



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Human Services and
Senate Committee on Education
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By
Nathan Murata, Dean
College of Education
And
Michael Bruno, PhD
Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 2701 – RELATING TO EARLY EDUCATION

Chairs San Buenaventura and Kidani, Vice Chairs Ihara and Kim, and members of the committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 2701, relating to early education. This bill seeks to help retain and recruit early childhood educators. We need to make investments in our early childhood workforce to support children, our working families, and our state.

Early care and learning programs are the cornerstones of our communities. They support our youngest learners and our working families. But they are facing a crisis. Low-compensation has forced dedicated professionals to leave the field and prevented others from joining. To begin to address low compensation among early childhood educators, SB 2701, seeks to create a pilot wage subsidy program for child care workers.

In addition, a common barrier to recruiting and retaining students who are pursuing early childhood education courses through higher education is not having money to pay for tuition. There needs to be funding for Hawaii's Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program, whose purpose is to support the early learning workforce by providing financial assistance upfront to eligible individuals taking coursework in early childhood education. Hawaii's Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program was established through Act 210 in 2021 without an appropriation. SB 2701 seeks to fund the Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Special Fund, which will be expended by the Executive Office on Early Learning for Hawaii's Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program.

Without support for these programs and the workforce, families will have fewer options for the care and education of their children. In UHERO's economic forecast for the state, economist Carl Bonham noted, "By making early childhood education accessible to more families, these programs will increase labor force participation, particularly among

women. They also represent an important investment in the development of the country's future human capital and in the fight against poverty". Growing quality, affordable programs won't happen without ensuring we have the workforce we need and our children deserve. I respectfully request the committee support working families and the dedicated early care and learning professionals by voting favorably on SB 2701