



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 and Technology
Friday, February 10, 2023, at 2:30 p.m.

By

Debora Halbert, Vice President for Academic Strategy
University of Hawai'i System

HB 919 – RELATING TO RESIDENCE FOR TUITION PURPOSES

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill (HB) 919 relating to residence for tuition purposes. We support the intent of this bill and offer the following amendments.

HB 919 would allow individuals who have obtained a Hawai'i high school diploma or equivalent credential, who are also registered to vote in the State, and are working toward their first undergraduate degree, to be classified as residents for the purpose of in-state tuition at the University of Hawai'i (UH), under the condition that this does not apply to individuals who have not been a bona fide resident of the State for more than twelve years.

An educated citizenry is a foundation for a strong state, and as the sole provider of public education in the State of Hawai'i, the UH supports the intent of this bill which will assist with increasing access to higher education and attempts to streamline the application process for residents. The duration of time that this opportunity is available to prospective students makes higher education accessible at the resident tuition rate for a longer period after high school completion, while using graduation from a high school in the State of Hawai'i or an equivalent status as a determining factor simplifies the residency process and would reduce barriers to local students enrolling at UH to pursue additional education and training.

Respectfully, we would like to offer some amendments to this bill. In the 2022 amendments to Hawai'i Administrative Rules (HAR), Chapter 20-4, all references to demonstrating an intent to reside in Hawai'i were removed. Therefore, the requirement that the applicant "demonstrates their intent to reside in Hawaii by registering as a Hawai'i voter" is not necessary for compliance with the current version of the HAR. We also note that we have resident students who may not be eligible to vote for reasons of age or citizenship. As this change in statute is intended to make it easier for Hawai'i residents to attend college affordably, we do not support adding additional barriers, such as registration as a voter to prove residency, that might hinder enrollment.

Nonetheless, as a matter of civic engagement, UH encourages all our students to register to vote, mounts voter registration campaigns, and supports the position that democracy is strengthened when there is a higher level of voter participation.

Finally, UH requests that the reference to “adult student” on page 3, line 15 be expanded to include “minor or.” There may be situations where an individual who is still a minor could benefit from these recommended changes.

As written, for residents who may have left the State and decided to return for any variety of reasons within twelve years after high school, this bill would allow them a faster transition to higher education for up-skilling or pursuing a different career without delaying pursuit of their educational and life goals. This could also serve as an incentive for residents who moved away to come back to pursue higher education at an affordable cost and contribute to Hawai‘i’s local economy, which would help to address the brain drain that occurs when students leave for college and do not return.

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