



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
Thursday, March 16, 2023 at 3:00 p.m.

By

Megan Donahue, Acting Director
Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology

And

Charles "Chip" Fletcher, Interim Dean
School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology

And

Michael Bruno, Provost
University of Hawaii at Mānoa

HB 848 HD2 – RELATING TO HAWAII INSTITUTE FOR MARINE BIOLOGY

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support for HB 848 HD2, which appropriates funds for the following support staff positions at the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology (HIMB):

- 1) Building Maintenance Worker II
- 2) Administrative Officer APT-B
- 3) Website specialist APT-B

HIMB is a world-class center for research and education with a mission to advance understanding and stewardship of oceans and coasts locally and globally. The proximity of the twenty-six acre campus with high-quality lab facilities to a living coral reef provides unparalleled opportunities for research. HIMB's scientists, educators, and support staff bring in close to \$9M annually in research, education, and outreach funds that contribute to our ability to hire Windward-based staff. As these programs continually expand, new permanent staff positions are crucial to help us sustain daily operations and meet the needs and expectations of our community partners.

HIMB has a long history of undertaking cutting edge science and our scientists were the first to report large scale coral bleaching in Hawaii and link it to high water temperatures, calling the world's attention to the consequences of global climate change. We apply our knowledge to address local as well as global problems. HIMB is pilot testing construction of hybrid reefs – human-built structures that interact with natural processes to create living reefs – that could reduce wave energy and protect nearshore cultural and infrastructure resources. HIMB is also testing novel shoreline erosion mitigation techniques that build on traditional practices to work *with* nature rather than fighting against it to shore up coastlines.

HIMB is well-known for internationally recognized training for students in conservation oriented and place-based scientific research, but we have also been working to expand vocational and technical training opportunities for local students. For example, we recently created a paid experiential learning internship program for local community college students to train with Facilities, Administration, Water Safety, Fiscal or Human Resources departments within our institution, preparing local students for real world jobs close to home.

Success in growing such programs, which provide direct benefits to local students and the State, is dependent on having permanent support staff that possess the institutional memory to efficiently navigate the State and University systems and do not turn over with individual grant cycles.

Building maintenance is critical to the operations at HIMB, with 8 research buildings, 5 housing buildings, storage facilities, boat docks, and sheds. HIMB is already operating under a minimal facilities crew and struggles to keep up with existing infrastructure maintenance needs. This hire is critical for health and safety concerns. Filling this position will allow research and education activities that are highly relevant to the university and the State to continue operating safely in well-maintained buildings. Without adequate building maintenance, HIMB may not be able to maintain a functional research infrastructure.

HIMB currently has only two permanent Administrative Officers to support 25 faculty and manage over 130 project accounts. This project load requires extensive grant management, account maintenance, budget oversight, forecasting, procurement, and disbursement of appropriated, extramural, and revolving funds. Hiring this third Administrative Officer position is essential to avoid overtime pay, staff burnout (with subsequent departure), and loss of research capacity. This hire is critical for maintaining a minimum base level of research productivity; without it, extramural grant submissions and success would likely be significantly diminished, resulting in reductions in extramural funding and associated research spending in the state.

HIMB has never had a permanent Website Specialist position. Website support was previously fulfilled by graduate assistants or extramurally-funded part-time staff, but these positions have been discontinued. HIMB has been without dedicated website and information services support for several years. With extensive programming in research, education, visitor, and community service, HIMB critically needs a permanent staff member who can manage the entirety of our web presence, online dissemination, and social media needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support for HB 848 HD2, provided that its passage does not impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget.

Your consideration is greatly appreciated.