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[EXTERNAL] Testimony – NBI 25-22 Policy on Hawaiian Permit Requirements, Program Responsibilities, and Review

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From Simon Tajiri <simon.tajiri@k12.hi.us>

Date Thu 1/15/2026 8:07 AM

To HTSB <htsb@hawaii.gov>

**Name:** Simeona Tajiri

**Position/Title:** Kumu Kaiapuni

**Organization:** Lānaʻi High and Elementary School (DOE)

**Meeting:** Hawaiʻi Teacher Standards Board – General Business Meeting

**Agenda Item:** NBI 25 22 Policy on Hawaiian Permit Requirements, Program Responsibilities, and Review

**Position:** Support

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Aloha Chair and Honorable Members of the Board,

My name is Simeona Tajiri. I am an immersion teacher, and I submit this testimony with deep respect for the work of the Hawaiʻi Teacher Standards Board and with serious concern for how the Palapala Aʻo Kūikawā (PAK), the Hawaiian Permit, is understood and implemented—particularly in rural and neighbor island communities such as my home island of Lānaʻi.

I am from Lānaʻi. I am Japanese-Filipino by ancestry, and I have taken up our shared kuleana to live Hawaiʻi by becoming a kumu kaiapuni through the Hawaiian Permit pathway. In 2015, Lānaʻi High and Elementary School hired me to help establish a Hawaiian language immersion program in direct response to sustained community advocacy. That advocacy culminated in the Hawaiʻi Supreme Court's 2019 ruling affirming that reasonable access to Hawaiian language immersion is a constitutional right of every child in Hawaiʻi.

At the time I was hired, I held only a substitute license and had limited ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi. I taught full-time while taking Hawaiian language classes at night. Progress was slow, but the need in our community was immediate.

In 2020, I registered for the Palapala Aʻo Kūikawā and joined a 2021 cohort with my colleague [REDACTED]. Through the Hawaiian Permit process, we received our first formal grounding in Hawaiian pedagogy and curriculum design—knowledge that was essential as we built a kaiapuni program from the ground up while holding only substitute licenses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, expanded distance learning options finally made it possible for us to continue our ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi studies and pursue teaching degrees.

For me, the Hawaiian Permit was a critical support. It allowed me to work full-time at LHES with benefits for one year. Prior to that, I had to seek additional work during school breaks to make ends meet. Living on substitute pay on Lānaʻi—even as a single person—was difficult to sustain.

However, the Hawaiian Permit has not been implemented consistently. [REDACTED]'s PAK placement was not accepted by our school while he was student teaching. The same occurred for me the following year. Despite the fact that we were classroom teachers meeting the daily needs of our students, our work was not fully recognized for compensation purposes because we were also completing student teaching requirements.

Today, I am the only person who grew up on Lānaʻi who is licensed and teaching at Kula Kaiapuni ʻo Lānaʻi. Without the extraordinary sacrifice of two licensed Maui kumu—Kumu [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]—there would be no immersion program on our island at all. They moved to Lānaʻi to establish and solidify our program. Even now, Lānaʻi does not have a complete PreK–12 kaiapuni pathway. Families who fought for immersion still have children—now teenagers—who cannot access middle- or high-school kaiapuni on their home island.

There are mothers in our community currently working toward teaching degrees. One of them, [REDACTED], has carried a lower-elementary kaiapuni classroom on her own for two years as a substitute teacher. She is raising a family, navigating college for the first time, learning ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi, and teaching full-time with limited experience and limited language support—while surviving on substitute pay in one of the highest cost-of-living communities in the state. Substitute-teacher pay is not enough and we are doing our part as a community to support her. She has the commitment and cultural grounding to become a kumu kaiapuni, but the pathway is long and demanding. Once she fulfills the language requirements, she is counting on her ability to apply for PAK to carry her through the rest of her schooling. Without PAK, she will have to look for additional work to make ends meet.

For these reasons, it is essential that the Hawaiian Permit be reasonably accessible to community members who are committed to learning the language and becoming kumu kaiapuni. I began studying Hawaiian seriously in 2011 and did not reach the level of fluency required to apply for the Hawaiian Permit until 2021—a full decade. During that time, I was already a college-educated adult familiar with academic systems and expectations. For educators like [REDACTED], who is attending college for the first time and whose parents did not graduate from college, the pathway is even steeper. These educators are simultaneously learning to navigate higher education, acquiring ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi, and teaching full-time. This is not a question of motivation. It is a question of time, access, and support. For rural communities like Lānaʻi, the up-to-ten-year renewal window for the Hawaiian Permit is not excessive; it is realistic and aligned with the actual timelines required for adult language acquisition, degree completion, and licensure.

