

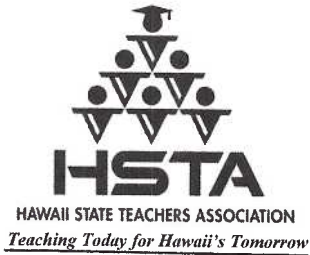
Hawaii Democratic Party Labor Caucus

S.B. 406 – Relating to Collective Bargaining
Senate Committee on Higher Education
February 2, 2016

S.B. 406 establishes a collective bargaining unit for full-time graduate student assistants employed by the University of Hawaii. The Hawaii Democratic Party Labor Caucus strongly supports the passage of this measure.

Thank your for the opportunity to testify,

Mary Wagner
Legislative Chair



1200 Ala Kapuna Street ♦ Honolulu, Hawaii 96819
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Corey Rosenlee
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Wilbert Holck
Executive Director

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON
JUDICIARY AND LABOR AND HIGHER EDUCATION

RE: SB 406 - RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2017

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Keith-Agaran, Chair Kahele, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association **supports SB 406**, relating to collective bargaining.

Collective bargaining is a human right. According to Article 23(4) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, “everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.” Likewise, the International Labor Organization, the UN agency responsible for safeguarding international labor standards, states in its Constitution and Declaration of Principles that the freedoms to associate and bargain collectively are fundamental rights of workers worldwide.

Graduate student assistants at the University of Hawai'i must no longer be denied their fundamental human rights. Besieged by budget cuts over the past decade, graduate students have borne increased class sizes and workloads, while suffering the same low pay of \$17,500 since the 2003-2004 academic year. Like educators throughout Hawai'i, they have seen their purchasing power crushed beneath our state's highest-in-the-nation cost of living.

Graduate student assistants are vital to the university community, performing instruction, research, and administrative work. Their labor, like all labor, should be publicly recognized by guaranteeing the right to bargain for fair wages and work conditions. To give graduate student assistants the ability to protect their interests and promote higher education, the Hawaii State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.



46-063 Emepela Pl. #U101 Kaneohe, HI 96744 · (808) 679-7454 · Kris Coffield · Co-founder/Executive Director

TESTIMONY FOR SENATE BILL 406, RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor
Hon. Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Chair
Hon. Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Higher Education
Hon. Kaiali'i Kahele, Chair
Hon. Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Thursday, February 2, 2017, 1:15 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

Honorable Chair Keith-Agaran, Chair Kahele, and committee members:

I am Kris Coffield, representing IMU Alliance, a nonpartisan political advocacy organization that currently boasts over 350 members. On behalf of our members, we offer this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 406, relating to collective bargaining.

There is a power in a union.

Today, political pundits prognosticate about the possible onslaught of austerity facing our nation. Many of these same pundits believe that labor unions are an impediment to economic prosperity, arguing that collective bargaining sets wages and work conditions above what the free market demands.

They couldn't be more wrong. Collective bargaining is a civil right. Unionized employees' compensation and work protections are essential to creating an upwardly mobile middle class and continually increasing economic prosperity. As economist Paula Voos of Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations notes, "It is no accident that the prosperity and consumer boom of the 1950s—a period of unprecedented middle class expansion, broad business growth, increased home ownership, rising consumer spending, and the shared expectation that a college education was within the reach of everyone and that the lives of our children would be better than our own—followed the greatest sustained expansion of unionization in American history."

Unsurprisingly, decreasing American middle class incomes and the rapidly widening wealth gap in our country parallel a significant decline in union membership. It is imperative,

then, that we promote higher productivity by strengthening labor-management relations. Through a union, employees have a means to dialogue with management about workplace problems, inefficient processes, unfair work conditions, and unsupportive compensation. Unions also increase the recruitment and retention of highly experienced employees, creating circumstances that favor professional development and mutual trust in the workplace. Perhaps most importantly, labor organizations foment understandings of democratic government and solidarity, resolving conflict and differences through negotiation and consensus-building, and participatory rulemaking. In turn, unions craft engaged and responsible citizens.

Graduate student assistants at the University of Hawai'i have earned the right to call for respect from university management. In providing instruction to students and research that expands our society's knowledge base, graduate students tirelessly toil on behalf of the college community, often under fear of retaliation because of a lack of organizing power in resisting exploitation. Graduate student assistants are short-term positions. Yet, the limited duration of graduate positions only heightens the urgency of establishing collective bargaining protections, as temporary employees too often fall prey to employers—including in our state university system—who exploit the precarious nature of these positions and assume student workers will simply "deal with the pain and move on," as one graduate assistant member of IMUAlliance maintained. Most startlingly, UH graduate assistants currently earn a base pay of \$17,500 per year, a number that has not increased since the 2003-2004 academic year. At the sunrise of 2017, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, that amount carries approximately \$5,500 less purchasing power than it did thirteen years ago *before* adjusting for Hawai'i's high cost of living. Even for students, it is nowhere near a livable wage.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." The same is true with basic civil rights, including the rights to freely associate and bargain for fair pay and work conditions, which are constantly under assault by a corporate mindset that puts dollars before democracy. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Sincerely,
Kris Coffield
Executive Director
IMUAlliance

Testimony for SB 406

February 2, 2016

Aloha,

I am in support of this bill to establish collective bargaining for full time graduate student assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i. As a full-time student myself, it would improve the quality of my life to be able to offer input to the University and ask for better benefits that would reduce the stress associated with obtaining a degree. For example, I struggle with chronic health issues, and would like to be able to bargain for better, affordable health care so that I can receive the care I need, afford my rent, and excel as a student.

Mahalo nui loa for your time. I hope you will support us to pass this bill that will create a better future for graduate students that struggle financially and otherwise while attending the University of Hawai'i.

Aloha,

Blaire Langston

LATE TESTIMONY

Date: Thursday, February 2nd, 2017
Time: 1:15 PM
Place: Conference Room 224

To: Senate Committee on Higher Education
Senator Kaiali'i Kahele, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor
Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Chair
Senator Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair

Re: Support for SB 406 Relating to Collective Bargaining

Dear Chair Kahele, Vice Chair Kidani, Chair Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair Rhoads, and Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education and Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Erik Brush, and I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I am writing in strong support of SB 406 to grant collective bargaining rights to graduate students employed by the University of Hawai'i (UH).

With the high cost of living in Hawai'i, getting by on a graduate student salary can be extremely difficult. Upon arriving here in August of 2015, I had approximately \$10,000 in my savings account. However, before the end of my first year as a graduate student, I had already drained my entire account. The high costs of rent and food alone were enough to overcome my savings and monthly graduate student salary. Life as a graduate student is not supposed to be luxurious by any means, but I believe that graduate students should be compensated enough for their work without the need for immense student loans or worry about having enough money each month. These financial worries only serve to rob us of the focus needed to successfully navigate our graduate career. Furthermore, the current situation deters many young, brilliant minds from attending UH Mānoa and further bolstering the great research and ideas developed here, as they are weary of the financial uncertainties involved.

Graduate students are an integral part of the UH system and the local economy. While attending UH, we constitute a committed learning community, do important research, and perform a substantial proportion of the teaching duties. Unfortunately, we are poorly compensated and are vulnerable to exploitation and poor treatment. As individuals, we stand little chance of success in demanding better treatment and compensation, and the long history of failed attempts at improvements proves this to be true. Our only hope for improving our own situations, then, is to collectively bargain with the University administration. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support SB 406.

Respectfully submitted,

Erik Brush

Date: February 2nd, 2017
Time: 1:15pm
Place: Conference Room 224

To: Committee on Judiciary and Labor
Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Chair
Senator Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair

Re: Support for SB406 Relating to Collective Bargaining

Dear Chair Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair Rhoads, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary and Labor:

My name is Jeanette Purvis and I am a Ph.D. student in Psychology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM). I am also a former Chandler fellow in Public Policy at UHM and current Chair of Academic Affairs for the UHM Graduate Student Organization. I am writing in strong support of SB406 to grant collective bargaining rights to graduate students employed by the University of Hawai'i (UH).

