



# **UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**

## **Legislative Testimony**

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Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Higher Education  
Thursday, February 12, 2015 at 2:00pm

By

Robert Bley-Vroman, Chancellor

And

Aviam Soifer, Dean

William S. Richardson School of Law

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### **HB 549 – RELATING TO PUBLIC SERVICE LEGAL LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE**

Chair Choy, Vice Chair Ichiyama, and members of the committee:

The University of Hawai'i is in strong support of HB 549, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget. The proposed law addresses an important issue facing our community: basic access to justice. The need for legal services for everyone is an ongoing issue in Hawai'i. In 2008, the Access to Justice Commission was by the Hawai'i Supreme Court to address the lack of sufficient legal service providers for those unable to afford legal representation. Our many law students often graduate owing an average of \$80,000 in student loans, for law school alone.

HB 549 proposes to assist law school graduates somewhat with their burdensome loans so that they can elect to work in public service and provide more legal services to those most vulnerable in our communities. The bill itself directly resulted from the work of a task force created as a result of Senate Concurrent Resolution 116, which called for the development of an educational loan repayment program. SCR 116 started with a bill introduced by law students of the William S. Richardson School of Law. Richardson students have strongly demonstrated their commitment to public service in many forms, such as their formation of Advocates for Public Interest Law (APIL) in 1985; creating and implementing a substantial pro bono requirement for graduation, participating in clinical outreach work, and post graduation employment in areas dedicated to serving those most needy in our community.

There is a clear need for greater access to justice, and addressing the serious burdensome debt that students face after graduation. HB 549 would be a vital supplement to current federal loan forgiveness programs for public service already in existence, and finally, would allow more of our graduates to do the kind of public service so many of them want to do.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter.