



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'olelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, March 19, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.

By

Erika Lacro

Vice President for Community Colleges  
University of Hawai'i System

### HB 1826 HD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports HB 1826 HD1 which expands the Mental Health Technician (MHT) certificate of competence at Windward Community College (WCC) through the hiring of a MHT certificate faculty instructor, a faculty outreach position, scholarships, and administrative costs.

WCC has coordinated with the Hawai'i State Hospital (HSH) in order to develop the Mental Health Technician (MHT) Certificate, which provides 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 Hawai'i State Hospital, 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 47 students, 19 of whom were employed at Hawai'i State Hospital. 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. WCC entered into a contract with Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation this spring to provide this training directly to adult corrections officers.

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.

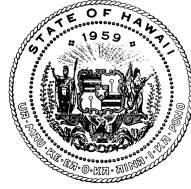
A Faculty Instructor will allow for curriculum development and expansion to meet the needs of employers and those we serve, implementation of the courses and certificate program, and articulation of the certificates to increasingly higher qualifications. A Faculty Outreach position amplifies the scope of this program from Windward O'ahu to our entire state through outreach and recruitment at our sister community college as well as through the creation of partnerships with mental health related agencies and workplaces throughout the state. The provision of a scholarship program allows this training to benefit a large range of potential workers across our state, removing financial barriers to education.

This bill supports the Mental Health Tech 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 HD1, as long as its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1826 HD1.

JOSH B. GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII  
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA  
MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I



KATHERINE AUMER, PhD  
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON  
LUNA HO'OMALU O KA PAPA

STATE OF HAWAI'I  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH  
P.O. Box 3378, Room 256  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96801-3378

**WRITTEN  
TESTIMONY  
ONLY**

**STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH**  
**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Higher Education**  
**in Support of H.B. 1826 HD1**  
**RELATING TO EDUCATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

**March 19, 2024, 3:00 p.m., CR 229 and Videoconference**

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Chair Mercado Kim, Vice-Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

Hawai'i law, HRS §334-10, established the State Council on Mental Health ("Council") as a 21-member body to advise on the allocation of resources, statewide needs, and programs affecting more than one county as well as to advocate for adults with serious mental illness, children with serious emotional disturbances, individuals with mental illness or emotional problems, including those with co-occurring substance abuse disorders. Members are residents from diverse backgrounds representing mental health service providers and recipients, students and youth, parents, and family members. Members include representatives of state agencies on mental health, criminal justice, housing, Medicaid, social services, vocational rehabilitation, and education. Members include representatives from the Hawai'i advisory commission on drug abuse and controlled substances and county service area boards on mental health and substance abuse.

The Hawai'i State Council on Mental Health strongly supports HB1826 HD1. This bill allocates critical funding for temporary positions to expand the University of Hawaii Windward Community College's mental health technician program statewide.

This investment is essential for two key reasons:

- **Addressing the Mental Health Workforce Shortage:** The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the existing shortage of mental health professionals in Hawaii. By supporting the expansion of this program, HB1826 HD1 directly addresses this critical need by training more mental health technicians.

- **Cost-Effective Approach:** The University of Hawai'i Windward Community College's program offers a proactive and cost-effective solution. The program's online accessibility and credit transferability toward social work or psychology degrees make it a valuable resource for students seeking careers in mental health.

Furthermore, Hawai'i's community colleges serve as accessible and inclusive hubs, making them ideal for promoting mental health awareness and support across diverse populations. By empowering students and community members with the knowledge and skills to address mental health challenges, this program fosters healthier and more resilient communities across Hawai'i.

**In addition to our original support, we particularly commend the bill's focus on expanding the program's reach statewide and for the funding of scholarships.** This broader accessibility will ensure a wider range of individuals have the opportunity to gain valuable mental health training and contribute to improving mental health services across the state.

We urge the passing of HB1826 HD1.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

VISION: A Hawaii where people of all ages with mental health challenges can enjoy recovery in the community of their choice.

MISSION: To advocate for a Hawaii where all persons affected by mental illness can access necessary treatment and support to live full lives in the community of their choice.



The Committee on Higher Education  
March 19, 2024  
3:00 PM  
Room 229

RE: **HB 1826, HD 1, Relating to Education for Mental Health Professionals**

Attention: Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani and Members of the  
Committee

The University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA) appreciates the opportunity to testify in **support of HB 1826, HD 1**, Relating to Education for Mental Health Professionals.

HB 1826, HD 1 expands Windward Community College's mental health-related programs by establishing two temporary full-time faculty positions to develop and administer curriculum, as well as to provide outreach to onboard new cohorts, grant scholarships, and carry out other tasks.

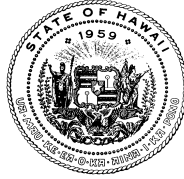
The expansion of this certificate program will afford greater opportunities for students to both enter the field of mental health, and to create pathways into other needed degree programs such as social work and psychology. To ensure the recruitment and retention of the program positions, it is essential for the FTE appropriation to have a recurring, general funded designation.

