

SCR 116

Testimony

Measure Title:

REQUESTING THE HAWAII ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION TO CONVENE A WORKING GROUP TO DEVELOP AN EDUCATIONAL LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM FOR WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW GRADUATES TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES TO PURSUE PUBLIC INTEREST CAREERS IN HAWAII THAT DIRECTLY SERVE UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.

Report Title:

Hawaii Access to Justice Commission; Law School Loan Repayment

Description:

Companion:

Package:

None

Current Referral:

HRE/JDL, WAM

Introducer(s):

TANIGUCHI



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education, and Judiciary and Labor
March 24, 2014 at 11:00 a.m.

by
Aviam Soifer, Dean
William S. Richardson School of Law
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SCR 116 – REQUESTING THE HAWAII ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION TO CONVENE A WORKING GROUP TO DEVELOP AN EDUCATIONAL LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM FOR WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW GRADUATES TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES TO PURSUE PUBLIC INTEREST CAREERS IN HAWAII THAT DIRECTLY SERVE UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.

Chairs Taniguchi and Hee, Vice Chairs Kahele and Shimabukuro, and Members of the Committees:

The William S. Richardson School of Law **strongly supports** SCR116, which would establish a working group to develop a loan repayment plan and other means to expand opportunities for our law graduates to pursue public interest careers that directly serve underserved communities in Hawai'i.

Over the past forty years, the Law School has contributed both direct legal services and leadership to provide access to justice for the most vulnerable members of our many communities in Hawai'i. We are proud of the *pro bono* and clinical work that our students do while in law school and of their recognition of an ongoing obligation to community service once they graduate.

With our first-rate faculty members as their teachers as well as role models for community service, many of our students are committed to doing public interest work and providing access to justice for all once they graduate. Although our tuition is low compared to most other law schools, a majority of our students nonetheless graduate with substantial debt from paying for law school. Approximately 80 percent of all Richardson students must borrow to attend law school and when they graduate, they owe an average of \$75,419 from law school debt alone.

Accordingly, the Law School applauds the effort of the Legislature to enhance access to justice and to assist our graduates in building on the founding vision of Chief Justice William S. Richardson and his allies that included training first-rate lawyers to provide excellent legal service to everyone in Hawai'i in need of legal assistance, regardless of ability to pay. The Law School is a member of, and has worked closely with, the Access to Justice Commission since the Commission's inception, and we look forward to assisting in the efforts of the working group provided for in Senate Concurrent Resolution 116.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Hon. Daniel R. Foley
Associate Judge
Intermediate Court of Appeals
Chair

Jill M. Hasegawa
Vice Chair

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March 20, 2014

To: Senator Brian T. Taniguchi
Chair, Senate Committee on Higher Education &
Senator Clayton Hee
Chair, Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor

Re: Joint Senate Committee on Higher Education & Senate Committee on
Judiciary and Labor
Hearing Date: Monday, March 24, 2014
Hearing Time: 11:00 a.m.

Testimony in **Strong Support** of SCR 116, to convene a working group to develop an educational loan repayment program for individuals pursuing public interest careers directly serving underserved communities

Dear Chair Taniguchi, Chair Hee and Members of the Joint Senate Committee on Higher Education & Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor:

The Hawaii Access to Justice Commission (the "Commission"), **strongly supports** the convening of a working group to develop an educational loan repayment program for individuals pursuing public interest careers directly serving underserved communities, and more especially those who pursue public interest work through our non-profit legal service providers.

The Commission, which was created by Rule 21 of the Rules of the Supreme Court of Hawaii on May 1, 2008, was established with the purpose of substantially increasing access to justice in civil legal matters for low- and moderate-income residents of Hawaii ("low income Hawaii residents"), including developing initiatives designed to enhance recruitment and retention of attorneys who work for nonprofit civil legal services providers in Hawai'i and to encourage law students to consider, when licensed, the practice of poverty law in Hawai'i.


