HB 0395 RELATING TO TUITION WAIVERS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I SYSTEM

Chair Hanohano, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

The purpose of HB 0395 is to require the UH Board of Regents to grant tuition waivers to native Hawaiian and Hawaiian students in the University of Hawai‘i System.

The University supports the overall intent of this bill and appreciates the Legislature’s concern for improving the academic success of native Hawaiians and Hawaiians in higher education. Likewise, the University strives to improve the access to state higher education and the success of our native Hawaiian and Hawaiian students. In its Mission Statement, the University states its unique commitment as an indigenous-serving institution, and "ensures active support for the participation of Native Hawaiians at the University and supports vigorous programs of study and support for the Hawaiian language, history, and culture."

In 2008, we placed Native Hawaiian Educational Attainment as our very first strategic outcome for the years 2008 to 2015. It is our goal to increase degree attainment of native Hawaiians or Hawaiians by 6 to 9 percent per year.

To help us succeed in our goal, we are encouraging students who have financial need to apply for financial aid so that we can maximize federal aid, such as the Federal Pell Grant, to students. We also already award the equivalent of 250 Native Hawaiian tuition exemptions to native Hawaiian or Hawaiian students with financial need, per UH Board of Regents policy. These are given in whole or partial amounts, depending on a student’s financial need. Furthermore, we exempt non-resident native Hawaiian and Hawaiian students from paying the non-resident tuition differential; they are only charged the in-state rates for tuition. Finally, we currently award a scholarship called the Second Century Scholarship, in the amount of $1,650,000 to Hawaiian students with financial need.

We are pleased to report that our enrollment of Hawaiians has nearly doubled across our ten UH campuses, growing from 6,631 students in Fall 2006 to 12,630 in Fall 2010. We believe this is due, in large part, to our commitment to financial aid for students who need funds to gain access to the University.

Awarding more tuition waivers for native Hawaiian and Hawaiian students would be very costly to the University without the opportunity to recoup federal, state, and private aid that is freely awarded to students with financial need. We respectfully request that the bill be amended to create a state financial grant program with funding that would apply to all native Hawaiian and Hawaiian students with financial need, as determined by the federal financial aid guidelines.
We also invite the State of Hawai‘i to become a partner in funding the Second Century Scholarship (mentioned above). This way, the University can continue to apply a variety of federal, state, private, and institutional grants and scholarships that can target our Hawaiian students who experience financial hardship.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this bill.