



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 02/10/2021

Time: 03:00 PM

Location: 229

Committee: Senate Education
Senate Higher Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB 0245 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education's existing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) working group to create a state plan to make completion of the FAFSA or an opt-out waiver a statewide graduation requirement by the 2023-2024 school year. Requires a report to the 2022 Legislature.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) respectfully offers comments on SB 245.

The purpose of SB 245 is to establish a working group to create a state plan to make the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, or an opt-out waiver for FAFSA completion, a statewide graduation requirement by the 2023-2024 school year. The Department recognizes the important role of public education in providing support for students and families in completing applications for post-secondary education but has concerns about hinging a student's graduation on FAFSA completion and the submission of an opt-out waiver.

The Department is committed to supporting students and families through the FAFSA process. The Department and Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education work together to provide support for high schools to help students and families complete the FAFSA through media and print resources, counselor professional development, virtual student and family workshops, an online FAFSA Data Dashboard for school completion rates, and a function in the Department's Longitudinal Data System to monitor individual student FAFSA completion data. High school counselors offer workshops and activities, classroom guidance, one-to-one counseling, targeted outreach interventions, and parent conferences to support college exploration, the application process, and FAFSA completion.

As of January 8, 2021, the Department's FAFSA completion percentage was 37.8% while the national average was 32.2%. Although the number of our completed applications decreased by 4.2% compared to this time last year, the national number of completed applications saw a larger decrease of 10.6%. This is consistent with the previous two years, showing that the Department performs above the national average in FAFSA completion.

While this measure does provide an option to opt-out of FAFSA completion, the Department is concerned about the negative messaging that comes across when promoting a policy of FAFSA for all students when not all students are eligible. Making families formally declare they want to opt-out of FAFSA completion may draw unwanted attention to private issues that students are grappling with, such as court involvement, legal tax issues, undocumented status, or other family hardships. The emotional well-being of students and the positive relationships between schools and families are at risk when we take that stance of obligating students to fill out the application.

The mission of the Department is to ensure that all students are college- and career-ready, which include different paths upon graduation including direct entry into the workforce and other options in addition to two- or four-year post-secondary institutions. The required completion of the FAFSA or the opt-out form reinforces the mindset that college is the single pathway to success which is contrary for a significant number of students.

Further, the Board of Education approves graduation requirements for all students regardless of students' post-secondary plans. Requiring FAFSA completion as a graduation requirement that students can opt-out of is of great concern as it will set a precedent that students may opt out of other graduation requirements.

Given the Department's ongoing work and commitment to supporting students and families in completing applications for post-secondary education and the desire to not penalize students whose career pathways do not include post-secondary institutions, the Department respectfully submits that this measure is not needed at this time.

The Hawai'i State Department of Education is committed to delivering on our promises to students, providing an equitable, excellent, and innovative learning environment in every school to engage and elevate our communities. This is achieved through targeted work around three impact strategies: school design, student voice, and teacher collaboration. Detailed information is available at www.hawaiipublicschools.org.

OFFICE OF INFORMATION PRACTICES

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To: Senate Committees on Education and on Higher Education

From: Cheryl Kakazu Park, Director

Date: February 10, 2021, 3:00 p.m.
Via Videoconference

Re: Testimony on S.B. No. 245
Relating to Education

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill, which would establish a working group to create a state plan to make FAFSA completion, or an opt-out waiver for FAFSA completion, a statewide graduation requirement. The Office of Information Practices (OIP) takes no position on the substance of this bill, but has comments and a **recommendation and proposed amendment** regarding the bill's proposed exemption from the Sunshine Law, part I of chapter 92.

This bill proposes to completely exempt the working group from the Sunshine Law, although it would require it to post some form of minutes with no set requirement as to their level of detail or when they must be posted. It is not obvious why the proposed working group would need a complete exemption from the Sunshine Law to be able to effectively consider the proposal to make FAFSA completion a high school graduation requirement, as the issues it is required to consider do not seem to be ones that would involve discussions of individually identifiable student information on any kind of a regular basis. Further, OIP notes that the proposal to require students to complete the FAFSA to graduate from high school is likely to be of high interest to public high school students and their parents

or guardians, particularly since completing the FAFSA requires a student's parents or guardians to provide extensive financial information and tax return information. It is likely that members of the public will be interested in weighing in on this issue, yet this bill would not allow them to provide testimony to the working group or attend its meetings, but only to read minutes posted at some unspecified time after a meeting has taken place.

OIP notes that the proposed working group includes many government officials and employees who may need to discuss college financial aid issues with one another as part of their usual jobs. If there is a concern that the Sunshine Law's requirements would constrain their ability to talk with one another about financial aid issues as needed for their usual jobs, these Committees could address that by adding a permitted interaction allowing less than a quorum of members to talk about board business together, while still allowing for public participation consistent with the purpose and intent of the Sunshine Law.

