



# 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  
Friday, February 7, 2025, at 2:00 p.m.

By

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#### HB 442 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the House Committee on Higher Education:

This testimony is presented on behalf of the University of Hawai'i (UH) System, including the UH Mānoa School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene (SONDH), UH West O'ahu, and the UH Hilo School of Nursing (SON), **in strong support of HB 442, relating to the University of Hawai'i.**

We thank and commend the Legislature for their dedication to addressing the nursing workforce shortage and for proposing this bill aimed to increase the capacity of nursing education through appropriations to: 1) UH Mānoa SONDH baccalaureate program for the UH Mānoa - UH West O'ahu Nursing Collaboration Phase III and the Online RN to BS Program; 2) UH West O'ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway; and 3) the UH Hilo SON baccalaureate program. The nursing program initiatives and proposed appropriations in this bill are in alignment with the UH BOR Fiscal Biennium 2025-2027 Budget that was submitted to the Governor and the Legislature.

The Healthcare Association of Hawai'i (HAH) reported a staggering 999 RN vacancies in 2022, and 1,043 openings as of 2024, highlighting a significant shortfall in our healthcare workforce. During the Academic Year 2022-23, the University of Hawai'i System produced 204 graduates from a total of 422 nursing graduates in the state, as noted in the Hawai'i State Nursing Education Capacity Report by the Hawai'i State Center for Nursing. This gap leaves us with a critical deficit of approximately 600 unfilled RN positions that current graduation rates cannot satisfy. A new report funded by the Hawai'i State Center for Nursing soon to be released is expected to confirm that the

utilization of RN services in Hawai'i will steadily increase through 2037. It is essential to strengthen our nursing education programs and address this pressing need for qualified healthcare professionals in our community.

Hawai'i is fortunate to have many students eager to pursue nursing studies at UH and contribute to the future nursing workforce. In fall 2024, the UH Mānoa nursing program received 1,000 applications for 54 admission slots, with 300 applicants being Hawai'i residents. However, both the UH Mānoa and UH Hilo nursing programs face capacity challenges due in large part to insufficient funding for faculty positions, which limits their ability to accept and enroll more students. Appropriated funds would allow our programs to increase enrollment while maintaining the essential faculty-to-student ratio required by accreditors and for ensuring patient safety.

The UH programs are working collaboratively to address the current and future nursing needs of our community. A highlight of these efforts is that it enables nursing students to receive quality nursing education in their home community which includes service learning clinical practicums with patients and families at health care agencies including long-term care, acute care hospitals, and in community settings that reflect the community's culture and values. The intent is that this pipeline of nurses will transition to nursing employment in their community after graduation and strengthen our health care system. Our health care community partners have expressed support to provide clinical training sites in tandem to our efforts.

The UH Mānoa - UH West O'ahu Nursing Collaboration increases access to nursing education and expands UH Mānoa nursing student enrollment by 50%, with an annual spring admission of students from the UH West O'ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway. After admission to UH Mānoa SONDH, students embark on a three-year journey engaging in nursing courses offered by the UH Mānoa SONDH at the UH West O'ahu campus and in clinical settings primarily located in West O'ahu. This initiative is efficient for several reasons. Nursing students from West O'ahu do not have to commute to the UH Mānoa campus (except for selected experiences), and UH West O'ahu maximizes classroom and laboratory spaces. This also helps to avoid duplication of nursing programs through UH Mānoa SONDH's existing robust curriculum and accreditation standing, whereas the start-up of a new program would be resource-intensive and require new nursing program accreditation.

The first cohort of nursing students was admitted to UH Mānoa SONDH in January 2024 and a second cohort in January 2025, which was made possible with vital funding approved by the Legislature and Governor. In the upcoming third and final implementation phase, the funds appropriated in this bill will support four nursing faculty positions for the students' senior year courses. By the initiative's full implementation in 2026, the UH Mānoa SONDH Bachelor of Science (BS) Nursing Program is projected to increase enrollment by 72 students through three ongoing spring admission cohorts, resulting in the graduation of an additional 24 new nurses annually.

