



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
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By
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HB 1731 HD1 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PROMISE PROGRAM

Chair Luke, Vice Chair Yamashita, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1731 HD1, which expands the University of Hawai'i (UH) Promise program, currently only at the community colleges, to qualified undergraduate students enrolled at a four-year campus of the UH.

Expanding the Hawai'i Promise program to qualified students in four-year degree programs at the UH would greatly assist our students. Expanding the program will significantly enhance the ability of community college students to transfer to a four-year program and increase the number of economically disadvantaged students who can earn a bachelor's degree from the UH. It will be a significant step forward in expanding access to economic opportunity for Hawai'i's students and preparing the educated workforce the state will need to grow in the coming decades.

The program is effective for students in the community colleges, where participation in Hawai'i Promise has increased student success in their programs. In academic year 2019-2020, Hawai'i Promise recipients earned more credits, received better grades, and had higher persistence and graduation rates. Many of these successful students are often surprised when they transfer to a four-year UH degree program to find that their scholarships do not cover their direct cost of attendance, even when awarded a full Pell grant. A four-year version of Hawai'i Promise will help these students afford the continuation of their education. In addition, due to the higher cost of tuition at a four-year campus, students who did not qualify for Hawai'i Promise at the community colleges might nevertheless have an unmet need when they attend a four-year program. Maybe due to the uncertainties created by COVID-19, it seems many students who might have gone to a mainland college have decided to stay home, and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa has seen a steady increase in enrollment these past two years.

However, student financial debt has continued to increase with the inability of students to pay as current scholarships and federal aid has not been able to fully cover their direct cost for eligible students. The University of Hawai'i Foundation conducted extensive research and found that for academic year 2019-2020, students at UH four-year campuses with the most financial need had average unmet need ranging between a low of 40% at Mānoa to a high of 59% at UH West O'ahu. The students with the most financial need were those with the Lowest Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) quartile who completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid. By expanding to the four-year campuses, based on academic year 2020-2021, we would be impacting 4,629 additional students at the baccalaureate level.

Additionally, the community colleges have found that more students qualify for Hawai'i Promise than the recurring general fund appropriation. Over the last few years, the Legislature has appropriated non-recurring funds to supplement the general fund appropriation, and the community colleges have awarded Hawai'i Promise scholarships to 2,109 students for this academic year, as of January 11, 2022. Additional funding would allow community colleges to commit the Hawai'i Promise to all eligible students.

Therefore, having the Hawai'i Promise program available to all eligible undergraduate students at the University of Hawai'i will continue to support our students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.