



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'olelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, March 19, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.

By

Erika Lacro

Vice President for Community Colleges  
University of Hawai'i System

### HB 1826 HD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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

The University of Hawai'i supports HB 1826 HD1 which expands the Mental Health Technician (MHT) certificate of competence at Windward Community College (WCC) through the hiring of a MHT certificate faculty instructor, a faculty outreach position, scholarships, and administrative costs.

WCC has coordinated with the Hawai'i State Hospital (HSH) in order to develop the Mental Health Technician (MHT) Certificate, which provides a foundation of knowledge and increase skills for those serving the mentally ill on our islands. The program falls within the purview of WCC and is offered to students at HSH and beyond. The program consists of three focused courses, available in person and online. Students learn fundamentals of psychology and psychological functioning, as well as conflict resolution and communications. This allows them to understand situations that arise at work, to more effectively deal with patients and to prevent escalation of conflict in tense situations. This leads to a safer workplace and a more supportive therapeutic environment.

This program addresses the severe shortage of mental health workers during a time when our State has dire needs for mental health support due to the impacts of the pandemic, socio-economic stressors, high job turnover, and a lack of workforce skilled in this area. It serves not only Hawai'i State Hospital, the second largest employer in Windward O'ahu, but also other mental health related employers such as Windward District Health, Hina Mauka and others. Our online asynchronous offerings allow current workers to grow their skills through course offerings maximally adaptable to their schedules and further allow for this program to be expanded statewide.

Since its inception in Spring 2022, this program has already graduated 47 students, 19 of whom were employed at Hawai'i State Hospital. In just two years, this program has had a large impact on the capacity of Windward O'ahu to care for those suffering from

mental health issues and to increase workplace satisfaction and safety in the workplace. This capacity is now being expanded with trauma-informed coursework tailored to the needs of adult corrections officers and the Honolulu Police Department, increasing workforce skills related to mental health in key professions serving vulnerable community members. WCC entered into a contract with Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation this spring to provide this training directly to adult corrections officers.

The MHT certificate creates a pathway to further training and higher education. A one year certificate currently being finalized builds on the MHT certificate by adding clinical skills and knowledge necessary to perform higher job requirements in more advanced clinical settings. These certificates are specifically designed to advance students to increasingly higher qualifications, such as degrees in psychology, social work and mental health counseling. This grows the overall capacity of our state to address mental health challenges and needs.

A Faculty Instructor will allow for curriculum development and expansion to meet the needs of employers and those we serve, implementation of the courses and certificate program, and articulation of the certificates to increasingly higher qualifications. A Faculty Outreach position amplifies the scope of this program from Windward O'ahu to our entire state through outreach and recruitment at our sister community college as well as through the creation of partnerships with mental health related agencies and workplaces throughout the state. The provision of a scholarship program allows this training to benefit a large range of potential workers across our state, removing financial barriers to education.

This bill supports the Mental Health Tech certificate program at WCC to address an immediate, critical workforce need for preparing potential employees and upskilling existing employees. It builds the capacity of our State to implement effective, supportive care for those suffering from mental illness.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of HB 1826 HD1, as long as its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1826 HD1.