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HAWAII EMPLOYER-UNION HEALTH BENEFITS TRUST FUND  
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DIRECTOR

SABRINA NASIR  
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**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE**  
*Ka 'Oihana Mālama Mo'ohelu a Kālā*  
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ADMINISTRATIVE AND RESEARCH OFFICE  
BUDGET, PROGRAM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DIVISION  
FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION DIVISION  
OFFICE OF FEDERAL AWARDS MANAGEMENT

**WRITTEN ONLY**

TESTIMONY BY LUIS P. SALAVERIA  
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE  
TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS  
ON  
HOUSE BILL NO. 2720, H.D. 3, S.D. 1

**April 5, 2024**  
**10:20 a.m.**

**Room 211 and Videoconference**

RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The Department of Budget and Finance (B&F) 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 numbers 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

**LATE**

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Friday, April 5, 2024, at 10:20 a.m.

By

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

HB 2720 HD3 SD1 – RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on HB 2720 HD3 SD1, 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.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 7:40:10 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Bronson Kainoa Kiyoshi Azama	Testifying for Office of the President of ASUH Manoa	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

From my perspective as the President of ASUH, the right toward unionization of Graduate Assistants to ensure our University is functioning should be supported by this Committee. University Administration has demonstrated its incompetence with its choice of forcing our hardworking student employees to have to go through the legislative process, rather than bargain with them. The Union could have been formed internally.

I believe all student employees deserve protection. And beginning with our graduate assistants is a step in the right direction.

To not allow protection of student employees is to condone what often feels like a plantation of a University.

Mahalo,

Bronson Azama

111th ASUH President

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 12:28:03 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Michael Golojuch Jr	Testifying for Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

The Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i; Hawai'i's oldest and largest policy and political LGBTQIA+ focused organization fully supports HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1.

We hope you all will support this important piece of legislation.

Mahalo nui loa,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)  
Chair and SCC Representative  
Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 12:29:55 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Pride at Work - Hawaii	Testifying for Pride at Work – Hawai‘i	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

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 SD 1.

We ask that you support this needed piece of legislation.

Mahalo,

Pride at Work – Hawai‘i



## UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

**THE SENATE  
KA 'AHA KENEKOA  
THE THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE  
REGULAR SESSION OF 2024**

**COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**  
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Friday, April 5, 2024, 10:20 AM  
Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

**Re: Testimony on HB2720, HD3, SD1 – RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, 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, HD3, SD1, which establishes a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawaii and 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 horizontal line.

Kalani Werner  
State Director

**HEADQUARTERS**

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Honolulu, Hawaii 96817-1914  
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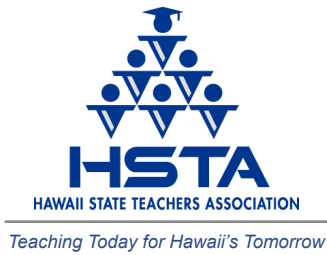
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**Osa Tui, Jr.**  
President

**Logan Okita**  
Vice President

**Lisa Thompson**  
Secretary-Treasurer

**Ann Mahi**  
Executive Director

## TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAII SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Item: **HB2720 HD3 SD1 - Relating to collective bargaining**

Position: **Support**

Hearing: **April 5, 2024, 10:20 a.m., Conference Room 211**

Submitter: **Osa Tui, Jr. – President, Hawai'i State Teachers Association**

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and members of the committee,

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association **supports** HB2720 HD3 SD1 which establishes a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i and community college system.

The HSTA appreciates the updates made in SD1 to use language from SB3317 SD1 which defines what a "graduate assistant" is, definitively declares the creation of Bargaining Unit 16 (BU16), establishes the governor's three votes, the Board of Regents' two votes, and the one vote for the president of the University of Hawai'i for collective bargaining purposes, establishes that part-time employees working less than twenty hours per week for BU16 are entitled to coverage under HRS Chapter 89, and that impasse procedures are in place for BU16.

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.



It is the HSTA's belief that ALU is unique enough to need their own designated BU. 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 BU5 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 BU5 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 BU5.

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, the HD2, and now the SD1 (and its equivalent SB3317) and helped to shepherd 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. ALU has attended and participated in the NEA's Higher Education Conference last month with opportunities to build relationships and share best practices with graduate assistants from across the country and has met with NEA's Vice President, Princess Moss, while she was here in the islands last week.

