To: Senator Jill Tokuda: EDU Committee Chair  
From: Erika Chinn-Galindo, University of Hawaii at Manoa Dietetic Undergraduate  
Re: SCR 48, SD1 – Requesting the department of health convene a task force to expand a school garden program statewide.

Dear Senator Tokuda,

My name is Erika Chinn-Galindo and I am a Dietetic student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. I am writing to ask your support of bill SCR48 which requests that the department of health, through its Healthy Hawaii Initiative, convene a task force to expand a school garden program statewide. I recognize that this task force is important to determine how to best expand a school garden program including recommendations for legislation and funding. School gardens are important as they provide fresh fruits and vegetables to schools in a self-sustainable way. Families vary in their access to supermarkets, farmers markets, and public transportation, making it challenging for all children to have access to high quality affordable fresh produce.  

Nutrition is a very important aspect in a child’s life as it is a critical time in which adequate nutrition is needed for proper growth and development. Children spend majority of their time in school and it is an ideal environment for them to learn and develop healthy eating behaviors that can help to decrease the prevalence of chronic diseases. The decision to pass SCR48 is important to help increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables and decrease the prevalence of chronic diseases among school children.

SCR48 states that over 19% of Hawaii residents live in food insecure households, most of which include school-aged children. The lack of affordable healthy food options in low-income households in Hawaii has been linked to poorer diets and is believed to contribute to chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes.  

Children spend much of their time in school and for a number of children; school lunch is the only nutritious meal that they will receive for that day. Adequate nutrition is essential to help a child achieve their maximum physical and mental potential. Fruits and vegetables provide many essential vitamins and minerals and their consumption is associated with lower risks of coronary heart disease, cancer, obesity, and other health related diseases. According to the national survey of children’s health, 28.5% of children in Hawaii are overweight or obese and are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes as adults. According to the American Diabetes Association, it is estimated that one out of every three children born after 2000 in the United States will be directly affected by diabetes. With the high proportion of ethnic minority children in Hawaii, that number is closer to one in two children directly affected by diabetes. Therefore, due to the increased exposure of children to fruits and vegetables by the implementation of school gardens, it is important to expand the program statewide as a strategy to prevent chronic diseases.
It is recommended to eat at least five fruits and vegetables a day to optimize weight and prevent chronic diseases however; despite the benefits, many children do not meet this recommendation.\textsuperscript{2} School gardens have shown to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables as many residents in poorer neighborhoods in Hawaii have less access to high quality affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. These children are often exposed to small convenience stores that often sell high calorie junk foods and less affordable fresh produce.\textsuperscript{1} SCR48 states that limited exposure to fruits and vegetables leads children to being susceptible to the ubiquitous exposure to junk food. Therefore, it is a concern of mine that without the implementation of school gardens statewide, all children will not have access to adequate high quality fresh produce.

Hawaii has an ideal agricultural climate for school gardens and it gives teachers the opportunity to educate children about the ecological systems linking food consumption to sustainable agriculture.\textsuperscript{6} SCR48 states that farm to school programs such as planting school gardens have been successful in supplying high quality food and cultivating long term healthy eating habits. A study by McPherson et al. found that 95\% of children reported that they learned about nutrition from their school.\textsuperscript{3} Teachers are able to use the educational environment of a school to their advantage by including nutrition curricula in conjunction with school gardens to educate children on topics like food groups, appropriate portion sizes, benefits of eating fresh versus processed foods, and food label reading.\textsuperscript{7} School gardens have been shown to increase the appeal of eating fruits and vegetables helping to increase the amount of children that meet the “5-a-day” initiative set by the USDA.\textsuperscript{6} In garden based learning, students have been shown to be better able to identify vegetables correctly, have improved attitudes towards eating produce, and an increased willingness to taste new vegetables. This in turn has increased the variety of vegetables eaten, as students learn where the food they eat comes from or how their food was produced. Unfortunately, one barrier that schools face to maintain these gardens are the limited resources for funding and personnel.\textsuperscript{8} Therefore it is important to implement the task force stated in SCR48.

I am very concerned that the incidence of chronic diseases such as childhood obesity and diabetes will only continue if programs such as school gardens that act as a strategy to prevent these chronic diseases from occurring are not implemented well. School gardens will allow children to practice and understand how their food is produced, promoting a lifetime of healthy eating behaviors. The children of Hawaii are the future and they deserve access to locally grown produce in school meals increasing their exposure to nutrient rich fruits and vegetables of the highest quality. In summary, I request your support of SCR48.
Best Regards,

Erika Chinn-Galindo
University of Hawaii at Manoa Dietetic Undergraduate

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