



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 Finance
Wednesday, February 22, 2023, at 2:30 p.m.

By

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HB 390 HD1 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PROMISE PROGRAM

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 390 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.

UH has two recommended revisions.

First, to align with the amount of credits that students can receive federal Pell grant awards for, we recommend amending page 5, lines 6-9:

“A student enrolled in an undergraduate program at a University of Hawaii campus, other than a community college campus, shall be eligible for scholarship consideration for a maximum of ~~eight~~ twelve semesters if the student:”

The goal is to align Hawai'i Promise with existing financial aid awards and practices at the four-year campuses.

Second, we believe the amendment included on page 6, lines 1-4, Section 2(c)(5), should be under page 5, line 5, Section 2 (b)(5), since the reference is for the community college certificates (and not the four-year campuses). The baccalaureate campuses, with only minor exceptions, do not offer certificates as a stand-alone degree.

It remains the case that a college degree is a critical method for increasing an individual's ability to enhance their earning potential over the course of their career. As the costs of higher education have been shifted to the individual, it has become essential to rethink how we ensure that college remains accessible to those in the lowest socioeconomic income brackets. Hawai'i Promise is an important tool directly benefiting Hawai'i's families otherwise least able to afford higher education.

Expanding the program will have multiple positive impacts. It will significantly enhance the ability for Hawai'i Promise community college students to transfer to a four-year program. Expanding the program to qualified students in four-year degree programs at the UH would greatly assist students pursuing their bachelor's degree. It will be a notable 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 has effectively proven its impact for students in the community colleges, where participation in Hawai'i Promise has increased student success in their chosen areas of study. In academic year 2021-2022, Hawai'i Promise recipients earned more credits, received better grades, and had higher persistence rates than their peers. Part-time students receiving a Hawai'i Promise scholarship also had higher graduation rates than their peers.

A survey to gather student feedback on Hawai'i Promise was emailed to all 2,139 students that received Hawai'i Promise in Academic Year 2021-2022. The large majority of survey respondents reported that the Hawai'i Promise Scholarship provided positive benefit and impact to their ability to afford, decision to enroll, and likelihood to persist in the University of Hawai'i Community College System.

- **91% of respondents** Strongly Agreed or Agreed that the Hawai'i Promise Scholarship helped them decide that college was affordable this year;
- **87% of respondents** Strongly Agreed or Agreed that the Hawai'i Promise Scholarship helped them to make the decision to enroll in college this year;
- **91% of respondents** Strongly Agreed or Agreed that returning to college next semester depends on continuation of their financial aid including Hawai'i Promise Scholarship.

Students transferring from the UH Community Colleges are often surprised to find that, due to the higher tuition rates at four-year universities, Pell grants and other scholarships may not completely cover their direct cost of attendance (tuition, fees, books, supplies, and transportation). A four-year version of Hawai'i Promise will help these transfer students afford the continuation of their education. Additionally, a four-year Hawai'i Promise can extend benefits to additional Hawai'i residents in need of support to pursue their higher educational goals. We would have the potential to impact 4,320 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 is able to support. The community colleges have awarded \$4,884,829 in Hawai'i Promise scholarships to 2,139 students for the 2021-2022 academic year.

As a "last dollar" initiative, Hawai'i Promise ensures that the State of Hawai'i can maximize federal support in the form of Pell grants while at the same time ensuring that our most vulnerable students can pay for the cost of education. It is important to extend

Hawai'i Promise to the four-year campuses because currently Pell grants do not cover the full cost of tuition for these campuses, and as a result, Hawai'i Promise can play a critical role in meeting their higher education financial needs with a combination of federal and state funding.

The extension of Hawai'i Promise to students attending four-year campuses in the UH System will help the state achieve its statewide goal to increase educational attainment of Hawai'i residents to help them thrive in our communities. Additionally, we know that four-year college degrees are critical for many jobs across the state and for support of Hawai'i's innovation and entrepreneurial efforts.

Therefore, having the Hawai'i Promise program available to all eligible undergraduate students at the University of Hawai'i will provide a critical investment in Hawai'i's present and future.

Thank you for your consideration of these amendments and the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.