



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the Senate Committee on Education and Senate Committee on Human Services and Public Housing

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by

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HCR 314: Urging the University of Hawaii to establish and administer a rehabilitative and related services graduate school loan program within its Center on Disability Studies.

Chair Sakamoto, Chair Chun Oakland, and Members of the Committees:

Hawai'i and the nation continue to have needs for professionals that serve our citizens in a variety of ways, including as physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, and school psychologists. While the University seeks to serve the many and various needs of the state, currently its capacity to provide programs in the areas related to this resolution is limited. While the intent of the resolution, urging establishment of a graduate school loan forgiveness program for those pursuing degrees in these occupational areas and serving in Hawai'i, is laudable, we cannot support the recommended approach in this resolution for the following reasons.

First, there is no funding associated with the resolution and the University of Hawai'i would not have the resources to establish such a loan program using its own resources. The resolution points to the fact that students would have to study in non-UH programs and return to the state for a service obligation. This means that candidates would likely be pursuing graduate education on the mainland or in institutions not part of the UH system within the state. It would not be reasonable to expect UH-based personnel to manage the complicated loan distribution and service obligation documentation required for serving students not attending UH.

Second, the Center on Disability Studies in the College of Education has limited experience or capacity in administering student loans, a task normally associated with the university financial aid office. The expertise necessary to manage such an undertaking is outside the scope of CDS. In addition, CDS is staffed almost entirely by temporary employees on contract and grant funded support. Because CDS is not permanently funded, housing responsibility for a program that requires a long-term commitment to tracking students and long-term documentation of service

commitments would be inadvisable. Should CDS not have the level of funding available to support personnel to take on this task, it would likely fall to another College office already at working capacity and without expertise in this area.

While incentives to pursue needed service occupations is worthwhile, we would suggest, should funding become available, that a more detailed plan be developed that would provide adequate support for management of such a program.

Thank you.