The UH West O‘ahu’s Pre-Nursing Pathway is essential to the collaboration, which facilitates a nursing student pipeline by offering prerequisite courses, support services, and health-related service learning experiences to prepare students for entry and application to the UH Mānoa nursing baccalaureate program. The funding allocated in this bill will support four positions to help ensure the sustainability of the Pre-Nursing Pathway, which has been temporarily financed by the campus’s financial reserves. The positions, separate and distinct from the UH Mānoa Nursing faculty position requests, are critical to both the sustainability of the Pre-Nursing Pathway program and to expanding it to support an increase in the number of students from Central and West O‘ahu who are able to pursue nursing education. The UH West O‘ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway program student enrollment has increased 139% in the past two years, and further growth is anticipated. An increase in UH West O‘ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway student enrollment is essential to support the necessary increase in the BS Nursing enrollment for the UH Mānoa - UH West O‘ahu Nursing Collaboration.

The UH Mānoa SONDH’s Online RN to BS Program efficiently and seamlessly transitions students from the UH Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) to a baccalaureate degree via a 1-year program. This program enables graduates to continue their academic progression via an online, asynchronous curriculum for didactic courses and complete required clinicals in their home island community. Student enrollment in the Online RN to BS Program has increased by 54%, from 35 students in fall 2022 to 54 in fall 2024. As of fall 2024, 50% of the students enrolled in the program graduated from a UH ADN program. The funds appropriated in this bill will support one nursing faculty position to teach students residing on Kaua‘i, where we currently have the most need for faculty. RN vacancies in Kaua‘i increased by 145% in two years, from 31 in 2022 to 45 in 2024 (HAH Hawai‘i Healthcare Workforce Initiative 2024 report). The program provides access to nursing education in rural areas and is helping to build a highly qualified RN workforce within their home communities. This is especially important as the health care needs of our population become more complex. Additionally, students from this program are well prepared for graduate level studies upon completion of their baccalaureate degree. Several graduates have gone on to immediately complete the school’s online Master’s Degree in Nursing for Advanced Population Health Nursing, which was recognized this year as one of the top 20% of online nursing master’s programs by U.S. News and World Report.

The UH Hilo SON offers the baccalaureate nursing degree with a unique transcultural thread throughout its curriculum facilitating learning pathways for cohorts in a smaller community setting including rural clinic learning experiences. UH Hilo SON has a junior and senior cohort, each currently with 30 students. The funds appropriated in this bill will support five faculty nursing positions and will increase enrollment in each cohort from 30 to 50. An increase in size using a staggered roll-out approach will enable UH Hilo SON to work with clinical sites to adjust to the integration of the increased cohort sizes. This increase in cohort sizes will allow the UH Hilo SON to increase our cohorts by 67%.

In 2024, the UH Hilo SON received 63 applicants to the Hilo cohort and accepted 30, turning away 33 qualified students. Many of these student applicants come from the UH Hilo Exploratory Health Sciences (EXHS) major, which is a pre-nursing program for the UH Hilo SON. In the fall of 2024, there were a total of 128 EXHS majors and 150 in fall, 2023. The intent of the EXHS path is to prepare students for the BSN program, however UH Hilo SON does not have the capacity to accept all EXHS students currently enrolled in this pathway. Additionally, the UH Hilo SON piloted a new High School Direct Entry (HSDE) into Nursing in fall, 2023, admitting three students, and a total of six applications were received during fall, 2024. These HSDE students follow the EXHS pathway for their nursing prerequisites and then enter into the BSN program in the fall semester of their third (junior) year.

The Healthcare Association of Hawai'i (HAH) reported the growing health care workforce needs on Hawai'i Island. The Hawai'i Healthcare Workforce Initiative 2024 Report addresses the increase in vacant registered nurse (RN) positions from 2022 to 2024, resulting in an over twofold increase in vacant RN positions from 72 to 159. This evidence shows the demand for nurses is growing faster than the supply, hence this greater need reflects the increased demand on educational programs to meet the growing need for nurses.

In closing, we are committed to developing our nursing workforce, with each of the campus initiatives contributing to a comprehensive strategy. By building and sustaining educational pipelines, we aim to make a meaningful impact on the nursing workforce in our state. We respectfully request full funding for the UH Biennium Budget request to address the nursing shortage using the capacity-building approaches described in this testimony.

We are grateful to the Legislature's attention to addressing health care shortages and ensuring the well-being of Hawai'i's communities.