



February 21, 2024

To: COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Rep. Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Re: SUPPORT of HB1775 HD1 - Relating to Education

Hrg: February 23, 2024, 1:00 PM

The Hawai'i Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 450 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawai'i through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy. Additionally, HPHA aims to call attention to issues around social justice and equity in areas that extend beyond the traditional context of health (e.g., education, digital equity, cultural sensitivity), which can have profound impacts on health equity and well-being. Therefore, as stewards of public health, HPHA is also advocating for equity in all policies.

HPHA supports HB 1775 HD1 as the bill aims to provide universal free school meals ensure that every child has access to a nutritious and balanced meal while in school, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Currently, 2 out of 3 struggling families are ineligible for free school meals, and the cost of school meals can be a barrier to accessing nutritious meals. Universal free school meals can alleviate the financial burden on families and promote a healthier, more equitable educational environment. This initiative contributes to better physical health and increases students' ability to concentrate, learn, and thrive academically.

HPHA strongly supports HB 1775 HD1 and respectfully asks that you pass this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Holly Kessler
Executive Director