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



1201 16th St, N.W. | Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: (202) 833-4000

Rebecca S. Pringle  
*President*

Princess R. Moss  
*Vice President*

Noel Candelaria  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

Kim A. Anderson  
*Executive Director*

April 4, 2024

Senate Committees on Ways and Means  
415 South Beretania St  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Honorable Committee Chair Senator Donovan Dela and  
Honorable Committee Vice Chair Senator Sharon Moriwaki

**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 and expertise needed to support the continued development of Academic Labor United as a viable, effective, and sustainable representative of its members.

We support reverting HB 2720 HD 3 to HD 2, which upholds the constitutional right of Graduate Workers to collectively bargain.

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 have hosted four members of Academic Labor United, including Chair Dianne Deauna, Treasurer Victoria Assad, Political Education Chair Kaiqing Su, and the College of Social Sciences Organizing Co-Chair Korey Wetherell at the NEA Higher Education Conference in Atlanta from March 14-17. This opportunity was a valuable professional

and networking experience which we hope will invigorate their members and inspire their leaders as they build their union in the coming months.

**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](mailto:mkamienecki@nea.org) or Valerie Wilk at [ywilk@nea.org](mailto:ywilk@nea.org).

Sincerely,

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

**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.***



# Academic Labor United

## Testimony from Academic Labor United (ALU)

Attention: Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Sharon Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Re: Strong support for HB 2720 HD3 SD1 Relating to Collective Bargaining

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Academic Labor United (ALU) stands in strong support of this bill. HB 2720 HD3 SD1 will amend HRS 89-6 to create bargaining unit 16 for Graduate Assistants and enable them to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed right to collectively bargain as public employees. **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 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 which tangibly uplift 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,



# Academic Labor United

2024, HLRB determined that Graduate Assistants are public employees with the right to collectively bargain. 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 their own bargaining unit. Their 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 CBUs 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 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.

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. 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. 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.”** 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 a minimum of \$22,140 for a 9-month, and starting February 29, 2024 up to \$52,488 for an 11-month contract. The total number of possible annual salaries for a GA is 38 (given that there are 19 possible pay steps for either a 9-month or 11-month contract), and only 4 out of those 38 pay steps meet the ~\$46,000 recommended living wage for a single adult with no dependents for Hawai'i. There are no consistent recommended guidelines upon which these pay scales are administered, and UH administration leaves it up to departments to decide whether they have sufficient funds to cover any salary increases. This creates salary inequity across departments and campuses, an egregious example of which was in Spring 2022, UH Hilo was forced to cut a GA position in order to raise salaries for other GAs. Having a graduate student worker union would provide a legal framework for accountability such that the University would have to ensure equitable outcomes for all workers, regardless of campus whenever it implements any policy.

**Additionally, 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.

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





# Academic Labor United

of April 4th, 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.

**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. **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 years to unionize and as a result have created an appropriate structure to properly represent ourselves. ALU has our own constitution and by-laws. The Executive Committee (EC) of ALU is currently composed of the following: Chair, Vice Chairs (for Organizing), Recording Secretary, Secretary-Treasurer, and Chairs for Communications, Political Education, Undergraduate Organizing, International Students, General Grievance and Gender Equity. 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, ALU 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 15 new Alaka'i in 14 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. Recently, on March 14-17, four members of ALU EC attended NEA (National Education Association)'s Higher Education Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, where their travel expenses were fully funded by the NEA. Korey Wetherell (College of Social Sciences Organizing Co-Chair), Kaiqing Su (Political Education Co-Chair), Victoria Assad (Treasurer) and Dianne Deauna (Chair) met NEA staff and



# Academic Labor United

other graduate student worker unions in person. They attended various panels on topics such as collective bargaining, budgeting, the importance of higher education, taking initiative in social justice issues, building community power with art and so on. They also participated in three panels that were organized for and by graduate student worker union leaders and were able to benefit greatly from their expertise. On April 1 and 2, NEA Associate Director Zone 4, covering the Pacific Region Melissa Case came to Honolulu and met with University of Hawai'i at Mānoa graduate student workers to talk about how NEA has supported and will continue to support ALU's unionization efforts. She met individually with members who needed support, and attended two General Assemblies where she provided valuable insights on ALU's next steps as it transitions into a full-fledged graduate student union.

The Hawai'i State Teachers Association, which is NEA's local, has promised support for ALU as a potential sister-union. Specifically, HSTA has secured legal representation and advice to help ALU become a nonprofit labor union under Hawai'i law, with financial assistance from NEA. HSTA's experience with the local political landscape has also been an invaluable resource in helping ALU leadership navigate the legislative process this session. ALU is extremely grateful for the guidance, support, and aloha that both NEA and HSTA have shown us throughout our organizing endeavors. **With our commitment and other unions' support, we have shown that Graduate Assistants are in urgent need of unionization and ready to have our own bargaining unit. We strongly urge that HB 2720 HD3 SD1 be passed.**

**The time is now.**

Sincerely,

Dianne Deauna,  
Chair, Academic Labor United



The Committee on Ways and Means

April 5, 2024

10:20 AM

Room 211

RE: **HB 2720, HD 3, SD 1, Relating to Collective Bargaining**

Attention: Chair Donovan Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Sharon Moriwaki and Members of the Committee

The University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA) supports the intent and purpose of HB 2720, HD 3, SD 1, establishing collective bargaining unit (16) under HRS, Chapter 89, §89-6, and other enabling statutes under HRS, Chapter 89, for graduate assistants employed by the university of Hawaii and Community College system.

UHPA supports all public employees' right to organize and to participate in collective bargaining. Taking into account the recent Hawaii Labor Relations Board decision, UHPA believes it is appropriate for this group of public employees to establish their own bargaining unit, since they currently do not fit within any of the existing 15 categorical bargaining units. Doing so would allow these public employees to better secure their interests through collective bargaining on the specific issues that graduate assistants are seeking to obtain.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 2720, HD 3, SD 1.

Respectfully submitted,

Christian L. Fern  
Executive Director  
University of Hawaii Professional Assembly

University of Hawaii  
Professional Assembly

1017 Palm Drive ♦ Honolulu, Hawaii 96814-1928  
Telephone: (808) 593-2157 ♦ Facsimile: (808) 593-2160  
Website: [www.uhpa.org](http://www.uhpa.org)

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:05:24 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Elizabeth Yen Tzu LIEW	Testifying for Academic Labour Union	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. My name is Liz and I am a graduate student, and a GA for the Asian Studies Department. I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.



UNIVERSITY OF  
HAWAII  
STUDENT CAUCUS

**LATE**

Date 04/05/2024

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Relating to HB 2720 SD 1

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, 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 SD1.**

Graduate Assistants (GA) have a direct impact on over 14,000 undergraduate students in the UH system who depend on the GAs 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. GAs are STUDENTS and pursue an education whilst providing a service to the University of Hawaii System. GAs should be properly represented so that they do not have to choose between struggling to keep the lights on and getting an education.

Quality GAs 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 GAs 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

**LATE**



## **TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII**

**COMMITTEE REFERRAL: WAM**

**APRIL 5, 2024**

**HB 2720, HD3, SD1, RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **supports** HB 2720, HD3, SD1, 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



**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 11:22:51 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kevin Faccenda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2720 creating a new collective bargaining unit for Graduate Assistants (GAs) at the University of Hawai'i system (UH). Now that the Hawai'i Labor Relations Board has declared the GAs are UH are public employees under Chapter 89 of HRS, we must be placed in a collective bargaining unit.

Unfortunately, none of the existing collective bargaining units meet the needs of GAs. For example we do not want our paycheck to go towards retirement, nor do our grievances with UH have much overlap with other existing units. I am a GA at UH where I have been working for the past 4 years. This position is far more work than it is to study and we would do best to negotiate with UH directly, without the needs of other bargaining units interfering.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kevin Faccenda

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 12:24:31 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Noelle Iati	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a graduate assistant at UH Mānoa and strongly support this measure, which affirms our constitutional right to collectively bargain. Refusing to pass this legislation amounts to denying the constitutional rights of the American citizens and residents employed as graduate assistants within the state. Passing this measure would significantly improve the quality of life of graduate assistants, allowing us to better communicate our needs to the University.

**TO: COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**  
**Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair**  
**Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair**

**FROM: Ho'oleia Ka'eo**

**RE: HB 2720, HD1 - RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

**Hearing on April 5th, 2024**

***IN STRONG SUPPORT of HB 2720***

Aloha e Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwa & Ka 'Aha Kenekoa Kōmike Ways And Means,

Mahalo for the opportunity to address this committee on this important issue.

'O Ho'oleia Ka'eo ko'u inoa. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and am also employed as a graduate assistant at the university.

I humbly ask for your support to allow us as workers, ruled as public employees by the HLRB, the ability to create our own collective bargaining unit. This is our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

As both students and workers, we are extremely sensitive to the current economic climate in Hawai'i. We are invaluable to the operations of the university and the ability to collectively bargain will not only better our working conditions, it will also help us achieve academically. This bill will only strengthen higher education in Hawai'i and help students who are largely already struggling to make ends meet. The progress that ALU has made recently in terms of adding sick days has personally benefited me and has made for a healthier work environment all around.

This bill does not seek any appropriations so I humbly ask that you take a stance to support workers and higher education. Please support our efforts to better the working conditions and lives of graduate students in Hawai'i.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Ho'oleia Ka'eo  
Graduate Student, Office of Public Health Studies  
Graduate Research Assistant

Mānoa, O'ahu

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 1:30:40 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Lauryn Pisciotto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Lauryn Pisciotto, a graduate student and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.*

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 1:33:21 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jocelyn B Brody	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Jocelyn Brody, a Teaching Assistant for a class called American Studies 220, Intro to Indigenous Studies. I live in Kapahulu right near the Leonard's and my senator is Les Ihara, Jr. and my House Representative is Bertrand Kobayashi and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 1:47:24 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Alan Tong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senate Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Alan Tong and I am writing in strong support of HB2720 SD1. I am a PhD student and research assistant at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in the Mathematics department, an essential part of education and research within our local community. As an Oahu born and raised resident originally from Makaha, I strongly believe in unions empowering workers to allow themselves to bargain for better working conditions. Please pass the bill for the sake of us locals who chose to stay in Hawai'i advancing STEM and social work instead of moving away from the problems!

Mahalo for your time,  
Alan Tong

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 1:58:44 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Zheng Zou	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Zheng Zou, a GA and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 2:00:09 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Lauren Taijeron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

I'm Lauren Taijeron, a graduate student and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions. Thank you for your time and consideration.



**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 2:03:41 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
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 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

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 HD 3 SD 1 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.

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 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations** and upholds the constitutional right of graduate assistants to collectively bargain. I urge you to join me with your unequivocal support.

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-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:25:40 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Daniela Escontrela	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Daniela Escontrela, a GA, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:38:21 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ty Kawika Tengan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. My name is Ty Kawika Tengan, and I am a professor of Ethnic Studies and Anthropology at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1 as it enables graduate student employees to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions. As a former graduate assistant myself who, after becoming faculty member, has worked with numerous graduate and teaching assistants over the last 21 years, I can attest to the central role that our graduate workers play in making sure that UHM provides a top notch education to the people of Hawai‘i. This bill will ensure that our graduate students and undergraduate students they serve (and the local families they come from) are adequately supported in their journey to becoming the next generation of leaders. Please pass HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:42:30 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Stephanie Dossett	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I'm Stephanie, a TA, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD3 SD1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their consitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions. I hope you will support this effort.

Mahalo

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:50:48 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kyle Conner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Senator Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Senator Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Kyle Conner, a graduate assistant at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD3 SD1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:51:22 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

I'm Aree Worawongwasu, a PhD student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

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 HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1, for the future of higher education in Hawai‘i and beyond.

Mahalo,

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

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:51:37 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Shannon McClish	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Please support HB2720 HD3 SD1. As graduate student workers were ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.*

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:52:36 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Victoria Assad	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Senator Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Senator Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

I'm Victoria Assad, a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Oceanography, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD3 SD1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

Mahalo,

Victoria

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:56:31 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Madi Davis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Aloha, Chair Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, and Vice Chair Senator Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,*

*I'm Madi, a GA, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD3 SD1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.*

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 4:41:26 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jacob Hakim	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Jacob Hakim, a PhD Candidate in Linguistics at UH and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 5:57:15 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jaehyung Kim	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Jaehyung Kim, a phd student at University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.*

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:01:44 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Donavan Kamakani Albano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Donavan Kamakani Albano, a graduate student in Political Science and a Graduate Research Assistant at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. As the Co-Chair of the Gender Justice Committee of Academic Labor United, I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.



