



LATE TESTIMONY

**Testimony to the House Committee on
Labor & Public Employment
Tuesday, January 29, 2008 at 8:30 a.m.
Conference Room 309, State Capitol**

RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 3169 RELATING TO LIFELONG LEARNING ACCOUNTS

Chair Sonson, Vice Chair Nakasone, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Tollefson and I am the President and CEO of The Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports House Bill No. 3169 relating to Lifelong Learning Accounts.

The Chamber is the largest business organization in Hawaii, representing over 1100 businesses. Approximately 80% of our members are small businesses with less than 20 employees. The organization works on behalf of members and the entire business community to improve the state's economic climate and to foster positive action on issues of common concern.

This measure establishes a Lifelong Learning Accounts program and tax credit in the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations to support upgraded training for the incumbent workforce, and encourages participation by employers and employees through tax credit incentives.

An effective workforce development system is necessary to construct a trained workforce, attract investment and business to the State, and to develop productive jobs for our people. To remain competitive, business needs employees, especially incumbent employees, who are prepared to address the quickly altering demands of the 21st century workplace. Additionally, over 90% of businesses in Hawaii are small businesses. These companies face economic obstacles and hurdles, and often struggle to improve and fund job training or educational programs on their own.

Therefore, Hawaii businesses have a crucial interest in strengthening workforce development and endeavor to be a part of the resolution. As the largest business organization, The Chamber supports legislation that recognizes state and local initiatives to improve education and workforce development.

In the Chamber's 2007 Survey, the membership identified workforce development as one of the top three issues that the Chamber should focus on as well as ranked the availability and quality of the workforce as two of the top three most important issues facing their business. This measure serves as a positive step in the right direction in addressing some of the workforce development issues.

In light of the above, The Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii supports HB 3169. We respectfully request that the committee pass this bill for further discussion and consideration.