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Statement of
BRENNA H. HASHIMOTO
Director, Department of Human Resources Development

Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY
AND
SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Thursday, February 15, 2024
3:10 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 225

In consideration of
SB2886, RELATING TO STATE EMPLOYMENT

Chairs Aquino and McKelvey, Vice Chairs Moriwaki and Gabbard, and members of the committees.

The Department of Human Resources Development (DHRD) appreciates the intent of SB2886, which seeks to prohibit the State or any of its branches, political subdivisions, or agencies from requiring a bachelor's degree as a condition of eligibility for hire to a position in state employment and establish certain exemptions.

DHRD offers the following comments on this measure:

1. DHRD recently completed a review of classes of work in the professional and scientific bargaining unit 13 and excluded managerial compensation plan to confirm that there are no classes of work that require an absolute degree, unless prescribed by law. The minimum qualification requirements consistently allow for combinations of experience and education, as well as the ability to substitute relevant work experience for a degree as a standard.
2. The minimum qualification requirements are prepared with input from program managers, subject matter experts and departmental human resources staff. DHRD follows the policy requirements:
 - a. Minimum qualification requirements must be bona fide occupation requirements, that is, they must be essential and job-related.

- b. Minimum qualification requirements should reflect the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies required to perform the work.
- c. Minimum qualification requirements should not pose artificial barriers, such as absolute educational degree, certification, or other requirement, unless they are bona fide requirements (e.g., licensure required by law).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and comments on this measure.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Labor and Technology
and
Senate Committee on Government Operations
Thursday, February 15, 2024, at 3:10 p.m.

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

SB 2886 – RELATING TO STATE EMPLOYMENT

Chairs Aquino and McKelvey, Vice Chairs Moriwaki and Gabbard, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed legislation relating to State employment, specifically the removal of the requirement of a bachelor's degree for the majority of state positions.

The University of Hawai'i (UH) appreciates our legislators' desire to reduce the number of vacant positions within state agencies, and UH acknowledges that there are undoubtedly certain government positions for which a bachelor's degree may not be an absolute necessity. At the same time, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of a college education in preparing individuals for the complex responsibilities of running state agencies. Fortunately, despite the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the percentage of Hawai'i's working-age adults who possess a post-secondary degree has risen from 41% in 2005 to 48% in 2022, expanding the pool of college graduates available to pursue state employment. Our comments highlight the broader value of a college degree in cultivating the skills and knowledge necessary for effective public service.

In the current landscape, the responsibilities of state agencies have become increasingly sophisticated and multifaceted. While some positions may not explicitly require a bachelor's degree, we believe most skills essential for effectively managing state agencies are acquired through higher education; and we appreciate the addition of Section 2(b) as it addresses our concerns for positions that require an additional degree or its equivalent for specialized knowledge, skills, or abilities. The proposed legislation should consider the overarching role of education in shaping individuals who are equipped to handle the challenges inherent in public administration.

Examples from existing state agencies further underscore the significance of a bachelor's degree in performing job functions effectively. Consider the role of a program manager responsible for overseeing complex initiatives within a state agency. A college

education provides individuals with critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills indispensable in strategizing and executing successful programs. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of public policy, budgeting, and organizational behavior, often acquired through college coursework, is instrumental in navigating the intricate landscape of state governance.

Similarly, while some positions may not necessitate a degree within law enforcement agencies, those with a college education often demonstrate more advanced communication skills, cultural competence, and the ability to comprehend and apply evolving legal frameworks. These attributes contribute significantly to the effectiveness and accountability of state law enforcement.

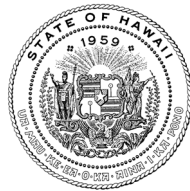
In the field of health services, professionals with a bachelor's degree are better equipped to comprehend the complexities of healthcare policy, epidemiology, and public health management. This understanding is vital for making informed decisions that impact the community's well-being.

UH must continue to require faculty to possess a college degree, and in most cases, a degree at the Master's level or higher, as it is essential for this population of state employees. Faculty are expected to be experts in their fields of study, intending to pass along critical knowledge through teaching, research, and service to future college-level learners, exposing them to the academic rigor of which they have first-hand knowledge.

State agencies should be able to require construction managers or architects to possess a degree in engineering or a related field. While a license or certification is not required for working as an auditor or fiscal specialist, state agencies should be able to require a degree in accounting, business, or a related field or equivalent professional experience. In these cases, the requirement of a college degree does not disqualify applicants for positions, provided they have met the equivalent professional experience requirements.

In conclusion, we hope the committee will carefully consider the broader implications of removing the bachelor's degree requirement for state positions. For example, one can foresee state agencies needing to invest more in training and development programs to ensure that employees without degrees possess the skills to execute their job duties effectively. Removing bachelor's degree requirements may result in the loss of individuals with specialized expertise, potentially harming the operational effectiveness of the employing agency. While acknowledging the flexibility needed to fill particular vacancies, it is essential to recognize that education plays a pivotal role in developing the skill set required to navigate the intricate responsibilities of public service. Our office strongly supports the pursuit of policies that enhance the qualifications and capabilities of individuals serving the State, ultimately contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of our state agencies.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we are available to provide any additional information or clarification if needed.



