SB 2435: RELATING TO EDUCATION (TFA)

Chair Sakamoto, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, College of Education commends the intent of this bill to provide assistance in having an adequate pool of highly qualified teachers to meet the needs of the state. The College of Education has participated in the partnership with Teach for America and the Hawai‘i Department of Education. In fact, the bulk of TFA candidates in Hawaii are prepared through the Master of Education in Teaching (MEDT) program and the post-baccalaureate and masters program in Special Education delivered by the UHM College of Education. Our experience with these candidates has been very good. And we are committed to continuing to work collaboratively with the Department of Education to ensure that there are qualified teachers in Hawai‘i’s schools. However, we cannot support this bill for several reasons.

First, in light of the current budget context and severe levels of restriction from DOE’s budget, we believe that there is clear reason for hesitation, anticipating the impact of an additional $3M reduction upon current levels of educational services, upon schools and most immediately, upon students. Although TFA is a worthy program that is successful in recruiting teacher candidates to Hawai‘i, a further reduction to DOE’s budget at this time gives us pause.

Second, we believe that alternative routes to certification, including programs such as TFA and other efforts, must be evaluated before a single route is specified for additional funding.

We appreciate the legislative support for meeting Hawai‘i’s teacher workforce needs with high quality teachers. We applaud the Senate for its attention to education issues.
However, we believe that a better approach would be to direct the DOE to review its own resources and to prioritize teacher recruitment and placement within their budget. Then allow them to determine how best to support teacher recruitment and preparation efforts, whether that be through TFA, local programs, or a combination of both.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.