UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
ʻŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAIʻI

Legislative Testimony
Hōʻike Manaʻo I Mua O Ka ʻAhaʻōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Education
and
Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs
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SCR 202 / SR 190 – REQUESTING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII TO ALLOW AN OLELO HAWAII PATHWAY UNDER THE NIIHAU DIALECT.

Chairs Kim and Richards, Vice Chairs Kidani and Lamosao, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawaiʻi would like to provide comments with suggested amendments on SCR 202 / SR 190 – Requesting The University Of Hawaii To Allow An Olelo Hawaii Pathway Under The Niihau Dialect. The University of Hawaiʻi (UH) appreciates the intent of this resolution and recognizes the importance of serving the linguistic, cultural, and educational needs of all communities across Hawaiʻi, including Native speakers and families connected to ʻōlelo Niʻihau.

Instruction in ʻōlelo Niʻihau at the University of Hawaiʻi requires careful consideration of both instructional capacity and intended student populations. Because ʻōlelo Niʻihau is a distinct and highly localized form of the Hawaiian language, effective and appropriate instruction at this level can only be carried out by native speakers who possess the linguistic fluency and cultural grounding necessary to ensure accuracy, integrity, and authenticity. Any effort to offer courses in ʻōlelo Niʻihau must therefore prioritize the recruitment and support of Native Niʻihau-speaking instructors.

In addition, the Legislature should recognize that the design of such programs must be intentional with respect to audience—whether serving Niʻihau native speakers seeking higher education in their home language, or non-Niʻihau learners who may require different pedagogical approaches, supports, and safeguards to engage respectfully with this ʻike and linguistic tradition. Thoughtful planning in both areas is essential to ensure that instruction uplifts and sustains the Niʻihau speech community while maintaining the highest academic and cultural standards. As ʻōlelo Niʻihau is a dialect of a particular community, the input of those community members should also be considered.

We note that establishing any new academic pathway, concentration, certificate, or micro-credential is subject to UH's academic program and curriculum approval processes. These processes are designed to ensure that proposed offerings are

academically sound, appropriately resourced, aligned with campus mission and student demand, and developed with appropriate faculty review and governance.

Accordingly, whether a specific campus is able to offer a pathway concentrating on the ‘ōlelo Ni‘ihau dialect would depend on that campus’s academic judgment, available faculty expertise, resources, student interest, and successful completion of the applicable campus and the UH approval processes.

Finally, we respectfully request that the committee amend page 2, lines 20-22, to read: “that the University of Hawaii consider Olelo Hawaii micro-credentials focusing on the Niihau dialect.”

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.