



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 & Technology
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By

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SB 500 SD1– RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Aloha e Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 500 SD1 relating to mental health at the University of Hawai'i. We are grateful to the members of the Senate who introduced this bill in support of our students. We support the bill and offer the following comments.

SB 500 SD1 appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) to establish three (3) additional permanent mental health practitioner positions within the Division of Student Success' Counseling and Student Development Center (CSDC).

College students are facing greater and more complex challenges in their personal and academic lives. During the 2020–2021 school year, more than 60% of college students met the criteria for at least one mental health problem, according to the Healthy Minds Study, which collects data from 373 campuses nationwide ([Lipson, S. K., et al., *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Vol. 306, 2022](#)). In another national survey, almost three-quarters of students reported moderate or severe psychological distress ([National College Health Assessment](#), American College Health Association, 2021). The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD) Annual Survey: 2021 reports the most frequent presenting concerns among college counseling center clients are anxiety with 61%, followed by stress (47%) and depression (44%). In addition, approximately 11% of counseling center clients reported suicidal thoughts (Gorman, K. S., et. al., Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors [Annual Survey: 2021](#), 2021).

Our students are presenting with identical issues including anxiety, stress management, and depression at similar levels nationwide. We work hard to attend to all of our students. Our current team of psychologists, a half-time psychiatrist, and trainees do an amazing job with limited resources.

CSDC currently has 5.0 FTE mental health professionals, 0.85 FTE temporary mental health professionals, and 5.5 FTE supervised trainees. The nationally recommended

minimum ratio of mental health professionals to students is one full-time equivalent (FTE), not including trainees, per 1,500 students. The UHM total student enrollment for Fall 2022 semester was 19,074 which results in a ratio of one mental health professional per 3,815 students. Adding three FTE positions would result in a ratio of one per 2,384 students which gets us much closer to the national best practice standard.

In the 2021-2022 academic year, CSDC provided a range of direct clinical services to approximately 933 students including 7,548 appointments scheduled. In the Fall 2022 semester, the need for CSDC outreach efforts that support students' mental health and well-being increased as well. This resulted in a 69% increase in facilitation or participation in workshops, training sessions, and resource fairs hosted by clinical faculty and trainees. Through these efforts, the CSDC has interacted with 3,687 UHM students and community members, which translates to a 244% increase in the number of participants reached as compared to the previous year.

The primary responsibility of the CSDC faculty is to provide direct service to students. Adding three full-time mental health professionals will allow more latitude in providing clinical support (i.e., long-term therapy, more frequent therapy sessions, crisis intervention) to students who present with higher levels of concerns and severity of symptoms. As students in distress tend to impact multiple UHM academic departments, services, and programs, a larger cadre of clinicians is needed to provide essential direct services but also to respond to the resulting mental health consultations requested by faculty, staff, and administrators as well as concerned students and parents.

Any efforts to increase the availability of services to our students would be very much appreciated. These new positions will help to alleviate the current heavy workload on our clinicians and increase our abilities to reach out to the campus through proactive educational efforts. Your investment in the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa will have a long-lasting impact and will create a legacy of those who supported the students of higher education in our state.

We support the intent of this legislation provided that its passage does not impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill.