



# 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 Finance  
Friday, February 23, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.

By

Debora Halbert, Vice President for Academic Strategy  
University of Hawai'i System

#### HB 1535 HD1 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PROMISE PROGRAM

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1535 HD1, which expands the University of Hawai'i (UH) Promise program beyond the community colleges to provide scholarships to qualified undergraduate students enrolled at UH Mānoa, UH Hilo, and UH West O'ahu, and appropriate funds to establish and implement the expansion of this program.

UH advocates for accessible higher education and the well-being of economically disadvantaged students. The proposed expansion is crucial in helping students most in need and setting them up for lifetime success.

The Hawai'i Promise Program, established in 2017, has proven to be a valuable resource for UH Community College students, providing "last-dollar" scholarships to cover direct costs that remain after other contributions and aid have been exhausted. Students who have received Hawai'i Promise scholarships in prior years have demonstrated higher credit earning, improved grades, and increased likelihood of continued enrollment at UH compared to their peers without the scholarship.

Expanding the Hawai'i Promise program to these four-year universities can significantly enhance the educational journey for community college students, facilitating a smoother transition to four-year programs. This expansion is essential for increasing the number of economically disadvantaged students who can pursue and obtain bachelor's degrees, thereby closing the workforce gap the State needs to fill.

Students transferring from the UH Community Colleges are often surprised to find that, due to the higher tuition rates at four-year universities, Pell grants and other scholarships may only partially cover their direct cost of attendance (tuition, fees, books, supplies, and transportation). A four-year version of the Hawai'i Promise program will help these transfer students afford to continue their education and extend benefits to additional Hawai'i residents needing support to pursue their higher educational goals. With expansion, we have the potential to impact nearly 4,000 students every year as they pursue their bachelor's degrees.

While the expansion does not eliminate all costs for UH four-year students, it alleviates a significant financial burden, making higher education more attainable for those who may not have considered it feasible. Since Hawai'i Promise is calculated based on direct cost items, the expansion still leaves students responsible for more than half of the total cost of attendance, including housing and food costs. Many students will still need to work and/or take out loans to complete their bachelor's degrees.

Family financial challenges have been a barrier to college-going rates for Hawai'i's public high school graduates, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Hawai'i Promise Expansion can be a lifeline for potential students who may have yet to consider a four-year campus due to financial constraints, creating opportunities for upward economic mobility.

Research conducted by the Economic Research Organization at UH (UHERO) indicates that college completion is a powerful tool for mitigating the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic status. The long-term returns for UH degree holders, regardless of socioeconomic background, are similar, highlighting the potential of higher education to create a more equitable and prosperous Hawai'i.

Furthermore, the expansion addresses the underrepresentation of Native Hawaiian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander students in higher education. These historically excluded groups comprise approximately 42% of the potential Hawai'i Promise Expansion recipients. By recognizing the importance of equitable access, the expansion seeks to bridge gaps and create opportunities for diverse communities, fostering a more inclusive and accessible higher education landscape for all.

HB 1535 HD1 represents a critical investment in the future of Hawai'i by providing opportunities for economically disadvantaged students and underrepresented populations to access higher education. This expansion aligns with the goals of creating a more equitable and prosperous Hawai'i and will contribute significantly to developing a skilled and diverse workforce. It will dramatically enhance the ability of Hawai'i Promise community college students to transfer to a four-year program.

As a "last dollar" initiative, Hawai'i Promise ensures that the State of Hawai'i can maximize federal support via Pell grants while ensuring our most vulnerable students can pay for their education. It is vital to extend Hawai'i Promise to the four-year campuses to effectively support our students' educational goals while addressing their financial needs through federal and state funding.

Expanding the program to qualified students in four-year degree programs at the UH would greatly assist students pursuing their bachelor's degree. It will also be a notable step forward in expanding access to economic opportunity for Hawai'i's students and preparing the educated workforce Hawai'i needs to grow in the coming decades.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



**HB1535 HD1**  
RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I PROMISE PROGRAM  
House Committee on Finance

February 23, 2024

10:00 am

Conference Room 308

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The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS HB1535 HD1**, which provides scholarships for the unmet needs of qualified students at any four-year University of Hawai‘i campus who meet certain criteria, such as being Hawai‘i residents who are in good academic standing and have demonstrated financial need as indicated by their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form.

In 2020, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs began its 15-year strategic plan. We identified four strategic directions. One of them was education pathways. In this direction, we look to support development and use of educational resources for all Hawaiian learners in schools, communities and ‘ohana. As we look to move the needle toward improving the educational pathways for Native Hawaiians, we are faced with some harsh realities. While Hawaiians graduate high school at a comparable rate as non-Hawaiian students, we have one of the lowest rates of bachelor’s degrees here in Hawai‘i. The reasons for this statistic are varied and complex. However, **we know that cost can be a major barrier for many students.**

**The UH Promise Program will help provide much-needed financial assistance for students who have unmet cost needs.** And, we know that the program will specifically address the needs of students from our community and others like ours who are underrepresented in the university system. The University of Hawai‘i has reported that nearly 60% of Promise Scholarships go to underrepresented students, such as Native Hawaiians, Filipinos and Pacific Islanders. Further, the program does not stop at providing tuition costs. We appreciate the way the program supports students with tuition, books, supplies and transportation costs.

For the above reasons, OHA urges this committee to **SUPPORT** the UH Promise Program and advance this measure as amended. Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.



The House Committee on Finance  
February 23, 2024  
10:00 AM  
Room 308

RE: **HB 1535, HD 1, Relating to the University of Hawaii Promise Program**

Attention: Chair Kyle Yamashita, Vice Chair Lisa Kitagawa and members of the Committee

The University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA) appreciates the opportunity to **support HB 1535, HD 1**, relating to the University of Hawaii promise program.

