



**Testimony to the House Committee on Economic Revitalization, Business, and Military
Affairs**

Thursday, January 29, 2009

8:30 AM

Conference Room 312

RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 457 RELATING TO EDUCATION

Chair McKelvey, Vice Chair Choy, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Charles Ota and I am the Vice President for the Military Affairs Committee of The Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii (The Chamber). I am here to state The Chamber's support of House Bill No. 457, Relating to Education.

The Chamber's Military Affairs Council (MAC) serves as the liaison for the state in matters relating to the U.S. military and provides oversight for the State's multi-billion dollar defense industry.

The measure proposes to appropriate funds to expand transition programs for military-impacted schools in the state and to hire necessary personnel to coordinate the transition programs.

I would specifically like to address Section 1 of this bill.

The quality of schooling provided to military children is the top quality of life concern faced by military families moving to Hawaii. This concern has existed for many years, and persistent efforts by the Hawaii Department of Education (DOE) and the military community have resulted in establishing the highly successful student transition program at Radford High School. The successful efforts were steered by the Joint Venture Education Forum (JVEF), which is a chartered partnership between Hawaii's U.S. military commands and families and the Hawaii Department of Education and its military impacted schools.

Tied to the work of the JVEF is an annual appropriation of congressional defense funding channeled through the U.S. Department of Defense to the U.S. Pacific Command at Camp Smith. These funds helped to establish student transition centers at qualifying schools, such as the center at Radford High School. However, JVEF funds may not be used to pay for salaries and wages.

The bill proposes to authorize the use of federal impact aid funds received annually by the DOE through the U.S. Department of Education. These funds flow directly to the DOE for use in helping to defray the cost of schooling the children of U.S. military and other federal employees in Hawaii's public schools.

Annual federal impact aid funding to the DOE amounts to about \$48 million.

The success of a transition center at schools with high enrollments of children from military and other federal employee families largely depends on the schools being able to have a trained staff to implement the program. This would be especially important at many schools such as Radford where the enrollment of students from federally employed families exceeds 50%.

General DOE funding from the state does not provide for staffing a transition center. Schools already struggle to fund the cost of classroom operations, other student services, and school administration.

The transition of military students and other federal employees into U.S. public schools is considered a priority issue, so much so that the Council of State Governments has acted to establish an Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. A separate bill is expected to be introduced during this session to recommend that Hawaii join this compact. We will support this legislation.

We should also like to mention that transition centers could also be available to service all students, including those of residents and other non-federally connected families. We believe that all students, regardless of whether their parents are employed by the federal government, face similar challenges that could be eased by a transition center.

For these reasons, the MAC strongly recommends approval of HB 457.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.