Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Education
April 6, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.
By
Debora Halbert
Vice President for Academic Strategy
University of Hawaiʻi System

SCR 112 PROPOSED SD1 / SR 105 PROPOSED SD1 – REQUESTING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, TO REQUIRE COMPLETION OF COMPREHENSIVE COURSEWORK IN THE SCIENCE OF READING AS A CONDITION FOR GRADUATION FROM ANY STATE-APPROVED EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM LEADING TO TEACHER LICENSURE

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SCR 112 Proposed SD1 / SR 105 Proposed SD1. The University of Hawaiʻi is opposed to SCR 112 Proposed SD1 / SR 105 Proposed SD1 – Requesting the University of Hawaiʻi System, in collaboration with the Hawaiʻi Teacher Standards Board and other institutions of higher education, to require completion of comprehensive coursework in the science of reading as a condition for graduation from any state-approved educator preparation program leading to teacher licensure.

The University of Hawaiʻi (UH) system shares the goal of ensuring that all students in Hawaiʻi receive high-quality reading and literacy instruction and that our teacher candidates are well-prepared to support all PK-12 diverse learners. We also support the inclusion of research-based practices in teacher education, including explicit attention to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

However, while the science of reading is an important body of research, it is not a single, unified, or settled framework. Rather, multiple lines of research contribute to our understanding of reading, and responsible teacher preparation should engage this full body of scholarship. The field of literacy is interdisciplinary and includes decades of research across cognitive science, sociocultural theory, multilingual education, and disciplinary literacy. Preparing effective teachers requires engagement with this broader body of knowledge, not a narrowed subset as articulated in these resolutions.

The question is how future teachers are best taught. Research and practice in teacher education suggest that candidates learn most effectively when concepts related to reading are integrated across coursework and clinical experiences, rather than isolated

in a single course as outlined in the resolutions. A course mandate may ensure coverage, but it does not ensure depth, application, or coherence in practice. In Hawai‘i, where many students are multilingual and bring rich linguistic and cultural resources to the classroom, literacy instruction must be responsive to the student context. A one-size-fits-all course requirement may not fully reflect these realities.

The University of Hawai‘i System fully supports strengthening literacy preparation and reading proficiency across programs. We would encourage approaches that ensure these competencies are meaningfully integrated, assessed, and applied in practice, rather than tied to a single course requirement. We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the Hawai‘i Department of Education and Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board on approaches that strengthen literacy preparation and reading proficiency while honoring the complexity of the field and the expertise of teacher educators across the University of Hawai‘i system.