UHPA supports increased access to education and closing the educational attainment gap. The Hawaii Promise Scholarship Program is a “last dollar” scholarship, meaning it covers financial needs not met by other forms of financial aid, such as federal grants and scholarships from UH, employers and other private sources.

The continued support of this valuable program, as well as its expansion to the four-year campuses would lower the barrier for students to attain community college, baccalaureate, and/or advanced degrees, thereby strengthening Hawaii’s workforce and the economic future of its residents.

**UHPA supports and requests the passage of HB 1535, HD 1.**

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Fern'.

Christian L. Fern  
Executive Director  
University of Hawaii Professional Assembly



AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION

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February 21, 2024

TO: Chair Yamashita and Members of the FIN Committee

RE: HB 1535 HD1 RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PROMISE PROGRAM.

Support for a Hearing on February 23

Americans for Democratic Action is an organization founded in the 1950s by leading supporters of the New Deal and led by Patsy Mink in the 1970s. We are devoted to the promotion of progressive public policies.

Americans for Democratic Action Hawaii supports this bill as it would provide scholarships for the unmet direct cost needs of qualified students at any four-year University of Hawaii campus who meet certain eligibility criteria. For years we have argued for the expansion of the Hawaii Promise program to qualified students in four-year degree programs at the UH.

Strengthening access to college is essential to delivering the promise of a higher education to all Hawai'i residents. Too often, the cost of college tuition remains unattainable to working families, many of whom are experiencing financial hardship. Making community college free for our state's residents would likely cost less than \$20 million. At such a price, this is an investment that our community should not afford to miss.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Bickel, President

**HB-1535-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/21/2024 2:44:54 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 10:00:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Arcelita Imasa      | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

I support this bill. I have friends and families who have benefitted tremendously from this Program. KUDOS to all who did the work of getting this established. Also, please extend the program to 4 years of support to the students!!!

**HB-1535-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 4:03:48 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 10:00:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b>       | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Carolyn Weygan-Hildebrand | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

Aloha. Mahalo for hearing this bill.

I am firmly in support of this measure to grow the Hawaii Promise program, provided that it does not cause any disadvantage to our community college students. As a former workforce development professional and employment analyst, I know that our local community college graduates make up a significant part of our needed workforce in Hawaii. A great number of community college students who need financial support are also the ones who stay and support our social and economic fabric. Hawaii Promise is more than just a scholarship. As a proud alumna of the University of Hawaii System, I believe that UH is the premiere public institution of learning in the State; as such, I also think that its students and graduates should stand out as socially responsible people with a strong sense of "giving back." Providing scholarships when students and their families need them the most is critical to completing and graduating. Beyond that, Hawaii Promise scholarships will nurture the sense of giving back.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Weygan-Hildebrand

The Hawaii State Legislature  
House of Representatives  
FINANCE COMMITTEE

Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita

*Chair*

Rep. Lisa Kitagawa

*Vice Chair*

*Members:*

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Rep. Cory M. Chun

Rep. Elle Cocran

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Rep. Scott Y. Nishimoto

Rep. Mahina Poepoe

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi

Rep. David Alcos III

Rep. Gene Ward

**Re: Support for HB 1535 HD1 (University of Hawai'i Promise Program)**

I like to register my **strong support for HB1535 HD1** relating to the University of Hawai'i Promise Program.

Since 2015, my students and I had been strongly pushing for a need-based award toward the unmet financial needs of qualified students enrolled at any campus of the university of Hawaii. In 2017, the UH Promise Program was eventually established and it has helped thousands of UH community college students complete their associate degrees and move on to four-year academic programs. Today, many of those scholarship recipients have completed their college/university education, are gainfully employed, and are productively contributing to the State's economy and social well-being.

HB1535 would expand scholarship grants to qualified students in any of the campuses of the University of Hawai'i. This would be an intelligent and proactive investment of the State of Hawaii toward the development of an educated labor force and engaged citizenry that are essential in today's global, knowledge-based economy. You can never go wrong with this.

I join the thousands of UH students and Hawaii residents in asking the Finance Committee pass this bill.

I am happy for this opportunity to support HB1535 and thank you for empowering our young people by passing this bill.



Raymund Llanes Liongson, PhD

(808) 381-4315 | rliongson@gmail.com

*Retired Professor, University of Hawai'i-Leeward CC*

*Ewa Beach Resident*



**HB-1535-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 10:08:37 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 10:00:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Dianne Deauna       | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

To Rep Yamashita, the Chair of the Finance Committee, and Rep Lisa Kitagawa, the Vice Chair of the Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony.

I'm Dianne Deauna, a PhD candidate in Oceanography at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and I'm writing in support of HB 1535, which expands the Hawai'i Promise Program to include students attending UH Mānoa, Hilo, and West Oahu.

In my current position as a Teaching Assistant, I have heard stories of students having to work multiple jobs, take out loans, and essentially drastically change their lives and their families lives just so they can afford to get their degrees. My students work hard, are committed to their education, and I can only imagine that the opportunity to apply for a scholarship that would enable them to focus solely on their school work would allow for them to achieve more. I also think of communities that are underrepresented in UH Mānoa, students from working-class backgrounds, from immigrant families, among others, who would be able to take advantage of the Hawai'i Promise Program in order to get an education that everyone deserves access to.

Please pass HB 1535 and continue to invest in the future of Hawai'i, by investing in opportunities for under privileged students to be able to afford quality education.