

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

LUIS P. SALAVERIA
DIRECTOR

SABRINA NASIR
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
Ka 'Oihana Mālama Mo'ohelu a Kālā
P.O. BOX 150
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96810-0150

EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM
HAWAII EMPLOYER-UNION HEALTH BENEFITS TRUST FUND
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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 HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
ON
HOUSE BILL NO. 2720, H.D. 2

February 28, 2024
12:00 p.m.
Room 308 and Videoconference

RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The Department of Budget and Finance offers comments on this bill.

This measure allows graduate students employed by the University of Hawai'i (UH) to collectively bargain by amending Chapter 89-6, HRS, to remove the exemption from collective bargaining (CB) for graduate student assistants employed by UH, and to authorize a new Bargaining Unit (BU) 16.

The long-term cost implications of allowing graduate student assistants to collectively bargain is a concern for the State budget. Negotiation of pay increases for graduate students need to be weighed against the foregone revenue from tuition waivers and other fees that graduate students do not pay as part of their assistantships. Further, their work hours and work conditions would all need to be part of CB negotiations that might not fit the flexible schedules that graduate students require to complete their academic program.

The Legislature has created two new BUs in recent years and is considering creating others, in addition to this one, this session. There are concerns with the increasing administrative costs and complexities, negotiating, arbitrating, and managing of contracts for every increasing number of BUs.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.



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
Wednesday, February 28, 2024, at 12:00 p.m.

By

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

HB 2720 HD2 – RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on HB 2720 HD2, which establishes a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i and community college system.

The University of Hawai'i (UH) has had ongoing discussions with the Graduate Student Organization (the UH Mānoa leadership entity for graduate students) elected representatives regarding this issue, and UH is deliberately not taking a position on the issue of unionization.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this measure.



February 26, 2024

House Committee on Finance
Hearing on February 28, 2024, 12:00pm
Representative Yamashita, Chair
Representative Kitagawa, Vice-Chair

Testimony in strong support of HB2720_HD2, relating to collective bargaining

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

UNITE HERE Local 5 represents 10,000 working people in the hotel, food service and health care industries across Hawaii.

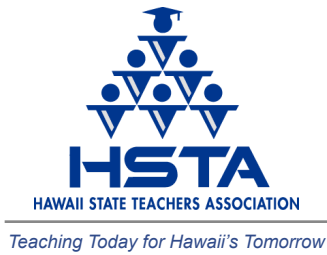
We are in SUPPORT of HB2720_HD2. As a union established in 1938, we are acutely aware of the benefits unionism will have on UH graduate student workers' lives.

We believe unions through collective bargaining provide safer and better working conditions, good wages, affordable healthcare, job security, dignity, respect and many other benefits for its members as well as the community.

Graduate student assistant workers are a vital part of Hawaii's educational system and they deserve the right to unionize in the way they see fit.

We urge you to pass HB2720_HD2.

Thank you for your consideration.



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawaii 96819
Tel: (808) 833-2711 • Fax: (808) 839-7106 • Web: www.hsta.org

Osa Tui, Jr.
President

Logan Okita
Vice President

Lisa Thompson
Secretary-Treasurer

Ann Mahi
Executive Director

TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAII HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Item: **HB2720 HD2 - Relating to collective bargaining**
Position: **Support**
Hearing: **February 28, 2024, 12:00 p.m., Conference Room 308**
Submitter: **Osa Tui, Jr. – President, Hawai'i State Teachers Association**

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association **supports** HB2720 HD2 which establishes a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i and its community college system.

There were questions and concerns brought up on February 8, 2024 in the joint Senate LBT/HRE committee hearing relating to SB3317 - Relating to collective bargaining. That bill also seeks to establish a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i (UH) and community college system.

In 2015, the legislature passed HB553 which was to remove part-time and full-time graduate assistants from being both exempted from inclusion in a bargaining unit and exempted from collective bargaining rights. Gov. David Ige subsequently vetoed that bill stating that they were students first and employees second.

In seeing the need for more organization to deal with the issue, Academic Labor United (ALU) was formed by the UH graduate assistants in 2017 to address the fact that the UH and community college system did not have any contractual obligation to discuss graduate assistants' terms of employment including working conditions, benefits, and compensation.

After many years of struggle, ALU received favorable rulings from both the Hawai'i Supreme Court (HSC) and the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board (HLRB). On April 5, 2023, the HSC determined that ALU had the right to petition the HLRB to determine if they were public employees. On January 4, 2024, the HLRB declared:

For the reasons stated above, the Board declares that Petitioner's graduate assistant members are public employees as defined under HRS § 89-2.

Now that a definitive ruling has come from the HLRB that the graduate assistants are public employees, the next step is to determine which bargaining unit would be most appropriate for the graduate assistants. During the February 8, 2024 Senate LBT/HRE hearing, Chair Kim stated the following:

The unions have all come in support, but they're not willing to take them on in their union so that is of concern.

It is the HSTA's belief that ALU is unique enough to need their own designated bargaining unit, Bargaining Unit (BU) 16. Unlike other government employee groups that wish to switch from their current bargaining unit and form their own bargaining unit, the UH graduate assistants do not currently exist under any current bargaining unit.

HSTA believes that the work performed by the graduate assistants fall well outside of the scope of BU 5 as defined by Hawai'i Revised Statutes §89-6(a)(5):

Teachers and other personnel of the department of education under the same pay schedule, including part-time employees working less than twenty hours a week who are equal to one-half of a full-time equivalent;

This was affirmed by the January 4, 2024 HLRB ruling which declared that the graduate assistants do not belong to BU 5 and neither to BUs 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15. The communities of interest do not intersect for HSTA and UH graduate assistants. HSTA bargains with the Hawai'i Department of Education and the Hawai'i Board of Education and represents employees in the Hawai'i PK-12 public school system. The UH graduate assistants would bargain with the University of Hawai'i and the UH Board of Regents and are employees of the UH and community college system. The graduate assistants also would not likely fall under the same pay scale as BU 5.

During the February 8, 2024 Senate LBT/HRE hearing, Chair Aquino stated the following:

To the NEA and to the HSTA who have shown probably the most support and administrative support at this point in time, we'd like to see how you folks are being involved and how we can get to the finish line for this particular group. If that information, and all information to the questions posted, can be provided to the chairs of the joint committees.

HSTA and the National Education Association (NEA) have been providing support to ALU and will continue to support ALU during this fledgling stage. As mentioned earlier, HSTA is an affiliate of the NEA. ALU took a non-binding ranked-choice vote in November of 2023 regarding national affiliation. The choices were between the NEA and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). NEA came away with 76 percent of the first-choice votes cast.

Given the strong indication to affiliate with the NEA, HSTA has stepped up our support for our potential sister-union, ALU, should they be granted their own bargaining unit. For the time being, HSTA has provided testimony in strong support of HB2720 as originally drafted (and its equivalent SB3317) and helped to shepard ALU leaders through the legislative process. HSTA has also met with ALU members

through their General Assembly. Additionally, HSTA has begun work, with the support of the NEA, to secure legal representation and advice on the next steps towards forming a nonprofit labor union under Section 501(c)(5) of the IRS code and to ensure all proper registrations and filings are processed. HSTA and the NEA will also guide ALU through their other needs they will require including supporting training in the area of nonprofit fiduciary obligations as well as collective bargaining and exclusive representation, which includes but is not limited to the bargaining process within the public sector and the State of Hawai'i, the formulation of grievance processes, and methods to support healthy labor management relations. The NEA in particular is very experienced and has access to a multitude of subject matter experts who work to support and are well-versed in issues affecting graduate assistant unions throughout the country. The NEA has already invited ALU to attend and participate in the upcoming NEA Higher Education Conference next month and other opportunities to build relationships and share best practices with graduate assistants from across the country.

In a state like Hawai'i where collective bargaining rights are enshrined in our state constitution, Academic Labor United has been diligently jumping over each obstacle and hurdle put in their way as they fight tooth-and-nail for the recognition and respect they should be afforded for the valuable work they perform as government workers.

There have been many struggles along the way and there will continue to be struggles as ALU works with passion and drive to organize and improve their conditions as public workers. Having the legislature create BU 16 and then allow the HLRB to place the graduate assistants there once the bargaining unit is created is the most reasonable course of action now that they've been declared as government workers. Please remove this final obstacle that remains in the path of University of Hawai'i graduate assistants to become their own bargaining unit with a legitimate seat at the bargaining table to advocate for themselves. HSTA stands ready to assist them in whatever way they need.

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.



UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THE THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2024**

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Rep. Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 28, 2024, 12:00 PM
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony on HB2720, HD2 – RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

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

The United Public Workers, AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO (“UPW”) is the exclusive bargaining representative for approximately 14,000 public employees, which includes blue collar, non-supervisory employees in Bargaining Unit 1 and institutional, health, and correctional employees in Bargaining Unit 10, in the State of Hawaii and various counties.

UPW supports HB2720, HD2, which establishes a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawaii and its community college system.

UPW supports the right of all employees to collectively bargain their wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment, including graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawaii System and its affiliated campuses. The various work-related issues that graduate assistants continue to encounter could fairly be addressed by the collective bargaining process. By eliminating the current exclusion of this group from collective bargaining, as proposed by the language of this bill, and creating a unique bargaining unit, graduate assistants will be provided the ability to resolve differences in contract negotiations with the employer.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kalani Werner', written over a light blue circular background.

Kalani Werner
State Director

HEADQUARTERS

1426 North School Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96817-1914
Phone 808.847.2631

HAWAII

362 East Lanikaula Street
Hilo, Hawaii 96720-4336
Phone 808.961.3424

KAUAI

2970 Kele Street, Suite 213
Lihue, Hawaii 96766-1803
Phone 808.245.2412

MAUI

841 Kolu Street
Wailuku, Hawaii 96793-1436
Phone 808.244.0815

1.866.454.4166

Toll Free - Molokai/Lanai only

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB 2720 - Establishing a Graduate Student Collective Bargaining Unit

Kahala Johnson
45-741 Kamehameha Highway
Kaneohe, HI 96744
Kahalajo@gmail.com
(808) 856-1701

26 February 2024

Dear Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Kahala Johnson, I am the Gender Equity Chair of Academic Labor United writing testimony in support of HB 2720.

Investing in graduate education and supporting the well-being of graduate student workers is an investment in Hawaii's future workforce and economic prosperity. Graduate student workers are integral to our state's research, innovation, and intellectual capital. By providing them with fair compensation, benefits, and essential resources through collective bargaining, we not only ensure their financial stability but also cultivate a highly skilled and educated workforce that drives economic innovation in Hawaii and the world.

In addition, establishing a graduate student collective bargaining unit can lead to cost savings for academic institutions in the long run. By addressing the concerns of graduate students through collective bargaining, such as fair wages, healthcare benefits, and tuition waivers, universities can mitigate the risk of turnover and attrition among graduate students. This, in turn, reduces recruitment and training costs and maximizes the return on investment in graduate education.

Lastly, a graduate student collective bargaining unit promotes accountability and efficiency in resource allocation within academic institutions. Through collective bargaining, graduate students can advocate for transparent and equitable distribution of funding and resources, ensuring that taxpayer dollars and tuition revenue are utilized effectively to support teaching, research, and student success initiatives.

In conclusion, I urge the Finance Committee to recognize the long-term economic benefits of establishing a graduate student collective bargaining unit in Hawaii. By investing in the well-being and professional development of graduate students, we lay the foundation for a prosperous future for our state.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your commitment to advancing the interests of Hawaii's graduate student workers.

Sincerely,
Kahala Johnson
Gender Equity Chair
Academic Labor United

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 10:47:18 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Golojuch	Rainbow Family 808	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Rainbow Family 808 supports HB2720. Please pass this bill.

Mike Golojuch, Sr., Secretary/Board Member

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 12:08:47 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pride at Work - Hawaii	Pride at Work - Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Representatives,

Pride at Work – Hawai'i is an official chapter of Pride at Work which is a national nonprofit organization that represents LGBTQIA+ union members and their allies. P@W-HI fully supports HB 2720 HD 2.

We ask that you support this needed piece of legislation.

Mahalo,

Pride at Work – Hawai'i



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

FEBRUARY 28, 2024

HB 2720, HD2, RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **supports** HB 2720, HD2, relating to collective bargaining. Pursuant to the “Economic Justice and Labor” section of the official Democratic Party of Hawai'i platform, the party believes “that all workers have the right to form a union to collectively bargain with employers on their behalf. We support the efforts of unions to protect and advocate for workers. We support anti-discrimination protections in the workplace. We support policies that reduce racial, gender, and other disparities in pay.”

There is a power in a union.

Today, political pundits prognosticate about the possible onslaught of austerity facing our nation. Many of these same pundits believe that labor unions are an impediment to economic prosperity, arguing that collective bargaining sets wages above what the free market demands.

They couldn't be more wrong. **Collective bargaining is a human right.** Unionized employees' compensation and work protections, moreover, are essential to creating an upwardly mobile middle class and continually increasing economic prosperity. As economist Paula Voos of Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations notes, “It is no accident that the prosperity and consumer boom of the 1950s—a period of unprecedented middle-class expansion,

broad business growth, increased home ownership, rising consumer spending, and the shared expectation that a college education was within the reach of everyone and that the lives of our children would be better than our own—followed the greatest sustained expansion of unionization in American history.”

Unsurprisingly, decreasing American middle-class incomes and the rapidly widening wealth gap in our country parallel a significant decline in union membership. It is imperative, then, that we promote higher productivity by strengthening labor-management relations. Through a union, employees have a means to engage with management about workplace problems, inefficient processes, unfair work conditions, and unsupportive compensation. Unions also reduce employee turnover and increase the retention of highly experienced employees, creating circumstances that favor professional development and mutual trust in the workplace.

Graduate assistants are employees and, thus, guaranteed the right to collectively bargain with university management, a fact that both the Hawai'i Supreme Court and Hawai'i Labor Relations Board have upheld within the last year. In providing instruction to students and research that expands our society's knowledge base, graduate students tirelessly toil on behalf of the university community, often under fear of retaliation because of a lack of organizing power in resisting exploitation. Graduate student assistants are short-term positions. Yet, the duration of graduate positions only heightens the urgency of establishing collective bargaining protections, as temporary employees too often fall prey to employers who exploit the precarious nature of these positions and assume student workers will simply “deal with the pain and move on.”

Appallingly, UH graduate assistants currently earn approximately \$20,000 per year on average, a number that has not significantly increased in almost two decades. At the sunrise of 2019, that amount carried over \$6,000 less purchasing power than it did fourteen years ago *before* adjusting for Hawai'i's high cost of living. **It is not even half of what MIT's living wage calculator calculates as a living wage for a graduate assistant working in the islands.**

Mahalo nui loa,

Kris Coffield
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
(808) 679-7454
kriscoffield@gmail.com

Abby Simmons
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
(808) 352-6818
abbyalana808@gmail.com



HOUSE BILL 2720, HD2, RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

FEBRUARY 28, 2024 · FIN HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 2720, HD2, relating to collective bargaining, which creates a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i and its community college system; exempts graduate assistants from collective bargaining until they petition the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board and the Board determines the graduate assistants are ready to be placed in a bargaining unit.

There is a power in a union.

Today, political pundits prognosticate about the possible onslaught of austerity facing our nation. Many of these same pundits believe that labor unions are an impediment to economic prosperity, arguing that collective bargaining sets wages above what the free market demands.

They couldn't be more wrong. **Collective bargaining is a human right.** Unionized employees' compensation and work protections, moreover, are essential to creating an upwardly mobile middle class and continually increasing economic prosperity. As economist Paula Voos of Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations notes, "It is no accident that the prosperity and consumer boom of the 1950s—a period of unprecedented middle-class expansion, broad business growth, increased home ownership, rising consumer spending, and the shared

expectation that a college education was within the reach of everyone and that the lives of our children would be better than our own—followed the greatest sustained expansion of unionization in American history.”

Unsurprisingly, decreasing American middle-class incomes and the rapidly widening wealth gap in our country parallel a significant decline in union membership. It is imperative, then, that we promote higher productivity by strengthening labor-management relations. Through a union, employees have a means to engage with management about workplace problems, inefficient processes, unfair work conditions, and unsupportive compensation. Unions also reduce employee turnover and increase the retention of highly experienced employees, creating circumstances that favor professional development and mutual trust in the workplace.

Graduate assistants are employees and, thus, guaranteed the right to collectively bargain with university management, a fact that both the Hawai'i Supreme Court and Hawai'i Labor Relations Board have upheld within the last year. In providing instruction to students and research that expands our society's knowledge base, graduate students tirelessly toil on behalf of the university community, often under fear of retaliation because of a lack of organizing power in resisting exploitation. Graduate student assistants are short-term positions. Yet, the duration of graduate positions only heightens the urgency of establishing collective bargaining protections, as temporary employees too often fall prey to employers who exploit the precarious nature of these positions and assume student workers will simply “deal with the pain and move on.”

Appallingly, UH graduate assistants currently earn approximately \$20,000 per year on average, a number that has not significantly increased in almost two decades. At the sunrise of 2019, that amount carried over \$6,000 less purchasing power than it did fourteen years ago *before* adjusting for Hawai'i's high cost of living. **It is not even half of what MIT's living wage calculator calculates as a living wage for a graduate assistant working in the islands.** Thomas Jefferson wrote, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” The same is true with basic civil rights, including the rights to freely associate and bargain for fair pay and work conditions, which are constantly under assault by a corporate mindset that puts dollars before democracy.

Kris Coffield · Chairperson, DPH Education Caucus · (808) 679-7454 · kriscoffield@gmail.com



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAI'I LABOR CAUCUS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE · FEBRUARY 28, 2024

HB 2720, HD2, RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Labor Caucus **supports** HB 2720, HD2, which creates a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i and its community college system; exempts graduate assistants from collective bargaining until they petition the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board and the Board determines the graduate assistants are ready to be placed in a bargaining unit.

There is a power in a union.

Today, political pundits prognosticate about the possible onslaught of austerity facing our nation. Many of these same pundits believe that labor unions are an impediment to economic prosperity, arguing that collective bargaining sets wages above what the free market demands.

