

From: [Shere-khan Smoot](#)
To: [DBEDT LUC](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Testimony for Meeting February 9, 2023, RE: Kūlanihāko'i High School
Date: Tuesday, February 7, 2023 7:38:18 PM



Aloha Commission Chair Giovanni and Land Use Commissioners,

My name is Shere-khan Smoot, the science teacher at Kūlanihāko'i High School. I appreciate you taking the time to consider the testimony around our high school and the student's ability to safely access the campus. As a Kihei resident, though, it greatly saddens me to see what should be an exciting time for our community and our *haumana* be ruined by a political struggle.

I recognize that the Department of Education has been negligent in abiding by the terms of the 2013 improvement condition. While it has affected our ability to open the campus, it has not stopped us from teaching our students from our temporary site on Lokelani Intermediate School's campus. This arrangement however is only meant to be temporary and is unsustainable for the long term, as we currently occupy five portables that were slated to be remodeled this year. While we are thankful for Lokelani's hospitality, we are also ready to be in our own space.

In order to allow this, we have worked as a school towards a solution rather than wait and have one dictated to us. As highlighted by the latest consultancy meetings with the Kihei community, particularly the one I attended at Lokelani Intermediate in the fall, there is significant support for using shuttle buses as a temporary solution to the lack of a grade separated crossing. As I recall, the indicated support was overwhelmingly in favor of the buses instead of guards. As a result, we have purchased, with the support of the Department, fourteen passenger buses with the primary purpose of shuttling students across the highway, thus eliminating the need for an at-grade pedestrian crossing. And as the school grows, this plan can be expanded to make transportation more streamlined as the Department works on the grade separated crossing.

I appreciate that everyone that has, and will, submit testimony all have an interest in our students' safety, however it's also clear that significant misinformation continues to exist in the community and detracts from the main issue. We all want our students to be safe, and we recognize that the Department has made a very large error in judgment that has forced us all into this position. But I do not appreciate continuing to see our students mischaracterized as brainless individuals who would willingly put their lives at risk to cross the highway and that we as a school community would allow them to do so. Our students are smart, kind, reasonable, and respectful community members too. They each have a voice and a choice in this continued political struggle and deserve to be heard, not dismissed, and talked down to by community members who *think* they know them. I ask that you take the time to focus on their testimony as they have the most significant stake in

the use of our new campus.

Denial of even temporary occupancy would have an immensely damaging impact to our students. This is because our shared arrangement is unsustainable because it severely limits our space, negatively impacts our ability to offer meaningful learning opportunities, and to support our students in an age-appropriate learning environment. As a result, we are not able to allow our students to experience the full range of high school experiences. This includes everything from athletics, clubs, intramurals, electives, Career and Technical classes, to even mundane things like the ability to establish their 'spot' on campus or in the cafeteria. As a result, we see that our students are struggling to find meaning and enjoyment in their education and have trouble seeing themselves as high schoolers who are supported by their community.

As a science teacher, this temporary arrangement is increasingly problematic as it severely limits the range of learning activities that my students are able to participate in. Anyone who has attended high school, can usually describe one or two activities conducted in their science class at some point. These activities generally involve exciting chemical reactions, stomach turning dissections, or complex engineering tasks. However, by being limited to a portable classroom that only has one small sink, no lab counters, and unable to handle the demands of a full class conducting experiments, our students are missing out on the opportunity to participate in these meaningful learning opportunities. Kitchen labs, while fulfilling the basic demands of our curriculum, fail to meaningfully capture the student's attention to the degree the lab facilities the new campus provides.

All of this is to say, that I hope the Commission will take my testimony along with others into account as it hears the Department's updates. There is a plan that is scalable and would allow students to safely access the campus while they work towards a more permanent solution. Allowing our staff and students to temporarily occupy the campus would allow us to demonstrate that we are willing to hold our end of the bargain, and would allow the Commission to firmly set its eye on the Department to ensure they do their part and construct a grade separated crossing as originally directed.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and attention.

Respectfully,

Shere-khan J. Smoot
Science Teacher
Kūlanihāko'i High School

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