



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 pm

By

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and

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HB 840 – RELATING TO UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ATHLETICS

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 840 that relates to the appropriation of \$8,519,341 for University of Hawai'i Athletics. Within HB 840, the amount of the appropriation to the University of Hawai'i at Hilo Athletics Department (UH Hilo Athletics) is \$800,000 for fiscal year 2025-2026 and fiscal year 2026-2027 for the program and operations..

HB 840 will help UH Hilo Athletics offset significantly higher costs associated with competing in the Pacific West Conference. The primary increase in costs being travel related. Nearly 250 student-athletes and our coaches, in 12 intercollegiate athletic programs, serve proudly as Ambassadors of Aloha representing the State of Hawai'i, the University of Hawai'i at Hilo and our Big Island community.

In the past 18 months, the Pacific West Conference has expanded adding four more institutions which has increased the length and amount of our travel significantly. With the expansion, the Pacific West Conference has also added end of season conference championships in the sports of men's and women's soccer, women's volleyball, baseball and softball. The addition of these championships alone adds a significant travel expense. This in combination with increased and longer travel due to the addition of the four schools in the conference necessitates our request for the \$800,000 appropriation. In addition, as part of the Pacific West Conference, UH Hilo Athletics brings in teams to play in-state in front of Hawai'i residents

This appropriation will be appreciated and beneficial to all of our sports and student-athletes at the University. Funding would be used to offset costs that are uniquely higher than our competitors, for example:

1. **TRAVEL EXPENSES:** Nearly 70% of our operational budget is allocated to travel related costs. In comparison, our peers on the continent appropriate between 20-25% of their budget towards travel-related expenses.

2. **RECRUITING COSTS:** It costs UH Hilo significantly more than our peers on the continent to recruit student-athletes that can compete at the NCAA II level.

In addition, UH Hilo Athletics intends to utilize funds to expand student-athlete directed programs such as:

1. Nutritional programs (training table)
2. Augment athletic training services to improve health, wellness and safety of our student-athletes through strength and conditioning
3. Upgrade and enhance treatment and rehabilitation equipment for student-athlete health and wellness

HB 840 will assist in addressing these unique costs, which in turn will make UH Hilo Athletics more competitive while at the same time improve the overall student-athlete experience. As our current and future Ambassadors of Aloha, this is vitally important. This funding will also assist in bringing immeasurable benefits to the Big Island and Hilo community as a collective source of community pride in our program.

In addition, UH Hilo Athletics provides significant economic benefits to the State and the Big Island communities over the course of the year with various teams, families, students and visitors that our program attracts each and every year that stay in our hotels, rent their vehicles and dine at our local restaurants.

UH Hilo is grateful for the support from the legislature. This funding will go to the costs listed above and will directly benefit our student-athletes health and wellness, experience and their competitiveness in the sports they participate in.

We respectfully requests the passage of HB 840. Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.