



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE, 2023**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

S.B. NO. 971, S.D. 2, H.D. 1, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

DATE: Thursday, March 30, 2023

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 308

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Yamashita and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

The bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) to collect certain data on county bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students. The bill also requires an annual report to the Legislature and appropriates funds to the DOE to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes.

The Department respectfully recommends the following revisions:

- (1) To clarify that the bill covers charter *high* school students, rather than *all* charter school students, which we understand is the intent of the bill, we suggest adding "high" between "charter" and "school students" on: page 4, line 18; page 5, lines 3 and 6; and page 6, line 6, of the bill.
- (2) The DOE is not responsible for the provision of bus transportation for individual charter schools and their students. Individual charter schools are in charge of deciding whether and to what extent they will provide transportation to and from a student's home and charter school. For those reasons, we recommend that the Hawaii State Public Charter School Commission (Commission) be involved in the collection of data referenced in the bill, and a separate appropriation should be made to the Commission to offer bus passes to charter high school students. References to the Commission should be added to the provisions on: page 4, lines 16-18;

page 5, lines 4-7; and page 5, lines 16-21. Additionally, the words "and charter school" on page 6, line 6, should be deleted from the appropriation to the DOE in section 3 of the bill and a separate appropriation to the Commission to provide bus passes to charter high school students and the expenditure of those moneys should be added to the bill. Purpose (3) at page 5, lines 1 through 3, should also add wording to clarify that the appropriations are separate.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



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

Date: 03/30/2023
Time: 02:00 PM
Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: SB 0971, SD2, HD1 RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on county bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes. Effective 6/30/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 971, SD2, HD1, which allows the continuation of the successful Expanding Ridership to Educate Students in School (EXPRESS) pilot program and expands it to include charter school high school students.

The school bus driver shortages continue to affect transportation options for students. Allowing high school students access to public transportation helps address the driver shortage while providing opportunities to improve their overall well-being and increase access to educational and social opportunities.

Usage of the HOLO card program on Oahu from October through December 2022 shows that students have tapped their EXPRESS cards between 38,000 – 43,000 times between Monday through Friday and 11,000 – 15,000 on the weekends. Students are riding most frequently at 7:00 a.m. and between 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m., which is consistent with most high school bell times.

If funding were provided to continue this program, the Department would have the means to include public charter schools. At the time of inception, the Student Transportation Services

branch utilized funds from their general fund allocation to support this program, so charter schools were not included in this initial pilot. However, the Department does acknowledge the testimony put forward by the Attorney General's Office around the inclusion of charter schools and requests clarifying amendments.

The Department would request that clarifications be made to state that the EXPRESS county bus pass program is intended for charter **high** school students only.

Additionally, the Department requests that the legislature add language in the bill to acknowledge that while the Department is not responsible for bus transportation for individual charter schools and their students, for the purposes of this EXPRESS county bus pass program, the Department will be responsible for purchasing the bus passes and then providing them to the Charter School Commission to distribute to the appropriate charter schools. The Department is in conversations with the Charter School Commission, and rather than having them duplicate the EXPRESS county bus pass program and infrastructure, the Department is willing to leverage its existing program and provide the required bus passes for charter high schools contingent upon receiving the additional funds.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

JOSH GREEN. M.D.
GOVERNOR



CATHY K. IKEDA
CHAIRPERSON

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION
(‘AHA KULA HO‘ĀMANA)

<http://CharterCommission.Hawaii.Gov>
1111 Bishop Street, Suite 516, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Tel: (808) 586-3775 Fax: (808) 586-3776

FOR: SB971 SD2 Relating to Student Transportation
DATE: March 30, 2023
TIME: 2:00 P.M.
COMMITTEE: Committee on Finance
ROOM: Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
FROM: Yvonne Lau, Interim Executive Director
State Public Charter School Commission

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and members of the Committee:

The State Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony in **SUPPORT of SB 971 SD2 HD1** which appropriates funds to the Department of Education (DOE) to provide public high school students and charter high school students with bus passes. The measure also requires the DOE to collect data on city bus pass usage by public high school students and charter high school students and requires an annual report from the DOE.

With respect to the concerns of the Attorney General, the Commission agrees that the Department is not responsible for providing bus transportation for individual charter schools and their students, however, what this measure seeks to do is to provide access to public charter high school students with access to county bus passes. The DOE has already worked out agreements with the individual counties to purchase the bus passes, but to require the Commission and the individual charter high schools to replicate the process that the DOE has already done would be an additional cost and burden to the schools and ultimately the state. Should the DOE be amenable to assisting the Commission and its public charter high schools in securing the bus passes, the Commission commits to working with the DOE to provide the requisite data for each of the charter high schools that would be eligible to receive bus passes for their students.