They couldn't be more wrong. **Collective bargaining is a human right.** Unionized employees' compensation and work protections, moreover, are essential to creating an upwardly mobile middle class and continually increasing economic prosperity. As economist Paula Voos of Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations notes, "It is no accident that the prosperity and consumer boom of the 1950s—a period of unprecedented middle-class expansion, broad business growth, increased home ownership, rising consumer spending, and the shared expectation that a college education was within the reach of everyone and that the lives of our children would be better than our own—followed the greatest sustained expansion of unionization in American history."

Unsurprisingly, decreasing American middle-class incomes and the rapidly widening wealth gap in our country parallel a significant decline in union membership. It is imperative, then, that we promote higher productivity by strengthening labor-management relations. Through a union, employees have a means to engage with management about workplace problems, inefficient processes, unfair work conditions, and unsupportive compensation. Unions also reduce employee turnover and increase the retention of highly experienced employees, creating circumstances that favor professional development and mutual trust in the workplace.

Graduate assistants are employees and, thus, guaranteed the right to collectively bargain with university management, a fact that both the Hawai'i Supreme Court and Hawai'i Labor Relations Board have upheld within the last year. In providing instruction to students and research that expands our society's knowledge base, graduate students tirelessly toil on behalf of the university community, often under fear of retaliation because of a lack of organizing power in resisting exploitation. Graduate student assistants are short-term positions. Yet, the duration of graduate positions only heightens the urgency of establishing collective bargaining protections, as temporary employees too often fall prey to employers who exploit the precarious nature of these positions and assume student workers will simply "deal with the pain and move on."

Appallingly, UH graduate assistants currently earn approximately \$20,000 per year on average, a number that has not significantly increased in almost two decades. At the sunrise of 2019, that amount carried over \$6,000 less purchasing power than it did fourteen years ago *before* adjusting for Hawai'i's high cost of living. **It is not even half of what MIT's living wage calculator calculates as a living wage for a graduate assistant working in the islands.**



HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

RANDY PERREIRA, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

The Thirty-Second Legislature, State of Hawaii
House of Representatives
Committee on Finance

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 28, 2024

H.B. 2720, H.D. 2 — RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO wishes to provide comments on the purpose and intent of H.B. 2720, H.D. 2 which establishes a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i and community college system.

In-light of the recent Hawaii Labor Relations Board decision, we find it necessary and appropriate for this group of employees to establish **their own** bargaining unit so that they can bargain collectively, just like many other public employee groups.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on H.B. 2720, H.D. 2.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira
Executive Director

MARCUS R. OSHIRO
CHAIRPERSON



SESNITA A.D. MOEPONO
BOARD MEMBER

STACY MONIZ
BOARD MEMBER

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 434
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

HAWAII LABOR RELATIONS BOARD
KA PAPA LIMAHANA O HAWAII

WWW.LABOR.HAWAII.GOV/HLRB
DLIR.LABORBOARD@HAWAII.GOV

WRITTEN ONLY

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 28, 2024 at 12:00 p.m.
Via Videoconference
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

by
Marcus R. Oshiro
Chairperson, Hawaii Labor Relations Board

H.B. No. 2720, H.D. 2, Relating to Collective Bargaining

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

The Hawaii Labor Relations Board (HLRB or Board) takes no position on H.B. No. 2720, H.D. 2, and defers to the Legislature to determine whether a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawaii and its community college system should be established.

However, the HLRB would like to clarify that the Board did not order that a new bargaining unit for graduate assistants at the University of Hawaii should be established but instead ruled that graduate assistants are public employees as defined under section 89-2, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), which provides:

“Employee” or “public employee” means any person employed by a public employer, except elected and appointed officials and other employees who are excluded from coverage in section [89-6(f)].

Subsection 89-6(f), HRS, currently provides 18 categories of individuals who are not included in any appropriate bargaining unit and are not entitled to coverage under Chapter 89, HRS.

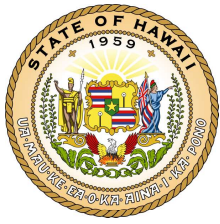
The Board further declared that graduate assistants are **not** included in any of the following bargaining units identified in subsection 89-6(a), HRS: (1) nonsupervisory employees in blue collar positions; (2) supervisory employees in blue collar positions; (4) supervisory employees in white collar positions; (5) teachers and other personnel of the department of education; (6) educational officers and other personnel of the department of education; (9) registered professional nurses; (10) institutional health and correctional workers; (11) firefighters; (12) police officers; (14) state law enforcement officers; or (15) state and county ocean safety and water safety officers.

The Board was not asked to rule on whether graduate assistants should be included in bargaining units: (3) nonsupervisory employees in white collar positions; (7) faculty of the University of Hawaii and the community college system; (8) personnel of the University of Hawaii and the community college system, other than faculty; or (13) professional and scientific employees, who cannot be included in any of the other bargaining units, as identified in subsection 89-6(a), HRS.

Board Order No. 4019, issued on January 4, 2024, in Case No. 23-DR-00-120, Academic Labor United v. University of Hawai‘i; Board of Regents, University of Hawai‘i; David Lassner, President, University of Hawai‘i; Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME, Local 152, AFL-CIO; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO; and University of Hawaii Professional Assembly, is attached.¹

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on H.B. No. 2720, H.D. 2.

¹An Errata to Order No. 4019, also issued on January 4, 2024, is not attached. The Errata corrected an inadvertent typographical error in the case ID on page 10. The correct case number is 23-DR-00-120.



EFiled: Jan 04 2024 11:03AM HAST
Transaction ID 71742983
Case No. 23-DR-00-120

STATE OF HAWAII

HAWAII LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

In the Matter of

ACADEMIC LABOR UNITED,

Petitioner,

and

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII; BOARD OF REGENTS, University of Hawai'i; DAVID LASSNER, President, University of Hawai'i; HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION, AFSCME, LOCAL 152, AFL-CIO; AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO; and UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PROFESSIONAL ASSEMBLY,

Intervenors.

CASE NO. 23-DR-00-120

ORDER NO. 4019

FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW, AND DECLARATORY ORDER

FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW, AND DECLARATORY ORDER

1. Introduction and Statement of the Case

Petitioner ACADEMIC LABOR UNITED (Petitioner or ALU) asks the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board (Board) to issue three declaratory rulings in its Petition for Declaratory Ruling (Petition). The Board does not have jurisdiction to weigh in on the constitutional issues ALU raises, but in this Decision the Board issues its Declaratory Rulings on the remaining issues that arise under Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS) Chapter 89.

1.1. Statement of the Case

After ALU filed its Petition with the Board, five parties submitted Petitions for Intervention. No one opposed the Petitions for Intervention.

At the status conference on September 26, 2023, the Board granted the Petitions for Intervention from Intervenors UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I (UH); BOARD OF REGENTS, University of Hawai'i (BOR); and DAVID LASSNER, President, University of Hawai'i (Lassner, and collectively with UH and BOR, UH Intervenors); Intervenor HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION, AFSCME, LOCAL 152, AFL-CIO (HGEA); Intervenor AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO (AFSCME); and Intervenor UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PROFESSIONAL ASSEMBLY (UHPA, and collectively with the UH Intervenors, HGEA, and AFSCME, Intervenors).

The Board also granted the Petition for Intervention from INTERNATIONAL UNION, UAW (UAW); however, because UAW's interest focuses on providing information about national efforts in collective bargaining for graduate assistants, rather than specific questions about the HRS Chapter 89 issues, the Board limited UAW's participation to providing an amicus brief and did not add UAW as a named party to the proceedings.

The Board ordered that the parties simultaneously brief the HRS Chapter 89 issues raised by ALU, with no reply briefs accepted. After receipt of UAW's amicus brief and ALU and the Intervenors' briefs, the record was closed.

1.2. Issues

The issues in the Petition that the Board has jurisdiction over, and which the parties were asked to brief, are:

- 1) Whether ALU's graduate assistant members are "public employees" within the meaning of HRS Chapter 89; and
- 2) Whether ALU's graduate assistant members are **not**:
 - 'nonsupervisory employees in blue collar positions,'
 - 'supervisory employees in blue collar positions,'
 - 'supervisory employees in white collar positions,'
 - 'teachers and other personnel of the department of education,'
 - 'educational officers and other personnel of the department of education,'
 - 'registered professional nurses,'
 - 'institutional, health and correctional workers,'
 - 'firefighters,'
 - 'police officers,'

- ‘state law enforcement officers,’ or
- ‘state and county ocean safety and water safety officers

within the meaning of HRS § 89-6.

2. Background and Findings of Fact

2.1. Parties

ALU is an unincorporated organization that represents graduate assistants at the University of Hawai‘i (UH).

The UH Intervenors are members of the employer¹ group for bargaining units 7 and 8² (BU 7 and BU 8 respectively).

UHPA and HGEA are exclusive representatives³ for BU 7 and BU 8, respectively.

AFSCME is an international labor organization that has four Hawai‘i affiliates.⁴

2.2. Background

After the State of Hawai‘i amended its Constitution in 1968, public sector employees gained the right to collectively bargain as prescribed by law. To enact this change, in 1970, the Hawai‘i State Legislature (Legislature) created HRS Chapter 89, Collective Bargaining in Public Employment, which set forth the laws that govern how public employees may organize, collectively bargain, and strike.

Even though the Constitution and the relevant statutes give public employees a broad right to collectively bargain, those rights are not without exception. Certain groups of public sector employees have been excluded from collectively bargaining under HRS Chapter 89 since 1970.

However, for those public employees allowed to collectively bargain under HRS Chapter 89, the Legislature created a list of appropriate bargaining units. All employees who are allowed to collectively bargain under HRS Chapter 89 must be placed in one of those statutorily defined bargaining units. Because the bargaining units are statutorily defined, the Legislature is the only entity that can create new bargaining units.

In 1972, HLRB’s predecessor, the Hawai‘i Public Employment Relations Board (HPERB) dealt with cases involving the initial makeup of bargaining units, including BU 7 and BU 8.

The issue of graduate assistants' placement in BU 7 and BU 8 was raised and considered by HPERB, and various parties weighed in on the issues. In determining the proper composition of the bargaining units, HPERB did not decide whether graduate assistants were public employees under HRS Chapter 89 or whether they would be entitled to collective bargaining rights under another statutory scheme.

The Hawaii Federation of College Teachers argued that graduate assistants are teachers and are, therefore, part of the faculty; however, BOR and UHPA both argued that graduate assistants are not faculty members and thus should not be a part of BU 7. After the hearing, the HPERB Hearing Officer determined that graduate assistants should be excluded from BU 7 because they are classified on a different compensation schedule and because the nature of their appointments and work differed from that of the faculty. Based on those findings, HPERB found that graduate assistants were excluded from BU 7. *See* Haw. Federation of College Teachers, et al., Board Case No. R-07-12, Decision No. 21, July 17, 1972 (<https://labor.hawaii.gov/hlrh/files/2018/12/Decision-No-21.pdf>) (Decision No. 21).

When considering the composition of BU 8, HPERB found that, once a graduate assistant completes their academic work, their employment is terminated and they have no possibility of continuing their employment with their department as a graduate assistant. HPERB further noted that graduate students were excluded from membership in the Hawai'i employees' retirement system under HRS Chapter 88, despite its broad definition of employees. Graduate assistants did not have social security deducted from their compensation and their salary could be exempt from federal income tax.

Additionally, HPERB recognized that the Constitution at that time required that BOR have the "power in accordance with law to formulate policy, and to exercise control over the university." The Legislature determined the initial bargaining units through considering occupational categories based on existing compensation plans. The salary schedule set up by BOR for graduate assistants differed from the other non-faculty personnel in the University of Hawai'i system. Further, UH treated graduate assistants differently than other non-faculty personnel in terms of access to benefits and the lack of social security and income tax withholdings. Additionally, any employment relationship established between a graduate assistant and the University of Hawai'i system was dependent on the student's status as a student, which made the graduate assistants primarily students, not employees.

Based on this information, HPERB found that graduate assistants were excluded from BU 8. *See* Haw. Federation of College Teachers, et al., Board Case No. R-08-13, Decision No.25, December 1, 1972 (<https://labor.hawaii.gov/hlrh/files/2018/12/Decision-No-25.pdf>) (Decision No. 25).

2.3. UH's Present Treatment of Graduate Assistants

The treatment of Petitioner's graduate assistants has evolved over the years. So too must the law and interpretation of HRS Chapter 89 adapt. The law, while codified in statute and supported by case law, is also meant to evolve in interpretation with changes in facts and circumstances to accomplish the goals of the statutory scheme.

Unlike the graduate assistants that HPERB considered in 1972, the current graduate assistants represented by ALU have a much wider range of duties and responsibilities. Graduate assistants today typically are given a nine or eleven-month appointment, and their duties may range from assisting faculty members to serving as the instructors of courses.

Today, graduate assistants have a multi-step salary schedule set by BOR. This salary schedule is based on considering graduate assistants 0.50 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. While graduate assistants who are full-time students are exempt from the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) tax, graduate assistant salaries are subject to both federal and state income tax withholding.

Graduate assistants also are eligible for benefits including tuition exemptions, health plan benefits, and other types of leave.

UH has also set out a grievance procedure that graduate assistants may use if issues arise.

3. Analysis and Conclusions of Law

3.1. Declaratory Ruling Standards; Jurisdiction

Declaratory rulings have a unique and independent role in the statutory scheme; namely, declaratory rulings are determinations of whether and in what way a statute, agency rule, or order, applies to the factual situation raised by an interested person. *See Citizens Against Reckless Dev. v. Zoning Bd. of Appeals*, 114 Hawai'i 184, 197, 159 P.3d 143, 156 (2007).

Hawai'i Administrative Rules (HAR) § 12-43-50 states that "[a]ny employee, public employee, public employer, exclusive representative, or interested person who has standing under this chapter may petition the [B]oard for a declaratory ruling as to the applicability of any statutory provision or of any rule or order of the [B]oard subject to its jurisdiction." In turn, HRS § 89-5 establishes the Board's authority over Chapter 89, HRS, including the authority to "[r]esolve controversies under this chapter[.]" HRS § 89-5(i)(3). However, the Board, as an administrative agency, can only wield powers expressly or implicitly granted to it by statute. *TIG Ins. Co. v. Kauhane*, 101 Hawai'i 311, 327, 67 P.3d 810, 826 (App. 2003).

The Board finds that ALU does have standing to pursue a declaratory ruling as the Petitioner is an interested person. *See, Asato v. Procurement Policy Board*, 132 Hawai'i 333, 344,

322 P.3d 228, 239 (2014). However, the Board does not have jurisdiction to decide any constitutional issues, and, therefore, declines jurisdiction over all such issues. Haw. Gov't Emp. Ass'n, AFSCME Local 152 v. Lingle, 124 Hawai'i 197, 207, 239 P.3d 1, 11 (2010). Constitutional analyses are unnecessary for the Board to decide statutory issues presented under HRS Chapter 89. *Id.* at 207, 239 P.3d at 11.

In construing and applying HRS Chapter 89, “our foremost obligation is to ascertain and give effect to the intention of the legislature, which is to be obtained primarily from the language contained in the statute itself. And we must read statutory language in the context of the entire statute and construe it in a manner consistent with its purpose.” Ka Pa‘akai O Ka‘Aina v. Land Use Commission, 94 Hawai'i 31, 41, 7 P.3d 1068, 1078 (2000). The Board notes that while it must follow this rule of statutory construction, it also acknowledges that the law does evolve over time with changing facts and circumstances. To this end, the Board believes that the law, including HRS Chapter 89, was never intended to be stagnant.

HPERB's Decision No. 21 and Decision No. 25 are not final determinations of whether graduate assistants are employees under HRS Chapter 89. Acad. Lab. United v. Bd. of Regents of the Univ. of Haw., 153 Hawai'i 202, 209, 529 P.3d 680, 687 (2023). Rather, they are determinations that graduate assistants did not belong in BU 7 or BU 8. *Id.*

The Board is not bound by the determinations in Decision No. 21 and Decision No. 25 that graduate assistants do not belong in BU 7 or BU 8 because the Board can and has amended the composition of bargaining units. *See, e.g., Bd. of Regents, Univ. of Haw.*, Board Case No. RA-07-186, Decision No. 322 (January 15, 1992) (<https://labor.hawaii.gov/hlrp/files/2018/12/Decision-No-322.pdf>); Bd. of Regents, Univ. of Haw. v. Haw. Gov't Emp. Ass'n, Board Case No. RA-08-188, Decision No. 328 (October 29, 1992) (<https://labor.hawaii.gov/hlrp/files/2018/12/Decision-No-328.pdf>). Accordingly, Decision No. 21 and Decision No. 25 are not relevant to this proceeding.

3.2. HRS § 89-2 Definition of “Public Employee”

The first question that the Board considers is whether ALU's graduate assistant members are “public employees” within the meaning of HRS Chapter 89. Based on the evidence, the Board finds the graduate assistants represented by ALU are public employees under HRS §§ 89-2 and 89-6 and, therefore, have the right to organize for collective bargaining.

HRS § 89-2 sets out that “‘Employee’ or ‘public employee’ means any person employed by a public employer, except elected and appointed officials and other employees who are excluded from coverage in section [89-6(f)].” Therefore, the relevant issue to determine whether graduate assistants are employees under Chapter 89 requires the Board to look at the exclusions under HRS § 89-6(f).

HRS § 89-6(f) provides:

- (f) The following individuals shall not be included in any appropriate bargaining unit or be entitled to coverage under this chapter:
- (1) Elected or appointed official;
 - (2) Member of any board or commission; provided that nothing in this paragraph shall prohibit a member of a collective bargaining unit from serving on a governing board of a charter school, on the state public charter school commission, or as a charter school authorizer established under chapter 302D;
 - (3) Top-level managerial and administrative personnel, including the department head, deputy or assistant to a department head, administrative officer, director, or chief of a state or county agency or major division, and legal counsel;
 - (4) Secretary to top-level managerial and administrative personnel under paragraph (3);
 - (5) Individual concerned with confidential matters affecting employee-employer relations;
 - (6) Part-time employee working less than twenty hours per week, except part-time employees included in unit (5);
 - (7) Temporary employee of three months' duration or less;
 - (8) Employee of the executive office of the governor or a household employee at Washington Place;
 - (9) Employee of the executive office of the lieutenant governor;
 - (10) Employee of the executive office of the mayor;
 - (11) Staff of the legislative branch of the State;
 - (12) Staff of the legislative branches of the counties, except employees of the clerks' offices of the counties;
 - (13) Any commissioned and enlisted personnel of the Hawaii national guard;
 - (14) Inmate, kokua, patient, ward, or student of a state institution;
 - (15) Student help;
 - (16) Staff of the Hawaii labor relations board;

- (17) Employees of the Hawaii national guard youth challenge academy; or
- (18) Employees of the office of elections.

