



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
Tuesday, March 2, 2021, at 11:00 a.m.

by
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HB 1291 HD1 – RELATING TO SCHOLARSHIPS

Chair Luke, Vice Chair Cullen and members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the intent of House Bill 1291, House Draft 1 (HB 1291 HD1). The bill encourages students who previously received special education services to pursue postsecondary education and training by providing access to scholarships at the University of Hawai'i.

The UH encourages all of Hawai'i's residents, including students with disabilities, to pursue education and training beyond high school. Financial assistance is available for students who have disabilities and who enroll in one of the UH's ten campuses. Students who have disabilities have access to need and merit-based scholarships at UH.

HB 1291 HD1 calls UH to award scholarships to high achieving students who have graduated from a public high school in the State and received special education services for two or more years during their enrollment in grades kindergarten through twelve. The bill calls for these students to receive scholarships for both the Hawai'i State Scholars Program, HRS 304A-504, and the Hawai'i Promise Program, HRS 304A-506.

The Hawai'i State Scholars program is a need-based scholarship for Hawai'i students who graduate from Hawai'i public schools with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher and have a demonstrated financial need. The UH respectfully requests that the Hawai'i State Scholars Program continues to be a need-based scholarship that supports all eligible students. Consistent with the intent of this bill to make college affordable for all high achieving students, students who previously received two years of special education services, are high achieving students, and have financial need would already be eligible for the UH's current Hawai'i State Scholars Program. Students who do not have financial need should be commended for their accomplishment and be considered for merit scholarships.

The Hawai'i Promise Program (HRS 304A-506) is a "need-based scholarship" which supports all UH Community College students, including students with disabilities, who meet the need-based eligibility criteria. Hawai'i Promise was established to cover the direct "out-of-pocket" costs for all eligible students on the basis of financial need. UH Community Colleges respectfully request that Hawai'i Promise continue to be a need-

based scholarship that supports all eligible students. Consistent with the intent of the Hawai'i Promise Program to make college affordable for all students, high achieving students who previously received special education services and have financial need should receive Hawai'i Promise irrespective of their academic achievement. High achieving students who previously received special education services but who do not have financial need should be commended for their accomplishment and be considered for merit scholarships.

In 2019-20, UH Community Colleges awarded Hawai'i Promise scholarships to 1,797 students who had financial need. The average award was \$1,337. Hawai'i Promise scholarship recipients had less student loan debt, earned more credits, earned better grades, were more likely to continue in college and more likely to earn a degree than their peers.

Also, UH Foundation scholarships, established by donors, specifically support students with disabilities:

- Walter Serikawa Memorial Scholarships for part-time students attending any UH Community College who have a disability and for UH Manoa students, graduate or undergraduate, who are legally blind and/or deaf or hard of hearing,
- Kal Warrington Silvert Scholarships for UH Manoa undergraduate students who are wheelchair users because of a permanent disability, and
- Masao and Michiko Okasako Scholarships for UH Manoa undergraduate students and for UH Maui College students who have a documented disability.

UH welcomes the opportunity to support additional scholarships to increase financial support available to students with disabilities, provided that the Legislature fund the additional scholarships.

HB-1291-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2021 10:18:56 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/2/2021 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Nicole Dolor-Bala	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Chairman,

My name is Nicole Dolor-Bala, a senior at Farrington High School. In elementary, I felt like a failure for years because of my learning disabilities. At the age of 10, I was diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and anxiety disorder. I have been in the special education program since I was 12.

Although I once struggled with my reading comprehension, scoring in the first percentile, I will now be graduating Summa Cum Laude at Farrington High School. Although I am graduating with honors, I will be the only one in my entire class in special education to reach this goal. In fact, only 51% of students in special education at my school will graduate on time.

There is a massive achievement gap between students in regular education and special education in our public schools. Not only will HB1291 provide hope and financial assistance, it will also provide equal opportunity for special education students to access scholarships.

I worked with my teacher and Representative Ohno to create HB1291. It's important to me and I hope it is to you too.

HB-1291-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2021 10:21:46 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/2/2021 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Sean Witwer	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

My name is Sean Witwer. I'm a special education math teacher and have taught at Farrington High School for 22 years. I support HB1291.

There's a massive achievement gap between students with and without disabilities in the DOE, as evidenced by their on-time graduation and college going rates.

According to the Special Education Take Force Summative Report, the on-time graduation rate for students with disabilities is 59% versus 86% for students without disabilities. The college going rate is only 31% for students with disabilities versus 57% for students without disabilities.

