



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Human Services
Senate Committee on Higher Education
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By
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SB 50 SD1 – RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES

Chairs Ruderman and Kim, Vice Chairs Rhoads and Kidani, and members of the committees:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the intent of SB 50 SD1 to provide positions and funds for the Hawai'i Nutrition Employment and Training Program (HINET). HINET is an innovative interagency partnership that leverages UH Community College (UHCC) and Department of Human Services (DHS) resources to assist SNAP eligible recipients through a college career pathway leading to self-sufficiency by lowering costs.

Although Hawai'i SNAP recipients receive basic living benefits from DHS, their access to Higher Education is limited, due in part to the USDA's 20-hour work requirement. Concurrently, many Community College students struggle with paying rent and other basic living needs forcing them to either drop from college or attend only part-time. Through HINET, SNAP recipients in Hawai'i now have greater access to college and are able to receive an exemption to the USDA 20 hr. work requirement. In addition, our current students are qualifying for SNAP and receive assistance with their food, transportation, childcare, basic living needs and some educational expenses as well. UHCC HINET staff work closely with DHS to recruit SNAP recipients and help current eligible college students navigate the DHS SNAP application process. HINET staff also provide comprehensive wrap-around student support services and develop workforce employment plans to help students achieve self-sufficiency. Key to student success is the frequent monitoring and documentation of student progress allowing HINET and DHS to prescribe support resources when needed.

HINET will be able to scale its enrollment count and intervention services by bringing additional federal funds to the State through the USDA reimbursement program. USDA will provide a 50% reimbursement of any State or private funding expended by the HINET program or its students. USDA reimbursements could establish student scholarships, support the program, or provide other financial assistance to HINET students.

Though HINET is only a few years in development, the program is demonstrating an overall fall-to-fall persistence rate that is 20% higher than the Community College system average. In addition, UH has a unique responsibility to the indigenous people of Hawai'i, and early analysis is showing that 58% of HINET students are Native Hawaiian.

We support SB 50 SD1 on the condition that any requested positions or funds do not supplant any portion of the University's Biennium Budget request.

Thank you for considering this testimony in your deliberations. Aloha.