

The Important Foundation of an Education

In many ways, a teacher shapes a child's future. They provide that child with the knowledge they need to go out into the world and make a difference. However, the frightening reality is that our state fails to treat these valued individuals accordingly. My mother, who has been teaching at an elementary school for the majority of her life said to me once, "Teachers do not teach for the pay they receive, they teach because it is their passion." However, as the cost of living in Hawai'i continues to rise while salaries for teachers remain stagnant, our educators are forced to choose between their passion and their financial stability. Until our government takes the initiative to solve this growing problem, teachers will continue to leave the field of education for better opportunities while the keiki in our community pay the price.

According to Corey Rosenlee, president of the Hawai'i State Teachers Association, there has been an 84 percent increase in teachers moving to the mainland in search of higher pay and lower cost of living within the past seven years. In a 2017 study conducted by WalletHub, Hawai'i was ranked the second-worst state for teachers. Despite the fact that teachers receive perquisites such as health benefits and retirement awards, their salaries do not provide them with the financial stability they need. While the mean salaries for public and private school teachers average \$55,300 and \$48,700, their adjusted salaries based on the cost of living in Hawai'i puts our state at the bottom of the national average. Just as doctors or lawyers must go to college and earn their degrees, teachers must also do the same. However, when their hard work fails to pay off, what

choice do they have other than to search elsewhere for the opportunity to receive the quality of life they deserve?

Given that the cost of living in Hawai'i is on the rise, the pressing issue of teacher shortages are only expected to grow over time. If nothing is done to remedy this problem, the educational foundation of our keiki are treading into waters of the unknown. 50 years from now, will we even have schools for our children or grandchildren to attend? Even if these institutions still exist, who will be the ones to teach future generations? Will it be those that are passionate, qualified, and dedicated to help develop growth in every individual, or those that fail to care about the tremendous impact they have on Hawai'i's youth? If we truly cared about the welfare and education of our children, why are we not devoting more attention and resources to those that want to stay in Hawai'i and it make a better place?

The solution I propose to ensure the stability and reliability for all educators and students in Hawai'i is an increase in awareness and allotment of government funds. Members of the Department of Education are currently working to bring forth a new constitutional amendment before voters in November. The amendment would ultimately increase funding for public education through a surcharge on investment properties worth more than \$1 million. Inevitably, there will be a number of opponents for this cause. However, a large part of this opposition likely stems from a lack of awareness towards this cause. If teachers shared their stories, presented the facts surrounding the issue, and explained the consequences of a failure to promote action, change can come faster than we think. Teachers should not have to endure their financial struggles any

longer than they already have. Just as the best teachers want what is right for their students, most parents want teachers that will help shape their children into the leaders of tomorrow, making them willing to support this cause. Although disagreements may arise in the way to choose to solve this problem, it would be foolish to deny that the way we choose to prioritize education will be reflected in our state and community, for better or for worse.

Clarence T.C. Ching surrounded one of his life goals around the improvement and development of capabilities to allow individuals the power to create a better society. Just as Marian Wright Edelman once said, "Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it." If our government is willing to pay a slight price in our present to invest in the future of our youth, Hawai'i can truly become a better place with individuals that have the power to change the world. Acting now will help all educators and students in the present and future, preventing fears from becoming a reality at the point of no return. Not only do we have a chance to improve the quality of life and education for our citizens, but also the opportunity to grow as a community and serve as a foundation for a greater cause that extends past our island chain.