



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
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by

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SCR 116 – REQUESTING THE HAWAII ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION TO CONVENE A WORKING GROUP TO DEVELOP AN EDUCATIONAL LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM FOR WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW GRADUATES TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES TO PURSUE PUBLIC INTEREST CAREERS IN HAWAII THAT DIRECTLY SERVE UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.

Chair Ige, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee,

The William S. Richardson School of Law **strongly supports** SCR 116, which would establish a working group to develop a loan repayment plan and other means to expand opportunities for our law graduates to pursue public interest careers that directly serve underserved communities in Hawai'i.

Over the past forty years, the Law School has contributed both direct legal services and leadership to provide access to justice for the most vulnerable members of our many communities in Hawai'i. We are proud of the *pro bono* and clinical work that our students do while in law school and of their recognition of an ongoing obligation to community service once they graduate.

With our first-rate faculty members as their teachers as well as role models for community service, many of our students are committed to doing public interest work and providing access to justice for all once they graduate. Although our tuition is low compared to most other law schools, a majority of our students nonetheless graduate with substantial debt from paying for law school. Approximately 80 percent of all Richardson students must borrow to attend law school and when they graduate, they owe an average of \$75,419 from law school debt alone.

Accordingly, the Law School applauds the effort of the Legislature to enhance access to justice and to assist our graduates in building on the founding vision of Chief Justice William S. Richardson and his allies that included training first-rate lawyers to provide excellent legal service to everyone in Hawai'i in need of legal assistance, regardless of ability to pay. The Law School is a member of, and has worked closely with, the Access to Justice Commission since the Commission's inception, and we look forward to assisting in the efforts of the working group provided for in Senate Concurrent Resolution 116.

In further support of this important effort, the Law School is ready to supply meeting rooms and administrative and student research assistance for the Working Group without charge.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.