The Board finds that none of the exceptions in HRS § 89-6(f) are applicable to graduate assistants. Therefore, graduate assistants employed by UH are employees under HRS Chapter 89.

Most of the exceptions under HRS § 89-6(f) clearly do not apply to ALU's graduate assistant members. The UH Intervenors argued that certain exceptions do apply to the graduate assistant members, but the Board must reject those arguments.

HRS § 89-6(f)(14) and (15) prevent both students of state institutions and student help from qualifying as employees under HRS Chapter 89.

The phrase "student help" is not defined in HRS § 89-6(f); accordingly, when there is doubt, doubleness of meaning, or indistinctiveness or uncertainty of an expression used in a statute, an ambiguity exists. State v. Choy Foo, 142 Hawai'i 65, 72, 414 P.3d 117, 124 (2018). When there is ambiguity, the meaning of ambiguous words may be sought by examining the context or resorting to extrinsic aids to determine legislative intent. Citizens Against Reckless Dev. v. Zoning Board of Appeals, 114 Hawai'i 184, 194, 159 P.3d 143, 153 (2007).

The relevant language of HRS § 89-6(f) could have been written by the Legislature to specifically exclude graduate assistants from being eligible to engage in collective bargaining. It could have been accomplished by listing graduate assistants or by including such individuals in definitions of student help or student of a state institution. The Legislature chose not to do so. The history of the statute does not indicate a clear intent of the Legislature to exclude graduate assistants from collective bargaining.⁵

Based upon the totality of circumstances, the Board concludes that graduate assistants are not "students of a state institution" or "student help" for purposes of exclusion from collective bargaining pursuant to HRS § 89-6(f)(14) and (15). There is a lack of any specific exclusion for graduate assistants in HRS § 89-6(f) and no evidence has been presented that the Legislature intended to exclude graduate assistants from the right to collective bargaining.

The Board finds that the Petitioner's graduate assistant members are public employees employed by a public employer. *See*, HRS § 89-2; Columbia University, 364 NLRB No. 90 (2016). The fact that graduate assistants also have some other non-employment relationship with the University is irrelevant to this determination.

3.3. HRS § 89-6 Appropriate Bargaining Units

As for the determination of what categories the graduate students are **not** included in, it appears to be undisputed among the parties and the Board agrees that the declarations submitted and the facts clearly demonstrate that the Petitioner is not described in any of the bargaining units listed by Petitioner and included in HRS 89-6.

Specifically, Petitioner’s graduate assistant members are **not** included in any of the following units identified in HRS § 89-6: (1) nonsupervisory employees in blue collar positions; (2) supervisory employees in blue collar positions; (4) supervisory employees in white collar positions; (5) teachers and other personnel of the department of education; (6) educational officers and other personnel of the department of education; (9) registered professional nurses; (10) institutional health and correctional workers; (11) firefighters; (12) police officers; (14) state law enforcement officers; or (15) state and county ocean safety and water safety officers.

No evidence has been provided nor is there any evidence of which the Board is aware which would properly place Petitioner’s members in any of these units as defined by statute or by prior Board orders.

4. Declaratory Order

For the reasons stated above, the Board declares that Petitioner’s graduate assistant members are public employees as defined under HRS § 89-2. The Board further declares that Petitioner’s graduate assistant members are **not** included in any of the following units identified in HRS § 89-6: (1) nonsupervisory employees in blue collar positions; (2) supervisory employees in blue collar positions; (4) supervisory employees in white collar positions; (5) teachers and other personnel of the department of education; (6) educational officers and other personnel of the department of education; (9) registered professional nurses; (10) institutional health and correctional workers; (11) firefighters; (12) police officers; (14) state law enforcement officers; or (15) state and county ocean safety and water safety officers. This case is closed.

DATED: Honolulu, Hawai‘i, _____ January 4, 2024 _____.

HAWAI‘I LABOR RELATIONS BOARD



[Signature]

OSHIRO, Chair


SESNITA A.D. MOEPONO, Member


STACY MONIZ, Member

ACADEMIC LABOR UNITED and UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII; BOARD OF REGENTS,
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII; DAVID LASSNER, PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII;
HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION, AFSCME, LOCAL 152, AFL-CIO;
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES, AFL-
CIO; AND UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PROFESSIONAL ASSEMBLY
CASE NOS. 23-CE-05-976; 23-CU-05-400; 23-CE-05-978; 23-CU-05-399; 23-CE-05-979; 23-
23-DR-00-120
FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW, AND DECLARATORY ORDER
ORDER NO. 4019

Copies sent to:

Lance Collins, Esq.

Bianca Isaki, Esq.

Elisabeth Contrades, Associate General Counsel

Jonathan E. Spiker, Esq.

Fernando R. Colon, Esq.

Wade Zukeran, Esq.

Garret Strain, UAW

¹ HRS § 89-2 defines “employer” or “public employer” as:

“Employer” or “public employer” means the governor in the case of the State, the
respective mayors in the case of the counties, the chief justice of the supreme court in the
case of the judiciary, the board of education in the case of the department of education,
the board of regents in the case of the University of Hawaii, the Hawaii health systems

corporation board in the case of the Hawaii health systems corporation, and any individual who represents one of these employers or acts in their interest in dealing with public employees. In the case of the judiciary, the administrative director of the courts shall be the employer in lieu of the chief justice for purposes which the chief justice determines would be prudent or necessary to avoid conflict.

² HRS § 89-6(a)(7) and (8) define BU 7 and BU 8 as:

(7) Faculty of the University of Hawaii and the community college system;

(8) Personnel of the University of Hawaii and the community college system, other than faculty;

Further, HRS § 89-6(d)(4) defines the employer group for BU 7 and BU 8 as:

For bargaining units (7) and (8), the governor shall have three votes, the board of regents of the University of Hawaii shall have two votes, and the president of the University of Hawaii shall have one vote.

³ HRS § 89-2 defines “exclusive representative” as:

"Exclusive representative" means the employee organization certified by the board under section 89-8 as the collective bargaining agent to represent all employees in an appropriate bargaining unit without discrimination and without regard to employee organization membership.

⁴ These affiliates include HGEA; United Public Workers, AFSCME, Local 646, AFL-CIO; United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP); and AFSCME Local 928.

⁵ *See*, Act 36, Session Laws of Hawai‘i 1973 and its legislative history.



Academic Labor United

Testimony from Academic Labor United (ALU)

Attention: House Committee on Finance
Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Re: Strong Support of HB 2720 Relating to Collective Bargaining

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Academic Labor United (ALU) stands in strong support of this bill. ALU is working to improve the lives of the 1400 plus Graduate Assistants employed at the University of Hawai‘i (UH) and gain recognition for our labor. Honorable representatives, now is your chance to help Hawai‘i to catch up to the rest of the continent and correct a grave injustice that has stood for 52 years. HB 2720 will amend HRS 89-6 to create bargaining unit 16 for Graduate Assistants and enable them to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining. **As such, the bill does not seek or require any additional appropriations; it offers public employees the opportunity to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement.**

Graduate Assistants manage diverse roles in the university. They constitute a committed learning community, conduct important research, and perform a substantial proportion of teaching and administrative duties. Graduate Teaching Assistants provide education to undergraduates by teaching their own classes and leading discussion sections, lectures, and labs. They also meet with undergraduate students during office hours to offer guidance and tutoring that greatly benefits students with an instructor’s personal attention. They do all the grading and lecturing, design syllabi, manage the classroom, and often teach more classes than the faculty of our departments. Graduate Research Assistants often manage multiple independent projects, and perform the cutting-edge research that has recently seen UH named in the top 1% of research institutions worldwide. Their research brings in millions of dollars in grants for the university, money and recognition these workers rarely receive. Other Graduate Assistants work in administrative offices and run key facilities, including the Athletics Department, Deans’ offices, and student support services such as Native Hawaiian Student Services and the Center on Disability Studies. These services make our university more accessible and better serve our community. **In response to the question: “Can UH function without graduate assistants?”, UH administration representatives admitted, “No, absolutely not. Most research 1 universities could not function without graduate assistants.”**



Academic Labor United

While their labor is increasingly indispensable to the university, graduate workers face particular challenges and disadvantages, and lack recourse when faced with administrative decisions that jeopardize their well-being and safety in the workplace. Graduate Assistants have no formal protection guaranteeing their right to free inquiry and expression. The combination of stagnant wages well below the minimum cost of living, zero job security, and the absence of basic benefits like medical and parental leave puts UH at a disadvantage when recruiting and retaining graduate students. This has led to an ongoing TA crisis, which sees the university canceling classes due to a dearth of Graduate Assistants who can lead courses. As individuals, GAs stand little chance of success in demanding better treatment and compensation and addressing issues such as sexual harassment and workplace discrimination. The long history of failed attempts at improvements proves this to be true. GAs cannot rely on our employers to act in good faith nor in our best interest; they must be contractually obligated to do so. Our best hope for improving our own situations is to come together and collectively bargain for better working conditions and, more importantly, for a better university. In turn, we can make the university a more attractive workplace for prospective workers and increase the amount of filled positions needed by the university.

The University pays students within a pay scale of \$22,140 for a 9-month, and up to \$35,460 for an 11-month contract, and these are well below the living wage for a single adult with no children in Hawai'i (a staggering \$46,000). There are no consistent recommended guidelines upon which pay scales are administered, and they vary greatly across departments and campuses. **In addition, the tuition waivers GAs receive are not income, in accordance with federal law.** IRS Code(Title 26): "Gross income shall not include any qualified tuition reduction." Section 117(d)(5) also specifies that this applies to "an individual who is a graduate student at an educational organization... who is engaged in teaching or research activities for such an organization." Waivers cannot be used for living expenses such as rent, food, and transportation, among other basic needs.

When Dr Julienne Maeda, the Interim Dean of the Graduate Division was asked about how the grievances she receives from graduate students are handled, she indicated that **"majority of them, 9 out of 10, do not want me to do anything because they are afraid of retaliation."** UH representatives indicated that they have started implementing "climate surveys of graduate students in general", and that in light of legislative testimony from 2023, have worked with GSO and ALU representatives to formulate a more effective GA complaint procedure. As of February 27th, 2024, no such climate survey has been implemented. The university's efforts to work with ALU and GSO representatives consisted of one consultation meeting in Spring 2023. Academic Labor United has not heard from the administration since. It is clear that there is no consistent and methodical approach by the University to address graduate student worker grievances and improve outcomes for reporters of harm. By providing GAs with their own bargaining unit, the graduate worker community will be able to act as a check to the administration to ensure that graduate student workers have a legal framework by which to hold UH accountable.



Academic Labor United

Graduate Assistants have come a long way to fight for their status as public employees and the right to unionize. Since the 1970s, graduate students in Hawai‘i have sought to collectively bargain, which was one of the founding missions of UH’s Graduate Student Organization (GSO), following the 60s-70s wave of graduate workers bargaining units and unions on the continent. Graduate Assistants from UH have been working to pass variations of this bill since 2012. In 2015, the bill arrived at the governor’s desk, but was vetoed. Exhausting all possible venues, graduate workers, including members of GSO, founded ALU in 2016, with a focus of gaining legal recognition. In 2019, the House Bill made it all the way to the Conference Committee but Speaker Scott Saiki did not assemble its counterpart House conferees. Bills were introduced in 2022 and 2023, but did not make it past their originating chamber. In all instances, the University of Hawai‘i has either submitted testimony opposing the bill or has chosen to not take a position on the matter, while failing to make substantive improvements to policies governing graduate student workers employment and working conditions.

Pursuing litigation against the 1972 decisions to exclude graduate assistants from collective bargaining has always been in the background, but it was not until 2021 when the lack of progress at the legislature prompted ALU leadership to work with Atty. Lance Collins to file suit against the Board of Regents, the Hawai‘i Labor Relations Board, and the state of Hawai‘i. It sought “declaratory judgment from the Court that graduate assistants are public employees and thus have the right to organize for collective bargaining”. In April 2023, the Supreme Court decision (*Academic Labor United v. Board of Regents of the University of Hawai‘i*) requested declaratory judgment from the Hawai‘i Labor Relations Board (HLRB) to determine UH Graduate Assistants’ status. After ALU filed a declaratory petition in July 2023, on January 4, 2024, HLRB determined that Graduate Assistants are public employees with the right to collectively bargain (see attached letter at the end of this document for more context). These decisions in the past year have put graduate workers at a different place from any other legislative session.

To effectively move forward and unionize, graduate student workers need our own bargaining unit. Our unique position as students, workers, and workers who manage students make us vulnerable in the face of the university and our direct supervisors. While the recent HLRB decision ruled out the possibility of putting graduate students into any existing bargaining unit except for Units 3, 7, 8, or 13, these four CBU’s do not fit graduate workers’ needs and working conditions. Unit 7 is for UH Faculty, and is represented by the University of Hawai‘i Professional Assembly. Graduate student workers do not fit into this bargaining unit as they would be in the same unit as their direct supervisors, creating conflict of interest, because GAs might have grievances against some faculty members. Unit 3 is for nonsupervisory employees in white collar positions, Unit 8 is for personnel of the University of Hawai‘i and the community college system, and Unit 13 is for professional and scientific employees, all represented by the Hawai‘i Government Employees Association. Unit 8 includes UH staff who directly process our employment papers. Unit 3 nor 13 does not cover teaching positions in any capacity. The scope and nature of the work done by graduate student workers at the University of Hawai‘i, along



Academic Labor United

with the requisite qualifications, training, and employment conditions necessitated by the nature of graduate teaching and research assistantships (e.g., graduate workers are exempt from any retirement and pension plan benefits which are fundamental to the contracts negotiated by all three units) all signify that graduate workers do not belong to any of the three units represented by HGEA. It is also noteworthy that both UHPA and HGEA have consistently supported graduate student workers belonging to their own unit since the beginning of legislative efforts by GSO and ALU in 2012.

It is important to highlight that even without legal recognition, ALU has been organizing graduate student workers and fighting for better living and working conditions. In 2020, when COVID-19 reached Hawai‘i, ALU started a hardship fund before UH did and organized a campaign for a sick leave policy. Later that year, ALU joined the ShaveICE coalition to push back against ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and government policies regarding international students. In 2022, ALU successfully mobilized hundreds of GAs to demand a pay raise after GAs not receiving one since 2016, and a paid sick leave policy in tandem with GSO. Currently, ALU membership is at ~50% of ~1,400 Graduate Assistants of UH Mānoa, and we are continually working to increase this percentage and this year have reached out to UH Hilo. **ALU has a well-defined structure that can handle the responsibilities of representing GAs in our own collective bargaining unit.** Members of ALU have fought tirelessly over the past few decades to unionize and as a result have created an appropriate structure to properly represent ourselves. The Executive Committee (EC) of ALU is currently composed of the following: Chair, Vice Chairs (for Organizing), Recording Secretary, Secretary-Treasurer, Communications, Political Education, Undergraduate Organizing Chair, General Grievance and Gender Equity. ALU is a structured, organized, and flexible union with our own by-laws as well as an active Finance, Communications, Political Education, International Students, Gender Equity, and General Grievance Committees. Our Finance Committee is working hard to ensure that ALU can meet the pecuniary needs of our organization to create a viable, long-lasting financial base, particularly through exploring ALU's future as a nonprofit organization. ALU is working closely with NEA to model our budget after successfully functioning graduate student unions. ALU is diligently aligning our future funding structure with the current GA salary steps to make sure we can create a realistic and affordable dues plan. ALU is confident that members will be able and willing to contribute based on the minimum of \$902 per year that UH currently requires all GAs to pay already. GAs would rather contribute to an organization that directly represents them and their needs.

This year, we also formed a Constitutional Revision Coalition to update our by-laws that were last revised in 2017. The aim is to revise our core constitution to better reflect the responsibilities and rights that members of ALU have within our graduate student union, as well as adapt existing union constitutions from the NEA, HSTA, and other existing graduate student unions to fit our needs through a care-centered approach. ALU would also like to highlight the formation of a Legislative Committee, which actively meets with legislators and allies to discuss relevant bills and devise strategies for Committee hearings and shows that we are taking feedback from the state seriously with the gravity it deserves.



Academic Labor United

Our Organizing Committee, which comprises a significant portion of the Executive Committee, has a structure similar to a typical union and liaison roles resembling the stewards in different colleges and departments. The Organizing Chairs include representatives from the College of Arts, Languages and Letters, College of Engineering, College of Natural Sciences, College of Social Sciences, School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, At Large Organizing Chairs (for UH Mānoa) and UH Hilo. This year to strengthen our Organizing Committee, we've developed Alaka'i roles (literally "a road that guides", with the idea that guidance comes not from persons directing it, but from the collective actions of people who leave their trace on the land) within as many departments as possible. The Alaka'i are similar to the shop steward structure found in most labor unions, and, as of creating the roles in ALU in late January 2024, ALU has brought on 11 new Alaka'i in 10 unique departments. ALU is bolstering our base of graduate students and continuously working to create an organizational structure that will outlast the term of any individual graduate assistant.

By Fall 2023, it had become clear that ALU needed support and guidance from a larger, more established union in order to grow and expand to meet its members' needs. Over the course of three weeks (from September 27 to October 12), a series of meet and greets were scheduled with representatives from the National Education Association, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. Each union was allotted two days in order for union representatives to meet ALU members, discuss their overlying structure, and provide context as to how they could assist ALU's unionization efforts. ILWU decided to withdraw from participating in the affiliation process, given the trajectory of the legal and political status of ALU's unionization efforts. To provide a summary of all the information received from both NEA and AFSCME, the Executive Committee worked closely with the Union Affiliation Committee to produce a Voting Guide that was then distributed to all ALU members, and several talk stories and information sessions were also held so members could freely discuss all considerations. Ultimately, ALU members determined, by the majority of votes cast, that the National Education Association was the best fit for our needs.

