



Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

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Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Higher Education

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

March 31, 2022

Support for GM 589

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Kim and members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Demi Michelau, and I'm the President of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. I am on Oahu this week participating in the Pacific Behavioral Health Collaboration Council and Certification Board meeting. When I recently learned of this hearing, I was excited about the opportunity to join you today to see Hawai'i's confirmation process for WICHE firsthand and provide my testimony in support of President Lassner's reappointment to the WICHE Commission in person.

Since 1953, WICHE has been strengthening higher education, workforce development, and behavioral health throughout the Western region. As an interstate compact, WICHE partners with states, territories, freely associated states, and postsecondary institutions to share knowledge, create resources, and develop innovative solutions that address some of our society's most pressing needs. WICHE's mission is to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West.

The longstanding partnership between Hawai'i and WICHE dates back to 1959, prior to statehood. During that time Hawai'i students and families have benefitted from our Student Access Programs among many other initiatives. During the 2021-22 academic year, undergraduate students from Hawai'i saved \$23.7 million. And 3,628 undergraduate students from throughout the region came to Hawai'i to study at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, University of Hawai'i at Hilo, University of Hawai'i - West Oahu, and University of Hawai'i Maui College. Another 308 students came to Hawai'i for graduate education through WICHE's Western Regional Graduate Program, or WRGP.

Dr. Lassner is a dedicated and committed leader. He currently serves as Chair of the WICHE Commission, a position to which he was elected by his peers throughout the West. Through his dedicated leadership, he provides steady guidance and valuable input on matters of importance to Hawai'i and the entire region.

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For example, President Lassner led a change to WICHE's WRGP that has resulted in expanded educational opportunities for graduate education for not only Hawai'i students but for students throughout the region.

President Lassner represented Hawai'i in the formative stages of what became WCET - the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies - and twice served as its Steering Committee Chair. His expertise in using technologies to serve students gave Hawai'i an outsized leadership voice in EDUCAUSE, Internet2, and open software projects, and his positive impact continues to be felt today.

As of July 2021, WICHE welcomed the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia into WICHE membership. This is a historical moment for both WICHE and the Pacific region by expanding access to postsecondary education for many students who may not have previously had opportunities to affordably access undergraduate and graduate programs throughout the West. As we bring our new colleagues into WICHE, President Lassner has been instrumental in ensuring that the process is smooth and respectful to our new partners.

In my role, I work closely with President Lassner to ensure that WICHE is as effective as it can be. I am grateful for his guidance and partnership, and it is an honor to speak in support of his reappointment today.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

March 28, 2022

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair  
Hawaii Senate Committee on Higher Education

Re: Testimony in Support of the Appointment of David Lassner as a WICHE Commissioner

Dear Senator Kim, my name is Colleen O'Brien Sathre, I'm retired Vice President Emeritus, Planning and Policy, University of Hawaii. It is a privilege and honor to testify in support of Dr. David Lassner continuing as a WICHE commissioner.

WICHE is a partnership among Western and Pacific states, U.S Pacific Territories and Freely Associated States. WICHE accomplishments are many and are described in its annual report and other publications that provide regional and state information about WICHE programs that benefit students, families and the larger community. Each state has three WICHE commissioners.

UH President David Lassner is currently the chair of the WICHE Commission. I will be brief and limit my support for David's appointment by commenting on the following question: "What is it about David Lassner that makes others want him as a leader?"

Based on observations others have shared and my own experience, the answer is that he brings to any issue intelligence and humility. These qualities result in someone who:

- deals with complexity in order to advance understanding with no hint of condescension;
- understands and acts to put the good of the whole first;
- is self-effacing and willing to do the work; and
- has a great sensitivity for culture and community.

In short, he is a person of integrity and character, and those he interacts with take notice very quickly.

I have observed in many different settings that, despite his quiet demeanor, others appreciate David's ability to articulate the issue, share relevant background, assumptions, and alternatives, and suggest possible actions. Others perceive a leader in their midst. Having served on the WICHE committee charged with nominating the next vice chair, I know firsthand that fellow WICHE commissioners sought his leadership as Commission chair at least twice until he was able to agree to adding on the chair responsibility and not diminish his presidential responsibilities. Hawaii and our Pacific and Western colleagues are blessed to have him in both roles.

Hawaii is very fortunate that David Lassner chose to follow a career in technology leadership that has evolved over the years, giving our Aloha State one of the best university presidents in the country. I do not make that statement lightly.

I strongly recommend that President David Lassner be appointed to the WICHE Commission.

Best regards and appreciation for the work you do for our State,  
Colleen O. Sathre, Ph.D.  
WICHE Commissioner

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