



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committees on
Higher Education, and
Labor

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by

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SB 1665 – RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Chairs Tokuda and Takamine, Vice Chairs Sakamoto and Taniguchi, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawaii Community Colleges have been the State's primary resource to prepare new workers and retrain the existing workforce. As such, we believe we can play a critical role in the economic recovery and revitalization of the State, as stated in the bill.

As our economy has slowed, we see an increasing number of individuals enrolling at our campuses to improve their skills and acquire the education necessary to become more competitive in the workplace. Community College enrollment has increased ten percent over the past year.

We support the intent of the bill to provide additional resources to the Community Colleges to expand the scope and focus of the Rapid Response Training initiative started with legislative support over the past few years. Given the economic situation facing the State, we believe there will be more individuals and businesses calling for the training we provide through that initiative than we currently provide with out limited resources.

We believe that for the State to successfully weather the current crisis, as well as prepare for the future, now is the time to invest in the training and technical support to small businesses needed to adopt new practices and technologies to improve their operational efficiency. While Hawaii currently has a growing rate of unemployment, an examination of our demographics suggests that this is a temporary phenomenon. As the economy improves over the next several years, we believe that employers will again face severe labor shortages as an increasing number of our aging population leave the workforce during the next decade. Now is the time to take steps to be prepared for that future.

One source of support noted in the bill is the Reed Act resources currently available in the State. It is our understanding that these federal funds have limitations on their use that prohibit it being used for direct training. However, it can be used for infrastructure in the State that supports state workforce development efforts and employment services. We believe it may be possible for a portion of those funds to be used in a manner that will free less restrictive funds to conduct the training and other services described in the bill.

We will be glad to work with other offices in the state to determine how best to apply a greater portion of the State's resources to meet the training and technical assistance tasks essential to speed the pace of our economic recovery and revitalization.