



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Education
And
Senate Committee on Higher Education
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SB 647 – RELATING TO TEACHERS

Chairs Kidani and Kahele and members of the committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 647. This measure would provide funding for training “home grown” Special Education teachers whose desire is to “give back to their communities”. Leeward Community College is prepared to address the critical shortage of teachers in Special Education through a flexible, cost effective quality alternative pathway leading to SPED teacher licensure.

Providing support for the organic growth of our educators from within our own communities will benefit not only our children’s educational experience but provide a “rooting” of teachers to remain within the school district they live in. Our 2016-2017 school year started with over 500 vacancies resulting in emergency hires, unqualified/unlicensed “educators” and para-professionals. Our children, especially those in the underprivileged communities need and deserve to have quality education and consistency in their school life, for many within these communities school is the only constant in their lives. Beyond the importance of community teachers for our children, this pathway provides the additional benefit of economic improvement within these communities allowing those within to earn a manageable living wage, an opportunity most would not otherwise have.

SB 647 would provide funding to train locally sourced SPED teachers in our highest need communities, at a fraction of the cost currently spent on recruitment and retention of inexperienced, imported candidates. Providing funds to support the state’s most cost-efficient pathway to SPED teacher licensure will enable the state to grow our own teacher candidates by investing in paraprofessionals, emergency hires, and substitutes who already have job-related experience and has demonstrated a long-term commitment to working with students with special needs in hard-to-staff schools. With Leeward CC’s tuition at \$126/credit for lower division coursework, and just \$300/credit for upper division courses, we can deliver the state’s most inexpensive and flexible pathway to SPED teacher licensure.

SB 647 would provide the state with an opportunity to develop a local, flexible, affordable, efficient, and quality alternative teacher preparation pipeline to address more challenging areas of the teacher shortage. Based on the Hawai'i DOE Teacher Retention Report, a majority of these hires are in Leeward communities and hard to staff classrooms, often highlighted by Special Education settings and needs.

The state funds would allow Leeward Community College's Teacher Education Program (TEP) to partner with other local and state agencies to recruit and prepare quality candidates to participate in a licensure program aligned to the Hawai'i Teachers Standards Board (HTSB) for entrance into Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) schools as Highly Qualified (HQ) teachers.

The UH Community Colleges is in concurrence with the intent of the bill and strongly supports its passage on the condition that any requested funds do not supplant any portion of the University's Biennium Budget request.