Since ALU's affiliation with NEA, NEA has pledged in writing support for our unionization efforts in various ways. Critical for the development of our own, unique collective bargaining unit, the NEA has offered support for budgeting assistance, establishing nonprofit/labor union status, and support from NEA's subject matter experts in graduate assistant history, applicable legal advice, and day-to-day chapter management. For the growth and vitality of ALU, NEA has also pledged support for organizational training programs, financial support for conference attendance, development of governing documents, membership to NEA's network, and access to NEA grants. These resources will help ALU with our ability to grow and remain an effective body to protect our graduate workers in the UH system. HSTA, which is an affiliate of NEA, has promised support for ALU as a potential sister-union. Specifically, HSTA has begun work to secure legal representation and advice to help ALU become a nonprofit labor union under Hawai'i law. HSTA's experience with the local political landscape is an invaluable



Academic Labor United

resource and greatly appreciated. ALU is extremely grateful for the guidance, support, and aloha that the NEA and HSTA have shown us throughout our organizing endeavors. With our commitment and other unions' support, we have shown that Graduate Assistants are ready and are in urgent need of unionization and our own bargaining unit. We strongly urge that HB 2720 be passed. The time is now.

Respectfully,

Dianne Deauna,
Chair, Academic Labor United

LAW OFFICE OF
LANCE D COLLINS

A LAW CORPORATION

Post Office Box 782, Makawao, Hawai'i 96768
(808) 243 - 9292 • lawyer@maui.net

January 30, 2024

Academic Labor United
<alu@aluhawaii.org>

Dear Academic Labor United,

You requested that I provide background on the circuit court lawsuit, the Supreme Court decision, the HLRB decision as well as whether the legislature has the power to deprive graduate assistants of their constitutional right to organize for purposes of collective bargaining.

I

Graduate assistants have been excluded from collective bargaining in Hawai'i based upon two 1972 Hawai'i Public Employment Relations Board decisions, Decision No. 21 and Decision No. 25. Decision No. 21 excluded graduate assistants from Unit 7. Decision No. 25 excluded graduate assistants from Unit 8 by determining that they were not public employees as defined by Chapter 89, HRS.

Under Hawai'i Labor Relations Board's former administrative rules and caselaw, there was no available procedure by which to challenge those 1972 decisions.

Academic Labor United filed suit in the First Circuit Court alleging three claims. The first claim sought to obtain a judicial declaration that graduate assistants are persons in public employment within the meaning of Article XIII, Section 2 of the Hawai'i State Constitution, have a right to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining and that neither state law nor agency interpretations of state law may abrogate altogether that right.

The second claim sought a judicial declaration that graduate assistants are "public employees" within the meaning of HRS 89-2 and to the extent that they are excluded from that definition, that exclusion unlawfully abrogates their right to organize for purposes of collective bargaining.

The third claim sought a judicial declaration that the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board's former administrative rules violate the right of persons in public employment to organize for purposes of collective bargaining insofar as previous decisions are binding on public employees but they have no administrative process to review or seek relief from those decisions.

The Circuit Court dismissed the complaint on the ground that jurisdiction under the declaratory judgment statute had not been met. ALU appealed

II

On April 5, 2023, the Hawai'i Supreme Court held that the 1972 decisions "are not a binding, final adjudication that graduate assistants are not 'employees' within the meaning of HRS 89-2" and distinguishing caselaw to the contrary, ALU could petition the HLRB for a declaratory order.

III

On July 28, 2023, ALU petitioned the HLRB for a declaratory ruling seeking a determination, among other things, that graduate assistants are persons in public employment and "public employees" within the meaning of HRS 89-2 and that they were not appropriately placed in

Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 or 15.

On January 4, 2024, the HLRB issued declaratory orders ruling that graduate assistants are public employees within the meaning of HRS 89-2 and that they are appropriately placed in Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 or 15.

IV

The Hawai'i Supreme Court ruled in 2002 in United Public Workers v. Yogi, 101 Hawai'i 46, 62 P.3d 189 (2002) that the phrase "as provided by law" in Article XIII, Section 2 of the Hawai'i Constitution was intended to confer on the legislature the power to regulate the scope of collective bargaining not to confer on the legislature the power to grant and deny the right of public employees to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining.

In United Public Worker v. Yogi, the Hawai'i Supreme Court unanimously agreed in the three opinions of the Court: "[w]hile the legislature is given broad discretion pursuant to article XIII, section 2, the language 'as provided by law' does not give the legislature unfettered discretion to infringe upon the core principles of collective bargaining." Yogi, 101 Hawai'i at 54, 62 P.3d at 198 (Nakayama, J, concurring majority opinion). "The legislature did not have the constitutional authority to enact a law that in effect completely abrogated the right granted under article XIII, section 2 of the Hawai'i Constitution." Id., 101 Hawai'i at 55, 62 P.3d at 199 (Nakayama, J., "concurring" majority opinion).

Yogi reiterated this constitutional interpretation throughout the opinions. "[T]he core of Article XIII, Section 2 of the Hawai'i Constitution, inasmuch as relevant history confirms that the right to organize and bargain collectively was to remain inviolate[.]" Id., 101 Hawai'i at 55, 62 P.3d at 199 (Acoba, J., concurring). "[T]he framers were not in favor of granting the legislature the ultimate power to deny the right to organize for the purpose of collectively bargaining[.]" Id., 101 Hawai'i at 51, 62 P.3d at 195 (Ramil, J., decision of the court). "[T]he framers did not intend to grant the legislature absolute discretion to take away the right to collectively bargain altogether[.]" Id. (Ramil, J.). "Granting the lawmakers absolute discretion to define the scope of collective bargaining would also produce the absurd result of nullifying the 'right to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining.'" Id., 101 Hawai'i at 52, 62 P.3d at 196 (Ramil, J.) "[T]he intent and object of the framers who adopted article XII, section 2 was to extend to public employees similar rights to collective bargaining previously adopted for private employees under article XII, section 1." Id., 101 Hawai'i at 53, 62 P.3d at 197 (Ramil, J.). As stated in all opinions of the Yogi court, the legislature lacks the power to completely abrogate the right granted under Article XIII, § 2 whether it does it to all public employees or only certain classes.

In short, the legislature cannot deprive graduate assistants of their constitutional right to organize for purposes of collective bargaining.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me should you have any other questions.

Very truly yours,
LAW OFFICE OF LANCE D COLLINS



LANCE D COLLINS

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION
2245 Campus Road, Hemenway Hall 212
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

Resolution 08-2024

Relating to Collective Bargaining of Graduate Assistants

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION:

WHEREAS, graduate assistants play a vital role in the operation of the University of Hawaii by conducting research, teaching, and performing administrative duties.

WHEREAS, graduate assistants face difficult working conditions including long hours, low compensation, limited job security, and unclear recourse for workplace mistreatment.

WHEREAS, collective bargaining provides an avenue to address poor working conditions, advocate for worker needs, and establish workplace policies that promote the wellbeing of graduate assistants and a supportive working environment.

WHEREAS, collective bargaining by graduate assistants has been shown to be a successful strategy to improve working conditions at various other U.S. universities.

WHEREAS, graduate assistants do not fit well in any current bargaining unit in the State of Hawaii due to the unique nature of graduate students as both students and employees of the university.

BE IT RESOLVED, we, the Graduate Student Organization of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, in order to promote improved working conditions for graduate assistants and a more supportive academic environment at the University of Hawai'i support the establishment of a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants through House Bill 2720.

Introducers: Benjamin Wiseman, Representative for Plant and Environmental Protection Sciences and Employment and Compensation Chair; Charles Addey, Representative for Oceanography.

Co-introducers: Ivet Rodriguez, Representative for Kinesiology and Rehab Science; Dorian Daimer, Representative for Physics; Kyle Conner, Representative for Oceanography; Moseli Motsoehli, Representative for Computer Science; Ikenna Nometa for Mathematics Representative.; McKinley Prager, Representative for Chemistry.

Vote to Approve House Resolution 08-2024: Ayes: 33. Nays: 0. Abstentions: 2.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION ON THE 15TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2024.



February 27, 2024

House Finance Committee
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania St
Honolulu, HI 96813

Honorable House Finance Committee Chair Rep. Kyle Yamashita and
Honorable House Finance Committee Vice Chair Rep. Lisa Kitagawa,

SUBJECT: HOUSE BILL (HB) 2720 RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

On behalf of the National Education Association (NEA), it is with great pleasure that I once again express our steadfast support for Academic Labor United (ALU). As the largest labor organization in the country representing education employees, we have the capacity to support the continued development of Academic Labor United as a viable, effective, and sustainable representative of its members.

In November 2023, the graduate workers of Academic Labor United voted to affiliate with the National Education Association. We are honored to welcome ALU members into our 3-million-educator strong union. With NEA, Academic Labor United's graduate workers will find support, resources, and kinship to meet the unique needs of graduate workers, empowering them to establish a member-led, effective, and resilient graduate worker union.

The NEA will provide the following resources and assistance to Academic Labor United (ALU):

Legal Support: The NEA recently committed \$10,000 to support ALU through the legislative process and the establishment of their collective bargaining unit.

Digital Organizing Tools and Platforms: We will provide access to state-of-the-art digital organizing tools and platforms, empowering Academic Labor United to streamline communication, collaboration, and outreach efforts.

Training Programs: Our organization will conduct comprehensive training sessions focused on key areas of organizational development, including leadership development, building membership, creating enduring structures, and formulating a multi-year organizing plan aimed at ensuring robust membership engagement and support.

Financial Support for Conference Attendance: We are pleased to extend financial support and logistical assistance to facilitate the attendance of members of Academic Labor United at the NEA Higher Education Conference in Atlanta. This opportunity will serve as a catalyst for valuable networking and professional growth.

Budgeting Assistance: We will furnish sample budgets, training and offer guidance on financial management to aid in the effective allocation of resources and strategic financial planning, in accord with the standards in our *Guide to Best Financial Practices for Local Affiliates*.

Development of Governing Documents: Our team can provide guidance and support in the development of governing documents tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of Academic Labor United.

Nonprofit/Labor Union Status Establishment: We are committed to providing support throughout the process of establishing nonprofit status for Academic Labor United, in collaboration with the Hawai'i State Teacher's Association (HSTA), to ensure compliance with state and legal mandates.

Membership in NEA's Network: ALU members will become part of NEA's network of over three million members, gaining access to invaluable resources, advocacy efforts, and collaborative opportunities.

NEA Graduate Assistant Committee Membership: Members of Academic Labor United will have the opportunity to join the NEA Graduate Assistant Committee, thereby gaining access to peer expertise, support, and a platform for sharing best practices and insights with similar organizations representing graduate assistants at universities across the nation.

Support from NEA's Subject Matter Experts: NEA's staff includes experts in Graduate Assistant history, organizing and issues, applicable labor law, professional development, policy, day to day chapter management, and much more.

Access to NEA Grants: Once unit 16 is established and ALU officially affiliates with NEA, they will be able to apply for a range of NEA grants to support initiatives and projects aligned with our shared goals and priorities; including organizing and member engagement, professional development, and racial and social justice.

The National Education Association is committed to advancing the objectives of HB 2720 and fostering the growth and sustainability of Academic Labor United. Should you require further information or have any questions, please feel free to reach out to our Higher Education Organizing Team, led by Marcy Kamienecki who can be reached at mkamienecki@nea.org.

Sincerely,

Tom Israel
Senior Director, Center for Organizing and Affiliate Support
National Education Association



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII STUDENT CAUCUS

Date 02/28/2024

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Relating to HB 2720 HD 2

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

The University of Hawai'i Student Caucus (UHSC) is formally authorized to serve as a system-wide association of all University of Hawai'i campus student governments, representing approximately 46,400 students across the 10 campuses of the UH System.

The UHSC unanimously shares a position of strong support for HB 2720 HD 2.

Graduate Assistants (GA) have a direct impact on over 14,000 undergraduate students in the UH system who depend on the GA's to instruct or provide multifaceted support.. The quality of work and life of a GA is directly tied to the quality of education received by the undergraduate students and by extension the quality of education provided by the University of Hawaii System. The people of Hawaii are all invested in the success of the University of Hawaii System.

The HLRB ruled as of Jan 4th, 2024 that GA's are PUBLIC EMPLOYEES, who have a right to collectively bargain. Without the ability to Collectively Bargain the GA's are at risk of exploitation. GA's are STUDENTS and pursue an education whilst providing a service to the University of Hawaii System. GA's should be properly represented so that they do not have to choose between struggling to keep the lights on and getting an education.

Quality GA's are a gateway to supplement the staffing and mitigating the impact of hiring shortages plaguing the University of Hawaii System. The establishment of a new bargaining unit would allow GA's to further assist the critically understaffed portions of the University of Hawaii System. This issue is of particular importance to the Student Caucus as understaffed services cause a decrease in the quality of educational experiences for the students of the University of Hawaii System.

Sincerely,

Ronald Sturges, Domineque Bonifacio
Legislative Action Committee, UH Student Caucus

Written Testimony for HB2720

Meagan Harden, PhD Candidate in Geography at UH Manoa

Aloha, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2720 which would establish a collective bargaining unit for graduate students employed by UH.

During my first two years as a PhD student at UH Manoa, I worked as a Teaching Assistant. For four semesters, I provided TA support to a total of 400 students in World Regional Geography, 140 students in Geography of Japan, and 140 students in Geography of Hawaii. In this role, I was responsible for creating and evaluating assignments, providing personalized feedback and remediation plans, and even delivering lectures and creating course content to the nearly 700 undergraduates enrolled in these classes. These tasks are typical of the kind of work that graduate assistants provide at the University of Hawaii.

When my grandmother passed away from covid in 2020, I relied on the goodwill of my supervisor to attend her funeral. I was lucky to have a kind supervisor, not everyone does; I could have missed my only opportunity to say goodbye to my grandma alongside my family. a collective bargaining unit will make sure that situations like these, where TAs are dealing with very real and very personal problems, are navigated fairly and equitably.

When I changed health insurance coverage last year, it took three months for my employee health insurance paperwork to be properly processed. For three months, I had to put pressing health concerns on the backburner while I waited for reassurance that addressing my health wouldn't put me even further into debt. Again, a collective bargaining unit will help ensure that employees have avenues for support in situations like these.

I now work as a lecturer, which means that I have a TA assigned to me for support in my World Regional Geography class. As her supervisor, it's completely up to me to make sure that her work environment isn't hostile, unsupportive, or unsafe. My TA should have an entity that is not her supervisor looking out for her, and that avenue should be permitted and supported by the state that employs her.

It is already an exceptional privilege to pursue graduate studies, and the lack of basic worker's rights are making grad school even more financially exclusive. When my former students ask me to write them letters of recommendation for grad school applications, I feel obligated to warn them that it's precarious out here. The state of Hawai'i needs to support TAs, so that we can continue to support our students. Thank you.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 11:47:49 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angela Amantite	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a graduate student and I support HB2720!

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 12:44:11 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anna Ezzy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa and honorable members of the Committee,

My name is Anna Ezzy, and I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo in Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science. I'm writing in **support of HB2720 HD2**, a bill that will create a new collective bargaining unit for graduate student workers of the UH and community college system.

This bill opens a pathway for graduate student workers like me to address our concerns through directly bargaining with our employers, the State of Hawai'i and the Board of Regents, to improve our living and working conditions. On January 4, 2024, the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board classified us as public employees, with the right to collectively bargain. We believe that the best path forward is for us graduate student workers to take ownership of our contract negotiations. We hope the legislature grants us this opportunity to bargain for our rights, similar to how our counterparts in the continent have been doing so for the past 50 years. Mahalo for your consideration, please pass HB2720 HD2 favorably out of committee.

Sincerely,

Anna Ezzy

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 12:59:17 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Motoki Yamamori Saito	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Motoki Yamamori Saito, a graduate student from School of Travel Industry Management in University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 1:02:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kyle K Kajihiro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Graduate Assistants at the University of Hawai'i are a vital part of the workforce. UH works because they do. They deserve the same rights of collective bargaining as any other state workers. I urge you to support this bill. Thank you.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 1:04:28 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alice Pendergast	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Alice, a graduate student TA from the UH Psych department, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 1:08:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Nightingale	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm John, a graduate student TA from Geography and Environment, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 1:27:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hiroko Saito	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Hiroko Saito, a GA from the department of American Studies, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 1:53:44 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sasha Nealand	ALU	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Sasha Nealand, a graduate student / GA / TA from UH Hilo, College of Pharmacy, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 2:01:38 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noelle Iati	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

I'm Noelle Iati, a teaching assistant from the American Studies Department at UH Mānoa, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 2:29:37 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Harangody	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Michelle Harangody, a PhD candidate in the Dept of Geography and Environment and a former Graduate Assistant for many years across the university. I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 2:39:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ivy Wappler	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Ivy Wappler, I am a graduate assistant at UH Manoa and I support HB 2720.

Mahalo,

Ivy

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 2:55:39 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dylan Pilger	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a graduate student worker, father to a young-child, and aspiring public health professional who was born and raised here in Hawai'i. Winning collective bargaining for graduate student workers will help me finish my education and stay in Hawai'i, so I can accomplish my goals of making Hawai'i a healthier place for everyone.

Graduate workers are workers! Please vote in support of HB2720!

Mahalo

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 3:50:29 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marina Karides	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, please pass this bill. It is essential that the labor of graduate students is recognized as such. It will build morale and assure fair labor practices for which the State of Hawaii has advanced previously.

mahalo,

Marina Karides

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 3:52:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Korey Wetherell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Chair Rep. Kyle Yamashita and Vice Chair Rep. Lisa Kitagawa of the House Higher Finance Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of HB 2720.

