



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

#### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs  
Wednesday, March 22, 2023 at 3:17 p.m.

By  
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### HB 67 HD1 – MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE PUUHONUA PROGRAM

Chairs Kim and Wakai, Vice Chairs Kidani and Elefante, and Members of the Committees:

Windward Community College strongly supports HB 67 HD1, which would appropriate funds for the Pu'uhonua Program at Windward Community College (WCC). Since 2017, WCC has offered credit bearing college education at the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC) and Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF). Courses have been offered at Halawa Correctional Facility since 2022. All college coursework and support services to date have been provided through the use of federal extramural (grant) funding. These funding sources are non-renewable and expire in June 2023 and September 2023.

WCC's Pu'uhonua Program has a proven history of success. Between Fall 2018 and Spring 2022, 218 students were enrolled in college coursework at WCCC and HYCF. These students earned 1057 college credits and 13 certificates. Their overall grade point average was 3.6, which is higher than the on campus student grade point average, demonstrating their aptitude and engagement year after year. In the one semester WCC has provided classes at Halawa Correctional Facility, 16 men have enrolled, earning 45 credits to date and with an overall grade point average of 3.12. Through supportive practices like pro-active counseling and tutoring, Pu'uhonua has resulted in positive educational change for carceral populations.

The Pu'uhonua Program provides effective pathways for incarcerated students to grow critical thinking, career and life skills. It also serves as a pathbreaking model for Hawai'i's educational institutions. WCC is the first college in the University of Hawai'i (UH) system to offer significant credit-bearing education to incarcerated populations. We are also the first to be designated as a Pell Experimental Site, utilizing federal financial aid to cover the cost of tuition, fees and educational materials.

Completing college coursework while incarcerated has been shown both nationally and locally to have significant benefits for the incarcerated individuals, the overall

incarcerated environment and society. While in prison, there is a substantial reduction in violence and disciplinary infraction. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, formerly incarcerated individuals who receive no further education within or after leaving prison are 76% more likely to recidivate within five years; that recidivism number drops to 14% for individuals who obtain an associate's degree. There is a 13% increase in post-release employment for parolees who participate in prison education programs.

After students are released from prison, these positions will continue to benefit the incarcerated individuals and our State. The supportive counselors created herein will connect students to further educational opportunities and resources post-release so they can continue their journey. For example, the students can be referred to career services and placement both online and in person through WCC's career center.

This bill supports an effective, supportive educational intervention that has been proven over seven years of implementation and growth. WCC urges the legislature to invest in effective rehabilitation for incarcerated populations by appropriating the funds to provide the positions necessary to staff WCC's Pu'uhonua program.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of HB 67 HD1, on the condition its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB 67 HD1.