**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:55:23 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mahina Kaomea	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha nui e Chair Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Mahina Kaomea, and I am a prospective graduate student in Political Science at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. I would like to emphasize that this bill does not seek any appropriations. Rather, graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, which gives them the constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions through the creation of a collective bargaining unit.

I have seen firsthand through the experiences of my friends and colleagues that being a graduate student is already tough. In addition to the rigorous academic load, many grad students employed as teaching assistants additionally have teaching responsibilities equal to or even greater than those of tenured faculty. I believe that we, as current and prospective students at the University of Hawai‘i, are the future—and we should have the right to advocate for fair compensation and working conditions through the creation of a collective bargaining unit.

Mahalo for your kind consideration of this testimony.

ke aloha nui,

Mahina

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:58:13 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Brentley Sandlin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

I'm Brentley Sandlin, a Graduate Assistant (GA) and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 8:00:04 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Hannah Freiin von Hammerstein	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Hannah Freiin von Hammerstein, a graduate student / GA and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 8:39:42 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Marina Karides	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I am Marina Karides, a community member and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

The UH System, our public campus, rely on graduate student labor to enormous degree and they deserve representation like all other employees. Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marina Karides

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 9:18:46 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kaiqing Su	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

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 strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. 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 am 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 sacred 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. 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-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 9:25:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
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, however, I believe the amendment that specifically excludes graduate students from collective bargaining should be removed.

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 over a million 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-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 10:04:39 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Olivia Meyer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Olivia Meyer, and I am a UH graduate student from the Department of Geography and Environment. I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations.

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, GAs 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 in my department 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 has already redistributed 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. The creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions. 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-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 10:17:37 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Teri Skillman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Teri Skillman and I am a former graduate student (M.A. and Ph.D.) at UH Manoa. I am writing as a private citizen and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1.

I am now a UHM employee supervising 5 graduate students for a center. It would be a conflict of interest to put graduate students in the Faculty or the APT bargaining units.

This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

I stand in strong support. Please pass HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1.

Mahalo nui,

Teri Skillman

**Chair Donovan Dela Cruz**  
**Vice Chair Sharon Moriwaki**

**Senate Committee on Ways & Means**

**Friday, April 5, 2024**  
**10:20 AM**

**TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB2720 HD3 SD1 RELATING TO  
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, Members of the Senate Committee on Ways & Means,

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 HD3 SD1**, 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. They need your support to officially form their own collective bargaining unit to negotiate for better working conditions. This is a right that they have as public workers under the Hawai‘i State Constitution. Also, this bill will not require any money from the legislature.**

I 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 HD3 SD1 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,  
State House District 23 | State Senate District 12  
Cell: 808-255-6663  
Email: junshinbusiness729@gmail.com

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 11:18:04 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Clemens Mayer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Clemens Mayee, a PhD Candidate in the department of Linguistics at UH Mānoa and a graduate assistant and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.*

*Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.*

*Me ke Aloha,*

*Clemens*

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:03:53 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tatsuki Kohatsu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Tatsuki Kohatsu, a graduate student, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:26:51 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Alexander Prosi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I am Alex Prosi, a graduate student and at UH Mānoa and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1.

Because graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

We have heard horror story after horror story of issues that can specifically only be addressed through the collective power of our union. There is a clear problem wherein even established systems cannot reliably advocate for our peers in dangerous and exploitative situations, where no one is able to protect our peers. Our union is necessary \*now\* in order to address serious issues already unfolding, so that we may work collectively.

Graduate students having their own bargaining unit is in no way unusual to American University systems. Many universities, large and small, have their own unit already and have for many decades in some instances.

I will emphasize again though that we have already been ruled public employees by the Hawaii Supreme Court. We seek no appropriations.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:27:32 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tiffany Beam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. My name is Tiffany Beam. I am a PhD student in Political Science and a graduate assistant that has taught 5 undergraduate classes at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

I write in strong support of HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers are recognized as public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

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 may read in several other testimonies, graduate teaching workers are still motivated and excellent at what we do 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 graduate 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 who were born and raised in Hawai‘i and want to invest in Hawai‘i’s future.

Earlier this year, 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. Yet, she was 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. The creation of our own bargaining unit is therefore crucial for Hawai'i's future, on and off-campus. Thank you kindly for your time.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 1:28:09 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kyle K Kajihiro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

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

My name is Kyle Kajihiro, an assistant professor at the University of Hawai'i. I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations.

I know many graduate student workers whose labor is vital to the functioning of the University of Hawai'i and yet struggle to make ends meet.

As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions. Graduate student workers deserve the same basic rights of collective bargaining as other workers in Hawai'i. I urge you to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Kyle Kajihiro

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 5:07:56 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Yilan Hu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Yilan Hu, a graduate student and TA, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.*

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 5:26:12 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha e Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Senator Sharon Moriwaki, and others of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. My name is Jason Mark Alexander, a 6th year PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Hawai'i who has served as a Graduate Assistant for 2.5 years. I strongly support the passing of HB2720 HD3 SD1 to instantly uphold the constitutional right for all 1,500+ Graduate Assistants in the UH system to collectively bargain, without requiring a new HLRB petition. When placed in CBU 16 specifically for the unique interests of research, clerical, and/or 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 Hawai'i. As every session passes, this becomes more and more critical for our welfare and the sustainability of the workforce of the state.

Graduate Assistants work while 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. My contract's specifications were always vague about Graduate Division and HR oversight of supervisor decisions, contained no benefits, and was not updated and reissued when sick leave and salary adjustments were instituted in August 2022, so I had no contracted guarantee of these changes for my specific position, which was a major 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 are not automatically renewable.

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 HD3 SD1 to enable workplace negotiations that will find resolutions to these issues, and stop excluding this category of workers from this right.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 6:19:53 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Nikhil Khurana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Grad student are workers! They deserve the right to collective bargaining as do all workers. I have so many friends who work as grad students, teach, produce papers, knowledge and garner funding for the university. And they are struggling on a salary that no one can reasonably survive on. My friends deserve a union and benefits befitting the work that they do. You must pass this bill in service of labor and fair conditions for all workers.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 6:39:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Alia Jeraj	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

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 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. As a graduate student now, my bi-monthly paycheck is \$750 (\$1500 per month, after taxes). My portion of rent for the studio I share with my partner is \$800, over 50% of my income. This is not sustainable.

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-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 7:59:53 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Olivia Jarvis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Olivia Jarvis and I'm a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

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-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 8:16:40 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Meagan Harden	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Meagan Harden, a graduate student and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 8:57:02 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
GRIFFIN BRYCE WERNER	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Griffin Werner, a Graduate Assistant and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.*

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 9:23:28 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Casey Brinkman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, and thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony! My name is Casey Brinkman and I am a 6th year Ph.D Candidate in Astronomy at the University of Hawai'i. I am a graduate assistant and I support HB 2720.

In my time as a Ph.D candidate, I have been both a Teaching and Research assistant. I have been the solo instructor for laboratory classes, and I have published numerous papers/recieved awards that have brough attention to my Department's research. My fellow graduate students and myself are who keeps the University running. The University of Hawai'i loves to claim and celebrate their graduate students for the prestige we are able to bestow upon the University, but will not claim us when it comes time to recognizing what we do as labor. We are employees of the University who deserve the right to collectively bargain, just the same as any other state employee, as recognized by the HLRB on January 4th 2024.

The University often claims that we are only half-time employees and therefore our hourly rates are well above minimum wage--however our contracts state that we are forbidden from having a second job, meaning our graduate assistantship is our only source of income. Most of my peers in the Astronomy Department are struggling to get by financially, including myself. We qualify for SNAP benefits and need that assistance in order to feed ourselves. We are severely rent burdened, spending 60% of our income in rent on average (with extremely few options to do otherwise). So much of my mental energy is spent worrying if I'll be able to pay off my credit card this month, if I'll need to move again if my rent goes up, or if I can afford to buy lunch today--mental energy that I should be spending thinking about Exoplanets and writing my dissertation. The worst part of my story is that I belong to one of the highest paid departments at the Univeristy of Hawai'i, and the vast majority of my peers are struggling more than I am.