My name is Korey Wetherell, a M.A. candidate in Geography and the Environment. I live in Mānoa Valley, and I'm represented in the House by Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, and Sen. Carol Fukunaga in the Senate. I'm writing in support of HB 2720, a bill that will create a new collective bargaining unit for graduate student workers of the UH and community college system.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:00:24 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amiti Maloy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:02:38 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jordan Ando	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Jordan Ando, a graduate student from the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences at UH Manoa, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:05:26 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Freiin von Hammerstein	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 2720

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:05:30 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dalilah Haji Laidin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Dalilah Haji Laidin, a graduate student from Department of Geography and Environment, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:06:51 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kira M Webster	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hi, my name is Kira Webster and I am a PhD candidate in Geography & Environment. My Senator is Carol Fukunaga and my House Representative is Della Au Belatti. I am writing you in support of SB 3317. I have been at UH for 10 years now, five of which have been graduate school. I have taught for the entire time I have been in graduate school, now continuing to teach in addition to my 20-hour-per-week graduate assistantship that I hold as my main source of employment. In addition to these two jobs, I am also the department representative for two separate organizations, I am the treasurer of Graduate Women in Science Hawai'i, and belong to another university organization, all unpaid labor. I regularly pick up jobs petsitting just to try to scrape together enough money to live on. As a single person living alone in Hawai'i (but with demands to be on campus everyday, leaving little room for housing location flexibility) it continues to prove difficult to keep my head above water financially. This bill opens a pathway for graduate student workers like myself to address these concerns by creating a bargaining unit for us, so we can finally directly bargain with our employers, the State of Hawai'i and the Board of Regents, to improve our living and working conditions. We believe that the best path forward is for us graduate student workers to take ownership of our contract negotiations. We hope the legislature grants us this opportunity to bargain for our rights, similar to how our counterparts in the continent have been doing so for the past 50 years. Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:33:03 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Wiwik Dharmiasih	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 2720

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:51:15 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sara Loh	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Loh Ci Yan Sara, an international graduate student and former GA from Anthropology. I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:52:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrew Lewis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB2720 because graduate students deserve to be treated fairly. UHM admin stated at the last hearing that if they didn't use us the university would not be able to function.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:53:53 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annie Chien	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Annie Chien and I am a graduate student from Earth Sciences. I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:54:59 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cynthia Franklin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Cynthia Franklin and I am testifying in full support of HB2720. I am a professor of English at the University of Hawai'i. I have worked with graduate students since coming to UH in 1994, and with ALU members since its formation in 2017. Their organizing has been principled, impressive, and inspiring. It is imperative that they have a union of their own that allows them collective bargaining rights.

When in the PhD program at UC Berkeley, I was part of graduate students' efforts to unionize. I did so because it was almost impossible to make ends meet under our poor labor conditions. Health care, sick leave, semi-fair pay: these were all things we needed and deserved as workers, and so we could succeed as graduate students, too.

Decades later, conditions for graduate student workers have worsened, and they are particularly bad here. Everyone who goes grocery shopping knows this. Everyone who pays rent or utilities or has bought a house or condo knows this. Imagine trying to live on just over \$20,000 a year! In addition to the right and need to be able to bargain for fair pay, graduate student workers need protection from workplace abuses.

Graduate student workers are essential to UH, and all the more so with the erosion of faculty in tenure track positions. They need and deserve a union of their own. The creation of a new BU for graduate students is critical: for student workers to be part of Unit 7 or 8 poses a direct conflict of interest. It would put students in the position of belonging to the same unit as their direct supervisors, the UH faculty, some of whom graduate student workers might have grievances against. UH admin are not part of the faculty union and by the same logic, graduate student workers should not be part of the same unit as UH faculty or staff who are in positions of power over them. Unit 13 does not cover teaching positions. All three of these units also have very different working conditions.

Graduate student workers need and deserve a union of their own. As a faculty member, I have the utmost respect for these workers, and know that faculty and students depend upon the crucial labor that they perform and the excellence they bring to the UH system. Passing HB2720 is the fair and right thing to do!

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:56:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Will Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in full support of HB2720 HD1. This is LONG overdue.

The Hawai'i Labor Relation Board and the Hawai'i Supreme Court have ruled and upheld that graduate students are employees. There should be no further discussion needed.

Graduate students have the same right to collectively bargain that any other group of workers has, period.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 4:58:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kyle Conner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kyle Conner, a graduate student GA from the Oceanography department, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 5:05:59 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
S. Shankar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 2720. Graduate students are workers and should be able to bargain collectively, and the opportunity to do so should be given to them.. They cannot be properly represented if they belong to a bargaining unit along with their supervisors (faculty). Thanks for reading my testimony.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 5:12:43 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Olivia Meyer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Olivia Meyer, and I am a UH graduate worker from the Department of Geography and Environment. **I support HB 2720’s current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.**

I came to graduate school to pursue a career in research and teaching on pressing environmental issues. I have been at UH since 2021 and received several large grants, including a fellowship of \$35,000 that raised UH’s status and recognition nationally. Beyond metrics officially recognized by the university, I have worked hard to build community within my department, in my international and Southeast Asian studies community, and beyond the university by getting involved with local environmental justice and labor issues.

While I love my research, professors and mentors, student mentees, and peers, I also want UH to be a better place for all of them. During my studies at UH, I have witnessed students experience extreme workplace abuse and injustice. My friend experienced repeated verbal abuse from her supervisor, but her entire funding position relies on maintaining the relationship. Many friends work multiple jobs to afford even the necessities of living in Hawai‘i. Numerous friends have been unable to seek justice through the Title IX process and remain disempowered by university procedures. I have talked to many Graduate Assistants (GAs) who consistently work double the hours of their contractual obligations. Our entire community suffers when we are not able to support one another. A harm for one is a harm for all.

At my master’s institution in Kentucky, Teaching Assistants in my department make roughly the same amount of money as they do at UH. While neither is remotely sufficient, the difference is the cost of living. They live in one of the most affordable states, while Hawaii ranks in the top-most expensive (US News & World Report). GAs completing a Ph.D. (which typically takes five years or more) received a guarantee of at least three years of funding, whereas here, students receive no such guarantee. Ph.D. students are often offered a single-year contract while others arrive with no funding but with the supposed promise of abundant GA-ships that can take months or multiple semesters to materialize. GAs at my master's institution have their student fees entirely waived, while UH GAs pay almost a thousand dollars per year out of their paychecks to cover these fees. These experiences have shown me that we do not need to accept the conditions at UH.

As a former union organizer in Kentucky, I also have seen the willingness of GAs to pay dues even in a right-to-work state. ALU is equipped and ready to receive recognition and go to the

bargaining table. Upon receiving recognition, we are ready to collect dues. **ALU currently operates without a single paid staff member.** ALU **already** redistributes funds through the COVID hardship funds, paying out of pocket for food at union events and sharing tips on accessing food stamps and health care. **We redistribute our labor by advocating for one another and providing emotional support when the structures of UH continually let us down.** Our support keeps students from dropping out of their programs entirely. Dues are not a problem- GAs already support one another when UH does not. We deserve a union.

GAs are public employees, as classified by the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board. We deserve the right to collectively bargain and to take ownership of our contract negotiations. We hope the legislature will grant us this opportunity to do what many other unionized graduate assistants across the US have been doing for the past 50 years. I appreciate your consideration.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 5:18:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Isaiah Wagenman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Isaiah Wagenman, A former Graduate student and GA from the Natural Resources Environmental Management Department of CTAHR at UH Manoa. I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to bargain collectively.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 5:20:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nikhil Khurana	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I fully support the right of graduate workers to collective bargaining. Such is the right of any worker and graduate students are workers! They do labor and depend on their income from the university to survive. As such they deserve a say in their working conditions. They deserve a way to address wrongs committed by their employer.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 5:23:49 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauryn Pisciotto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Lauryn Pisciotto, a graduate student from the UH Manoa Oceanography Department, and I support HB 2720's current amended form to one that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain

Aloha and terveh. My name is Sara Maaria Saastamoinen, and my pronouns are she and they. I am a Ph.D. student in Political Science in my third year as a student and graduate worker at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I live here in town in Ala Moana, and I am the constituent of Representative Scott Saiki in the House and Senator Sharon Moriwaki in the Senate. As a graduate student worker, I **fully support House Bill 2720**, which upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. I urge you to join me with your unequivocal support.

I wanted to start by expressing my passibot and appreciation for the representatives who brought forth this bill, the lawyers who have worked with Academic Labor Union organizers for years, and of course, my fellow graduate students who are all working to secure our right to a union that can support graduate student workers — who are here today to speak with you, taking time away from the many responsibilities we carry as students, scholars, teachers, researchers, parents, friends, caregivers, and citizens to ask you to listen.

For years now, graduate students have been denied our right to collectively bargain our contracts. This impacts not only us graduate students but also the future leaders we educate, so supporting graduate workers should be one of the most crucial issues for this legislature. This academic year alone, I am teaching more than 45 undergraduate students who will be the leaders of Hawai'i. For the past four semesters, as the sole instructor who entirely devises her own curriculum, I have worked for the state by selecting thought-provoking readings and creating accessible and engaging assignments, solely grading all students' in-class and written assignments and providing robust written feedback, devising lectures and in-class activities to help students both digest and weave connections between selected course materials and the real-world issues we face in Hawai'i and globally, and fulfilling numerous other responsibilities expected of faculty, such as participating in surveys to secure funding for UHM through grants, writing reference letters for students to study abroad programs, graduate school and other degree programs, jobs during and after college, and more.

Here are some snippets of what my students have to say about my teaching:

- I believe Sara did a good job furthering and challenging students' thinking and from what I have heard other students say, this class has changed the way we think about water and our relationality. I felt like Sara cared more about what the students wanted out of the class and how we learn best than what I have experienced from other instructors.
- To Sara: The passion you have for this class was inspiring. You made this class something I wanted to attend and also to succeed in. You taught me more than water politics. You taught me to think about more than the living things.
- Sara is incredible, literally one of the best if not the best teacher I have ever encountered. I cried to my mom after going to office hours one day because of how incredible she is.

- Excellent mind-opening course that had me grow so much academically and in my general thinking of the world. As an added positive note Sara is the best professor I have had in the whole past two years I have been in college! She had very extensive knowledge about the topics covered in the class as well [as] any other topic brought up. She was very good at giving detailed feedback and really seemed as if she was there to help all the students succeed and grow!
- To Sara: I want you to know that you are the most caring and intelligent teacher I have ever encountered. You are why I go to school. It is teachers like you who change lives.

For all of this work and even with rave reviews from students, the state pays me poverty wages. The state is not even paying me half of what a living wage is for Honolulu County. As the instructor of your children, your future leaders, I make \$22,000 a year: to pay rent, to cover utilities, to feed myself, not to mention healthcare, clothing, or any paid time off to get to rest.

We should be supporting those who are cultivating our brightest minds, instead of leaving teachers to struggle every month to make ends meet. As public employees, we deserve to form a union to collectively bargain for working conditions that are fair, equitable, safe, healthy, and which serve the future of Hawai'i—not its underpaid and overworked past.

Without us, the University of Hawai'i would not have the world-class teaching and research that it is known for; without us, the State of Hawai'i would not have a Research One institution to call its own. I ask you to **pass HB 2720 urgently** and to listen to the voices of Graduate Assistants who have been fighting for years to secure our right to unionize. Mahalo nui and passibo.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 5:49:30 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Yen Tzu LIEW	Academic Labour Union	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Elizabeth Liew and I am a graduate student and a GA in the Department of Asian Studies. I fully support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 6:05:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ia Maranon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB2720!

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 6:28:07 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Areerat Worawongwasu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Aree Worawongwasu. I am International Students Committee Co-Chair and Constitutional Revision Committee Co-Chair of Academic Labor United, and I also serve on the Gender Justice Committee, Communications Committee, and Political Education Committee of our union. I am testifying in strong support of HB2720 HD2's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of Graduate Assistants to collectively bargain. For the past three years, I have worked as a Graduate Assistant in the American Studies department of the University of Hawai‘i, where I am pursuing my PhD. I work hard, I enjoy teaching, and I have even been nominated for the prestigious Frances Davis Award for Undergraduate Teaching. I have taught 40 students in two class sections in almost every semester I have worked at the University of Hawai‘i, including a writing-intensive course I designed entirely by myself as the Instructor Of Record last Spring. As much as I love teaching and research, UH simply does not pay us a living wage in order for us to sustain the work that keeps this university running.

Here are just a few excerpts of what students have shared about my teaching over the past three years:

“Ms. Worawongwasu was and continues to be one of the most influential people in my life. I truly believe that Ms. Worawongwasu and her teachings have changed my life and career path for the better. Her class opened my eyes to a world of work in Indigenous rights and sovereignty movements, which I am looking to enter as I continue on my academic journey. It was during my time as her student that I realized the importance of and my passion for Indigenous rights and sovereignty. Her class pushed me to further investigate the relationships between America and all groups of Indigenous peoples and to think critically about what I have learned about America and Indigenous peoples prior to the class. Ms. Worawongwasu’s teachings were so influential that my education since that class has been centered around the topics introduced to me by her.

The fervor in which she taught created such an engaging learning environment. I learned something new each and every class. Ms. Worawongwasu also cultivated a learning environment in which each person could feel comfortable asking any questions that they had or to share opinions safely. In class, she made it a point to make sure that every student felt valued and that their voice mattered, no matter what background they came from.

Ms. Worawongwasu's public and vocal support as an ally for the Kānaka 'Ōiwi community has made me feel that much more comfortable as a student of hers. Being of Hawaiian descent, I always felt supported and never spoken over by her or other classmates because of her allyship and the nurturing environment she created within the classroom.

Even after finishing my course with Mr. Worawongwasu, she continues to be a very supportive and trustworthy figure in my life. Whenever I needed a Letter of Recommendation, wanted to discuss American Studies material, or just wanted to chat about life, she made time for me. Before I officially declared American Studies as my minor, she met with me multiple times so that she could answer all my questions and so that I felt clear about what I was getting myself into. She has also met with me on multiple occasions just to talk about various topics that I am passionate about, like blood quantum and Indigenous education, so that I could learn more and sort through the thoughts that I had. I have never felt more supported by an educator before."

"Aree served as my section's Graduate Teaching Assistant for Kumu Brandy Nālani McDougall's Intro to Indigenous Studies course in Fall 2021. Of the many instructors I've come across in the UH system, from undergraduate to tenured, Aree is at the very top of my list. First and foremost, Aree is a living embodiment of conscious engagement with indigenous lands, waters, and communities. She is perfectly suited as a role-model for undergraduate students learning to ethically engage with the world around them. As an indigenous woman myself, I know very few people who dedicate their daily lives to decolonization and social justice more resolutely than Aree. From her fervent activism through Women's Voices Women Speak and the O'ahu Water Protectors, to her monthly commitment to mālama 'āina through Ka Papa Lo'i O Kānewai, to the full-time pursuit of her Ph.D. in American Studies with a Graduate Assistantship - to name a few of her involvements known to me - I am often left astonished at the way Ms. Worawongwasu still moves through the world with such tenacity and grace.

As an instructor, Aree critically engages students in the examination of their privileges and positionalities, while extending compassion and holding a safe space for this exploration. In what appeared to be an inexplicably difficult semester for many, I watched as Aree managed to facilitate meaningful discourse with at times minimal student engagement. On a practical level, between all her commitments, Aree is incredibly prompt in responding to any course-related questions or concerns. She has given the most impactful academic feedback of any instructor I've worked with. When our class met for optional mālama 'āina workdays in relation to our final project, Aree always found the time to be present. Beyond the course material, Aree's expansive knowledge of worldwide indigenous issues was evident in her frequent "plugging" of organizations and movements for students to support. I was once surprised and heartened to see Aree share the information for Prutehi Litekyan, an organization of land and water protectors on my home island of Guāhan. Her capacity for global social awareness is incredible to witness and something I aspire to."

"Aree is amazing! She always led thought provoking discussions and allowed students to share and work through their thoughts in a supportive way."

"I truly appreciate our GA, Aree. She did a lot of the grading and accepting papers as well as leading discussions. Most of the time, I enjoy emailing her with questions because it felt more

comfortable to do so due to her welcoming presence. She is also understanding of technical difficulties that may prevent us from submitting assignments online.”

“Aree was very kind, endlessly patient, and always helpful. She was a great leader for the discussion sections.”

“Very helpful! She was able to look over my essays and give me feedback so I could get a better grade. Facilitated classroom discussions well, making them engaging and relevant to the lecture.”

“I always felt like I could express my thoughts and opinions in our class section. Our discussions were super insightful and fun. I appreciate you being so understanding and flexible with our work and readings. It was SUPER helpful and I appreciate it.”

As you can see from these evaluations and letters of support, Graduate Assistants such as myself make a profound impact on our students and to the future of higher education in Hawai‘i.

For all my work and stellar reviews from my students — some of whom have gone on to become graduate students at the University of Hawai‘i themselves with my guidance — the poverty wages, poor working conditions, labor violations, and lack of effective grievance processes, have left me little choice but to go on a medical leave of absence for this Academic Year in order to recover from the mental and physical toll these exploitative working conditions have put on me. This leave of absence has slowed down my degree progress, and while I am able to recover my health in Thailand, where we have universal healthcare, the same cannot be said for the many domestic and international students who also faced health issues due to our poor working conditions. While I am choosing to return to the University of Hawai‘i this Fall and become a Graduate Assistant again, it is with the conviction and hope that I will return as part of a new collective bargaining unit which addresses the unique labor challenges that Graduate Assistants at the University of Hawai‘i face.

I strongly urge you to pass HB2720 HD2, for the future of labor in Hawai‘i and beyond.

Mahalo,

Aree Worawongwasu, International Students Committee Co-Chair and Constitutional Revision Co-Chair of Academic Labor United.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 6:32:32 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Olivia Jarvis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Olivia Jarvis, a graduate student at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo. I live in Hilo and am represented in the House by Rep. Richard Onishi and Sen. Lorraine Inouye in the Senate. I’m writing in support revising HB 2720’s current amended form to one that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

I’ve been a student at UH for the past six years and in my second year of the Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science (TCBES) Graduate Program. To support myself through graduate school, I’m also working as a graduate teaching assistant for the Geography and Environmental Science Department. I assist two courses in geographic information systems by holding office hours for students, grading assignments, and maintaining the student computer lab by updating and licensing the softwares. Some of my hours are also dedicated to supporting the TCBES program by promoting seminar series talks, managing department vehicle rentals, writing the semesterly newsletter, editing the program website, and maintaining the program email. This position allows me to work 20 hours a week, but sometimes I work beyond these hours to keep up with the work that needs to be completed. To fulfill my degree requirements, I am taking courses and working on my thesis project that is focused on detecting invasive species in aerial imagery using machine learning. My work is helping biocontrol efforts to reduce the spread of invaders and protect native ecosystems. Despite all this hard work in and out of the classroom, other graduate assistants and myself often find it difficult to manage living in Hawai‘i on our current UH salaries.

This bill opens a pathway for graduate student workers like me to address these concerns by creating a bargaining unit for us, so we can finally directly bargain with our employers, the State of Hawai‘i and the Board of Regents, to improve our living and working conditions. On January 4, 2024, the Hawai‘i Labor Relations Board classified us as public employees, with the right to collectively bargain. We believe that the best path forward is for us graduate student workers to take ownership of our contract negotiations. We hope the legislature grants us this opportunity to bargain for our rights, similar to how our counterparts in the continent have been doing so for the past 50 years. Thank you for your consideration.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 6:41:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Hartman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Hannah Hartman, a graduate student from the Asian Studies department, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain".

