



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
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By

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SB 1489 – 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 SB 1489 relating to the University of Hawai'i (UH) resident tuition fee.

SB 1489 would classify graduates of a Hawai'i high school as residents for the purpose of in-state tuition at UH. A well-educated citizenry is essential for a vibrant state. As the sole provider of public higher education in the State of Hawai'i, UH supports this bill to increase access to higher education and streamline the application process for residents, particularly recent high school graduates.

By offering four-years of in-state tuition to qualifying students, this initiative makes higher education more accessible for an extended period after high school. Basing residency determination on high school graduation within the state simplifies the process and reduces barriers for local students seeking to enroll at UH to pursue further education and training.

Hawai'i's "college-going rate" for high school graduates declined during the pandemic, falling from 55% to 51% in immediate post-graduation enrollment. This drop disproportionately affected low-income, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander graduates. While some of this decline can be attributed to the uncertainties created by the pandemic, it is crucial that the UH works to streamline the transition from high school to college as we move forward.

As written, for residents who may have left the state and decide to return for various reasons within four years of graduating from a Hawai'i high school, this bill would facilitate a quicker transition to higher education. This would support their up-skilling or career changes without delaying their educational and life goals. Additionally, this extension could serve as an incentive for residents who moved away to return to Hawai'i and pursue higher education at an affordable cost, thereby contributing to the local economy and addressing the issue of brain drain when students leave for college and do not return.

Passing this measure would ensure the current statutory residency requirements for tuition purposes. This change aims to ease the challenges faced by some high school seniors and recent graduates in Hawai'i. It would also align with the UH's amendments to administrative rules, streamlining the enrollment process for all applicants seeking admission into the UH System.

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