UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I SYSTEM

TESTIMONY

HB 1592 MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI`I AT HILO

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education

February 8, 2005

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Chair Waters and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai`i at Hilo is emerging as a Comprehensive University with expanding research programs and newly established graduate programs. These programs are bringing greater numbers and size of external research and training grants to the university. In the years 1999-2000, grants received at the University of Hawai`i at Hilo averaged $3.2M per year, while in 2003-2004; the average was 14.5M per year, a 450% increase. These rapid changes in extramural funding at the University of Hawai`i at Hilo herald a broader transition in the State of Hawai`i toward development of a technologically advanced workforce.

Several major programs are building this science training and research on the campus. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Minority Biomedical Research Support (MBRS) program has been supporting research for faculty and students for over 30 years. The NIH Idea Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE) and the NIH Research Infrastructure in Minority Institutions (RIMI) programs have more recently continued to expand the Biomedical research capability on the campus. The recently established National Science Foundation (NSF) Tribal Colleges and Universities Program (TCUP) is enhancing the undergraduate curriculum in order to recruit and retain more local and Native Hawaiian students to the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). This program joins with the University of Hawai`i Hawaiian Internship Program (UHHIP) and the NSF Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) Program to promote the advancement of underrepresented groups in science. The first science graduate program in Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science is off and running with over 25 active faculty and 16 students in its first year and a second cohort set of students seeking admission for next fall. These undergraduate and graduate programs in the sciences engage the entire university community with both undergraduate and graduate students actively involved in the research and training programs. The students in turn are excellent role models to their fellow students and members of their hometowns around the State.

The NSF Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) is continuing this expansion of research programs and training students in modern scientific research techniques. The EPSCoR program is a statewide program that is raising the research capacity of the University of Hawai`i at Hilo in cooperation with the University of Hawai`i at Manoa and the University of Hawai`i Community Colleges. The University of Hawai`i at Hilo took the lead in developing this program and ensuring that the program benefits the entire University of Hawai`i System. In January 2005, the EPSCoR Monitoring and Assessment Panel reviewed the Hawai`i program. The panel praised the EPSCoR faculty at the University of Hawai`i at Hilo for their efforts and enthusiasm for research and the remarkable development of the research programs on the Hilo campus. They further stated this enthusiasm is apparent to the students and serves as an inspiration to them to strive to do well in the sciences so they can pursue scientifically based careers. It is these career paths that will lead to a more scientifically literate workforce for our State.

These research programs are being developed due to a large influx of new science faculty on the University of Hawai`i at Hilo campus. In the last eight years, over 70% of the faculty in the Natural Sciences Division have been hired. These faculty members have brought new ideas, energy and enthusiasm to the sciences. This represents a unique historical opportunity on the campus. This young faculty will continue to enhance the research and training programs and bring in additional externally funded programs in the coming years. The students of Hawai`i, and especially those who are underrepresented in the sciences, will benefit through their involvement in these research and training programs.

Despite these vigorous developments, all of the new research and training programs in the sciences are creating a tremendous strain on the infrastructure at the University of Hawai`i at Hilo. It is vital that the facilities and equipment be enhanced to accommodate and facilitate the new and developing research and training programs. The purpose of this bill is to upgrade research and training facilities that are desperately needed to house these programs. This one-time infusion of capital will return its value many times over to the University of Hawai`i and the State of Hawai`i through increased externally funded projects, advancement of the research and training programs on the campus and the enabling of a future scientifically and technologically trained workforce in Hawai`i. The time is now to realize the potential of the University of Hawai`i at Hilo.