The Commission appreciates that this measure provides the funding needed to make this program available to charter school students and the Legislature’s proactive intention of

addressing student transportation challenges, especially for rural and remote communities. The Commission will be available to assist the DOE as needed in effectuating the requirements of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR



J. ROGER MORTON
DIRECTOR

JON Y. NOUCHI
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

TESTIMONY OF J. ROGER MORTON
DIRECTOR OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE

Thursday, March 30, 2023, 2:00 PM, Via Videoconference

TO: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair, Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair,
and Members of the Committee on Finance

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 971, SENATE DRAFT 2, HOUSE
DRAFT 1, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

The Department of Transportation Services (DTS) of the City and County of Honolulu (City) **strongly supports** Senate Bill 971, Senate Draft 2, House Draft 1 (SB 971 SD2 HD1), relating to student transportation.

DTS is aware that allowing students free access to public transportation is common practice in several major cities around the world and has shown positive outcomes for families and students alike as it increases their access to not only education, but to medical care, food and shelter resources, libraries, and other social opportunities. Additionally, the annual cost of public transportation is less than half the cost of school bus service per student. According to the National Center for Education Statistics the average cost of school bus service was \$1,152 per student per school year (2018 - 2019 data). That amount is likely to be at least 10% higher in Hawai'i, compared to the annual cost of a youth bus pass at \$480 a year per student.

DTS partnered with the Department of Education (DOE) in September of 2022 to help launch the EXPRESS pilot program, allowing all DOE students in grades 9-12 access to public transportation at no cost to families. The program was launched, in part, to help address the school bus driver shortage, remove transportation barriers to non-school hour programming and empower students to develop healthy public transit habits at an early age.

House Committee on Finance
Testimony on S.B. No. 971, SD2, HD1, Relating to Student Transportation
March 30, 2023

From the inception of the pilot program through January 2023, DTS has recorded the following usage from DOE students utilizing the EXPRESS program:

2022	Number of HOLO Card Taps (Boardings)
Oct	40,206
Nov	95,003
Dec	93,837
2023	
Jan	80,136
Grand Total	309,182

The highest recorded times for usage were Monday – Friday, from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., which aligns with DOE school bell times. The second highest usage for the school week were from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., indicating students are able to participate in after school hour activities and catching the bus home afterwards. Weekend taps for students were about 15,000 – 20,300.

In addition, DTS continues to work closely with the DOE on ways to streamline public transportation access for high school students. By collaborating with different stakeholders over the last several weeks, DTS and DOE have identified methods to better support student transportation needs, as well as negotiate a special discounted rate for DOE to provide public transit passes to high school students.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support.



Email: communications@ulupono.com

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Thursday, March 30, 2023 — 2:00 p.m.

Ulupono Initiative supports SB 971 SD2 HD1, Relating to Student Transportation.

Dear Chair Yamashita and Members of the Committee:

My name is Micah Munekata, and I am the Director of Government Affairs at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy and clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

Ulupono supports SB 971 SD2 HD1, which requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on city bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students; requires an annual report to the Legislature; and, appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes.

In addition to the numerous educational benefits for students, this measure would help meet many community goals and make transportation choices more affordable across all islands. Specifically, these types of complementary and supportive programs from the State help us support our communities more effectively to:

- **Improve congestion**—Up to 20–30% of morning traffic can be generated by parents driving their children to school.¹
- **Reduce our climate impacts**—It is not possible to rely exclusively on the electrification of the current system to meet our climate goal of carbon net neutrality by 2045.² We need those who want to walk, bike and bus to be able to do so as conveniently as possible. This also includes students and their families.
- **Lower the cost of living in Hawai'i**—If we can help our households' shed cars, we can help them save up to \$16,200 per year while reducing the indirect public costs associated with vehicle ownership that amount to \$11.2 billion per year in Hawai'i.³ In addition, housing can become more affordable if we don't dedicate so much land and financial resources to expensive, space-intensive car dependency.

¹ <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2012/09/05/september-brings-back-to-school-jump-in-traffic-congestion/>

² Presentation at Hawaii Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission Meeting 4/6/2022
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqwhX8RI_IQ

³ "The Costs of the Vehicle Economy in Hawai'i," <https://ulupono.com/news-listing/report-examines-hawaii-s-21-8-billion-vehicle-economy/>.

- **Make bus transit more family-friendly**—At the high end, a family of four on O‘ahu currently could pay up to \$18 per trip.⁴ If one parent has a monthly pass and the kids now are free, that transit becomes a much more affordable option. Although not the intent of this bill, it is an additional benefit.

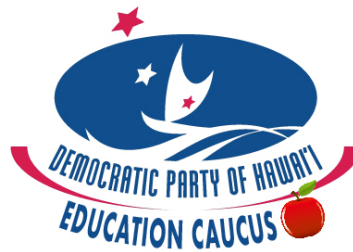
As Hawai‘i’s transportation needs are increasingly complex and challenging, we appreciate the state exploring and supporting the many different policies that help improve our transportation choices in our communities

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Micah Munekata
Director of Government Affairs

⁴ Round-trip for 2 adults at \$3 per leg and 2 kids fares at \$1.50 per leg. No monthly pass discount assumed.



