



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
Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 3:10 p.m.

By

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

SB 1490 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII RELIEF FUNDING

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 1490 relating to the University of Hawai'i (UH) relief funding.

SB 1490 would require UH to allocate a specific amount of funds exclusively for disaster relief purposes. This means that the United States Department of Education (USDOE) would recognize these funds as state aid when distributing assistance to students in direct response to an emergency or a disaster declared by the governor. As state aid, these relief funds would be exempt from being classified as financial assistance, ensuring that they do not affect the student's financial aid package.

Currently, each UH campus has institutional funds available for students facing emergencies and crises. However, these funds are noted on students' accounts, which can lead to the reduction or reversal of previously awarded scholarships or other forms of financial aid. As a result, students often feel penalized for receiving relief funds, which undermines the purpose of providing assistance during difficult times.

This measure does not request additional funding, it simply directs the allocation of existing institutional funds specifically for disaster relief. By doing so, it ensures that when funds are awarded, there are no negative impacts on the student recipients.

Passing this measure would enable UH to offer financial support to students without adverse effects during already stressful disaster situations. It is anticipated that the UH's ability to provide disaster relief funding will enhance student's retention and improve overall student success.

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