



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 Finance
Friday, February 24, 2023 at 1:30 p.m.

By

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

HB 961 HD1 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 961 HD1. The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the Legislature's intent to expand access to affordable and quality early care and education opportunities to three-year-olds across the State.

Currently, only four-year-olds and children in the year prior to entering kindergarten are eligible to participate and enroll in the Executive Office on Early Learning's (EOEL's) public pre-kindergarten (PreK) program and Department of Human Services' (DHS) Preschool Open Doors (POD) child care subsidy program. This bill would expand the age-eligibility of EOEL's PreK program and DHS' POD child care subsidy program to include three-year-olds, thus increasing access to these programs and easing the financial burden many families face when accessing early learning opportunities.

UH is working collaboratively with stakeholders, including DHS, EOEL, the School Facilities Authority (SFA), and the Department of Education (DOE), to increase the availability of early care and education programs on a number of UH campuses. And while we are still developing how these facilities and programs can be sustained, we believe that State support of early childhood programs and facilities – wherever they may be located – are valuable to advancing educational development and learning for Hawai'i keiki.

We appreciate the Legislature's intention to provide financial assistance for more families to access affordable and quality early care and education and defer to DHS and EOEL regarding the implementation and provisions of the sections of the bill that are pertinent to the respective offices.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill.