



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education & Technology
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By

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HB 67 – MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE PU'UHONUA PROGRAM

Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of HB 67, 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 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 post-release to further educational opportunities. 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, on the condition that any funds appropriated in support of this program does not supplant any portion of the University's budget request.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 67.