This is why I worked with my student, Nicole Dolor-Bala, and Representative Ohno to create HB1291.

HB1291 will help to close the achievement gap by providing hope and equitable opportunities for scholarships at UH and the community colleges through the Hawaii Community College Promise Program and I ask you to support it.

Thank you

LATE

HB-1291-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2021 12:16:59 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/2/2021 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Janet Kim	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha members of the finance committee,

My name is Janet Kim and I am a faculty member at the University of Hawai'i at MÅ• noa and previously served as an elementary special education teacher in our Hawaii public schools.

I believe it is necessary to make a targeted and explicit effort in supporting students with disabilities towards pursuing higher education. For too long has there been stigma and misconceptions around students who qualify for special education services. We need to help create awareness in that some people learn differently or need additional support and that these challenges and obstacles do not ultimately define their abilities and potential for their future.

Take Amanda Gorman as the most recent example, an incredible poet who delivered her poem at the presidential inauguration. Gorman's love and devotion to poetry stemmed from having a speech impediment as a child and had been diagnosed with an auditory processing disorder.

HB1291 allows us to cultivate more students with disabilities, like Gorman, right here in Hawai'i. This bill helps them to believe in themselves and gives them the motivation to stay the course and overcome whatever challenges and barriers they face early on. When a child gets referred for special education services, it's often accompanied by years and years of struggling in school. As special education teachers, sometimes our first mission is just to revive a student's level of confidence and self-worth so they begin to believe and understand that they are worthy and capable of academic success. Ironically, the goal of a special education teacher is to make themselves dispensable. When a student develops the skills needed to be successful and independent in their learning, they are then rescinded from special education services. This is an amazing accomplishment and yet there are no award assemblies, certificates of achievement, or any form of recognition given to students who were able to overcome whatever it was that qualified them for special education services in the first place. I believe this bill serves as an opportunity to acknowledge and recognize students who demonstrated persistence and grit, able to persevere through their challenges, and reach academic success.

In the end, they need to know that they not only belong in higher education but that their hard work and perseverance would be recognized and rewarded. We hope this bill supports more students with disabilities to be able to afford and pursue college, which can then also help counter and destigmatize previous notions around special education and individuals with disabilities.

Mahalo for your time and for consideration of such an important bill,

Janet Kim

LATE

HB-1291-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2021 12:17:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/2/2021 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Wyomie Pilor	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha my name is Wyomie Pilor, a parent of a student with learning disabilities who attends Farrington High School.

I fully support the HB1291 bill because I truly believe that every student deserves a chance to earn a scholarship. Especially students with learning disabilities. I've seen my daughter's self-confidence grow so much. Today as a sophomore she is currently maintaining above a 3.0 G.P.A. She is very determined to work hard to keep up with her peers with no disabilities.

Her goal is to attend college to become a Radiologic Tech. To be able to attain a scholarship as a student with learning disabilities to help her achieve her dreams and goals would be a tremendous feeling of accomplishment.

Ultimately, I strongly feel that all students with or without learning disabilities should be given the same opportunities and benefits, and with that said. I can only hope and pray that this bill, HB1291 is passed!

Mahalo for hearing my testimony!

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Submitted on: 3/1/2021 1:00:19 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/2/2021 11:00:00 AM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Derek Govin	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

My name is Derek Govin. I am a special education teacher at Roosevelt High School I am in support of HB 1291 which would support allocating funding for UH scholarships towards high-achieving students with special needs. Students with special needs face barriers that students without a disability do not experience. within the Hawaii Department of Education, students with disabilities make up 11% of the total student population. To drive excellence and prepare our students to be college, career, and world ready, allocating scholarship funds to targetted students would ensure students with special needs have access to post high school eduaction, and the possibility of a better personal and profession life in Hawaii. As the cost of living continues to increase, systematic changes such as reallocating these funds would help young adults with special needs to live fuller lives. How do we define success and excellence in general education? Within special education? It is important for us to realize that the two look different between general and special education, and that being said, we should be supportive of students who display success and excellence in their education as they overcome barriers presented by their disability. Thank you for reading my written testimony and considering this to ensure students with special needs have post high school opportunities to college, as well as opportunities to a better life in Hawaii.

LATE

HB-1291-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2021 7:37:42 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/2/2021 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Lauren collier	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Supporting this will help close the achievement gap for students and help students achieve long term life goals. It sets our students and our community up for success!