SENATE RESOLUTION

ENCOURAGING THE GOVERNOR TO MAINTAIN TEACHERS AND SCHOOL-LEVEL PERSONNEL AS ESSENTIAL WORKERS DURING A PANDEMIC WHEN CONTEMPLATING EMERGENCY FURLoughS AND LAYOFFS.

WHEREAS, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on the State's education system, forcing teachers, school-level personnel, and students to adjust to remote online learning, and blended classes, and causing significant learning losses and other hardships; and

WHEREAS, in December 2020, the Department of Education announced the details of furlough plans for its 21,900 full-time, salaried employees, and under the proposed furlough plan, teachers would have been required to take six furlough days between January 1, 2021, and June 30, 2021; and

WHEREAS, on January 21, 2021, the Governor announced that with additional federal funds and more optimistic revenue projections, the public school/education budget cut was reduced from ten percent to 2.5 percent; and

WHEREAS, even with the reduction in budget cuts, the Department of Education still faces roughly $140,000,000 in budget cuts for the 2021 school year, with close to seven hundred teachers subject to potential layoff, and some schools losing ten percent of their faculty; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Health defines frontline essential workers as those "whose duties must be performed on-site and require being in close proximity to the public or coworkers, and are essential to the functioning of society"; and

WHEREAS, teachers and school-level personnel are expected to continue to show up to work directly with students or work at schools where students are going to a campus to receive services; and
WHEREAS, for purposes of vaccine distribution, the State has placed teachers and educational support staff in the 1b category, which includes those deemed "frontline essential workers", such as first responders, corrections officers, childcare providers, emergency services dispatchers, U.S. Postal Service employees, and others; and

WHEREAS, reopening schools is critical to reopening the economy, ensuring childcare for the State's workforce, and maintaining a stable learning environment for students; and

WHEREAS, updated guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control show that all of Hawaii's counties were in the lowest-risk category and could safely reopen; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Education recently announced that all Hawaii elementary schools could reopen for in-person learning by the end of March 2021; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2021, that the Governor is urged to maintain teachers and school-level personnel as essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic or any future pandemic, when contemplating emergency furloughs and layoffs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the Governor, Superintendent of Education, Executive Director of the Board of Education, and President of the Hawaii State Teachers Association.