



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Judiciary  
Thursday, February 18, 2016 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Robert Bley-Vroman, Chancellor

And

Aviam Soifer, Dean

William S. Richardson School of Law  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 1531 HD1 – RELATING TO PUBLIC SERVICE LEGAL LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE.

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair San Buenaventura, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i and the William S. Richardson School of Law (WSRSL) is in strong support of HB 1531 HD1, 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 by assisting licensed attorneys with burdensome student loan debt.

The need for legal services for everyone is an ongoing issue in Hawai'i. In 2008, the Access to Justice Commission was formed by the Hawai'i Supreme Court to address the lack of sufficient legal service providers for those unable to afford legal representation. Our many students often graduate owing an average of \$80,000 in student loans, for law school alone.

Students and Administrators from WSRSL participated in a task force formed by SCR 116 during the 2014 Legislature. SCR 116 brought together legislators, legal providers for indigents in our community, students and current practitioners, and the Judiciary's Access to Justice Commission. HB 1531 HD1 is the second result of 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; creating and implementing a substantial pro bono requirement in areas dedicated to serving the most needy in our community.

There is a clear need for greater access to justice and addressing the serious burdensome debt that students face after graduation. HB 1531 HD1 would be a vital supplement to current federal loan forgiveness programs for public service already in existence, and finally would allow more of our 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.