**UHPA supports and requests the passage of HB 1826, HD 1.**

Respectfully submitted,

Christian L. Fern  
Executive Director  
University of Hawaii Professional Assembly

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII  
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII



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**LATE**  
KENNETH S. FINK, M.D., M.G.A., M.P.H.  
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

WRITTEN  
TESTIMONY ONLY

**Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 1826 HD1  
RELATING TO EDUCATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

SENATOR DONNA MERCADO KIM, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Tuesday, March 19, 2024, 3:00 p.m., Room 229 / 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 has coordinated with the Windward Community College (WCC) and we  
8 respectfully jointly support this measure which appropriates funds to support and expand the  
9 WCC’s mental health technician (MHT) certificate program through the hiring of an MHT  
10 certificate faculty instructor and a faculty outreach position program, establishment of a  
11 scholarship program, and any other necessary 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 47 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 Hawaii State Hospital. The coordinator  
11 position is critical to WCC's mission to develop and grow the specialized workforce needed not  
12 only for the Hawaii State Hospital (HSH) but for other entities statewide that interface with  
13 individuals with severe mental illness (SMI) conditions. The Department has yet to establish this  
14 position and respectfully recommends that this position be moved to WCC in the Supplemental  
15 Budget bill. This will allow the college to expand the program to meet the critical needs of the  
16 HSH and other statewide entities and to address the immediate and significant workforce  
17 shortage of mental health providers.

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

22 We believe appropriating funds to establish positions to support the program, moving  
23 the MHT Certificate Coordinator position from HSH to WCC, and establishing a scholarship  
24 program will allow this program to expand and be offered statewide through community

1 colleges, thereby helping to address the need for health care workforce training throughout our  
2 state. We respectfully ask for the Legislature's support of this measure.

3 **Offered Amendments:** None. However, the Department respectfully requests that the  
4 Permanent Mental Health Technician Certificate Program Coordinator position (Sequence  
5 #2100-001 in HTH430 in Act 164, SLH 2023) be transferred from HSH to Windward Community  
6 College in HB 1800.

7 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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### Testimony to the Senate Committee on Higher Education HB1826 HD1, Relating to Education for Mental Health Professional March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 3:00pm

Aloha Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education.

Mental Health America of Hawaii is in strong support of HB1826 HD1 which appropriate funds for temporary positions to support the statewide expansion of the University of Hawai'i Windward Community College's mental health-related programs.

Mental Health America of Hawai'i (MHAH), an affiliate of the renowned national organization, is a highly regarded 501(c)(3) non-profit organization serving the State of Hawai'i. For nearly 80 years, MHAH has been fulfilling its mission "to promote mental health & wellness through education, advocacy, service, and access to care" through its vision of 'mental wellness for all.' We endeavor to reduce the shame and stigma of mental illness and improve the overall care, treatment, and empowerment of those with or at risk for mental health challenges across all stages of life in Hawai'i.

Considering the continued impact of the global pandemic, a national youth mental health crisis, and the ongoing statewide traumatic impacts of the Lahaina fires, the need for increased resources for these critical programs has never been greater.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony, and encourage your positive review of HB1826 HD1

Mahalo,



Bryan L. Talisayan  
Executive Director



# Hawai'i Psychological Association

*For a Healthy Hawai'i*

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## COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

**March 19, 2024 3:00 P.M. Conf Rm 229 & via Video conference**

### **Testimony in Support of HB1826 HD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS.**

The Hawaii Psychological Association (HPA) strongly supports HB1826 HD1 to provide funding and support for The University of Hawaii Windward Community College's (UH-WCC) mental health technician certificate of competence program.

We are deeply concerned about the critical workforce needs of mental health professionals in the State of Hawai'i. This shortage makes it difficult for people to access the care they need, and it can have a serious impact on well-being. UH-WCC's program provides a versatile training program that expands the scope of mental health services. There is a trauma-informed care pathway for the Honolulu police department and adult corrections officers that can equip officers with additional resources and skills to address a variety of challenging situations.

Additionally, Hawai'i's community colleges provide an accessible and affordable pathway for many who want to serve the behavioral health needs of their community. WCC's program is flexible, offering courses online asynchronously, allowing working professionals and students from across Hawai'i to participate. In order to further increase accessibility, the bill proposes to establish a scholarship program to aid unemployed, underemployed, and low-wage earners.

HPA believes that HB1826 HD1 is an important step forward in improving mental health care in Hawai'i and urges you to pass the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this important bill.

Sincerely,

Raymond A Folen, Ph.D., ABPP.  
Executive Director

**HB-1826-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/18/2024 1:20:26 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/19/2024 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Marsha Hee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Marsha Hee. I support HB 1826 that appropriates funds for temporary positions to support the statewide expansion of the University of Hawai‘i Windward Community College's mental health-related programs. This is an effective and necessary step towards upskilling and providing for more educated, trained professional providers ready to serve our state's underserved mental health community members. I am a family member of a loved one who lives with mental health conditions.

Thank you for taking my perspective and opinion into consideration to support and pass HB 1826.

Sincerely,

Marsha Hee, Volcano HI 96785, life-long resident/citizen of Hawaii

Family member of loved one with serious mental health conditions