



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education & Technology
Wednesday, January 31, 2024 at 2:10 p.m.

By

Erika Lacro

Vice President for Community Colleges
University of Hawai'i System

HB 1826 – RELATING TO EDUCATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports HB1826, which expands the Mental Health Technician (MHT) certificate of competence at Windward Community College (WCC) through the hiring of a MHT certificate faculty instructor and a faculty outreach position.

WCC developed the MHT certificate in collaboration with the Hawai'i State Hospital (HSH) in order to provide a foundation of knowledge and increase skills for those serving the mentally ill on our islands. The program falls within the purview of WCC and is offered to students at HSH and beyond. The program consists of three focused courses, available in person and online. Students learn fundamentals of psychology and psychological functioning, as well as conflict resolution and communications. This allows them to understand situations that arise at work, to more effectively deal with patients and to prevent escalation of conflict in tense situations. This leads to a safer workplace and a more supportive therapeutic environment.

This program addresses the severe shortage of mental health workers during a time when our State has dire needs for mental health support due to the impacts of the pandemic, socio-economic stressors, high job turnover, and a lack of workforce skilled in this area. It serves not only HSH, the second largest employer in Windward O'ahu, but also other mental health related employers such as Windward District Health, Hina Mauka and others. Our online asynchronous offerings allow current workers to grow their skills through course offerings maximally adaptable to their schedules and further allow for this program to be expanded statewide.

Since its inception in Spring 2022, this program has already graduated 46 students, 19 of whom were employed at HSH. In just two years, this program has had a large impact on the capacity of Windward O'ahu to care for those suffering from mental health issues and to increase workplace satisfaction and safety in the workplace. This capacity is now being expanded with trauma-informed coursework tailored to the needs of adult

corrections officers and the Honolulu Police Department, increasing workforce skills related to mental health in key professions serving vulnerable community members.

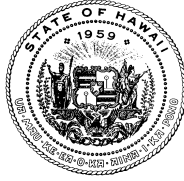
The MHT certificate creates a pathway to further training and higher education. A one year certificate currently being finalized builds on the MHT certificate by adding clinical skills and knowledge necessary to perform higher job requirements in more advanced clinical settings. These certificates are specifically designed to advance students to increasingly higher qualifications, such as degrees in psychology, social work and mental health counseling. This grows the overall capacity of our state to address mental health challenges and needs.

An additional faculty instructor will allow for expansion of the program to meet the needs of employers. The faculty outreach position expands the scope of this program from WCC to our entire state through outreach and recruitment at our sister community colleges as well as through the creation of partnerships with mental health related agencies and workplaces throughout the state.

This bill supports the MHT certificate program at WCC to address an immediate, critical workforce need for preparing potential employees and upskilling existing employees. It builds the capacity of our State to implement effective, supportive care for those suffering from mental illness.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of HB 1826, on the condition its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1826.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

WRITTEN
TESTIMONY ONLY

**Testimony COMMENTING on H.B. 1826
RELATING TO EDUCATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

REPRESENTATIVE AMY A PERRUSO, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & TECHNOLOGY

Hearing Date, Time and Room Number: Wednesday, January 31, 2024, 2:10 p.m.,
Room 309 / Videoconference

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health (“Department”) requests that this measure be
2 considered as a vehicle to provide this needed funding as long as it does not supplant the
3 requests outlined in the Governor's executive budget request.

4 **Department Position:** The Department supports this measure and offers comments.

5 **Department Testimony:** The Adult Mental Health Division (AMHD) provides the following
6 testimony on behalf of the Department.

7 The Department supports this measure which appropriates funds to support and
8 expand the Windward Community College (WCC) mental health technician (MHT) certificate
9 program through the hiring of an MHT certificate faculty instructor and a faculty outreach
10 position program, establishment of a scholarship program, and any other necessary
11 administrative costs.

12 The Department recognizes that education and training are important parts of building
13 the mental health care workforce. We understand that education and training should not stop
14 when someone is hired for employment. Ongoing opportunities to provide training and
15 professional development can help to address staff retention concerns while also supporting

1 employees who want to learn additional skills through convenient learning modes that provide
2 work-life balance (e.g., online distance learning.)

3 The WCC MHT certificate program began in Spring 2022 and has a total of 46 graduates
4 to date. This program provides introductory training to those entering the mental health service
5 field. Courses in psychology, communication, and conflict resolution and mediation offer a
6 range of academic study and skill-based activities to strengthen knowledge about working
7 through difficult situations in the workplace. Of these 46 graduates thus far, 19 are employed at
8 the Hawaii State Hospital.

9 In 2023, the legislature allocated one permanent position for a Mental Health
10 Technician Certificate Program Coordinator to the Department. The coordinator position is
11 critical to WCC's mission to develop and grow the specialized workforce needed not only for
12 the Hawaii State Hospital (HSH) but for other entities statewide that interface with individuals
13 with severe mental illness (SMI) conditions. The Department respectfully recommends that this
14 position be moved to WCC. This will allow the college to expand the program to meet the
15 critical needs of the HSH as well as other statewide entities and to address the immediate and
16 significant workforce shortage of mental health providers.

17 We are pleased with the interest that this program has received thus far and look
18 forward to partnering with WCC to welcome prospective students as well as to congratulate
19 future MHT certificate program graduates, including those who are currently employed or
20 aspiring to be employed by the HSH.

21 We believe appropriating funds to establish positions to support the program and
22 moving the MHT Certificate Coordinator position from HSH to WCC will allow this program to
23 expand and be offered at other community colleges, thereby helping to address the need for
24 health care workforce training throughout our state. We respectfully ask for the Legislature's
25 support of this measure.

