believes that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. As a nurse and a mother, I strongly support free to fair price for school meals for all students in public education. The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. We urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. We strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place for all our public school students.

Mahalo,

Jennifer Yeban Paseuth

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January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ronald Fujiyoshi

Organization

Association of Hawaiian Evangelical Churches

Position/Title

Chair, Ho`ola I Ka `Aina Committee

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

The decision to raise the cost of lunches in the schools will impact the poorest members of the public disproportionately.

Please look for a win-win solution and do not raise the cost of school lunches.

Mahalo for allowing me to express my opinion!

Ronald Fujiyoshi

1196 W. Kawaihewa St.

Hilo, HI 96729

Tel. 808-959-9775

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Ashlee Valeros

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Ashlee Valeros. I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I firmly believe that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. I strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,

Ashlee Valeros

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Stason Skeen

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I strongly oppose raising the price of school meals. This would place an even greater financial strain on working families already struggling with Hawai'i's high cost of living.

A recent ALICE report shows that nearly half (46%) of ALICE households face food insecurity, and over a third (37%) have considered leaving due to rising costs. Instead of making meals more expensive, the DOE should provide free school meals for all—an approach proven to boost Math and English scores by the equivalent of six extra weeks of learning.

Let's not add to the burden of hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's ensure every keiki has access to the food they need to thrive.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Raimar Bylaardt II

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Raimar Bylaardt II. I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I firmly believe that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. I strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that

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we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Kevin Kersting

Organization

IATSE local 665

Position/Title

Key Grip

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Kevin Kersting . I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I firmly believe that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. I strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that

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we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,

Kevin Kersting

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Larry Schultz

Organization

IATSE - Local 665, SAG-AFTRA

Position/Title

Scenic Artist, painter, actor/performer

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Larry Schultz . I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

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program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,

Larry Schultz
SAG-AFTRA, IATSE (Local 665),
US Army Veteran

Susan Pcola-Davis
Board of Education January 16, 2025
FIC Meeting
Testimony

STRONGLY OPPOSE:

IV. Fees for Student Activities, Summer School, Meals and Bus Transportation

Reference: [Civil Beat January 14, 2025](#) “Struggling To Survive: Hawai‘i Residents Take On Debt, Think About Leaving”

“They are among a quarter of households in Hawai‘i who spent more than their income in 2024.

To make up the difference, people used savings and credit cards and cut expenses. They worked more hours or an extra job. They sold belongings. They borrowed money from family and friends, or banks or other lenders and overdrew their checking accounts.”

Board Policy 303-10, Fee for Service, authorizes the Department to set and adjust fees:

“The Department shall determine and assess reasonable fees of public, private, public charter school, and homeschooled students enrolling in Department schools’ activities or services when such participation is allowed by law, rule or policy. Fees shall be approved in accordance with procedures established by the Department or overriding law, rule, or policy. A service fee shall be required for access to services and

activities for students not enrolled in Department schools unless prohibited by law, rule, or policy.

It never fails that Public schools continue to expect monetary support to run programs. Public schools are no longer free public education. At the beginning of each year a family with two children in school can expect to pay out of pocket approximately \$100 for each child. Class fees, school supplies, lunch account, teachers requesting fees for supplies, it is endless.

Disregarding that the cost of living is extremely high, parents get hit with fees.

One example: Caps and Gowns went from \$25 to \$125.

If you think your tables address all fees: student activities and other well you need another table for "Other, Other."

In addition, if the Legislature appropriates funds that money will be used to offset costs, funding could subsidize a portion or all of the tuition. Summer school needs to be free. This is where learning loss is efficiently addressed.

Your theory of implementing higher fees for summer school to improve attendance rates and completion rates is fraught with flaws.

In addition, parents and students maybe more likely to enroll and prioritize attendance. To include your other theories just doesn't add up. If you don't pass your classes during the school year then you have to pay tuition for summer school to make up the credit....REALLY? You think that is an incentive.

I am not even going to address meals and transportation. How much more do you want?

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

John A H Tomoso+

Organization

Clergy

Position/Title

Episcopal Priest and Retired Social Worker

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Comments only

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

I oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for working families, who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

According to a new ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access. The report also found that over one-third (37 percent) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs.

Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. Studies have shown that schools that implemented free school meals experience gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to six additional weeks of school.

Please do not increase basic costs for hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let's work together to end hunger for our keiki.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Shayna Esteban

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Aloha,
I'm writing as a resident of Kaneohe. I'm a parent of two keiki who attend Kaneohe Elementary. I strongly oppose increasing the price of school meals for our school system. This would be a financial burden for families who already face one of the highest costs of living in the nation.

My 8-year-old is currently learning about needs vs. wants. Even she knows that breakfast and lunch is essential to one's health and well-being. Rather than raising the price of school meals, the DOE should implement free school meals for all. No keiki should go to school hungry regardless of their family income and background. How we treat our keiki is a reflection of our society.

Please do not increase basic costs for the working community. Instead, let's work together to make sure our keiki have everything they need to succeed.

Aloha,

My name is Brandon Kinard, and I am writing in opposition to the current proposal to increase school meal prices that parents would have to pay, as outlined in Agenda Item IV of the Board of Education's Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting on January 16, 2025.

