



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committees on Higher Education and Hawaiian Affairs
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By
Jonathan K Osorio, Dean
School of Hawaiian Knowledge
And
Michael Bruno, PhD
Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 938 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chairs Kim and Shimabukuro, Vice Chairs Kidani and Kahele, and members of the committees:

Aloha mai Kākou

I testify in support of SB 938 provided it does not adversely affect UH priorities as set in our budget request. This measure would provide \$1,002,000 in each of the next two years in support of Native Hawaiian Student Services (NHSS) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. As the dean of Hawai'iñuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge (HSHK), in which NHSS is located, I can attest to the efficiency and the efficacy of this department. As an alumnus and professor of twenty-six years in Hawaiian Studies at Mānoa, I can attest to the need for student service programs targeting Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) who wish to obtain four year and graduate degrees at Mānoa.

In 1986, the year that I graduated from UH Mānoa, 4.9% of the students on my campus identified as Hawaiians. System-wide, 8% of students identified as Native Hawaiians. UH Hilo, in which faculty and staff created vigorous new programs aimed at recruiting and preparing Hawaiians for college enjoyed the highest percentage of 15.6%. The 1986 Ka'ū Task Force Report which collected this data concluded that the "University does not have a comprehensive plan to provide the services and support that are needed to improve access and persistence of Hawaiian students in higher education."¹

In Fall 2017, UHM admitted its largest co-hort of more than 600 incoming Native Hawaiians, bringing our numbers up to 2,584, 14.6% of the Mānoa student body. The fairly steady rise of Kanaka Maoli representation at Mānoa has coincided with creation of Native Hawaiian Student Services, its successful Title III grant applications and its creative and effective use of this funding. NHSS' success in obtaining federal grants

¹ Ka 'ū: University of Hawai'i Hawaiian Studies Task Force Report, December 1986. P. 19

and a large commitment of scholarship funds from the Kamehameha Schools has allowed this department to thrive and has been decisive in the vast improvement of a Kanaka Maoli presence on the campus.

Through its federal grants NHSS has also been able to support undergraduate research at UH Mānoa, hosting conferences for young scholars doing research in Hawaiian knowledge, even as UHM has begun to recognize the importance of undergraduate research in its emerging strategic plan. While comparatively small, the UH commitment to NHSS has been decisive and effective because of the federal grants and the Kamehameha partnership. As these grants begin to expire we ask that the legislature provide the support that will allow us to bridge the end of federal support and a gradual enlargement of the university's commitment.

As the school's dean these past two years, I recognize the difficulties facing the University of Hawai'i system and the Mānoa campus during a prolonged period of enrollment decline. Now that this decline seems to have ended with the first semester of enrollment increase since 2014, an increase to which we believe NHSS has contributed, we are certain that the university will see the wisdom of making incremental increases to our budget on behalf of NHSS. Senate Bill 938 will maintain the progress we have made as Mānoa moves to institutionalize support for Native Hawaiians.

As our NHSS director has testified, we are funding a diverse array of programs addressing historic disparities suffered by Kānaka Maoli with regard to higher education, economic opportunities, health and general well-being. As we continue to seek new federal funding and renewed partnerships with Kamehameha and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs in the future, it will be to expand our programs and our outreach, and we are better poised to do this as we move into a much larger and better equipped space later this spring. But without immediate support we do not know how we can continue the success of the past few years, and we have a real concern about what a termination of those programs would bring.

The framers of our state constitution mandating that Hawaiian culture and language be taught in Hawai'i's schools recognized the precarious position of our culture, language, indeed, of our existence as a people. But it is a fact that most of the gains we have made since 1978 have come through our organizing efforts in the communities and in the schools, helped from time to time, by strategic and necessary funding from the legislature. This is why we are making a separate ask from the legislature, knowing that the university administration has made their own commitments, and believing that their biennium budget has been framed intelligently and in good faith. Please support this bill and help Native Hawaiians continue our progress in higher education.

We believe that increasing a Native Hawaiian presence in the University of Hawai'i has been good for UH, good for our people and good for all of Hawai'i. Thank you for receiving our testimony.