- 1 **Offered Amendments:** None.
- 2 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/29/2024 1:58:10 PM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cards Pintor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this bill.

Mahalo nui,

Cardenas Pintor

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 7:05:39 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Desrae Kahale	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support 1826 HB.

Mahalo,

Desrae Kahale

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 7:33:53 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaimionalani Gamble	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 1826.

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 7:53:22 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kalaiku Stephenson	Windward Community College	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 1826.

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 8:32:07 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tara Severns	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawai'i is in urgent need of a significant increase in professional healthcare workers. This is not just necessary, but also an imperative response to the escalating mental health crises that are affecting every aspect of our community. HB1826 is a crucial step towards strengthening our healthcare infrastructure and ensuring that people from diverse backgrounds receive compassionate and effective care. By supporting this legislation, we are collectively committing to a healthier and more resilient future for all residents. Please support this vital endeavor and by voting yes for this bill.

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 8:48:48 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brian Frederick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB1826.

Train more mental health professionals to serve the community.

=brian

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 8:51:28 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Scott Sutherland	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support House Bill 1826, which focuses on enhancing the education for mental health professionals in Hawaii via the Windward Community College Mental Health Tech Program. This legislation proposes the allocation of resources, including the addition of 1 faculty instructor and 1 faculty outreach position, to help address the increasing demand for qualified mental health professionals in our state. Investing in the education and outreach aspects of mental health training will not only elevate the standard of care but also contribute to building a healthier and more resilient community in Hawaii. I urge your support for HB 1826 to ensure that we are equipping our mental health professionals with the necessary resources to meet the evolving needs of our diverse population. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Aloha Committee on Higher Education and Technology,

I am writing to express my **strong support** for HB 1826, a bill relating to education for mental health professionals. As a professional and advocate with a mental health background, I believe that this bill is a crucial step towards addressing the pressing need for well-trained mental health professionals in our communities.

One of the most significant challenges facing our society today is the increase of mental health issues in Hawai'i. Depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses affect a significant portion of our population, and the demand for mental health services has never been greater. Unfortunately, our current mental health workforce is stretched thin and struggling to meet the increasing demand thus making Hawai'i a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA).

HB 1826 proposes to address this issue by providing necessary support for the education and entry level training of mental health professionals. Through this bill, additional resources would be allocated to Windward Community College, enabling them to expand their mental health programs and equip aspiring professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to provide effective care.

By investing in a more robust mental health education system, we can better prepare our future mental health professionals to address a challenge that has plagued our Hawai'i for generations. Whether it be providing therapy to those grappling with trauma, working with children experiencing behavioral disorders, or offering support to individuals struggling with addiction, these professionals play a crucial role in enhancing the well-being of countless individuals and families.

Furthermore, HB 1826 has the potential to address the issue of mental health provider shortages in underserved areas. Currently, many rural and low-income communities lack access to mental health services, leading to a significant disparity in care. This bill can help bridge this gap by incentivizing mental health professionals to serve in these underserved regions through loan forgiveness programs or scholarship opportunities. This would enrich the mental health workforce and ensure that everyone, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status, has access to quality mental healthcare.

In conclusion, HB 1826 represents a significant opportunity to strengthen our mental health system and address the critical needs of our communities. By investing in the education and support of mental health professionals, we can provide better care to those in need and work towards improving the overall mental health of our society. I urge you to support this important legislation and help pave the way for a healthier, more resilient future.

Mahalo nui for your attention to this matter.

Mālama,
Māhiehie Garrett

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 9:40:28 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl N Prince	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is no exaggeration to say that Hawai`i is in desperate need of improving its mental health care system. HB 1826 can help to create trained technicians to care for a range of mental health patients. The technicians are essential in carrying out the day to day supports that make all the difference in whether a patient benefits from treatment or not. I strongly support passage of HB 1826.

Cheryl N. Prince, LCSW

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 11:05:19 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christina Lawes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I wholeheartedly support HB1826! One of the things that became abundantly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic is that we do not have enough mental health professionals to support our community. As someone with mental health professionals in my family, I can attest to their concerns with a lack of adequately trained professionals in the field. They are also suffering from burnout themselves and we are losing mental health professionals because of it. Mahalo for your consideration of HB1826!

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 11:34:05 AM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alysa Tomasa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The COVID pandemic revealed Hawai'i's strong need for more mental health professionals. I support HB 1826 because it is evident that many would benefit from Windward Community College's Mental Health Technician program and gain valuable training and certification, allowing more local professionals to enter the mental health field that is under terrible strain.

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 12:23:09 PM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Adrienne Robillard	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 1826.

HB-1826

Submitted on: 1/30/2024 1:13:38 PM

Testimony for HET on 1/31/2024 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Frank Palacat, Ed.D., MSCP	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As indicated in Bill 1826, the need to increase the access to Mental Health service is at an all-time high. After the recent COVID experience, life has changed for many individuals. The current Mental Health Tech program attempts to increase the number of knowledgeable individuals that are working in the Mental Health field. More qualified individuals mean better success on helping those in need. The newly added informed trauma certificate in Mental Health program attempts to inform public officials as well as others on the impact of trauma on individual lives. We all experience trauma throughout our lives, when we realize that trauma impacts how we interact with others as well as how others interact with us, it creates a better and more understanding community of individuals.

Currently, there is no one instructor or counselor at the college that is working on the development and delivery of this crucial program. The appropriation of funds for these two positions will provide support and focus on this state-wide community focused program.

Ka mālama ‘ana i nā kānaka

Mahalo,

Frank Palacat