Because we are not able to collectively bargain, GAs at the University of Hawai'i do not earn a living wage. According to the living wage calculator created by MIT (Glasmeier, 2004), a single adult in Hawaii would need to make over \$31,000 a year in order to be classified as earning a living wage. Since GA stipends start at \$17,500, it is clear that most graduate students rely on loans, external employment, or family support in order to afford food and rent. For myself, I worked a 40-hour-a-week external job while maintaining a 20-hour-a-week GAship and going to school full-time to earn my Masters at UH. I did this because I did not want to take loans and had no family support. In consequence, it took me three years to finish my Masters instead of two, and I was not able to attend conferences or publish my research because of my busy schedule. Since beginning my Ph.D., I've opted to take out loans instead of take on external work, which negatively impacts my credit, my ability to purchase a home, and leaves me with incredible anxiety regarding my future.

My work as a GA here at UH helps the University run. With enrollment down and potential grad students turning down opportunities to study here because of poor financial packages, it would be empowering and helpful to allow graduate student assistants to collectively bargain. Beyond compensation we also would like to negotiate for sick days, a more formalized policy in regard to maternity leave, and a more streamlined grievance process. This would allow us the protection we need to focus on our work and studies, which would in-turn increase student productivity and enhance the University and its international reputation.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanette Purvis

Date: February 2, 2017
Time: 1:15 pm
Place: Conference Room 224

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor
Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Chair
Senator Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Higher Education
Senator Kaiali'i Kahele, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Re: Support for SB406, Relating to Collective Bargaining

I am writing in strong support of SB406, relating to Collective Bargaining for Graduate Student Assistants. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and am a graduate student representative for my department in the Graduate Student Organization. As such, I have heard directly from colleagues and read accounts of how life has become increasingly precarious for graduate assistants working for UH and living on Oahu. Graduate assistants face many challenges common to others here, including rising living and food costs, but in addition must contend with teaching and working hours in excess of what they're compensated for. Given how dependent UH is on its graduate students for so many duties, greater bargaining power would also make the university more appealing to potential talented students abroad, not to mention at home. Tuition costs at UH community colleges have increased 71.3% from 2006 to 2011 and doubled at UH proper in that same time frame. If the university wants to attract the best and brightest from these islands and inspire them to apply for their graduate programs, then better bargaining power and a living wage will go a long way towards inspiring its talented young people to stay.

Graduate students are an integral part of the UH system and the local economy. While attending UH, we constitute a committed learning community, do important research, and perform a substantial proportion of the teaching duties. Unfortunately, we are poorly compensated and are vulnerable to exploitation and poor treatment. As individuals, we stand little chance of success in demanding better treatment and compensation, and the long history of failed attempts at improvements proves this to be true. Our only hope for improving our own situations, then, is to collectively bargain with the University administration. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support SB406.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Hui
UH Manoa Graduate Student Representative

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [JDL Testimony](#)
Cc:
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB406 on Feb 2, 2017 13:15PM
Date: Wednesday, February 1, 2017 7:22:47 PM

SB406

Submitted on: 2/1/2017

Testimony for JDL/HRE on Feb 2, 2017 13:15PM in Conference Room 224

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Kepo'o Keliipaakaua	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Aloha e Chair Kahele, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education, and aloha e Chair Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair Rhoads, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor. My name is Kepoo Keliipaakaua and I am a graduate student at the University of Hawaii (UHM). I am writing in strong support of SB406 which would grant collective bargaining rights to graduate students employed by the University of Hawaii (UH). Graduate students are an integral part of the UH system and the local economy. While attending UH, we constitute a committed learning community, conduct important research, and perform a substantial proportion of the teaching duties. Unfortunately, we are poorly compensated and are vulnerable to exploitation and poor treatment. As individuals, we stand little chance of success in demanding better treatment and compensation. The long history of failed attempts at improvements validates this. Our hope for improving our own situations, then, is to collectively bargain with the University administration. For these reasons, I respectfully request that you support SB406. Mahalo nui for your time and consideration of this testimony.

