



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 Higher Education
Thursday, February 1, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.

By

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

SB 3187 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII RESIDENT TUITION FEE

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill (SB) 3187 relating to the University of Hawai'i (UH) resident tuition fee.

SB 3187 would allow graduates of a Hawai'i high school to be classified as residents for the purpose of in-state tuition at UH. An educated citizenry is a foundation for a strong state, and as the sole provider of public education in the State of Hawai'i, UH supports this bill, which will increase access to higher education and attempt to streamline the application process for residents, especially recent high school graduates.

The four-year duration of time that in-state tuition would be available to prospective qualifying students makes higher education accessible for an extended period after high school completion, while 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.

Hawai'i's "college-going rate" of high school graduates declined during the pandemic, dropping from 55% enrolling immediately after high school 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 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.

As written, for residents who may have left the State and decide to return for any variety of reasons within four years post-graduation from a Hawai'i high school, this bill would allow them a faster transition to higher education for up-skilling or change to a different career path without delaying pursuit of their educational and life goals. This extension could also serve as an incentive for residents who moved away to return to pursue 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.