



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

TESTIMONY

HB 1591 RELATING TO THE HAWAII STATE UNIVERSITY

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education

February 8, 2005

by

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Chancellor
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

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Chair Waters and Members of the Committee:

We support House Bill 1591 that provides for an initial examination of the feasibility of establishing the Hawai`i State University. This action is in the best interest of the residents of the State of Hawai`i and its college level students. Support for this bill comes from the residents of the County of Hawai`i, organizations within the county, from the University, and from the students enrolled at the University of Hawai`i at Hilo.

The University of Hawai`i at Hilo is an emerging institution that has transformed from a liberal arts college to a comprehensive university during the past several decades. Graduate programs at the master's level are currently offered and several doctoral degrees have been authorized and will be offered in the near future. Enrollments have grown at an approximate rate of 5% per annum in recent years and should reach 5,000 students in the foreseeable future. Concurrently, new awards for externally funded research and training activities are approaching \$20,000,000 per annum – an amount equal to the funds received from the State for operations. It is time for UH-Hilo to move to a new level and be afforded the status of an autonomous university – namely the Hawai`i State University.

The model for having two autonomous public universities within a state is not new. Consider University of Iowa and Iowa State University, New Mexico and New Mexico State, Michigan and Michigan State, Montana and Montana State – the list goes on and on. And why? Because this is a successful model that offers diversity, choice, and competition. Diversity comes from differences in emphases (basic versus applied research), differences in programs (traditional programs versus workforce and practical arts preparation), and differences in location and environment. Real choices are provided to the citizens of the State as the universities differentiate their missions from one another. Perhaps most important gains are from the competition that provides for increased efficiencies in the educational processes and increased responsiveness to the needs of the State and the students who attend these universities.

While UH-Hilo has had sustained growth in its student body and research/training activities, the amount of funding available has not kept pace under the present “system” structure. Funding has been based on historical proportions rather than on the basis of enrollments. This has left the university in Hilo in the difficult situation of serving many more students with state funds that have, in deflated dollars, actually declined during the past decade.

Finally, HB 1591 involves minimal cost. The bill does provide, however, a first step to increased opportunities and efficiencies with returns that may far outweigh the cost of any required reorganization.