

Date: April 22, 2026

Subject: Opposition to NBI 25-41: The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board Executive Director's Evaluation Recommendation for 2025-2026

To the Members of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board,

I am writing to formally submit testimony in opposition to NBI 25-41, which recommends a "Commendable" performance rating for Executive Director Felicia Villalobos for the 2025-2026 cycle. While the evaluation highlights certain administrative successes, there are critical areas of concern regarding the Director's leadership and its impact on the educator community that warrant a reconsideration of this rating.

The current approach to program oversight has shifted from a partnership to a more adversarial relationship. This change is hurting the very institutions that train our teachers. Many EPP leaders feel their expertise is being dismissed or undervalued, creating a divide between the programs and the Board. More concerning is that many stakeholders are now hesitant to speak up about these issues. There is a growing fear that voicing a grievance regarding the Executive Director's leadership will result in professional retaliation, leading to a culture where people are afraid to provide honest feedback.

The Executive Director's advocacy for "high standards" and "accountability" has been used to create unnecessary barriers, thereby obstructing the mission of increasing the number of qualified teachers in Hawai'i. There is significant concern that the current decision-making strategies do not align with the goal of facilitating reasonable licensure pathways. For potential teachers, this rigid interpretation of rules has led to the denial of licenses and requirements to redo coursework, resulting in undue financial hardship and emotional stress during an already critical teacher shortage.

A major professional concern is the tendency to change rules or interpretations mid-semester without a clear implementation plan. This lack of transparency and predictability undermines the stability that EPPs and teacher candidates require to succeed.

While maintaining high standards is essential, it should not come at the cost of a collaborative culture or the creation of unnecessary obstacles for those entering the profession. For these reasons, I respectfully oppose the "Commendable" rating and urge the Board to address these issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Hope Pualani McKeen