I respectfully ask the Board, through its review of NBI 25-22, to:

- Honor PAK as equivalent to a teaching license statewide.
- Allow permit holders to receive full time teacher pay when serving as classroom instructors while student teaching.
- Require continued oversight and corrective action to ensure the 2019 constitutional mandate is meaningfully fulfilled in rural and hard to staff communities such as Lānaʻi.
- Preserve the Hawaiian Permit as a renewable pathway—up to ten years—intended to realistically support educators' progression toward licensure.

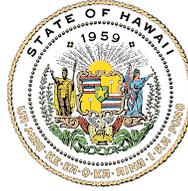
To ensure that this review does not later get interpreted as changing the intent of the Hawaiian Permit, I respectfully urge the Board to implement NBI 25-22 in full continuity with NBI 16-06, which established the Hawaiian Permit as a renewable pathway—up to ten years—designed to realistically

support educators in progressing toward licensure, particularly in rural and hard-to-staff kaiapuni communities.

Na'u nō me ka ha'aha'a,  
Simeona Tajiri  
Kumu Kaiapuni, Lāna'i

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JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
KIA'ĀINA  
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI  
LUNA HO'ONA'AUAO  
SUPERINTENDENT

**MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I**  
**STATE OF HAWAI'I**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
**KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO**  
P.O. BOX 2360  
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96804

OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN EDUCATION

January 14, 2026

To: Chair Kristi Miyamae and Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board Members  
Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board

From: Kau'i Sang, Director  
Office of Hawaiian Education  
Hawai'i Department of Education

**Subject:** Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board, General Business Meeting  
Agenda Item IV. C. NBI 25-22 Policy on Hawaiian Permit Requirements,  
Program Responsibilities, and Review

Aloha Members of the Teacher Standards Committee,

The Hawai'i Department of Education appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on Agenda Item III. B. NBI 25-22: Policy on Hawaiian Permit Requirements, Program Responsibilities, and Review. We request substantial amendments to the NBI to align with the recommendations made by the Hawaiian Work Group at its December 12, 2025, meeting.

The Department **does not concur** with the direction set forth in the current draft of NBI 25-22 and strongly urges this committee to adopt the revised version attached to this testimony. The revised draft reflects the collaboration of the Department of Education, through its Office of Hawaiian Education, with Ka Papahana Kaiapuni partners and the discussion of the Hawaiian Work Group convened by the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board.

The Department fully supports robust and rigorous teacher standards to ensure the continual delivery of a high quality education to the students in its care. In regards to Ka Papahana Kaiapuni, the need for quality teachers is often overshadowed by the pre-existing practices and frameworks that are deeply embedded within the system and unintentionally act as barriers to actualizing this imperative. At present, Ka Papahana Kaiapuni is in the process of critical research and (re)development. Through the tandem work with program founders, leaders, and experts in actively defining, refining, and reclaiming the methodologies and praxes, the Department hopes to produce and deliver high quality learning experiences. This is essential work and contributes to the ability of our educators and students to successfully overcome barriers and positively contribute to Hawaiian language revitalization. Therefore, it is vital that

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Chair Kristi Miyamae and Board Members

January 14, 2026

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programmatic decisions, such as teacher standards and licensing, take the current context into account.

The Department takes its *kuleana* seriously. We encourage all partners to unite in making clear, well-informed programmatic decisions that support the faculty, staff, and students who have chosen Kaiapuni education.

Should you have any further questions, please contact Dawn Kau'i Sang, Director, Office of Hawaiian Education, at [dawn.sang@k12.hi.us](mailto:dawn.sang@k12.hi.us) or by phone, at (808) 784-6070.

