Written Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on
Finance
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by
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SB 1665, SD2 – RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Chair Oshiro, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawaii Community Colleges have been the State’s primary resource
to prepare new workers and retrain the existing workforce. As such, we believe we can
play a critical role in the economic recovery and revitalization of the State, as stated in
the bill.

As our economy has slowed, we see an increasing number of individuals enrolling at
our campuses to improve their skills and acquire the education necessary to become
more competitive in the workplace. Community College enrollment has increased ten
percent over the past year.

We support the intent of the bill to provide additional resources to the Community
Colleges to expand the scope and focus of the Rapid Response Training initiative
started with legislative support over the past few years. Given the economic situation
facing the State, we believe there will be more individuals and businesses calling for the
training we provide through that initiative than we currently provide with our limited
resources.

We believe that for the State to successfully weather the current crisis, as well as
prepare for the future, now is the time to invest in the training and technical support to
small businesses needed to adopt new practices and technologies to improve their
operational efficiency. While Hawaii currently has a growing rate of unemployment, an
examination of our demographics suggests that this is a temporary phenomenon. As
the economy improves over the next several years, we believe that employers will again
face severe labor shortages as an increasing number of our aging population leave the
workforce during the next decade. Now is the time to take steps to be prepared for that
future.
One source of support noted in the bill is the Reed Act resources currently available in the State. It is our understanding that these federal funds have limitations on their use that prohibit it being used for direct training. However, it can be used for infrastructure in the State that supports state workforce development efforts and employment services. We believe it may be possible for a portion of those funds to be used in a manner that will free less restrictive funds to conduct the training and other services described in the bill.

We will be glad to work with other offices in the state to determine how best to apply a greater portion of the State’s resources to meet the training and technical assistance tasks essential to speed the pace of our economic recovery and revitalization.