The Commission was created in response to the 2007 Assessment of Civil Legal needs and Barriers of Low- and Moderate-Income People of Hawaii (2007 Assessment), which found that four out of five low income Hawaii residents do not have their legal needs met and that legal service providers are only able to assist one in three persons who contact them for assistance. The Commission recognizes that in order to increase delivery of legal services to low income Hawaii residents, more resources, including increasing the number of attorneys who practice public interest law is needed.

Many law students enter law school with the desire and passion to assist the public through public interest work. However, several barriers exist which deter those individuals from pursuing this aspiration. Among them is the financial reality of having to immediately payoff their student loans. One crucial step towards increasing the number of public interest attorneys is to lessen some of the financial burdens of those attorneys through a educational loan repayment assistance program. With such a program, those attorneys interested in practicing public interest law would have one less financial obstacle to overcome.

In order to create a successful sustainable educational loan repayment assistance program, the Commission realizes that many issues need to be addressed, which will require cooperation, discussion, and collaboration amongst a number of groups including, but not necessarily limited to: the William S. Richardson School of Law, law students, legal service providers, the Hawaii State Bar Association, and representatives from the legislative and judicial branches.

It is especially important for our legal service providers to have a voice in the creation of a successful educational loan repayment assistance program, as they are a critical piece of the discussion, and have legitimate concerns about any negative effect on their funding. The legal service providers, who provide valuable services to our underrepresented communities, are especially concerned that any funds to maintain an educational loan repayment assistance program, not supplant and/or be diverted from their programs.

The Commission strongly supports the passage SCR 116 and appreciates the opportunity that this resolution provides to further the discussion towards the creation of a successful educational loan repayment assistance program, that will truly benefit the underserved populations in Hawaii. Thank you for your attention to this matter.


Jill M. Hasegawa, Esq.
Vice-Chair
Hawaii Access to Justice Commission

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE ON PRISONS

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COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Sen. Brian Taniguchi, Chair

Sen. Gilbert Kahele, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND LABOR

Sen. Clayton Hee, Chair

Sen. Maile Shimabukuro, Vice Chair

Monday, March 24, 2014

11:00 a.m.

Room 016

SUPPORT FOR SCR 116 - Working Group to Develop UH Richardson School of Law Loan Repayment Program for Graduates Working to Serve Underserved Communities

Aloha Chairs Taniguchi and Hee and Members of the Committees!

My name is Kat Brady and I am the Coordinator of Community Alliance on Prisons, a community initiative promoting smart justice policies for more than a decade. This testimony is respectfully offered on behalf of the 5,800 Hawai'i individuals living behind bars, always mindful that approximately 1,500 Hawai'i individuals are serving their sentences abroad, thousands of miles away from their loved ones, their homes and, for the disproportionate number of incarcerated Native Hawaiians, far from their ancestral lands.

SCR 116 requests the Hawaii Access to Justice Commission to convene a working group to develop an educational loan repayment program for William S. Richardson School of Law graduates to expand opportunities to pursue public interest careers in Hawai'i that directly serve underserved communities.

Community Alliance on Prisons supports this measure that supports our community and congratulates the students for their community heart.

We know many great law graduates are unable to pursue the meaningful work that in many cases was the reason they pursued a law degree because of crippling debt. Encouraging our brilliant law students who see a need and want to help our communities is a great investment in Hawai'i's future.

Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community.

Anthony Burgess

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [HRETestimony](#)
Cc: pohlca@aol.com
Subject: *Submitted testimony for SCR116 on Mar 24, 2014 11:00AM*
Date: Thursday, March 20, 2014 2:00:17 PM

SCR116

Submitted on: 3/20/2014

Testimony for HRE/JDL on Mar 24, 2014 11:00AM in Conference Room 016

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Bill Brown	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Please note that testimony submitted less than 24 hours prior to the hearing, improperly identified, or directed to the incorrect office, may not be posted online or distributed to the committee prior to the convening of the public hearing.

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