

**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 1:57:09 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Leinaala Kealoha	Testifying for Department of Education	Support	No

Comments:

I support bill SB1291. I am a special education teacher in the state of Hawai'i, and am well aware of the many inequities students with disabilities face. I have seen their learned helplessness become a crippling factor in the confidence they have toward their own education; thus, I believe that this bill will help to empower our students with disabilities and will stand as a message to them that there are people who believe in their ability to further their education beyond high school.



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Thursday, April 1, 2021, at 9:30 a.m.

by  
Hae Okimoto, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs  
University of Hawai'i System

### HB 1291 HD1 SD1 – RELATING TO SCHOLARSHIPS

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the intent of House Bill 1291, House Draft 1 Senate Draft 1 (HB 1291 HD1 SD1). 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 SD1 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 three or more years during their enrollment in grades seven through twelve.

The Hawai'i State Scholars program was established in 2005. As described in HRS 304A-504, the program establishes scholarships for recent Hawai'i high school graduates who are high achieving: valedictorians, 4.0 grade point average or high college admissions test scores. If the legislature elects to make high achieving students who received special education services eligible for this scholarship, we recommend that the criteria be amended, as follows, to facilitate efficient administration to award scholarships to eligible students:

(D) Earned a high school diploma from a public high school in the State with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 as determined for admission to the university if the student provides evidence that they qualified for and received special education services for two or more years during enrollment in grades *nine* through twelve;

Please note that this scholarship is awarded when funds are available. Funds are not currently appropriated for this scholarship.

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 Mānoa students, graduate or undergraduate, who are legally blind and/or deaf or hard of hearing,
- Kal Warrington Silvert Scholarships for UH Mānoa undergraduate students who are wheelchair users because of a permanent disability, and
- Masao and Michiko Okasako Scholarships for UH Mānoa 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 funds the additional scholarships.



**S E A C**  
**Special Education Advisory Council**  
1010 Richards Street Honolulu, HI 96813  
Phone: 586-8126 Fax: 586-8129  
email: spin@doh.hawaii.gov  
April 1, 2021

**LATE**

**Special Education  
Advisory Council**

Ms. Martha Guinan, *Chair*  
Ms. Dale Matsuura, *Vice Chair*  
Ms. Ivalee Sinclair, *Vice Chair*

Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Committee on Ways and Means  
State Capitol  
Honolulu, HI 96813

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Ms. Susan Wood

Ms. Annie Kalama, *liaison to  
the Superintendent*  
Dr. Bob Campbell, *liaison to  
the military community*

Amanda Kaahanui, Staff  
Susan Rocco, Staff

RE: HB 1291, HD 1, SD 1 - RELATING TO SCHOLARSHIPS

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) **strongly supports** HB 1291, HD 1, SD 2 which allows special education high school students who graduate with a 3.0 grade point average to apply for scholarship funding through the University of Hawaii State Scholars Program. Previous versions of this bill also created criteria for disabled students to apply for the Hawaii Community College Promise Program, and we strongly recommend that you restore this opportunity. SEAC also recommends that you maintain eligibility for these scholarships for students who received special education services for **two or more years in grades seven through twelve.**

Accommodating students with disabilities by creating special education-specific eligibility criteria for these programs is a true example of offering equity while honoring excellence in higher education. As you know, students with disabilities make up about 10% of our public school population. Currently, the majority of these students are significantly underperforming their non-disabled peers on a number of parameters:

- a 45% achievement gap in ELA and a 35% achievement gap in math compared to students without disabilities (SBA 2018-19),
- a 2018 graduation rate of 64% vs. 87% for students with disabilities,
- a 2018 college enrollment rate of 30% vs. 57% for nondisabled peers.

Graduating with a 3.0 grade point average is a considerable achievement given the academic challenges facing students with disabilities. The opportunity to secure a scholarship to one of the UH campuses is both an incentive and a lifeline for students with financial need.

Mahalo for the opportunity to support to this important legislation.

