

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I SYSTEM LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



SB 2214 RELATING TO BRIDGE TO HOPE PROGRAM

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

January 31, 2008 at 1:30 p.m.

by
Francisco Hernandez
Vice Chancellor for Students
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

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Chair Chun Oakland, Vice Chair Ihara and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports SB2214 amending the state statute to ensure that all First-to-Work clients have continued access to a full range of post-secondary education opportunities. However, as stated in previous testimony, the University of Hawai'i prefers SB2210 as the language the Department of Human Services and the UH Bridge to Hope Coordinator have agreed will accomplish both agencies' goals of post-secondary access for welfare participants. If SB2214 is to continue, we support language submitted by the BTH Coordinator amending the "Purpose" on page 5 line 3 to read:

(3) "Clarifying that participants may pursue the full range of post-secondary educational opportunities as part of their work activities."

The University has actively supported access to post-secondary education for welfare recipients since 2000 when legislation created the Bridge to Hope education program within the Dept. of Human Services. We now urge the legislature to make appropriate amendments to ensure that a full range of post-secondary education options are available, especially baccalaureate programs.

In addition to the support of President McClain and the system-wide UH Commission on the Status of Women, faculty and staff at every campus have given their time and full support to its implementation on our campuses.

Since Fall 2000, the University and the Department of Human Service have successfully partnered to maintain education as a work activity; reduce work requirements for full-time students, provide on-campus employment, and student support services for the needs specific to student parents.

This partnership has resulted in over 600 First-to-Work clients participating in on-campus Bridge to Hope employment and student services. With students in the educational pipeline moving from community colleges to baccalaureate campuses, over 150 students have earned Associate of Arts degrees at the community colleges and nearly 100 have earned Bachelor of Arts degrees. Popular and highly employable degrees include: Social Work, Nursing, Dental Hygiene, Teaching, Accounting, Software Technology, Counseling, Business Administration, Paralegal, Office Management, various Health Sciences, etc. These graduates are now fully employed and no longer receive cash assistance.

While the Dept. of Human Services has modified their education policy to accommodate both federal and state-funded participants, the statutory change is necessary to ensure that a full range of educational opportunities are always available. We are particularly disturbed with the

federal restriction to baccalaureate education, which is particularly necessary for women to earn a wage sufficient to support a family.

The federal restriction to 1 year of vocational education does not take into account the reality of pre-requisites for many 2-year vocational programs, including the economically viable health sciences careers (e.g. Dental Hygiene, Licensed Practical Nursing, Respiratory Therapist). For example, a two-year medical lab technician program has nearly 1 full year of pre-requisites before the student can even apply to the program. Limiting education activities to 2 years effectively limits students' participation in educational programs that can provide lifelong economic security.

The University strongly supports this program and believes that its passage will be a significant help for Hawai'i families seeking to move from welfare to self-reliance. We believe that providing educational opportunities to students on welfare is consistent with the University's Strategic Plan goals of access, service to the State and diversity.