SENATE BILL 971, SD2, HD1, RELATING TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

MARCH 30, 2023 · HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE ·
CHAIR REP. KYLE YAMASHITA

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** SB 971, SD2, HD1, relating to student transportation, which requires the Department of Education to collect certain data on county bus pass usage for public high school and charter school students; requires an annual report to the Legislature; and appropriates funds to the Department of Education to provide public high school and charter school students with bus passes.

Currently, the Hawai'i Department of Education provides regular bus service to meet school transportation requirements and ensure adequate attendance for children. According to HIDOE, an average of 35,090 regular education students ride the bus each day, along with 3,359 special education students. Bus service is essential for students who lack other transportation options, especially those who live in remote communities or face financial hardship.

A nationwide shortage of bus drivers that is being experienced by 80 percent of school districts has caused route cancellations and transportation disruptions for many working families. Around 33,000 students across the islands the rely on DOE school buses to commute to and from school each day. Yet, **150 out of 700 bus driver positions were left vacant as of September of 2022**, despite efforts to increase pay and provide recruitment incentives.

To qualify for regular bus service, students in grades kindergarten through five must reside a mile or more, and students in grades six through twelve must reside 1.5 miles or more, from the school within their geographic area in which they are enrolled. Students who qualify for bus service may receive a free bus pass if they meet eligibility requirements or pay \$36.00 for quarterly one-way trips, \$72.00 for quarterly round trips, or \$10.00 for ten coupons. A student who qualifies for *free* lunch under the free and reduced-price lunch program is eligible for a free bus pass. **Yet, free bus passes are not given to students who qualify for reduced price lunch.**

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, bus service has become a tremendous challenge for remote communities. On Hawai'i Island, for instance, bus routes have been routinely cancelled because of a lack of drivers in areas that are already exceedingly large and that require lengthy travel times for students—in some cases, students must travel over 1.5 hours to reach their schools. These areas also tend to be some of the most impoverished districts in our state.

Families of students at Ka'u High School and Pahala Elementary (one campus), for instance, have a median annual income of \$39,751, less than half of the state average of \$83,173 for families of public school students. According to the most recent STRIVE HI report, 63 percent of students at Ka'u High and Pahala Elementary missed fifteen or more school days. **This data shows the strong correlation between poverty and chronic absenteeism, a problem that is exacerbated by the lack of affordable transportation options for working families.**

Therefore, passage of this measure would assist many impoverished families in obtaining transportation for their keiki and, thus, reduce the chronic absenteeism that prevents children from reaching their full potential.

Kris Coffield · Chairperson, DPH Education Caucus · (808) 679-7454 · kriscoffield@gmail.com

From: Emily Warren, Individual (Former DOE Student Transportation Administrator)

To: Representative Yamashita, Chair, Representative Kitagawa, Vice Chair and Members of the House Finance Committee

Re: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 971, Relating to Student Transportation

Thursday, March 30, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 308 Via Videoconference

As a previous Department of Education (DOE) employee working in student transportation, I **strongly support** SB 971 relating to student transportation. This bill is a long game investment that will benefit our students, our state budget, and our infrastructure.

Cost of school bus service per student per school year	Cost of public transportation per student per school year	Savings per student
\$1,667	\$400	\$1,267

As you can see from the financial information above, the state stands to save over \$1,200 per student if they choose to ride public transportation vs. a school bus.

DOE student transportation is appropriated \$55 million per year.

Annual school bus service ridership: 33,000

$\$55 \text{ million} / 33,000 \text{ students} = \$1,667$ is the cost of school bus service per student.

As public transit services expand across all islands, it is highly likely that as time passes, more students would choose to utilize public transportation.

While working for student transportation at the DOE, I had the opportunity to talk to dozens of families regarding their transportation challenges and the impact it had on their students. I spoke with a grandmother on Kauai who was taking care of her 3 grandchildren while her daughter worked 2 jobs trying to support the family. She couldn't drive her grandchildren to and from school every day, which affected their ability to participate in sports and other after school activities. The children were missing school on a regular basis until the DOE launched the EXPRESS program, which allowed them access to free public transit (something they could not afford on their own).

I spoke with a couple in Ewa who both worked in the healthcare profession and needed school bus service to get their daughter to and from school due to their work schedules, however there was no room on the bus. The access to public transit allowed their daughter to get to and from school consistently and she was able to participate in an after school academic program that she had previously been unable to attend.

I spoke with a single mother on Maui who relied on school bus service for her daughter and son. When their bus route was suspended due to driver shortages, she had to take vacation hours to get to work late and leave early to drop off and pick her kids from school. Her vacation hours were running out and she was about to start having to take leave without pay when the EXPRESS program "threw her a lifeline" enabling her kids to take the public transit buses to and from school.

Additionally, as a Board of Directors appointee for the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, I can tell you with 100% certainty that the school bus driver shortage is going to continue to get worse until school bus driving is considered a full-time job with benefits (like most CDL professional driving careers). As an average taxpayer, I would love to see my tax money go towards a program like this that enables and empowers our youth and by extension, our families. Allowing students access to free public transportation sends a strong message to our communities that you see and understand the foundational challenges to success, which most frequently start with transportation barriers.