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HAWAII EMPLOYER-UNION HEALTH BENEFITS TRUST FUND
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ADMINISTRATIVE AND RESEARCH OFFICE
BUDGET, PROGRAM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DIVISION
FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION DIVISION
OFFICE OF FEDERAL AWARDS MANAGEMENT

WRITTEN ONLY

TESTIMONY BY LUIS P. SALAVERIA
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
TO THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND
LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY
ON
SENATE BILL NO. 2886

February 15, 2024
3:10 p.m.
Room 225 and Videoconference

RELATING TO STATE EMPLOYMENT

The Department of Budget and Finance (B&F) offers comments on this bill.

Senate Bill No. 2886 adds a new section to Chapter 78, HRS, to prohibit the State or any of its branches, political subdivisions, or agencies from requiring a bachelor's degree as a condition of eligibility for hire to a State position unless the knowledge, skills, or abilities required from the position can only be reasonably attained through a bachelor's degree, as determined by the appointing authority.

Although B&F generally supports initiatives to enhance the State's recruitment efforts, it should be noted that the possession of a college degree continues to be one of the most important signifiers that a job candidate has the professional-level comprehension and writing skills needed to conduct State business. Furthermore, the proposed blanket prohibition on bachelor's degree requirements may be impractical for certain job classifications and should be carefully considered with respect to each department's recruiting needs.

Finally, B&F defers to the Department of Human Resources Development on the merits and implementation of this bill as it pertains to State human resources policy.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Feb. 15, 2024, 3:10 p.m.
Hawaii State Capitol
Conference Room 225 and Videoconference

To: Senate Committee on Labor and Technology

Sen. Henry Aquino, Chair
Sen. Sharon Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Government Operations

Sen. Angus McKelvey, Chair
Sen. Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns

RE: COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF SB2886 — RELATING TO STATE EMPLOYMENT

Aloha Chairs Aquino and McKelvey, Vice-Chairs Moriwaki and Gabbard and members of the Committees,

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii would like to offer its support for [SB2886](#), which would prohibit a state agency from requiring a bachelor's degree for any position unless "the knowledge, skills, or abilities required for the position ... can only reasonably be obtained" through a bachelor's degree.

A bachelor's degree is not necessary for many state jobs, even though it is often required. A degree may indicate a certain set of skills, but it is by no means the only indicator.

A study from the Burning Glass Institute and Harvard University researchers noted that "when employers drop degrees, they become more specific about skills in job postings, spelling out the soft skills that may have been assumed to come with a college education, such as writing, communication and being detail-oriented."¹

¹ Joseph Fuller, Christina Langer, Julia Nitschke, Layla O'Kane, Matt Sigelman and Bledi Taska, "[The Emerging Degree Reset: How the Shift to Skills-Based Hiring Holds the Keys to Growing the U.S. Workforce at a Time of Talent Shortage](#)," Burning Glass Institute, 2022, p. 3.

Maryland, Utah, Pennsylvania, Alaska and many other states have all enacted policies aimed at removing arbitrary degree requirements for state jobs.² Hawaii should follow their lead.

For the record, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that only about a third of Hawaii residents age 25 or older have bachelor's degrees.³

Similarly, the nonprofit Opportunity@Work reports that individuals who do not possess four-year bachelor degrees but who are "skilled through alternative routes" made up 59% of Hawaii's workforce in 2019, compared to 53% of the workforce nationwide.⁴

Given this data, it is clear that this measure would broaden employment opportunities for local residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

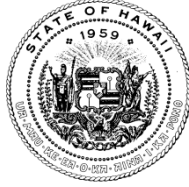
Ted Kefalas
Director of Strategic Campaigns
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

² Kathryn Moody, "[Pennsylvania ends 4-year degree requirement for majority of state jobs](#)," HR Dive, Jan. 24, 2023; and Joey Klecka and Elena Symmes, "[4-year degree no longer required for some state jobs](#)," Alaska's New Source, Feb. 14, 2023.

³ "[QuickFacts: Hawaii](#)," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 20, 2023.

⁴ Communication with Ashley Edwards, Director for Data Services at Opportunity@Work, Aug. 17, 2022.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | KA 'OIHANA ALAKAU
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February 15, 2024
3:10 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 225

SB2886
RELATING TO STATE EMPLOYMENT

Senate Committee on Government Operations
Senate Committee on Labor and Technology

The Hawaii Department of Transportation (DOT) **supports** this measure.

Current minimum qualification requirements include a bachelor's degree for entry-level professional positions (i.e., a Specialist I). In certain classes of work, substitution for the degree with experience is not allowed. This measure will allow consistency in substituting experience for the degree in all classes of work.

Most importantly, DOT's vacancy challenges will be lessened if we do not strictly require a bachelor's degree as part of the minimum qualification requirements. In addition to experience, applicants with less than a bachelor's degree (i.e., associate's degree), will also be considered, which will further expand our pool of qualified applicants.

We recognize that there are occupations where knowledge, skills, or abilities must be acquired through a course of study leading to a bachelor's degree such as in the engineering field. However, for the most part, the classes of work in our other professional positions do not necessarily require a bachelor's degree; experience equivalent to the degree may be a better fit.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.