HB 2397 HD2 – RELATING TO BROADBAND

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

The University of Hawai‘i, representing the State’s broadband interests, provides the following comments on HB 2397 HD2.

HB 2397 HD2 creates a state broadband infrastructure authority, and provides for clarification of the role of the state broadband office within DBEDT to focus on critical elements of digital equity and literacy necessary to maximize benefits of investment in broadband infrastructure. Based on a range of conversations and views expressed over the past weeks, while the creation of a state broadband infrastructure authority may be necessary at some point in the future, it might be prudent to wait for clarity around the expected Federal program announcements and rules, as well as determination of requirements around ownership and governance of any resulting assets and facilities constructed or acquired with the anticipated influx of public funds. There is also the concern expressed over imposing potentially conflicting or overlapping regulation in the generally competitive broadband markets currently under the oversight of the FCC.

The rules and processes to support the expected Federal formula and competitive programs remain unclear at this time, and are likely to be issued over the second half of calendar 2022. Planning to maximize the community benefits of the expected Federal funds is underway, and we expect that we will align projects and outcomes with those funds as the programs controlling the funds issue rules and create the mechanisms to expend the funds. An integral part of the planning process includes the governance and sustainability of the efforts to be implemented; that will inform the potential for requiring the formation of a state broadband infrastructure authority.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 2397 HD2.