I acknowledge the Board's authority to make such decisions under Board Policy 303-10. I also recognize the rising costs associated with feeding our children in the school system, with expenditures reaching \$82,018,139.62 during the 2023–24 school year, as reported in the Annual Report on Local Meals and Farm to School Meals (published January 2025). When adjusted for the same product categories, this represents an increase of nearly \$23 million compared to the expenditure reported in the Annual Report on Local Meals (published December 2022).

However, I strongly oppose increasing the financial burden on families. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, "States with the highest RPPs were California at 112.6, New Jersey at 108.9, and Hawai'i at 108.6" [1]. Additionally, Hawai'i has been identified by the World Population Review as having the highest cost of living among all U.S. states. Furthermore, an ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report reveals that nearly half (46%) of ALICE households struggle with consistent food access 2, and over one-third (37%) of households have considered leaving Hawai'i due to high living and housing costs [2].

Given Hawai'i's already high cost of living and widespread income insufficiency—where the ALICE report indicates that 84% of annual household incomes fall below the median—this proposal does not appear to be a supportive or equitable decision for our community. It stands to potentially disproportionately impact parents who are already struggling to make ends meet. My aspiration is to support our families by advocating for universal free school meals. This proposed policy stands in direct contrast to that goal.

In conclusion, I urge the committee not to support this policy change. Let us instead work towards solutions that uplift and support Hawai'i's families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Brandon Kinard

Sources:

[1] <https://www.bea.gov/data/prices-inflation/regional-price-parities-state-and-metro-area>

[2] <https://www.boh.com/siteassets/files/community/alice-report-2022.pdf>

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Brandon Tapati

Organization

Local 665 IATSE

Position/Title

Craft service

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

Aloha Chair Kuraya, Vice Chair Chung and members of the committee,

My name is Brandon Tapati. I oppose the proposed increase in school meal fees. This proposal comes at a time when Hawai'i residents are already grappling with high inflation and a high cost of living, as evidenced by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report. This report highlights the financial struggles of a significant portion of Hawai'i's population, and increasing school meal fees would further burden working families and hinder students' access to essential and healthy meals.

I firmly believe that access to nutritious and healthy meals is crucial for students' health, academic performance, and overall well-being. I strongly support free universal school meals for all students in public education. Providing free meals ensures that no student goes hungry and that they have the nourishment they need to succeed in school.

The proposed increase in school meal fees would disproportionately affect lower income families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. This could lead to decreased student participation in the school meal program while also potentially affecting overall program revenue and student nutrition.

At a time when Hawaii residents are facing significant financial challenges, it is imperative that we prioritize making education and its associated resources more accessible and affordable, not less. I urge the Department of Education to reconsider the proposed school meal fee increase and instead seek alternative solutions that prioritize the needs of our students and their families. I strongly recommend the Board of Education to keep the current fees in place and publicly support universal free school meals for all our public school students.

Mahalo,

Brandon Tapati

Dear Hawai'i Department of Education",

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed increase in the cost of school meals within our public school system. Such an increase would impose a significant financial burden on working families, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet in one of the most expensive states in the nation.

According to the most recent ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report, nearly half (46 percent) of Hawai'i households experience difficulties maintaining consistent access to food. The same report reveals that over one-third (37 percent) of families have considered leaving Hawai'i due to the unsustainable cost of living and housing. Increasing school meal prices would only exacerbate these challenges, pushing more families to the brink of financial insecurity and potentially impacting student well-being and academic success.

Rather than raising meal costs, I urge the Department of Education to prioritize the implementation of free school meals for all students. Research has consistently demonstrated the numerous benefits of providing universal free school meals. Schools that adopt this model see measurable improvements in academic performance, including gains in Math and English test scores equivalent to an additional six weeks of school instruction. Furthermore, universal free meals promote equity, ensuring that all keiki have access to the nutrition they need to thrive without the stigma sometimes associated with free or reduced-price meal programs.

Hunger and food insecurity among our children are urgent issues that require bold, compassionate solutions. By committing to free school meals for all, the Hawai'i DOE can take a critical step toward alleviating financial pressures on families, supporting student achievement, and ensuring no child in our state goes hungry.

I respectfully ask the Hawai'i Department of Education to reconsider its approach and reject any measures that would increase the financial strain on hardworking 'ohana. Instead, let us work collaboratively to end hunger for our keiki and build a brighter, more equitable future for all.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Emily Emmons
emily@hoolafarms.org
Parent and Concerned Community Member

01/17/2025

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Lynn Bowen

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

Most parents are already strapped trying to make ends meet. Please do NOT raise these fees.

Mahalo

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January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Judy Peckenpaugh

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony

Write Testimony

As a retired school nurse, please don't let our keiki go hungry by raising school lunch prices. This would be criminal.

Also, summer programs are crucial for working parents trying to make ends meet in the most expensive state in America. We must prioritize our keiki, they are our future.

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Susan Boynton

Organization

Retiree, DOE

Position/Title

Substitute teacher, PCNC

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

So many school age children are dependent on these meals. Do not deny these children a decent meal, this could be the only means that some of these children can receive a decent meal. Food prices in Hawaii are astronomical and many parents cannot afford to adequately feed their children proper nutrition.

The State of Hawaii, the DOE can do their part by opposing this increase.

Mahalo

January 16, 2025, Finance and Infrastructure Committee Meeting

Name

Susan Boynton

Organization

Retiree, DOE

Position/Title

Substitute teacher, PCNC

Agenda Item

IV. Fees for student activities, summer school, school meals, and bus transportation

Position

Oppose

Written Testimony**Write Testimony**

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Mahalo