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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From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [JDL Testimony](#)
Cc:
Subject: Submitted testimony for SB406 on Feb 2, 2017 13:15PM
Date: Thursday, February 2, 2017 12:16:01 PM
Attachments: [testimony.pdf](#)

SB406

Submitted on: 2/2/2017

Testimony for JDL/HRE on Feb 2, 2017 13:15PM in Conference Room 224

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Luke	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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I am a first year PhD student at UH Mānoa and I feel the need to make my opinions heard. You all know Honolulu is an incredibly expensive city. As you also know, we get compensated very poorly with no recompense for improving our financial situation. Given UH, presumably, wants to continue being a research institute of notoriety, which in turn brings more talented people to Hawai'i, providing a reasonable living wage for graduate students should be paramount to the state legislature. I do not anticipate Gov. Ige going to bat on our behalf, especially given his historic rejection of our ability to collectively bargain, but I would be please if we were granted the power to fight this battle ourselves.

As state employees, we receive many benefits (e.g. EUTF health coverage) but we are barred from others. Notably, we are barred from collective bargaining to achieve better compensation. Additionally, although not as important for this bill, we are also barred from being a part of the state retirement program (although with our current wages there is nothing left to contribute to our future). This juxtaposition is unjust and should be changed. If in the state's eyes we are employees of the state, we should be treated that way.


I came to UH because of the wonderful graduate program. Unfortunately, excitement about academic prosperity outweighed hesitancy to commit to a university with such low compensation. I am a person of great perseverance, so I will continue my education at this university. But, from this point forward I will use the entirety of my academic network to advise and warn perspective students about the financial situation our wages place us in unless something changes. It is not fair to expect us to teach the students at University of Hawai'i and produce primary research while living on the brink of poverty. Let me be clear, I am not using the word poverty allegorically, graduate students are literally on the precipice of poverty. Please allow this bill to pass so we, the graduate student body of present and future, can continue to contribute positively to this institution and this state.

Thank you for your consideration.

LATE TESTIMONY

2 February 2017

TO: Hawai'i State Legislature

FROM: Dr. Mark Hixon 
Hsiao Endowed Professor of Marine Biology
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
contact information:

RE: Senate Bill 406 and House Bill 1277

Dear Legislators:

Writing as a fellow citizen, I **wholeheartedly support efforts to allow graduate students in the University of Hawai'i System to engage in collective bargaining.** Graduate students are presently the only state employees that are legally not allowed to form a collective bargaining unit. Better compensation for graduate students will result in far reaching benefits: (i) improve the ability of the University to attract top applicants; (ii) encourage experienced graduate student teachers to continue as teaching assistants, resulting in better education for undergraduates; (iii) produce healthier and more productive graduate student researchers, given that present stipends are nearly at poverty level; and (iv) the economy will benefit because a large number of people will now have disposable income to spend in the community. Thank you for your consideration.

LATE TESTIMONY

Date: Thursday, February 2nd, 2017
Time: 1:15 PM
Place: Conference Room 224

To: Senate Committee on Higher Education
Senator Kaiali'i Kahele, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor
Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Chair
Senator Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair

Re: Support for SB 406 Relating to Collective Bargaining

Dear Chair Kahele, Vice Chair Kidani, Chair Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair Rhoads, and Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education and Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Sitara Palecanda, and I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I am writing in strong support of SB 406 to grant collective bargaining rights to graduate students employed by the University of Hawai'i (UH).

I have counted up the hours I spend working as a teaching assistant and my total for most weeks is around 30 hours. I am a part time employee and am being paid as though I work 20 hours a week. Cutting down the amount of time I spend preparing for lab or grading assignments is the only way to decrease my workload yet that makes for unsatisfied students in the labs I teach. I feel that as a grad student you are asked to be many things and one of them is an employee who does the best they can at a job that is not easy. We are students but we are also employees and it is important to acknowledge both.

Graduate students are an integral part of the UH system and the local economy. While attending UH, we constitute a committed learning community, do important research, and perform a substantial proportion of the teaching duties. Unfortunately, we are poorly compensated and are vulnerable to exploitation and poor treatment. As individuals, we stand little chance of success in demanding better treatment and compensation, and the long history of failed attempts at improvements proves this to be true. Our only hope for improving our own situations, then, is to collectively bargain with the University administration. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support SB 406.

Respectfully submitted,

Sitara Palecanda