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 6:59:34 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason Mark Alexander	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Jason Mark Alexander. I have served as a Graduate Assistant for 2.5 years and am a PhD candidate at the University of Hawai‘i. I strongly support HB2720 with the new amendment to instantly uphold the constitutional right for all 1,500+ Graduate Assistants in the UH system to collectively bargain, **without** gatekeeping via requiring a new HLRB petition. As a 6th year PhD student in Sociology and a worker, I am specializing in conflict transformation and ways state administrators should care about their constituents.

This bill integrates Graduate Assistants as a category of legitimate Public Employee into the existing systems of collective bargaining and negotiations to which we are entitled. Once this adjustment is made, with Bargaining Unit 16 specifically for the unique interests of research, clerical, and teaching work GAs perform at all hours of the day across the UH system, we can proceed as working adults in equal conversation with our employers, entitled to legal protections in negotiating workplace issues as we are living in and contributing to this state.

All of work in graduate school is done by people in their 20s, 30s, and older, with routine needs to support dependents and their own wellbeing while confronting the range of inequities of citizenship, race, gender, physical abilities, and generational situation. The decades-long denial of union rights is a shameful injustice by which UH can ignore the workers' situations. I have heard too many accounts from colleagues whose supervisors essentially interpret the bare-bones GA contract freely, with no oversight from department and college level administration because the short-term work demands override the welfare of the graduate assistants doing the work. I am attaching an anonymized version of my own GA contract; it is vague in oversight of supervisor decisions, contains no benefits, and was not updated and reissued when sick leave and salary adjustments were instituted in August 2022, so I have no contracted guarantee of these changes for my specific position, and has been a source of anxiety. Can you imagine having to work 60 hours per week, even though the contract sets a limit of 20, with no overtime pay? This is what happens at UH for many workers. There is a spiritual drain that comes from seeing your supervisor monopolize your time, forcing you to stretch your academic degree progress by years. Conditions vary depending on the supervisor, but the issue of workers having no systematically ensured influence on conditions, while the number of open positions in one's area of expertise is limited, encourages the trend of exploitation to go unchecked. It feels coercive, and there's not even job security throughout an academic career under the current system of single-year contracts that do not automatically renew.

The University has not taken meaningful initiatives to understand workers' voices or incorporate our standpoints as both workers and students into the institutional priorities. In the new UH System Strategic Plan 2023-2029, approved on November 17 2022 by the Board of Regents, one of the four imperatives is to Meet Hawai'i Workforce Needs of Today and Tomorrow. The Goal is to "Eliminate workforce shortages in Hawai'i while preparing students for a future different than the present," with primary metrics being the number of shortages and of number of students learning career skills. Nowhere in this framing is a consideration of the positionality of the thousands of students enrolled at UH who are also employees of UH during that period, nor the health and motivation of these workers even if they find a job, which is a crucial determinant of the very shortages the state is facing as people leave in disgust over employers' humiliating contract conditions. In town hall forums on the strategic plan, I raised this issue of excluding university laborers from the workforce of the state, including the urgent need for collective bargaining rights to help the university community as a whole meet all its constituents labor goals holistically. Disappointingly, as I see the exclusion of this consideration from the plan's structure and President Lassner's empty promises, it is crystal clear that UH administration is not going to seriously consider contract negotiations until this legislature passes this bill I testify on now. There won't be any meaningful workplace reform or pathways of discussion over issues until we establish them with everyone at the table.

I routinely feel obligated to warn enthusiastic professionals, potential arrivals to the UH system, that they can easily be placed at high risk of being exploited with no recourse to protect their health other than leaving the UH system itself. And they already know that, because so many other universities are more attractive to work at with established non-faculty unions giving people living wages and senses of safety in work environments. The conspicuous lack of a union, not just for graduate assistant workers but also for lecturers and undergraduate students, is causing a brain drain of people currently enrolled as living costs and workplace stresses increase. It particularly blocks out people without financial and social wealth and safety nets, as well as international students from all over the globe as visa conditions further limit what workers can do to survive the slippages between the unilaterally imposed contracts and reality.

As workers for a public employer, all GAs deserve the right to collectively negotiate their contracted working conditions to determine the quality of their lives, their health, and the well-being of their communities in Hawai'i. I urge you to listen to the voices of GA workers struggling with poverty wages, supervisor abuse, and other grievances. Please pass HB2720 to enable workplace negotiations that will find resolutions to these issues, and stop excluding this category of workers from this right.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 7:26:36 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
HELENA ANDRADE	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Helena Andrade, a graduate student GA in the Earth and Planetary Sciences Department at the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, University of Hawai‘i. I stand in strong support of HB 2720’s current amended form, which recognizes the right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain for fair wages. This bill directly addresses the financial challenges we face, ensuring our contributions to academic and research excellence are fairly compensated.

Fair wages for graduate assistants are not just a matter of equity but a crucial investment in the quality of education and research. By supporting HB 2720, you are affirming the value of our work and the importance of our well-being, which in turn, enhances the university's mission and societal advancement. I urge you to consider the positive, long-term impacts of this bill on the academic community and beyond.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 7:34:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alia Jeraj	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Alia Jeraj, and I'm a graduate assistant at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in Asian Studies. I am writing in support of HB 2720 in its current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate student workers to collectively bargain.

When students apply for graduate programs, a big factor we consider is the financial aspect—will we be able to live and feed ourselves while focusing on our research and work at our university? With our current conditions, I cannot answer “yes” to prospective grad students. Many students increasingly select programs where the graduate students have a union. That excludes Hawai'i. For 52 years, the State has denied graduate students at UH Mānoa a union, and in doing so, has inadvertently driven brilliant students away from our programs.

I am a second-year MA student, set to graduate this May. When we win our union, I will no longer be a student at UH Mānoa—I will not directly benefit from the contracts ALU negotiates. However, the success and well-being of grad students at UH and the health and reputation of the programs is important to me, and should be to everyone here..

Our grad student numbers at UH Mānoa are declining. By supporting graduate student workers in our fight to win our constitutional right to collectively bargain, you actively show your dedication to maintaining the health, longevity, and reputation of our university. In doing so, you support current graduate student workers, alumni of the programs, and the wider community here in Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui for your time,

Alia

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 7:46:20 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hailey Pantaleo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Hailey, a graduate student / GA from SOEST, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain

Chair Kyle Yamashita
Vice Chair Lisa Kitagawa

House Committee on Finance

Wednesday, February 28, 2024
12:00 PM

**TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB2720 HD2 RELATING TO
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

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

My name is Jun Shin. I am a union service worker as well as a labor and social justice activist, testifying as an individual in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **HB2720 HD2**, Relating to Collective Bargaining.

Graduate assistants were some of the best instructors I ever had during my time at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa as an Ethnic Studies and American Studies double major. I had several classes where a graduate assistant was either the primary instructor or taught alongside the professor. As instructors who were working towards completing higher education related to those classes, I really learned a lot and deeply appreciated their passion and dedication. Those same graduate workers were willing to serve as tutors, helping me when I struggled with class or had questions. I also found them to be very understanding and empathetic when I had to deal with life’s curveballs, given that they were also students and/or were closer to us in life experience.

Graduate assistants like my instructors are fundamentally important to the University of Hawai‘i and its community colleges. They are instructors, tutors, researchers, administrative assistants, even unofficial counselors and so much more, forming the backbone of Hawai‘i’s higher education system. Like all workers, they deserve respect on the job and should not be scraping by and struggling to barely survive while working and studying. **Graduate assistants have been putting in the work of building their union for years now and need your support to officially form their own collective bargaining unit as public workers. I support HB2720 as currently amended, because it upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to bargain collectively.**

I also support the establishment of a separate collective bargaining unit, Unit 16 for graduate student workers for these reasons:

1. Graduate student workers cannot be categorized into either just instructional (Unit 7) or just administrative, professional, technical, or scientific (Unit 8 & Unit 13). There are cases of overlap in specifications.
2. In the event that graduate student workers are placed under Unit 7, they would be in the same bargaining unit as their supervisors.
3. Unique among the University of Hawai'i and community college workplaces, the composition of the graduate student workforce will consistently change over time. That requires specific union representation.

A union will allow graduate assistants to have a vehicle to fight for higher wages and better benefits. It will allow graduate assistants to be able to have a protected voice in how their workplace, the University of Hawai'i is being run. It would create an avenue for graduate assistants to address critical issues in the workplace like equal pay, sexual harassment, abuse of authority, and discrimination in its many forms.

Please **PASS** House Bill 2720 HD2 out of your committee and allow for graduate student workers to enter into workplace negotiations in equal footing with their employers.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Jun Shin,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 8:24:05 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shree Deshpande	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Shree Deshpande. I am PhD student and graduate teaching assistant in the department of Political Science and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 9:02:20 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joan Pan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 9:33:52 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Krisna Suryanata	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support the University of Hawaii's graduate students' rights to establish their own collective bargaining unit. They are instrumental for ensuring the university can carry out its mission in teaching and research.

I strongly support HB2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 9:40:40 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victoria Assad	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Victoria Assad, a graduate student TA from the Department of Oceanography, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 9:54:35 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tatsuki Kohatsu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Tatsuki Kohatsu, a graduate student from the Department of Geography and Environment, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 10:03:06 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannon Pomaikaʻi Hennessey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou, my name is Shannon Pōmaikaʻi Hennessey, and I am a Kanaka Maoli, first-year PhD student at UH Mānoa born and raised in Niu Valley, Oʻahu, represented by Rep. Mark J. Hashem in the House, and Rep. Stanley Chang in the Senate. Alongside studying and working in the Political Science department, I also serve as the Grievances Committee co-chair for the Academic Labor United. I am writing in strong support of HB 2720’s current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

Last September, less than a month into my new graduate program, I was quickly recruited as an Organizing Co-Chair of the College of Social Sciences. In the midst of so much of what has put ALU in a stronger position than ever before—an upcoming union affiliation vote and awaiting HLRB rulings and legislative hearings—any new ALU member might feel overwhelmed. For me, the overwhelm was present, but it was always supplanted by incredible support from other Executive Committee (EC) members, especially more senior members who have been involved in this present iteration of this struggle for nearly a decade. These fellow EC members, as well as rank-and-file members, clarified our efforts as a union, articulated my role, and empowered me to organize our college—particularly new members—to sign union cards, vote for our affiliation, and show up to events and actions like these. It is because of them that over 700 graduate students, 50% of total grad students, are active in ALU.

It is because of us, and our painstaking commitment to both our union and to caring for each other well, that we have created a space that not only recruits new members and officers like myself, but produces a sustainable legacy. After a semester as Organizing Co-Chair, I am now taking on the role of the Grievances Committee co-chair, under the great mentorship of the present co-chair, as she plans to graduate soon. As graduate students, we eventually do graduate and move on from ALU—meaning our situation is distinct from other bargaining units. The inherently transitory nature of a graduate worker union, then, requires the vigilance in sustaining our organization that we have already demonstrated, and also affords us fresh vitality and energy that I have personally experienced in the past semester.

This bill in its current ammended form opens a pathway for graduate student workers like me to address our concerns regarding livable and fair wages, access to healthcare, and ability to address grievances by creating a bargaining unit for us, so we can finally directly bargain with our employers, the State of Hawaiʻi and the Board of Regents, to improve our living and working conditions. On January 4, 2024, the Hawaiʻi Labor Relations Board classified us as public employees, with the right to collectively bargain. We believe that the best path forward is for us

graduate student workers to take ownership of our contract negotiations. More importantly, according to the state constitution, we deserve the opportunity to exclusively bargain for our rights.

The graduate student workers of ALU are ready to unionize, we have been ready to unionize. We implore you to support us in this effort to make it so—not just for us, but for all future graduate student workers of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your time.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 10:30:10 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emma Stierhoff	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and members of the committee,

My name is Emma Stierhoff, and I am a former Graduate Assistant and Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science Master's student at the University of Hawai'i in Hilo. I am writing to urge you to support HB2720 in its current ammended form to secure the right for all Graduate Assistants in the UH system to collectively bargain.

Graduate Assistants provide research, administrative, and teaching labor that is integral to the functioning of UH. Personally, I carried many responsibilities from teaching undergraduates to IT work to managing the department website to running workshops for grades K-12. Despite the crucial role we play in the UH system, for many years, Graduate Assistants were denied the ability to exercise their right to collectively bargain over the terms of their contracts as part of a union. As workers for a public employer, all GAs deserve the right to collectively negotiate their contracted working conditions to prioritize their quality of life and health. Please pass HB2720 to uphold the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify,

Emma Stierhoff

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 11:00:37 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Hyman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Hannah Hyman and I am a Graduate Assistant in the Political Science department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. Graduate Assistants work incredibly hard for very low pay and often struggle to make ends meet; despite our work, many of us require assistance from the state or from food pantries to make sure that we have enough to eat. These financial difficulties are even more severe for international students or students with families. Allowing us to collectively bargain as a union would empower us to negotiate for better conditions, which would in turn improve our quality of living. I support HB 2720 and urge you to as well.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 11:05:53 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
teri skillman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Finance Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Teri Skillman and I am submitting testimony as an individual. I **support HB 2720's** current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate student workers to collectively bargain.

I was a graduate assistant for both my MA and my PhD degrees at UH Manoa. I do work at UHM now and as an administrative person (APT) in Bargaining Unit 8, I supervise 5 GAs and our director is a tenured faculty in BU7. There needs to be 3 different bargaining units to avoid conflicts of interest since our roles and responsibilities differ.

Please pass HB 2720 to ensure that graduate students have their constitutional right to collective bargaining.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Teri Skillman

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 11:38:11 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Miles Drazkowski	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

I'm Miles Drazkowski, a TA from Civil, Environmental, and Construction Engineering, and I support HB 2720's current amended form as one that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

I count myself fortunate to stand with my peers as a graduate student worker. As such, there are a multitude of reasons why I think this bill deserves your support and attention.

As part of my testimony, I want to lend my voice to a group that is particularly vulnerable to the kinds of issues my peers have mentioned, international students, and particularly international students with families and children.

My college, by a large measure, is composed of international students. These are workers that have largely left their families and their countries behind, just for the opportunity provided by a graduate degree.

Their sacrifice and dedication make them particularly susceptible to workplace abuse. As we sit here, deciding whether or not workers deserve their rights, these workers are working under conditions that anyone can see are intolerable.

In my short time here, every single one of the international students in my cohort has voiced to me multiple situations in which the demands of the work far exceeded the job description. And yet, they have all voiced to me concern that reporting these situations would put their job, and by extension their VISAs and their futures, in jeopardy.

A bargaining unit and by extension, a union, would provide a safe forum to report workplace abuse and protect those most vulnerable.

Whether it is simply that as public employees it is our right to collectively bargain, or whether it is the fact that our contributions are invaluable to not only the university, but academia, the intellectual future of our given fields, and our wider communities, or whether it is the direct effects that we will have on the lives of our students and colleagues, not to mention the lives of everyone that calls these islands home; we deserve better. We deserve our rights.

We have been asked, why make the choice to be a graduate student worker?

In my field of engineering, employment that would simultaneously offer me the flexibility and financial resources that could allow me to pursue a graduate degree, doesn't exist. Hence, I've sought employment as a Teaching Assistant.

In Fall 2023, out of the 1,536 graduate student workers, 579 were Teaching Assistants. If TAs average 20 students, that means around 11,600 undergraduates have been directly affected by our labor. The UH Manoa undergraduate population is approximately 14,500, that's almost 80% of the undergraduate population attending TA led classes. And that is only considering one class. In most cases, undergrads take multiple classes that are taught by TAs.

The students that we teach, the students that I teach, will wind up as the engineers in your Department of Transportation, your Board of Water Supply, your Clean Water Branch.

The benefits that [students and society reap](#) are, in large part, due to our labor. And yet, the compensation and working conditions offered to TAs has led to hiring shortages for example those in the Physics Department and School of Life Sciences. As a result, sections of required classes are canceled, student progress delayed.

And even still, I'm more privileged than most. I'm able to take on overload positions to augment my income despite which remains crucially and distressingly below a Honolulu living wage (MIT's published [living wage for Hawai'i](#) is currently at \$47,000)

I think that I have a pretty good imagination and yet, even I, can't imagine any valid argument that would preclude graduate workers from forming our own collective bargaining unit.

It is the moral imperative of any equitable society that workers be able to form a union and bargain for their collective welfare.

Any doubt of our ability to organize and to handle the challenge of unionization is unfounded as we have demonstrated time and time again our willingness and ability to organize. After all, we may be students but we are also working professionals. We make meaningful contributions to our respective fields and even prior to attending our graduate course of study, the majority of us have spent years employed in our fields.

Being able to collectively bargain in our own unit, will allow graduate workers to improve our living and working conditions. Inevitably, this will result in hiring from a more diverse and typically underrepresented background, bringing not only monetary value but intellectual and cultural contributions to the university and Hawai'i as a whole.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 12:49:51 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaiqing Su	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kaiqing Su. I am a Graduate Assistant at the Political Science Department at UH Mānoa, and a first-year student studying the politics of infrastructure in the Pacific. I am also an international student coming from Guangzhou, China. And I feel extremely grateful for the opportunity to pursue my passion and study in Hawai'i. I support revising HB 2720's current amended form to one that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. As an international student worker, I am disadvantaged in the workplace due to my citizenship and visa status. Joining a legally recognized union is one of the few rights we have to protect ourselves. Delaying our right to collectively bargain makes our conditions in the U.S. even more unsustainable.

