



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
Thursday, March 30, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.

By

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

SB 1413 SD2 HD1 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII RESIDENT TUITION FEE

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill (SB) 1413 SD2 HD1 relating to the University of Hawai'i resident tuition fee.

SB 1413 SD2 HD1 would allow individuals who graduated from a Hawai'i high school within ten years prior to starting their higher education with University of Hawai'i (UH) to be classified as residents for in-state tuition at the UH. In addition, the bill simplifies residency determination for high school students and recent graduates who are homeless and/or have complex family circumstances. As the sole provider of public higher education in the State of Hawai'i and in recognizing that an educated citizenry is the foundation for a strong state, UH supports this bill which will assist with increasing access to higher education and attempts to streamline the application process for residents, especially recent high school graduates.

Hawai'i's "college-going rate" of high school graduates declined during the pandemic, dropping from 55% enrolling immediately after high school graduation to 51%. The decline in college-going rates to UH disproportionately affected low-income, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander graduates. While some decline may be attributed to the uncertainties the current health pandemic created in the lives of our students, as UH moves forward, we must do so in ways that streamline the transition from high school to college as much as possible.

The proposed duration that the resident rate would be available to prospective students makes higher education accessible for a longer period after high school completion. Additionally, using graduation from a high school in the State of Hawai'i as a determining factor simplifies the residency process and would reduce barriers to local students enrolling at UH to pursue additional education and training.

As currently drafted, for residents who may have left the State and decided to return for any variety of reasons within ten years after graduating from a Hawai'i high school, this bill would allow them a faster transition to higher education for up-skilling or pursuing a different career without delaying pursuit of their educational and life goals. This revision could serve as an incentive for residents who moved away to return in pursuit of higher education at an affordable cost, further contributing to Hawai'i's local economy and addressing the brain drain that occurs when students leave for college and do not return.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.