Respectfully,

Martha Guinan

Ivalee Sinclair

**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/29/2021 11:14:39 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
John D. Smith	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I support.

**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/29/2021 3:25:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Sean Witwer	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**My name is Sean Witwer. I'm a special education teacher at Farrington High School.**

**I am concerned about the achievement gap between students with and without disabilities, and the massive disparity between the amount of scholarship monies that are allocated to high-achieving students with and without disabilities.**

**Currently, students with disabilities make up about 10% of our public school population. It stands to reason that 10% of state's scholarship monies, or at least a significant amount, be allocated to support high-achieving students with disabilities as they pursue their college dreams.**

**Unfortunately, the State of Hawaii and our UH system does not do enough to financially support our high-achieving students with disabilities.**

**First, I ask the legislature to expand the definition of "academic excellence" to include a goal attainable by special education students, which would give students with disabilities equal access to UH Scholars Program scholarships.**

**Currently, only students that graduate as a valedictorian, have a 4.0, or score in the top 10% on their SAT or ACT are deemed "academically excellent" and are able to access UH Scholars Program scholarships. This definition effectively eliminates students with disabilities from being able to reach this standard of academic excellence and to access UH Scholars Program scholarships. This definition needs to be changed and expanded through HB1291.**

**Shouldn't students with disabilities have a reasonable chance to participate in the UH Scholars Program along with their non-disabled peers?**

**Second, there's a massive disparity between the amount of scholarship monies that are allocated to high-achieving students with and without disabilities that needs to be addressed.**

**Last year, \$7,569,126 in scholarships were awarded to 2,357 Manoa students. However, how much of that money is being allocated to support and target high achieving special education students?**

**Currently, UH Foundation scholarships provide the following scholarships:**

- 1. Walter Serikawa Memorial Scholarships.**
- 2. Kal Warrington Silvert Scholarships.**
- 3. Masao and Michiko Okasako Scholarships.**

**However, according to my sources, the sum total of ALL of these scholarships are less than \$8,000.**

**In other words, of the \$7,569,126 in scholarships that were awarded to 2,357 Manoa students, only about 0.1% of that total went to specifically support students with disabilities.**

**This is a massive disparity, a travesty, and needs to be addressed. We can and should do better as a state.**

**Please support HB1291 so that we can address this massive disparity in the way we financially support students with disabilities in college.**

**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 8:33:42 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Hartwell lee loy Jr	Testifying for Farrington High School	Support	No

Comments:

I stand in support of HB1291 HD1 SD1!!



**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 9:23:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
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.

Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith -Agaran, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Melisa Heimuli  
P.o Box 921, Kahuku, HI, 96731

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

Support for H.B. No. 1291, H.D. 1, S.D. 1, Relating to Scholarships

My name is Melisa Heimuli I am writing you as a student in the Myron B Thompson School of Social Work at the University of Hawaii. I was born and raised in Oahu, Hawaii on the North Shore. I am in support of H.B. 1291, relating to Scholarships which would provide the individual who graduates from a public school in the state with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 as determined for admission for the University of Hawaii.

This will allow more opportunities for minority students to apply and hopefully qualify for scholarships. From the University of Hawaii Student Equity, Excellence, and Diversity in 2015, reported on the graduate level Caucasians (31.7%) are the largest group of graduate students at Mānoa, and are at least twice the proportion of all other ethnic groups. The second largest group of graduate students is Asian (15.3%), followed by Native Hawaiian (13.4%) and Multiracial students (11.5%). Japanese (9.9%), Chinese (8.0%), and Filipino (4.2%) each comprise less than 10% of graduate students. In particular, Filipinos are severely under-represented at the graduate level. They make-up only 4% of all graduate students and 11% of all undergraduate students, yet they comprise 22% of all students in the Hawai'i DOE.

