



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
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By

Robert Bley-Vroman, Chancellor
and

Aviam Soifer, Dean
William S. Richardson School of Law
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 1531 – RELATING TO PUBLIC SERVICE LEGAL LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE

Chair Choy, Vice Chair Ichiyama, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa William S. Richardson School of Law (WSRSL) is in strong support of HB 1531, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget. The proposed law addresses an important need in our community—to provide access to justice for all by assisting licensed attorneys with burdensome student loan debt to be able to serve the most vulnerable among us.

The need for legal services for everyone is an ongoing problem in Hawai'i. The Access to Justice Commission was formed by the Hawai'i Supreme Court in 2008 to address the lack of sufficient legal service providers for those unable to afford legal representation. Over 80 percent of Richardson students must take out loans, and to cover law school expenses and they now graduate owing an average of \$80,000 for their student loans incurred for law school alone.

Students and Administrators from WSRSL participated actively in a task force triggered by SCR 116 during the 2014 Legislature. SCR 116 brought together legislators, legal providers for indigents in our community, students and current practitioners, and members of the Access to Justice Commission. HB 1531 results from this collaboration.

It is important to note that SCR 116 started with a bill introduced by law students of William S. Richardson School of Law. Richardson students have strongly demonstrated their commitment to public service in many forms, such as their formation of Advocates for Public Interest Law (APIL) in 1985 as well as their creation and advocacy for a substantial (60 hour) pro bono requirement in order to graduate in which students work for free to serve the most needy in our community.

There is a clear need for greater access to justice and to address the burdensome debt that law students face after graduation. HB 1531 would serve as a vital supplement to current federal loan forgiveness programs for public service; it would allow more Richardson graduates to do the kind of public service so many of them want to do.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter.