UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Wednesday, February 25, 2015 at 9:00 am
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SB 314 – RELATING TO THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

Chair Tokuda, Vice Chair Kouchi, and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 314, which provides funding for critical positions in the Cooperative Extension Service under the direction of the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa.

We strongly support this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget.

The Cooperative Extension Service is the means by which the Land Grant university system extends the results of research to directly assist agriculture and the public in each state. Among the 50 states, Hawaiʻi is virtually unique is supporting agricultural research and extension, along with all other university functions, solely through the single budget line of the University of Hawaiʻi. In recognition of the unique nature of agricultural extension, and to a lesser extent agricultural research, other states choose to provide a budget line specifically for these core Land Grant activities. In the absence of such a funding mechanism, extension service functions potentially suffer to a greater extent than other university functions during periods of fiscal austerity. Tuition-driven university budget models may also have the unforeseen effect of disincentivizing extension functions.

Hawaiʻi is also unique among all the states in that the four county governments make no set contribution to the costs of the extension service. The program funding that several are willing to provide is greatly appreciated, but core infrastructure support is absent.

As a result of the above-described factors, the extension faculty workforce in the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources has decreased 43% over the past 20 years, and 27% over the past six years alone. Retirements and resignations are a normal occurrence, but the present budget situation prevents replacement of many vacant positions. Again, a focus on university budget reductions and increasing tuition revenue does not support extension staffing at optimal levels.

At the same time, the legislature and the people of Hawaiʻi have an increasing sense of urgency with respect to food security. This includes a need for accelerated training to assist new

farmers, with an emphasis on farming practices that will decrease Hawai‘i’s need for imported and expensive farming inputs; and a concomitant need to ensure that appropriate good agriculture practices are followed and safe food reaches our plates. In order to reduce our reliance on imported food, and also ensure that farming in Hawai‘i remains a viable occupation, our farmers need to be well-trained in both farm/ranch production methods and in practices that will ensure the safety of the food they produce without increasing production costs unreasonably.

Each of the positions identified in the bill represents a state need, and will serve as a resource across the state, as well as filling manpower gaps within their home county and freeing time on the part of current agents to provide better service to their agricultural clientele. In addition to filling immediate needs, SB 314 provides the time needed to work on inclusion of extension functions in the budget models currently being developed within the university.

SB 314 will strengthen the eroding agricultural extension infrastructure in Hawai‘i by appropriating $700,000 per year for eight temporary extension agent positions, two in each county, for a two year period. We recognize that there are many demands on the legislature, and even one position in each county (four positions total), at half of this amount, would help to alleviate current shortages.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 314.