



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
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HB 2491 HD2 – RELATING TO THE HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE

Chair Luke, Vice Chair Yamashita, and members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2491 HD2. The University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UH Hilo) supports HB 2491 HD2 that proposes to establish a standard for the spelling and punctuation of Hawaiian names and words as they appear in official State and County documents, letterheads, and signage.

UH Hilo is home to Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, College of Hawaiian Language, that has been leading efforts to revitalize the Hawaiian language while also serving as a model to national and international Indigenous communities who also seek to revive their endangered languages. The college has translation expertise among faculty, M.A. and Ph.D students and the Hale Kuamo'o Hawaiian Language Center at UH Hilo. Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani has also established minimum qualifications (MQs) for demonstrated Hawaiian language proficiency of faculty and staff positions of the college.

Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani has the expertise in identifying traditional dialects of Hawaiian existing before language shift to English throughout the state, including Ni'ihau. However, providing a list of dialects may be problematic in that claims can be made by people that they speak different dialects. We suggest that only those dialects recorded directly on tape and in writing from those born before statehood are to be identified. We have also seen that there has been testimony on this bill regarding different spelling systems used historically for Hawaiian. The College also has expertise in that area as among our faculty members are individuals with training in historical linguistics and in the history of Hawaiian. In the report on dialects we could include information on historical variation in writing systems and what has become most commonly accepted over time from the earliest efforts to write Hawaiian.

Official use of Hawaiian will require research into historical use of different terms for different government offices and not simply translation. Additionally, some of the government offices and positions will require creation of new terminology. In 1995 through HB1798 the legislature established the Hale Kuamo'o Hawaiian language center at UH Hilo to serve the use of Hawaiian in schools, especially immersion schools and schools serving Ni'ihau children. The Hale Kuamo'o then incorporated the Hawaiian Lexicon Committee established from the beginnings of the Pūnana Leo preschools in

1982. That committee has included representation from various islands and native speaker communities to create vocabulary and disseminate it for use in schools. The Hale Kuamo'o Center was incorporated into the Hawaiian language college mandated at UH Hilo by the 1996 legislature in Act 315. As a result, HRS 304A-1302(3) requires the Hawaiian language college to provide a Hawaiian language support center that includes research and language development, which could include the purposes of HB 2491 HD2 and the overall coordination and dissemination aspects important to making this effort successful. However, we see that this responsibility as requiring additional funding, as like the increased attention to the Hawaiian language college and its partner 'Imiloa mandated in HB 2543 HD1 and SD2 of 2020, it calls for increased support for the larger state use of Hawaiian beyond university language courses.

We see the bill as an important step towards strengthening the vitality of Hawaiian through increasing government documents, functions, services and a growing workforce community of Hawaiian speakers as a critical effort to ensure the revitalization of the Hawaiian language for generations to come.

Mahalo for allowing UH Hilo to testify on this issue.