This bill will give greater opportunities to Hawaii students to apply for much needed scholarships. The ethnic make up of the high school student DOE in Hawaii is not represented well in the report shown by the Hawaii student equity, excellence, and diversity report for graduate level. This bill can create greater access to fund that stop minority students from applying because the lack of scholarships. I believe education is the key to a greater future and I am very passionate about this bill. Please vote in support of H.B. 1291. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 6:52:05 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Derek Govin	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

My name is Derek Govin. I am a special education teacher at Roosevelt High School, and I am also the founder and co-coordinator of the Speducator Project. The SPEDucator Project is an innovative personnel development initiative designed to increase the recruitment and retention of quality special education teachers in the state of Hawaii. The project is empowering a community of teacher-leaders to develop media marketing campaigns based on the authentic experiences and needs of current "SPEDucators." I speak to you on my own behalf, and not for those affiliated with either Roosevelt High School or the SPEDucator project. Working with SPEDucator Sean Witwer to connect him with his vision and passion project of supporting students with disabilities to have equity of access to funds to obtain a four year degree has been a time full of innovation, drive, and passion has been not only rewarding to help him see his passion come to life, but the ripple effect of the power this bill has is revolutionary.

I am in support of HB 1291 HD1 SD1 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. Supporting HB1291 HD1 SD1 means that we empathize with students with special needs, see their perseverance within their educational experience, and value their lives as hard working, contributing members to society. 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 oppportunities to a better life in Hawaii.

Testimony for HB1291

Aloha Chair, Vice-Chair, and members of the committee,

My name is Janet Kim and I serve as the Special Education Recruitment Specialist at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Previous to this position I was a special education teacher for six years at Pearl Harbor Elementary School. My passion lies in uplifting and advocating for our profession and our students.

In SY 2019-2020, there were over 17,000 students qualified for special education services in Hawaii public schools. This means at least one out of every ten students are qualified as having a disability and needing specially designed instruction. Unfortunately, in the end, only 31% of students in special education go on to pursue a college degree. I believe longstanding notions of stigma and misconceptions around individuals with disabilities have contributed to this bleak statistic. Almost three-fourths of all students qualifying for special education services fall under three eligibility categories: specific learning disability (44%), other health impairment (17%), and autism (10%). Therefore, the low rates of college-going students with disabilities is especially tragic, knowing a large majority of our students often have average to superior intelligence and encompass a wealth of skills, knowledge, and admirable character traits often not recognized through standardized measures of educational achievement.

The role of a special education teacher is to understand, and then build upon, a student's strengths while providing interventions and support in the areas of need. What many people do not realize is when a child gets referred for special education, it's often accompanied by years and years of struggling in school. Another common misconception is that people sometimes think once a student qualifies for special education, they will always be in special education. On the contrary, 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 through their challenges and have since achieved academic success. 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.

To me, the Hawaii State Scholars Program recognizes the value in providing financial assistance to high-achieving students from our local communities into pursuing higher education. Currently, the eligibility criteria to be eligible for the Scholars program requires applicants to be valedictorians with a 4.0 GPA or higher. In order to qualify for special education services, a student's disability must adversely impact their educational success, often meaning they are performing below grade level prior to qualifying. This means students with disabilities would never be able to qualify under current standards of a 4.0 GPA. By allowing a student with a disability to qualify upon receiving a 3.0 GPA or higher by the time they reach graduation means that they worked hard enough to not only successfully achieve success in relation to their peers, but also means they were able to close the gap. Therefore, in the end, being on the honor roll as a student qualifying for special education services is a much more rare occurrence than obtaining valedictorian status. Being able to academically push through, demonstrating persistence,

determination, and grit are all qualities I believe the Hawaii State Scholars Program seeks to recognize and support.

In the end, I believe students with disabilities deserve the opportunity to be empowered, uplifted, and rewarded for their success through these programs. 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 has been diagnosed with auditory processing disorder. HB1291 allows us to cultivate more students with disabilities, like Gorman, right here in Hawaii. Helping them to believe in themselves and giving them the motivation to stay the course and overcome whatever challenges and barriers they face early on. In the end, they need to know that they not only belong in higher education, but that their hard work and perseverance is recognized and rewarded. We hope this bill supports more students with disabilities to be able to afford and pursue higher education, which can then also help counter and destigmatize previous notions around special education and individuals with disabilities.

