UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committees on Higher Education and the Arts,
Economic Development, Environment and Technology,
and
Judiciary and Labor
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by
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SB 2943 – RELATING TO UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII RESEARCH

Chairs Taniguchi, Wakai, Keith-Agaran; Vice Chairs Slom, Shimabukuro and members of the committees:

The University of Hawaiʻi (UH) supports this bill which would provide UH express statutory authority to encourage, promote, financially support and directly participate in the commercialization of university-generated research. The legal framework is adapted from chapter 211F, Hawaiʻi Revised Statutes, applicable to the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT).

With its array of program strengths in ocean sciences, energy research, sustainable agriculture and astronomy; and its growing strength in cybersecurity and health sciences -- UH is the primary public institution generating academic research in the state.

A portion of the academic research has the potential to be converted to commercially viable products. In the past, UH secured patents on its inventions and licensed the patents to private companies willing to risk commercialization. After observing how UH's mainland public university counterparts promote innovation and research, it is clear that University of Hawaiʻi needs to be more active in its support and more focused in its efforts to commercialize its research products.

The University of Hawaiʻi established a proof of concept center/venture accelerator program named "XLR8UH" to turn university-related research into viable commercial products in cooperation with private investment. However, if a clear legal framework authorizing UH to participate directly and indirectly in new enterprises were established, UH could more efficiently contribute to this state-wide initiative. This express legal authority would reduce the uncertainty in creating, financing, and operating new ventures affiliated with UH, and would thereby induce greater private sector participation in promising concepts.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this measure.