



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education and Technology
Friday, January 27, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.

By

Debora Halbert, Vice President for Academic Strategy
University of Hawai'i System

HB 78 – RELATING TO STRENGTHENING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 78, which seeks to expand Hawai'i Promise at the Community Colleges for all Hawai'i residents.

The University of Hawai'i (UH) strongly supports efforts to make public higher education more affordable. We also note that the current Hawai'i Promise program has effectively proven its impact for students in the community colleges, where participation in Hawai'i Promise has increased student success in their chosen areas of study. In academic year 2021-2022, Hawai'i Promise recipients earned more credits, received better grades, and had higher persistence rates than their peers. Part-time students receiving a Hawai'i Promise scholarship also had higher graduation rates than their peers.

UH supports the intent of expanding the current Hawai'i Promise program to financially support all qualified students. Specifically, as the bill notes, a program where the awards granted to the student are focused on the unmet direct cost need and one calculated based upon a student applying for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and receiving whatever available Pell grants and other scholarships might be available to them.

As a "last dollar" initiative, the current Hawai'i Promise ensures that the State of Hawai'i can maximize federal support in the form of Pell grants. If that were to be extended to all "qualified" residents it would also reach students who have economic need but may not be able to fully cover the direct cost of education using other grants and scholarships.

As the data from the current Hawai'i Promise program shows, there are benefits to making the direct cost of education affordable for all eligible Hawai'i residents. The state would benefit from more students having the opportunity to attend college and potentially increase their ability to earn a living wage. Hawai'i residents would benefit by having increased access to expanded educational and workforce opportunities.

The UH has a small clarifying amendment to the purpose section starting on page 3, line 16, regarding the college students who received financial aid. The forty-two percent discussed in the purpose section received financial aid to contribute towards their direct cost, not necessarily to cover the cost of their tuition. See suggested amendment below:

*... college students received financial aid to ~~[cover the cost of their tuition]~~
contribute toward their direct costs in the most recent year for which data is
available*

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.