



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Labor and Technology
and
Senate Committee on Government Operations
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SB 2886 – RELATING TO STATE EMPLOYMENT

Chairs Aquino and McKelvey, Vice Chairs Moriwaki and Gabbard, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed legislation relating to State employment, specifically the removal of the requirement of a bachelor's degree for the majority of state positions.

The University of Hawai'i (UH) appreciates our legislators' desire to reduce the number of vacant positions within state agencies, and UH acknowledges that there are undoubtedly certain government positions for which a bachelor's degree may not be an absolute necessity. At the same time, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of a college education in preparing individuals for the complex responsibilities of running state agencies. Fortunately, despite the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the percentage of Hawai'i's working-age adults who possess a post-secondary degree has risen from 41% in 2005 to 48% in 2022, expanding the pool of college graduates available to pursue state employment. Our comments highlight the broader value of a college degree in cultivating the skills and knowledge necessary for effective public service.

In the current landscape, the responsibilities of state agencies have become increasingly sophisticated and multifaceted. While some positions may not explicitly require a bachelor's degree, we believe most skills essential for effectively managing state agencies are acquired through higher education; and we appreciate the addition of Section 2(b) as it addresses our concerns for positions that require an additional degree or its equivalent for specialized knowledge, skills, or abilities. The proposed legislation should consider the overarching role of education in shaping individuals who are equipped to handle the challenges inherent in public administration.

Examples from existing state agencies further underscore the significance of a bachelor's degree in performing job functions effectively. Consider the role of a program manager responsible for overseeing complex initiatives within a state agency. A college

education provides individuals with critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills indispensable in strategizing and executing successful programs. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of public policy, budgeting, and organizational behavior, often acquired through college coursework, is instrumental in navigating the intricate landscape of state governance.

Similarly, while some positions may not necessitate a degree within law enforcement agencies, those with a college education often demonstrate more advanced communication skills, cultural competence, and the ability to comprehend and apply evolving legal frameworks. These attributes contribute significantly to the effectiveness and accountability of state law enforcement.

In the field of health services, professionals with a bachelor's degree are better equipped to comprehend the complexities of healthcare policy, epidemiology, and public health management. This understanding is vital for making informed decisions that impact the community's well-being.

UH must continue to require faculty to possess a college degree, and in most cases, a degree at the Master's level or higher, as it is essential for this population of state employees. Faculty are expected to be experts in their fields of study, intending to pass along critical knowledge through teaching, research, and service to future college-level learners, exposing them to the academic rigor of which they have first-hand knowledge.

State agencies should be able to require construction managers or architects to possess a degree in engineering or a related field. While a license or certification is not required for working as an auditor or fiscal specialist, state agencies should be able to require a degree in accounting, business, or a related field or equivalent professional experience. In these cases, the requirement of a college degree does not disqualify applicants for positions, provided they have met the equivalent professional experience requirements.

In conclusion, we hope the committee will carefully consider the broader implications of removing the bachelor's degree requirement for state positions. For example, one can foresee state agencies needing to invest more in training and development programs to ensure that employees without degrees possess the skills to execute their job duties effectively. Removing bachelor's degree requirements may result in the loss of individuals with specialized expertise, potentially harming the operational effectiveness of the employing agency. While acknowledging the flexibility needed to fill particular vacancies, it is essential to recognize that education plays a pivotal role in developing the skill set required to navigate the intricate responsibilities of public service. Our office strongly supports the pursuit of policies that enhance the qualifications and capabilities of individuals serving the State, ultimately contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of our state agencies.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we are available to provide any additional information or clarification if needed.