DKS:lh

**New Business Item 25-22**  
Introduced January 16, 2025

**TITLE: Policy on Hawaiian Permit Requirements, Program Responsibilities, and Review**

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The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) adopts the following recommendations from the 2025–2026 Hawaiian Focus Workgroup for the purpose of clarifying the implementation, expectations, and ongoing review of the Hawaiian Permit:

- ~~Educator preparation programs (EPPs) approved by the HTSB that enroll candidates holding a Hawaiian Permit shall be responsible for the planning, coordination, and provision of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i instructional support throughout all required clinical experiences, practicum, and student teaching assignments, and ensure that candidates satisfy HTSB licensure requirements.~~
- Hawaiian permit holders need to be engaged in job relevant professional development aligned with their cultural growth plan which may include a EPP approved by HTSB.
- ~~The HTSB strongly encourages individuals holding a Hawaiian Permit to enroll in a Kaiapuni Hawaiian language teacher EPP to support linguistic and pedagogical proficiency aligned with Kaiapuni educational settings.~~
  - ~~Hawaiian Permit holders enrolled in a non HTSB approved program should be aware of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) requirements (see New Business Item [NBI] 25-04) to ensure eligibility for HTSB licensure.~~
- The Hawaiian Permit, as outlined in Hawaii Administrative Rules, including its eligibility criteria, conditions, and requirements, shall undergo periodic review by the HTSB, with the scope, evaluative criteria, process, and timing determined in collaboration with the Hawaiian Workgroup.

**Rationale/Background:**

The Limited Duty Special Permit-Hawaiian Permit, as defined in Hawaii Administrative Rules §8-54-9.6(a)(1–6) and NBI 16-06, was established to address educator workforce needs in Kaiapuni/Hawaiian Language Immersion and Hawaiian Knowledge educational settings while supporting the revitalization and perpetuation of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. ~~As interest in Hawaiian language instruction and immersion education continues to expand, it is essential that teacher candidates holding a Hawaiian Permit receive appropriate linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical support throughout their preparation to become fully licensed teachers.~~ Hawaii Administrative Rules §8-54-9.6(a)(1–6) further explains that a Hawaiian Permit candidate:

- Is assessed as proficient in the Hawaiian language by the Office of Hawaiian Education in collaboration with a Hawaiian Language Immersion educator preparation program;
- Completes thirty (30) hours of induction by the Office of Hawaiian Education in collaboration with a Hawaiian Language Immersion educator preparation program;

- Submits a cultural growth plan on how the individual will obtain licensure, to be monitored annually by the Office of Hawaiian Education in collaboration with a Hawaiian Language Immersion educator preparation program:

During the 2025–2026 academic year, the Hawaiian Focus Workgroup reviewed the implementation and use of the Hawaiian Permit, identifying areas that required clarification, consistency, and long-term oversight. The Workgroup’s review emphasized the importance of structured ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i support during clinical preparation, alignment with Kaiapuni teacher education pathways, and the need for periodic evaluation of the permit to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.

In considering the broader landscape of Ka Papahana Kaiapuni, the work group highly encourages Hawaiian Permittees to pursue licensure through a Kaiapuni Education Preparation Program. Furthermore, we recommend that candidates pursuing licensure in other programs use the 'Add-A-Field' option to obtain the Kaiapuni license. This pathway adheres to the same rigorous requirements established by the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board.

The adoption of these recommendations is intended to strengthen the preparation and support of Hawaiian Permit holders while ensuring program accountability and instructional quality. ~~Requiring HTSB-approved programs~~ Upholding the language of Hawaii Administrative Rules §8-54-9.6(a)(1–6). HTSB confirms that collaboration between the Office of Hawaiian Education and Hawaiian Language Immersion educator preparation programs to coordinate ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i support during clinical experiences promotes equitable access to language mentorship and reinforces best practices for Kaiapuni immersion or Hawaiian-medium instruction.

~~Encouraging enrollment in Kaiapuni teacher education programs aligns permit holders with established pathways that integrate Hawaiian language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and instructional methodology specific to Kaiapuni settings.~~ Finally, instituting a regular review cycle for the Hawaiian Permit ensures that its requirements remain responsive to evolving educational needs, workforce demands, and community expectations.

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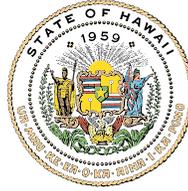
**Cost:**

All costs are included in the current staff job duties/responsibilities.

**Submitted by:** Kristi Miyamae

**Referred to:** Teacher Standards Committee

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
KIA'ĀINA  
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI  
LUNA HO'ONA'AUAO  
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January 14, 2026

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