Thus, OIP would strongly recommend that these Committees either remove entirely the Sunshine Law exemption at bill page 5, lines 17-21, or replace it with a permitted interaction allowing less than a quorum of members to talk together. If the Committees prefer the option of replacing the exemption with a permitted interaction, OIP would recommend the following language:

Two or more members of the working group, but less than the number of members that would constitute a quorum for the working group, may discuss between themselves matters relating to official business of the working group to enable them to faithfully perform their duties to the working group and the organizations they represent, as long as no

Senate Committee on Education
February 10, 2021
Page 3 of 3

commitment to vote is made or sought. Such discussions shall be a permitted interaction under section 92-2.5, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

Thank you for considering our comments and recommendation.

FAFSA Completion Graduation Requirement **OPPOSE** 2021

Written & Submitted by Mahina Kamakana-Juario, Counselor, Molokai High School

My statements DO NOT SUPPORT MAKING FAFSA COMPLETION A GRADUATION REQUIREMENT;

- Students who live in disruptive homes or have errant parents and other unusual situations cannot be expected to complete the FAFSA. Who will create a plan to track down absent parents or guardians who are willing (not) to give up personal information?
- My school relies on community partners for assistance and we find much success from partnering. Partners like Alu Like Inc, Lili'uokalani Trust, UHMC EOC, HI P-20 are great partners and empowering them would also help to increase the FAFSA Completion. My school has won 3 years in a row "Cash for College" in completing the FAFSA because of help from our partners. In Maui County, we have small schools that need help with FAFSA Completion and partners in the community are better suited to assist FAFSA Completion because they know the families and they can maneuver around schedules and can easily assist families.
- FAFSA Completion does not need to be a graduation requirement because it will bombard the schools that already need help with educating our youth. You're adding on another responsibility for teachers to get trained for FAFSA Completion when they already are up to their eyeballs with curriculum and teaching. Community partners and or professionals that do this on a regular basis are suited for this.
- Not everyone will venture to college and they are not required to. Employment or military or raising a family might be their choice after high school is done. They don't need FAFSA to do that. Empower those agencies that are willing and able to assist with FAFSA Completion for those who want to attend college. It makes better sense and more practical for what is desired.
- Young people want to venture out on their own once high school is done. That means they want to cut ties with their parents. In many instances, they can't do it without their parent's financial information if they are considering going to college. This cannot be a "Catch 22" for young people; you need this in order to get that. If this can be figured out, then you'd have more young people completing their FAFSA.
- To make FAFSA Completion a graduation requirement may be seen as punitive versus a plus for students. This could be a positive for some students, but catastrophic for others. If a student does not want to attend college but completed all of their high school requirements, would the schools deny them their high school diploma?

SB-245

Submitted on: 2/8/2021 9:17:22 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/10/2021 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Crystal Kondo	Individual	Oppose	No

Comments:

Requiring students to fill out the FAFSA for graduation unfairly punishes undocumented students. Undocumented students cannot receive FAFSA services, and it potentially exposes information they would rather not share.

Additionally, a diploma should be a measure of the educational gains that a student makes towards a diploma. Completing the FAFSA is not a measure of these gains.

The FAFSA should continue to be a service provided to students who CHOOSE to utilize it. It should not be required.

SB-245

Submitted on: 2/9/2021 10:17:46 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/10/2021 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Jacey Waterhouse	Individual	Oppose	No

Comments:

I do not support this bill as many students are unable to complete the FAFSA because they cannot obtain the required information from their parent(s), they are not interested (for religious/personal reasons), they are not ready to attend college following high school graduation and/or they are already enrolled or accepted into a credentialing program that will not accept the FAFSA. Furthermore, public/charter schools do not have the resources (physical, technological and/or human) to ensure completion if this is mandated.



MAUI
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
VOICE OF BUSINESS

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**HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON
EDUCATION & HIGHER EDUCATION
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM 229
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2021 AT 3:00 P.M.**

To The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Chair;
The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair;
Members of the Committee on Education;

To The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair;
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair;
Members of the Committee on Higher Education;

SUPPORT SB245 RELATING TO EDUCATION

Aloha, my name is Pamela Tumpap. I am the President of the Maui Chamber of Commerce, in the county most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of our dependence on the visitor industry and corresponding rate of unemployment. I am writing share our support of SB245.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce supports a working group to look at how students who want to go to college and their parents can be encouraged to and receive more help to complete FAFSA. According to the FAFSA website, it takes an average of 55 minutes to complete the form, plus additional hours to collect the needed information. This can be overwhelming for parents and students alike and support and education on this process would be valuable. This is an important effort to capture federal money to get those students to college with better opportunities and will need special resources, outreach and education to parents and students.

However, we feel strongly that failure to complete the FAFSA or opt-out waiver should not bar a student from graduating. During this pandemic especially, parents and students have many things taking up their time and attention and there are many reasons why they may get distracted and forget to turn in paperwork and it would be a disservice to students to not allow them to graduate for failing to turn in the opt-out waiver. We feel the working group should be empowered to create a plan to get more FAFSA's completed in a positive manner without this restriction.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this matter and provide comments and ask that this bill be passed.

Sincerely,

Pamela Tumpap
President

To advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating for a responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.