International workers like me often face unique challenges. In my first year at UH as an MA student, I had the opportunity to get a GAship outside of my department in Political Science. Because of the limited venue of income (i.e. this part-time GAship is the only job we can take, and any other jobs will be illegal under our student visa status), I especially cherish this GAship. Since this was my first GAship, I didn't know what to expect, how to negotiate, and how to keep my boundaries. My eagerness to do my job well and the fear of losing it also made me vulnerable when my supervisor made requests such as working after hours, even after midnight. Sometimes I was handed tasks that I was capable of doing but weren't listed in the job descriptions, such as TAing a class that was outside of the College of Social Sciences (i.e. outside my own expertise). I lost control of my time and got extremely anxious whenever a task was assigned to me. I wasn't able to do well in my school work and was always near the edge of an emotional breakdown. I couldn't address this directly to my supervisor because I sincerely respect them and support their work as a student, but I didn't know how to confront them as an employee. It wasn't until my friend who was also an international GA noticed how unwell I was doing that I realized I shouldn't be taking all the blame, and I have the right to say no to unreasonable asks. I realized how important it is to have a community of workers together, to share our stories, to heal, to support each other, and to see the blind spots that are unacknowledged because we were immersed in unhealthy relationships and feeling utterly alone. I also wish I had learned how to negotiate my job expectations and communicate my needs instead of relying on the mercy of individual Supervisors.

In 2023, when I was deciding between two PhD programs--one at the University of Minnesota, the other here, at UH Mānoa--I almost chose the former, because the University of Minnesota has a guaranteed funding of 5 years (instead of having to apply for GAship and be scared of job instability every year), and their graduate students were just freshly unionized. But I decided to stay. Not only because I appreciate intellectual discussion, the educational environment, community in Hawai'i, but because I am committed to building a union for fellow UH GAs, and in the future, hopefully, lecturers and post-docs. All of us made the economically unwise decision to be here because we are passionate. After all, we want to foster something beautiful together. We are not alone, and we are determined to get our union together. Please make our decisions worth it.

In the past few months actively participating in Academic Labor United as part of the Executive Committee, I felt both challenged by the vision of unionization and nourished by my fellow workers who are fighting together. More international friends have been reaching out and sharing their stories of struggle. It was painful to watch how some of them have been under unbelievable levels of abuse and hostile, if not life-threatening working conditions, yet chose to remain silent because confronting their supervisors directly could mean the end of the world. While we have been trying our best to support each other and our concerns, I wish we could take up these systematic abuses at UH as a union in a more effective way. We all believe that only by having a union and our own bargaining unit that our studies can really excel and our potential to contribute to the university can be maximized. We greatly appreciate the opportunity for this hearing, and we urge you to give GAs an opportunity to collectively build a better future. Mahalo nui loa.

Respectfully,

Kaiqing Su

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 1:08:55 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexander Prosi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Alex Prosi and I am a PhD student and graduate work in the American Studies department. I wish to announce my strong support for HB 2720 in its current amended form, upholding the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. I would like to thank you for the extensive time you have given our critical, urgent bill. Our own bargaining unit is critical for us to begin addressing harms affecting graduate students and our community every day.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 7:40:46 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley Clark	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a graduate student and research assistant to my advisor; I support HB 2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 7:53:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannon Chambers	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Shannon Chambers, a graduate student from the UHM Department of Geography and Environment, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 7:56:23 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
YINGUANG ZHAO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this testimony to express my decision not to enroll in UH due to significant concerns regarding the absence of a union organization and inadequate funding.

I was admitted to the political science PhD program at UH Manoa for Fall 2023, but due to the lack of a union organization for graduate student workers, the University could not offer competitive nor secure continuous funding. As a result, I decided not to take the offer from UH Manoa. An environment that values both academic excellence and the welfare of its faculty and students is the key to success in higher education. A union provides an essential mechanism for ensuring fair wages, reasonable working conditions, and a voice in decision-making processes. Without such representation, graduate student workers will not receive sustainable compensation.

I support this bill, HB2720, because I think it will be the first step to address these concerns of mine and prioritize the well-being of its faculty, staff, and students in the future.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 8:09:54 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Yoko Uyehara	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 8:51:41 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nanea Lo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello,

My name is Nanea Lo. I'm born and raised in the Hawaiian Kingdom. I live in Mō'ili'ili. I'm writing in SUPPORT of HB2720 HD2.

me ke aloha 'āina,
Nanea Lo, Mō'ili'ili, O'ahu

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 9:16:06 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Foley Pfalzgraf	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Chair Yamashita and Vice Chair Kitagawa, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Foley Pfalzgraf and I am represented by Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi and Sen. Stanley Chung. I am a Faculty Specialist at the University of Hawai'i where I help to manage and implement a \$2 million federal grant focused on expanding educational resources and opportunities for learning about the Pacific Islands and Pacific languages. I find this work to be deeply fulfilling as well as high-impact. During my graduate studies at the same institution I was a graduate assistant for two years. While I held that role, I had previously earned two master's degrees and was approaching ABD status for my doctoral degree. I was responsible for outreach and recruitment for students interested in AmeriCorps opportunities. While I served as a graduate student worker, I was unable to afford the high living costs of Honolulu and consistently worked several jobs to make ends meet or to obtain health insurance, which was not included in my particular role. Despite having at least 4 years of prior work experience, my annual salary was around \$20,000. At times it felt like drowning. I was pursuing higher education to obtain a well paying job and stable post graduate career, and yet every month my savings dwindled and my loan balances increased. Despite the stress, I cannot overstate how grateful I am for the opportunity to pursue a doctoral degree, I have learned perhaps greater than a lifetime's worth of knowledge and found joy in the texts I studied, the students I taught, and even the grants I wrote for the university. To be a student or a teacher can be a joy, if one can afford to buy lunch. Please take this testimony as my ardent support for graduate student collective bargaining as described in HB 2720's current amended form.

Mahalo,

Foley Pfalzgraf

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 9:30:08 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mahinaokalani Robbins	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Mahinaokalani Robbins, a graduate student/research assistant from the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

My name is Matt Miller. I am a graduate assistant and PhD student at the University of Hawai‘i and live in Mō‘ili‘ili. I support HB2720 to secure the right for all Graduate Assistants in the UH system to collectively bargain.

As an MS student, I’m specializing in research on the impacts of climate change on Kona Lows. If you remember December of 2021, a little over two years ago, then you might recall the huge amounts of rain and subsequent flooding across all of the islands. Hanalei flooded, Kaupō flooded, Waikīkī and Pearl City flooded, and the storm caused millions of dollars in damages in total. Kona Lows are a very real severe weather threat for the islands, with the potential to cause huge amounts of damage and displace communities, and we still don’t know if they will be stronger or happen more frequently in the future! Our research has the potential to save lives and millions of dollars.

I love my Kona Low research, and I love even more that my skills and my work are focused on helping my community. I love what I do, but I’m scared for my capacity to be able to continue. My fellow grad students, my coworkers and colleagues and friends, we all make at least \$11,000 under the Honolulu county livable wage with some of my friends making \$25,000 under the livable wage. It is scary and disheartening to know that one rent hike, one period of higher food costs, or one visit to the emergency room would be the end of my friend’s and my personal and scientific dreams. If we cannot support ourselves, all the work we do in severe weather, disaster management, and future climate prediction will disappear. We want to help prepare my community for the future, and we cannot do that if we cannot survive. You cannot study a hurricane while living in a hurricane.

Personally, as a 1st year PhD student in the atmospheric science department, I’ve seen the dedication and love that is being poured from all sides into ALU. I’ve been the SOEST Organizing Chair and a member of the Gender Equity committee since Fall 2023, and, while the excitement and recruiting events originally got me in the door, it has been the deep commitment to community and a better life for graduate workers that has kept me working hard. ALU is an organization that is care-centered, dedicated to fostering strong relationships with both people and the land, and has every chance to make UH a better place of learning and living. As a meteorologist, I know that you take every piece of information, every method and model and observation, into consideration to protect your community through your predictions. We have our methods in our organization structure, we have our models in NEA and HSTA, and we will weather the storm to see the sun on the other side.

Thank you for your support.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 9:44:47 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jade Comellas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Jade Comellas, a graduate student GA from the Department of Earth Sciences, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. Grad students are an extremely important part of a university's growth and contribute strongly to science, teaching and outreach. Grad students are often expected to work ridiculous hours (on weekends and after 5) yet are payed very little (often wages that are impossible to buy groceries and pay rent with). We should be given living wages and a good quality of life for all the hard work and possitivity we bring into our communities and University!

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:01:15 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Luis Dasilveira	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Luis Dasilveira, a graduate student and receiving graduate assistant ship through my teach assistant from Earth planetary Science and I support the **HB2720** current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collect bargain.

Sincerely,

Luis Dasilveira

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:08:41 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Monica Orillo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a graduate student at UH Manoa and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:20:36 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emily West	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Emily West, and I am an assistant professor at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. I am writing to express my strong support for HB2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. As a professor, I know how essential graduate students are to my students' education and to the university mission as a whole. Though graduate students do crucial work every day, they are not compensated appropriately, and many of the students I work with struggle to survive on poverty wages. Graduate students deserve a livable wage, and they deserve the right to organize their workplace so that they can negotiate with their employer to improve these exploitative working conditions. Thank you for considering this important bill.

Sincerely,

Emily West

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:38:38 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jack McKee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jack McKee, I'm a research assistant at the mathematics department at the University of Hawai'i writing in support of HB2720.

I live on Dole street, less than a block from the university. Like many of my peers, I live in substandard housing that is not up to building codes, with roommates. Before my girlfriend moved in, even my small hotbox of a room was eating up almost half of my monthly pay. Many of us are on food stamps. I manage food costs by making big pots of stew for the week.

Especially when adjusted for cost of living, UH has some of the worst pay for graduate assistants in the country, and there is almost no uniformity in the amount of work -- usually grading, teaching, programming, and other tasks unrelated to our studies -- that different assistants do. We are supposed to all do 20 hours per week but many people put in nights and weekends to get their work done. This is work that brings grant money and high reputation to the university and benefits the people of Hawai'i at large through education. I, for instance, have done much of the programming work on PISALE for the past few years, a project that has attracted thousands of dollars in grant funding. This is all on top of being a PhD student, which is practically a full-time job in itself and is extremely stressful.

I came to grad school because I want to do something with my life. I want to contribute somehow to society as a scientist and as an educator. I moved here with the intent of staying and using my expertise locally. When we are paid like this, and can't meaningfully negotiate with the university to change it, we are basically being told that this dream is not valuable. I support this bill because it would give us a chance to change that.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:43:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marceline Kanaiaupuni-Naff	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB2720 in its current form.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:44:25 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nate Hix	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Workers who also attend school deserve the same rights as those workers who are not attending school. Please treat graduate student workers with the same level of respect that you show other employees. Please pass HB2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:58:20 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jon Gabriel Ehrenberg	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Jon, a graduate student / GA / TA from the graduate division, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:59:30 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Manshel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Hannah Manshel and I am a faculty member in the Department of English at UH Manoa. I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate student workers to collectively bargain. Graduate workers are indispensable to the functioning of the university, and they deserve to be treated as such. I also will note that graduate workers should have their own collective bargaining unit, rather than be combined in a unit with faculty. Graduate workers have different workloads, expectations, and needs. I firmly support HB 2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:01:29 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karen Lee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:04:59 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carissa Chew	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Carissa Chew, I am a third year PhD student in the History Department at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, where I am currently employed as a Graduate Assistant. Living in Manoa Valley, my House Representative is Andrew Takuya Garrett and my Senate Representative is Carol Fukunaga. I am writing to declare my support for HB2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate students to collectively bargain.

As an international student on an F-1 visa, I have been a graduate worker at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa for three consecutive years now. Taking up a graduate assistantship is the only way I've been able to legally support myself through my PhD whilst meeting my visa requirements. I teach three sections of 20 students per semester (60 students) for World History classes, and my responsibilities include preparing and leading lab sessions, grading coursework and exams, and holding office hours. I am paid for 20 hours of work a week, but often work beyond these hours during mid-term and finals weeks. On my current contract, I'm ineligible for any type of overtime pay, yet I earn below the living wage in Hawai'i for a single person. This makes it very difficult to afford rent, food, and medical expenses despite spending most of my time studying and working. My PhD research explores mixed-race identity in colonial East Africa in the period 1940-1980, making an essential contribution to mixed-race studies in a transnational and decolonial context whilst bringing African history into perspective within Hawai'i's academic circles.

I therefore urge you to pass HB2720 and allow UH graduate workers to take ownership of their contract negotiations and bargain directly with the State of Hawai'i and the Board of Regents to improve their working and living conditions. We deserve the same rights as other graduate student unions in the US continent. UH could not function without Graduate Assistants!

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:08:02 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

Mahalo nui for Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and all the legislators for hearing HB2720. My name is Cardenas Pintor. I am testifying in support of this bill. As students in the School of Social Work at UH Mānoa, we are taught we are the agents of change. One of the ways we cultivate change is through advocacy. Today, I am here to advocate for my fellow students and myself. Some of these graduate assistants are my instructors or teacher aides. While they perform research for work, attend classes, and grade papers, they often find themselves worrying about rent, food, medical, and more. Of the three (internships, practicums, and graduate assistant), being a graduate assistant includes monetary compensation while the student gains practical experience in their field. Unfortunately, due to the meager wage, many students find themselves still having to pay at least \$7,800 for one semester as a resident, full-time student, or more if they are a non-resident or here on a student visa. The Hawai'i Labor Board unanimously agreed UH graduate assistants are public employees, indicating they are essential to our public workforce. This is important to note as we look at the precarious staffing shortages in many of our state agencies and departments. Adding graduate assistants to the collective bargaining unit helps students advocate for better working conditions, a livable wage, and a grievance procedure to improve performance between graduate assistants and their students and can retain job positions. With that said, I want to provide my support for HB2720 and humbly ask for you all to consider supporting this bill as well.

Mahalo nui again for hearing this bill, Cardenas Pintor

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:08:45 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Clemens Mayer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Clemens Mayer, a PhD Candidate from the department of Linguistics at UH Mānoa, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:13:51 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lehua	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Lehua Matsumoto, I am a graduate student worker in the Department of American Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

I am a second year graduate student, and I have led undergraduate discussion sections for two different classes, coming up with entertaining ways for students to engage with the material and ensuring that they are learning something from our coursework. In the last year, I have worked with our department as an Editorial Assistant for American Quarterly, ensuring that our department maintains its exemplary status within the field of American Studies.

I support HB 2720's current amended form because I know that the stress of graduate school should not be compounded by the stress of unforgiving labor practices and expectations, including an overwhelming workload, insufficient pay, and employment uncertainty, and collective bargaining is a powerful method of ensuring that will not happen. This bill will allow grad students like myself to address these concerns and communicate directly with our employers, the State of Hawaii and the Board of Regents, to improve our living and working conditions.

I hope the legislature grants us this opportunity to bargain our rights, similar to how other graduate student organizations on the continent have been doing so for the past 50 years.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:15:21 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Monisha Das Gupta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Members of the House Finance Committee,

I strongly support the right of graduate students at the University of Hawai‘i to collective bargaining. Indeed, the Hawai‘i Labor Relations Board determined in January 2024 that graduate assistants are public employees. As a faculty member at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, I can vouch that graduate students are workers who are responsible for teaching our students and supporting them, running labs, and contributing to faculty research. Without them, the faculty, and by extension, the university, will be unable to conduct the many tasks crucial to our work. Most importantly, their labor is vital for the extra-mural funding faculty attracts to UHM for research. The Board of Regents has set a multi-step salary schedule for graduate assistants on the basis that the assistantships are .50 full-time equivalent positions.

The ability of graduate assistants to collectively bargain with their employer, the University of Hawai‘i, to improve the conditions under which they work and negotiate benefits is a win for the university as a whole. Our capacity to grow and teach the number of students at UH and our capacity to conduct funded research -- all central to the financial health of the university -- depend on labor rights protections for graduate assistants, represented by Academic Labor United. Graduate students at many universities across the United States have the right to bargain collectively. It is time for Hawai‘i to catch up.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:15:46 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ken Reyes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Ken Reyes, a PhD candidate in Political Science at UH. I live in Makiki, which is represented by Sen. Carol Fukunaga and Rep. Della Au Bellati. I'm writing in full support of HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

I intend on getting a graduate assistantship in the fall and I am worried that the pay will not be enough to provide for myself and my family that I support. During these last several semesters, I witnessed my colleagues working tirelessly while still producing excellent scholarship for coursework, conferences, and other academic endeavors. But sometimes, this comes at the expense of their health — many are overworked by their supervisors, are supplementing their inadequate university income by working other jobs, and are skipping meals and struggling to make ends meet.

As an R1 university, UH relies on the labor of GAs to acquire new grants, produce groundbreaking research, and practice innovative teaching — this labor is simply essential to keeping our university's standing among institutions that rank highly in research and scholarship. The university thrives because of graduate workers' commitment and dedication to our good work. But how can we thrive in this work and our lives if we are hungry, tired, sick, and overwhelmed? The university's pursuit of excellence depends on our well-being and safety as graduate student workers. Without our labor, the university would fall apart.

However, negotiating with UH is not possible without the right to collectively bargain as a union. This would allow us to raise our concerns, advocate for each other, and continue to thrive as equal and essential members of this university and community. We are more than committed to organizing as fellow workers. Though I am not yet a GA, I will not wait until later to organize with my colleagues — I support them now because their future is also my future. Ours is a shared tomorrow, one that I hope leads to our collective joy and flourishing. To deny us is to go against the millions of laborers around the country who advocate with us for proper wages and safer workplace conditions while standing against the exploitation of our hard work.

Mahalo nui for allowing us to be heard. We hope that you will support this bill and allow us to fully unionize. It's good for us and our families, it's good for the university, and it's good for the community.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:17:38 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Reece Jones	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 2720. I am a professor and the chair of the Department of Geography and Environment at UH-Manoa, but I am writing in my personal capacity. I support the right of graduate students to organize as a union.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:22:32 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ming Li Yong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am Ming Li Yong, a Research Fellow at the East-West Center. I am writing in support of HB2720's amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

I work closely with and play a mentoring role to University of Hawai'i's graduate students. Graduate student workers play a critical role in keeping various academic operations and events on campus running and organized. In a summer field school program in Southeast Asia that I ran with the Department of Geography and Environment, our graduate student worker played a leading role in designing curriculum, logistical arrangements, and providing on-the-ground support for the program.

As an educator and former graduate student myself, I know that universities can only be successful because of the labor put in by graduate student workers who play a key role in teaching and grading for university courses. Having worked closely with UH graduate student workers, especially those who part of our center's education program, I have heard first-hand about the struggles they face in securing funding to support the entire course of their graduate programs, and their struggles in coping with the high costs of living in Honolulu. The circumstances for international graduate students are even more precarious as funding options are limited, and their working hours are also limited by their visa conditions. When faced with a raise in housing rates, many students fell into food insecurity and had to be provided with additional food donations.