I thank the committee for taking the time to consider such an important initiative.

Respectfully,  
Janet Kim

## **ORAL TESTIMONY**

Aloha members of the committee. My name is Janet Kim and I am a faculty member at the University of Hawaii at Manoa 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 has been diagnosed with auditory processing disorder.

HB1291 allows us to cultivate more students with disabilities, like Gorman, right here in Hawaii. Helping them to believe in themselves and giving them the motivation to stay the course and overcome whatever challenges and barriers they face early on. In the end, they need to know that they not only belong in higher education, but that their hard work and perseverance is recognized and rewarded. We hope this bill supports more students with disabilities to be able to afford and pursue higher education, 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.

**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 9:52:00 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Pamela Walencewicz	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**Aloha, my name is Pamela Walencewicz and I am a special education teacher at Waikoloa Elementary and Middle School. I support HB 1291 because this is a landmark opportunity for students with special needs who have demonstrated academic excellence. This bill would provide students who have learning disabilities with wider access to college scholarships. In the last school year, over \$7 million dollars in scholarship funds were awarded to approximately 2,357 college-ready students; however, the lion's share of those monies went to students without learning disabilities. Only a mere 0.1% of scholarship funds was allocated to students with special needs. Students with disabilities and special needs who have worked hard to become college-ready have often had to overcome academic challenges in addition to social and behavioral obstacles unique to their disability and life situation. These additional challenges are substantially burdensome and surpass what a typical learner would experience. In addition, our students with special needs are often marginalized because of their disability. In essence, they face more challenges, have to work harder, and receive access to fewer opportunities that ensure they can thrive in the world beyond high school. This bill, if passed, would be a pioneering effort in reducing the disparity between the funds dedicated to supporting typical learners and those with special needs who have demonstrated academic excellence.**



**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2021 8:03:23 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Jessie Ford	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha,

As a high school special education teacher, I support this bill. It is an important element of equity for students who strive for excellence but may have different strengths in their education process than traditional students who receive scholarships. This would improve students' sense of opportunities to continue with higher education, if they know more supports, such as scholarships, are attainable.

Mahalo for your consideration and approval of this bill.

Aloha

Jessie Ford

special education teacher

**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2021 8:09:15 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Detina	Testifying for Speducator Project	Support	No

Comments:

My name is Detina Smith. I am a special education teacher at Mililani Waena School. I am a teacher participating in the Speducator Project. The Speducator project is a group of special education teacher's devoted to increasing special education recruitment and retention of quality special education teachers in the state of Hawaii.

I am testifying in favor of HB 1291 HD1 SD1 which is in favor of allocating funding from UH scholarships towards excelling students with special needs. Students with special needs endure and overcome obstacles that students without disabilities do not face. Once these exceptional students work hard they too should be given the opportunity to have access to a post high school education. By making scholarships more attainable for excelling Special Education students it would increase the chances of them pursuing a college education and help give them the tools to have a successful professional career.

Please consider supporting this bill. Thank you for your time and efforts.

Sincerely,

Detina Smith

***Special Education Teacher***

Mililani Waena Elementary School

95-502 Kipapa Drive

Mililani, HI, 96789

(808)-627-7300

**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2021 8:14:19 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Lauren collier	Testifying for Kaneohe Elementary School	Support	No

Comments:

We need this scholarship fund for our students with recieve special education services! Helping them helps our whole community!

**HB-1291-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2021 9:06:46 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Brandon Moises	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I am in support of HB 1291 HD1 SD1 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. This bill gives our special education students hope of a better future for themselves and their families as they overcome the label of being SPED and reach for their dreams. It provides an opportunity for them to continue their educational progress at a higher level without the worry of financial costs which hinders many of our students as they set their goals for post-secondary life. Thank you for your time!