



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM

TESTIMONY

S.B. 2419, RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Education

February 13, 2004

By

David McClain
Vice President for Academic Affairs
University of Hawai'i

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Chair Sakamoto and Members of the Committee:

The purpose of SB 2419 is to establish an office of public policy coordination and support within the University of Hawai'i. Functions of this office would include facilitating interaction between policy makers and the University, serving as a clearinghouse of information, and promoting multi-disciplinary analysis, discussion, and understanding of policymaking and Hawai'i trends affecting public policy.

The University is committed to providing public service in addition to its missions of instruction and research. In fulfilling its commitment to public service, the University has a long standing record of willingly responding to requests to share its expertise and been recognized as a valuable resource in public policy formulation. For these reasons, the University supports the intent of SB 2419.

Public policy centers are not new to the University. The University has a number of existing programs and departments involved in public policy matters like the Social Science Research Institute, the Hawai'i Educational Policy Center, and Department of Urban and Regional Planning. These existing programs are often called upon to serve as expert witnesses or consultants for specific studies and serve as a source of special policy reports, testimony and data for a wide range of issues.

Members of the University community have had some conversations about the idea of a coordinating public policy center within the University and identified the following as concerns:

1. If public policy coordination is elevated in importance and prominence, it is essential that adequate funding be provided. There is a real concern that this new office not be funded by subtracting from other pressing needs of the University, especially other policy centers. Therefore, funding sufficient to support staff, equipment and other operating expenses of the new center is necessary. Further, funding for a new public policy center should not supplant Board of Regents approved University supplemental budget priorities.
2. We would not want the new center to become an unnecessary level of bureaucracy. While greater coordination between existing centers is seen as beneficial, there is also concern that the creation of a new overarching entity may be at the expense of existing center flexibility.
3. It is essential that any future office of public policy coordination not be one that can impose its view or approach or censure on the existing centers. It must be clear that such an office be there to facilitate and serve, when asked, and to provide services to the University community and policy makers that others may not be able to provide. The suggested list of powers and duties in SB 2419 may imply an overly ambitious agenda that may be more appropriately identified as options rather than mandates. We suggest that the proposed powers and duties of the center be recast as issues for consideration by the University.

4. A number of operational questions have been identified. What is the more effective and appropriate way for the University to share its expertise and limited resources in the process of public policy formulation? What should be the Administrative and operational relationship between the proposed public policy center and other existing University centers involved in public policy? What is the most appropriate balance between the University's research, instructional and community service missions while recognizing the need to be responsive to the informational and expertise requirements of public policy makers?

The University would be pleased to work with the committee to amend the bill to address the specific concerns identified. As an option, the University and its existing centers could be charged with engaging in a comprehensive consideration of the proposal to establish a coordinating center on for public policy. The intent of the charge to the University would be to develop a plan how the University might better coordinate its efforts to support for public policy formulation in the context of SB 2419.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2419.