I strongly believe that student workers should be able to collectively and directly bargain with their employers, the State of Hawai'i and the Board of Regents to improve their working conditions and to take ownership of their contract negotiations. I hope that the legislature will grant them the opportunity to bargain for their rights, which their counterparts in the mainland have been doing for decades. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ming Li Yong, Ph.D.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:24:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Donavan Kamakani Albano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice-Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on HB 2720: Relating to Collective Bargaining. My name is Donavan Kamakanimaikalani Albano, I am the co-chair of the Gender Justice Committee of Academic Labor United, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Political Science, and a Graduate Research Assistant at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

As a māhū Kanaka ʻŌiwi, a Native child birthed from the lands and waters upon which you make decisions about and upon, I am writing to express my **strong support** of HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. The ability to collectively bargain, as we are recognized as public employees, is a process that we have been affirmed our right to. I am thinking deeply about my fellow queer, trans, māhū, LGBTQIA2S+, and MVPFAFF+ relatives who may not only be navigating financial insecurity due to low wages and high cost of living, but also who may be experiencing workplace violence, such as queerphobia, homophobia, and transphobia. There needs to be opportunities for us to engage processes that keep us safe and to support is in our work, so that we may be able to pursue our graduate education without insecurities and concerns; we should be supported in gaining access to gender-affirming care, proper and low-costing healthcare, housing, and more. These are things we can have critical conversations about in our collective bargaining unit, especially if we are able to have our own unit.

This bill opens a pathway for graduate student workers like myself to address these concerns by creating a bargaining unit for us, so we can finally directly bargain with our employers, the State of Hawai'i and the Board of Regents, to improve our living and working conditions. On January 4, 2024, the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board classified us as public employees, with the right to collectively bargain. We believe that the best path forward is for us graduate student workers to take ownership of our contract negotiations. We hope the legislature grants us this opportunity to bargain for our rights, similar to how our counterparts in the continent have been doing so for the past 50 years. If you care deeply about Kānaka ʻŌiwi communities, whose Native lands you make decisions about and upon, then supporting this bill is critical. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:26:05 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kekuhi Kanahele	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Kekuhi Kanahele, a graduate research assistant from the Native Hawaiian Place of Learning Office at Mānoa, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:27:36 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bronson Azama	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

From the perspective of the President of ASUH Mānoa, which represents over 12,000 undergraduate students, and in respect to the support Graduate students provide to us, and the various needs of the University, I write in support of HB2720. I will stand on the testimony of ALU. And remain a committed supporter.

I continue to be concerned that administration should have simply agreed to having a Union and it should not have had to taken these legislative steps. With Graduate Assistants now being classified as Public Employees, this is an issue on their right to unionize, a right I hope our elected representatives can support.

Mahalo for taking the time to read this testimony

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:36:03 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauren Taijeron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Lauren Taijeron and I am a graduate student at UH Mānoa. I am writing this testimony in support of HB 2720 because UH cannot function without graduate assistants! They deserve the right to their own bargaining unit. They deserve the freedom to not worry about rent or their next meal. While I am lucky to receive funding for my education, I see the endless work my friends and colleagues are forced to do. More than half of my undergraduate education was provided through the teachings and labor of graduate students. Please support HB2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:39:08 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Josiah Murphy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha. My name is Josiah Murphy, and I am a doctoral student in UHM's Linguistics Department. I'm writing today to support passage of HB 2720's current amended form, which upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. I would write more; however, I need to run off to my second non-academic job in order to earn money to pay for my rent bill.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:41:10 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrew Meyer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Andrew Meyer, I am a PhD Candidate in Physics at UH Manoa. I'm writing in support of HB 2720 in its current form to give graduate student workers of the UH System a collective bargaining unit.

Graduate students have struggled for decades with being paid at a level far too low to be able to afford living in Hawai'i while having little to no recourse for dealing with poor and abusive working conditions. With HLRB recognizing us as public employees, we now need to be granted our own collective bargaining unit so that we may redress these concerns, as our graduate counterparts on the mainland have been doing for around 50 years.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:42:31 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Josiah Rodriguez	Academic Labor United	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Keoni Rodriguez and I'm a GA employed by the Colkege of Social Work at UH Mānoa and I support the amended version of HB2720 that ensures our right to collectively bargain. You have seen us before and you will see us again -- for years, we have demonstrated the work we do to uphold the promise of a quality, public higher education here in Hawai'i. Until our constitutional rights are guaranteed by this body, we will continue to fight, if not for us, for the workers yet to come.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:44:04 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noah Perales-Estoesta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Noah, a Research Associate employed at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and 2015 graduate of the same institution, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:47:26 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan McElligott	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support of HB 2720. As a graduate worker myself, I know how important it is that we have our own collective bargaining unit. The University of Hawaii would not be able to function without it's graduate workers, yet we are undervalued with our time and compensation.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:52:04 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lilly Fisher	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa and Finance Committee members,

My name is Lilly Fisher, I am a PhD candidate and graduate assistant in the American Studies Department at UH Manoa.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **strong support of HB2720** in its current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

Grad student labor is essential to the operation of the University of Hawaii; the school could not run without it. Collective Bargaining will allow graduate students to harness the power of our vital labor to address ongoing, structural inequities in grad student salaries, treatment, and security.

For years, Graduate Assistants have been denied the ability to exercise their right to collectively bargain over the terms of their contracts as part of a union. During the time I've been at UH I've taken on multiple other forms of part-time employment to make ends meet, as over 60% of my income goes to pay my rent, and I consider myself lucky to be able to do this, since I do not have child care obligations and am not barred from seeking other employment because of a visa.

Given the demands of our jobs, in addition to the expectations of schoolwork, it's a huge burden to have to seek additional employment to supplement the income provided by the school, let alone to work another job, to try to meet the Honolulu County living wage for a single person, calculated by MIT, of \$55,961 per year before taxes (which is around \$30,000 more a year than most GAs make). I know classmates with children who are doubly stressed at the prospect of keeping up with multiple jobs in additional parenting to try to meet the needs of their family, as well as others who have had to take time off and/or abandon plans for their degree because the financial burden is too great. The loss of these scholars and their unique perspectives is a huge disservice to these graduate student workers, as well as to the students they teach, the university, and their fields at large.

GAs deserve to negotiate with the administration as a collective, and we have proven we are capable of doing so. For years, and without institutional support, ALU has created avenues to serve the unique needs of our diverse membership. We are a truly grassroots organization, committed to creating a union built on principles of community care and inclusivity, that can attend to the intersecting needs of every graduate student. I have been working with ALU for over two years, and have listened to numerous stories of compounding academic, economic, and

interpersonal stresses that make life as a graduate assistant unsustainable. I have also seen ALU emerge as a space and resource in which we can seek sustenance from our community. I am inspired every day by the brilliant and tenacious workers that compose our membership. In spite of numerous roadblocks and our own heavy work-loads; our numbers continue to grow. We have only become more organized, better resourced, and more committed to one another and to our mission to win a union.

We will continue to work for the rights that we deserve, because we care about keeping each other safe, making higher education accessible to people of all socio-economic backgrounds, and we know a graduate student union will benefit not only the students and workers of UH but workers in Hawai'i more broadly. We are here asking for support and a legal pathway to do what we have already been doing – to care and fight for our community.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:52:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abigail Hawkins	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Abigail Hawkins, I am a graduate student worker, and I support HB2720.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:59:02 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nelum Rakinawasan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a graduate student. I strongly support the bill.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:59:10 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tiffany Beam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Tiffany Beam. I am a PhD student in Political Science and a graduate assistant that had taught 5 undergraduate classes in the department. I live in Makiki and am represented in the House by Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, and Sen. Carol Fukunaga in the Senate. I am writing in support of revising HB 2720’s current amended form to one that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. It is imperative that there be a mitigation of delays in the creation of our own bargaining unit.

Given that we make up a significant portion of the teaching labor force, graduate working conditions directly correspond to the undergraduate student learning conditions at UH. When we are responsible for teaching multiple classes and sessions, without adequate pay and protections, our ability to foster the next generation becomes dubious. The quality of how we teach, facilitate class, hold office hours, grade, offer feedback, and support our students— the conditions of student learning— is at stake when we are exhausted, rushing to other jobs that help us make ends meet, or experiencing threats to our position. And yet, as you have read in several other testimonies, graduate teaching workers are still motivated and excellent at what we do even under our existing conditions. Imagine what we can bring to student learning and the reputation of UH when we have proper, safe, and supportive working conditions. As enrollment of undergraduate students increase, graduate student enrollment and our labor force becomes all the more critical. But grad student enrollment has been decreasing and that is due in large part to a lack of funding, a union, and the ongoing delay of amending this gap.

In 2021, when I was deciding between graduate programs — one at New York University and at UH Mānoa, I nearly chose NYU because its PhD students are funded for 5 years and were recently unionized. I was ultimately drawn to the reputation of UH’s professors, their course offerings, and the student culture of UH Mānoa knowing full well the precariousness I would face. I weighed the pros and cons, and chose UH with the resolve of having to fight for our rights and the well-being of future graduate workers. Not everyone is able or willing to make this choice, even those born and raised in Hawai‘i and want to invest in Hawai‘i’s future.

This past month, I met with a graduate applicant with an ivy league undergraduate background and works in sustainable farming on O‘ahu who applied to graduate programs at UH, NYU, Stanford, and Yale. It was clear her true desire is to stay home, learn from our reputable professors, and invest in Hawai‘i as she pursues a PhD, but is weighed with uncertainty because of our graduate learning and working conditions. A lack of funding and a union is a serious

factor in turning away bright and excellent students. Revising HB 2720's current amended form is crucial. Thank you kindly for your time.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 12:00:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Hong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Rachel Hong and I am a graduate student at UH Manoa writing in support of HB2720. Thank you.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 12:16:51 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenny Brown	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Support for the Establishment of a Collective Bargaining Unit for Graduate Assistants

Aloha,

I am writing to express my strong support for the establishment of a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants (GAs), I believe that recognizing and enabling GAs to engage in collective bargaining is a crucial step towards fostering a fair and equitable working environment for these essential members of our academic community.

As a fellow undergraduate student, graduate assistants play a vital role in the academic and research within UH's institution. Their dedication to teaching, research, and other responsibilities significantly contributes to the overall success of our educational programs. However, it is essential to acknowledge that GAs often face unique challenges, including financial strain, long working hours, and limited access to essential benefits.

Establishing a collective bargaining unit for GAs would empower them to negotiate fair terms and conditions of employment, including issues such as stipends, healthcare benefits, workload expectations, and job security. By providing GAs with a platform to collectively advocate for their rights and interests, we can create a more inclusive and supportive working environment that aligns with the values of fairness and equality.

Furthermore, a collective bargaining unit for GAs can enhance communication and collaboration between administration and graduate assistants. This collaborative approach can lead to more effective problem-solving, improved working conditions, and ultimately contribute to the overall success and reputation of our institution.

I urge to consider the establishment of a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants, recognizing the importance of fair and respectful treatment for all members of our academic community. This step would not only benefit GAs but also contribute to a positive and inclusive working environment that fosters academic excellence.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Jenny Brown

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 1:59:38 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lucie Knor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Lucie Knor and I have been a Graduate Assistant (GA) at the University of Hawai'i with the Department of Oceanography since 2016. During my time at UH I have seen many of my brilliant colleagues struggle through and sometimes even fail at their studies because of the completely unregulated and therefore often abusive and exploitative working conditions they have faced as Graduate Assistants.

Graduate Assistants teach large classes, keep laboratories and complicated machinery running, design curricula, mentor students, manage toxic waste, and more. In my time as a research assistant I have led and participated in ship-based fieldwork to deploy, recover and maintain a total of seven 600lb moorings with 1500lb anchors that measure carbon dioxide in the water and air, contributing crucial data for research on ocean acidification and climate change impacts on coral reefs. This work is by no means part of my studies or training.

On January 4, 2024, the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board classified graduate assistants as public employees, with the constitutional right to collectively bargain. Finally, with this recognition, there is a path forward for graduate assistant unionization. With union representation, my colleagues and I will no longer be unsure of how many hours a week we can be expected to work as a GA. In the beginning of my studies, I was told that "it says 20 hours, but it's really way more", and the expectation is that GAs work well over 40 hours in most cases. This is particularly harmful for international students on F-1 visas like myself, whose immigration status is directly tied to our employment as a GA. In many cases, our supervisors are thus our employers, mentors for our studies, and in control of our immigration status in the United States. This extreme power differential leaves GAs vulnerable to exploitation and harassment, with few options for recourse if we feel our rights have been violated. I have witnessed a colleague of mine get blacklisted from teaching in our department by her thesis supervisor, just because she decided to pursue her degree with a different professor, leaving her scrambling for financial security. I've seen multiple colleagues who have been sexually harassed by their superiors stop coming to campus to avoid running into their harasser, while there were no consequences for the perpetrator. These behaviors are already illegal and classified as transgressions based on current university policy, but the truth is that it is very hard

for GAs to protect ourselves from retaliation if we speak up. Union representation through grievance processes and a contract that explicitly states our responsibilities and rights are the only remedy for this dire situation.

The whole time I've spent at the University of Hawai'i, GAs have organized relentlessly as Academic Labor United to gain recognition as public employees, and to build our own union from the ground up. Despite the fact that ALU currently has no dues, no paid staff or official status, we have already negotiated with UH administration to implement the first sick leave policy for Graduate Assistants, as well as pay raises. During the first few months of COVID-19, we organized a hardship fund for students that was up and running months before the official University fund. Last fall, we organized an affiliation vote amongst our members, who after careful consideration chose to affiliate the largest union in the United States, the National Education Asssociation (NEA). They are now a great ally and resource for us. We already have a constitution, and are working on revisions of that constitution with member participation. I believe that our organization is ready to take on the task of contract bargaining for our membership, and that the rulings by the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board and the Supreme Court have shown that our status as public workers is out of the question. Please stand with us at this historic moment that graduate students have worked for since the 1970s, pass HB 2720 in its current form.

Mahalo,

Lucie Knor

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 2:41:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Smrity Ramavarapu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e,

I am writing in support of the collective bargaining Bill (HB2720). As an international student, studying in the United States, and a first generation college graduate, I depend heavily upon my GAship. Without collective bargaining rights, the university would not be in favor to help us Graduate students.

The GA salary amount barely covers the expenses of living in Hawaii. After getting taxed (about 30-40%) and paying rent, I am unable to afford groceries for the month. Since I am an immigrant, I am not eligible for food stamps or work beyond 20 hrs or work outside the University. I sincerely request to help me understand- how can an individual survive like this?

I wish to return to my country with the learning experience from USA which I currently call home. But I believe that you would understand, an empty stomach can seldom create revolution. I'm finding it more difficult each day to support myself. I am working hard to support the university by providing education to my students to the best of my abilities. I have gone above and beyond for my profession. And I believe, we as Grad students have the right to be compensated for our work.

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 3:04:45 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacy Prellberg	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Chair Rep. Kyle Yamashita and Vice Chair Rep. Lisa Kitagawa of the House Higher Finance Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of HB 2720.

My name is Stacy Prellberg, a PhD candidate in Education Administration. I am a resident of Mō'ili'ili. I am writing in support of HB 2720, a bill that will create a new collective bargaining unit for graduate student workers of the UH and community college system.

I work as a faculty member of the University of Hawai'i Mānoa College of Education and have had the privilege of working with several Graduate Assistants in my time as faculty. These students are our future educators and administrators that eventually work in our public, private, elementary, secondary, and higher education settings. I would hope that every step of their employment, in whichever institution they work in, would have some kind of employment support and advocate voice for them as they work towards a better future for us all. This is why I support HB 2720.

Stacy Prellberg

27 February 2024

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Anna Feuerstein, and I am an English professor at UH-Mānoa, and Director of the English Major, where I have the privilege of working with our graduate students every day, in multiple aspects of my job. As such, I write to *strongly support* HB2720, in its current amended form, which upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. It is reprehensible that our graduate assistants do not yet have the right to collectively bargain, and that the State does not see them as employees. They deserve a union not solely because they work tirelessly for our haumāna that they teach, but because the university literally could not function without them. Given their importance to our university and our haumāna, they deserve the right to be treated as the employees that they are, and to have the right to collectively bargain to assure they can have the working conditions they need to thrive. Plus, didn't the Labor Board just affirm their right to organize?

I did my MA and PhD at Michigan State University, in the Midwest, generally considered a conservative part of America, where I was part of a union as a graduate assistant. I thought this was normal. I was even a student representative at one point, and saw how deeply important a union was to the well-being and protection of graduate assistants, a group of people who are so often exploited by the university system. I am not exaggerating when I say that I was shocked that our graduate assistants here at UH did *not* have the right to unionize, because the State could only see them as students. I think that my surprise and dismay at seeing a lack of union representation for our graduate assistants shows that frankly, UH is *far behind* on this issue. To have new faculty come in and feel dismayed at the treatment of our graduate assistants is a sign that UH is behind the times, and shows a deep lack of concern for its State employees.

I would also like to speak to my experience working with our graduate assistants, who I think of as my colleagues. Every day I pass these colleagues in the hall as they are on their way to teach. I see them talking with their students in the hallway. I talk to them about their haumāna and their classes, hearing what they love about it and what they are struggling with. I have worked with them on constructing their literature courses. I hear from students who have so enjoyed a class with one of our graduate assistants that they have decided to change their major to English. In our department, our graduate assistants teach not only ENG 100 – a course *all haumāna* are required to take, by the way – but they also teach in our ENG 270 series, which are basically 200-level Intro to Lit classes. These courses are a requirement for every English major, and while faculty teach them too, graduate assistants also teach them so they can get experience teaching literature classes in their areas of expertise. These are essential classes for the recruitment of new majors, and I want to reiterate that we have such talented graduate assistants that I personally get haumāna who come to my office as the Director of the Undergraduate Program in English raving about their teacher, and how much of an impact they had on them. But yet, in the eyes of the State, they are not employees? This is reprehensible.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony, and please support this bill to ensure our graduate assistants can collectively organize.

Mahalo nui loa ,
Anna Feuerstein

HB-2720-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/28/2024 10:33:45 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
grant goin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I'm Grant Ka'ehukai Goin, a graduate student GA from the Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science Masters program, and I support HB 2720's current amended form that upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain.

e mālama,

Grant