



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education and the Arts
And
Senate Committee on Agriculture
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By
Robert Bley-Vroman, Chancellor
And
Maria Gallo, Dean
And
J. Kenneth Grace, Associate Dean
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 314 – RELATING TO THE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

Chairs Taniguchi and Ruderman, Vice Chairs Inouye and Riviere, and members of the committees, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 314, which provides funding for critical positions in the Cooperative Extension Service under the direction of the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

We strongly support this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget.

The Cooperative Extension Service is the means by which the Land Grant university system extends the results of research to directly assist agriculture and the public in each state. Among the 50 states, Hawai'i is virtually unique in supporting agricultural research and extension, along with all other university functions, solely through the single budget line of the University of Hawai'i. In recognition of the unique nature of agricultural extension, and to a lesser extent agricultural research, other states choose to provide a budget line specifically for these core Land Grant activities. In the absence of such a funding mechanism, extension service functions potentially suffer to a greater extent than other university functions during periods of fiscal austerity. Tuition-driven university budget models may also have the unforeseen effect of disincentivizing extension functions.

Hawai'i is also unique among all the states in that the four county governments make no set contribution to the costs of the extension service. The program funding that several are willing to provide is greatly appreciated, but core infrastructure support is absent.

As a result of the above-described factors, the extension faculty workforce in the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources has decreased 28% over the past six years. Retirements and resignations are a normal occurrence, but the present budget situation prevents replacement of many vacant positions. Again, a focus on university budget reductions and increasing tuition revenue does not support extension staffing at optimal levels.

At the same time, the legislature and the people of Hawai'i have an increasing sense of urgency with respect to food security. This includes a need for accelerated training to assist new farmers, with an emphasis on farming practices that will decrease Hawai'i's need for imported and expensive farming inputs; and a concomitant need to ensure that appropriate good agriculture practices are followed and safe food reaches our plates. In order to reduce our reliance on imported food, and also ensure that farming in Hawai'i remains a viable occupation, our farmers need to be well-trained in both farm/ranch production methods and in practices that will ensure the safety of the food they produce without increasing production costs unreasonably.

SB 314 will strengthen the eroding agricultural extension infrastructure in Hawai'i by appropriating funding for eight extension agent positions, two in each county, for a two year period. Each of the positions identified in the bill represents a state need, and will serve as a resource across the state, as well as filling manpower gaps within their home county and freeing time on the part of current agents to provide better service to their agricultural clientele. In addition to filling immediate needs, SB 314 provides the time needed to work on inclusion of extension functions in the budget models currently being developed within the university.

Thanks for this opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 314.