Passing this bill and allowing the graduate students to be able to collectively bargain for our contracts would give us the ability to improve these conditions. We are not asking for a perfect contract to be handed to us, but meerly for the opportunity to advocate for ourselves and to be able to achieve these goals through hard work. There is precident for this: roughly 120,000 graduate student workers were represented by unions last year across the country, and fourteen schools established graduate student unions in 2023 including Cornell, Stanford, and University of Chicago. I urge the Senate Ways and Means Committee to vote yes on Hb2720 to allow the University of Hawai'i to follow suit.

Mahalo for your consideration!



**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 9:28:57 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
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) or with other workers. Hawai`i Supreme Court's recent confirmation that graduate students are public employees only makes the need for HB2720 even more urgent. Thanks for reading my testimony.

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 9:35:37 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Brandy Nalani McDougall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kākou,

I am writing in full support of HB 2720 in establishing a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants throughout the UH system.

I am an associate professor of American Studies at UHM and live in Kalaepōhaku, O‘ahu (St Louis/Kaimukī). I am also a single parent, a survivor of childhood trauma, and the poet laureate of Hawai‘i. I strive to be a force for healing and support in my teaching, my scholarship, and poetic work. As part of my job at UHM, I have had the privilege of mentoring many graduate students for the past 12+ years and have seen them struggle financially and academically with the stress and anxiety of needing to make ends meet with the high cost of living in Hawai‘i (esp on O‘ahu). As graduate assistants, they work full-time for the university by teaching vital lower-division courses for undergraduates. These courses are truly the lifeblood of each department and the entire university, and yet their labor is exploited and taken for granted. GAs are grossly underpaid for their work, often undertrained, and are not given crucial benefits and labor protections that other teachers (faculty) and specialists have at UHM by virtue of our being of a different rank and unionized.

Prior to my hire, I was a GA for the University of Oregon for my MFA (1998-2001) and for the UHM's English department for 4 years (2005-2009) for my PhD. At UO, GAs were unionized which meant that I had healthcare and sick days, and i got paid enough to live modestly but comfortably on just my GA stipend and a scholarship I had via financial aid. I completed my degree on time and with only the typical stress that comes from pursuing a degree.

At UHM, I was grateful for the tuition waiver and the small stipend I received, but it was nowhere near a living wage for Hawai‘i and I ended up needing to take out loans because the scholarship, tuition waiver, and financial aid I received along with the GAship still was not enough to support me. I also worked 30 hours a week at another job to pay for my housing, food, etc and thankfully, healthcare benefits. I was working 50-60 hours/week for 2 jobs (as a teaching GA and with my other job as a grant writer) in those days on top of being a full-time student trying to keep up with classes and research and it nearly broke me. It certainly had a negative impact on my work in all areas and it delayed my time to completion of my PhD which only pit me further in debt.

I chose UHM for my PhD because I wanted to study the Hawaiian language and work with Hawaiian literature and archives, yet the financial stress, along with seeing my peers experience the same or much worse was really horrible.

Nearly 20 years later, it's unconscionable and frankly, outrageous, to see that UH's GAs are still being exploited and are not even given the basic right to advocate for themselves via collective bargaining. As a result, the university is not held accountable and our graduate students can do very little to have a voice and advocate for themselves. GAs teach courses that serve all of the undergraduate students at UHM--they are invaluable and essential workers--and yet they receive so little compensation and recognition for their labor. Faculty and specialists have had a union that protects us for decades now, and GAs should be afforded the same rights and protections, especially as they are the most vulnerable university workers within the academic hierarchy. Collective bargaining for our GAs is long overdue. I urge you to please support HB2720 and support Hawai'i's hardworking teachers, emerging scholars, and engaged citizens in the UH system.

Mahalo nui, me ka ha'aha'a,

Brandy Nālani McDougall

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 9:53:31 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Andrew Meyer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Andrew Meyer, a PhD Student from the Physics Department at UH Manoa, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, it is our right to collectively bargain for our wages and working conditions, as our graduate assistant counterparts on the mainland have been doing for over 50 years.



**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 9:55:03 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Eleanor Bates	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm Eleanor Bates, a PhD student and Graduate Assitant, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD3 SD1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.



**HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION**  
AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

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

**LATE**

The Thirty-Second Legislature, State of Hawaii  
The Senate  
Committee on Ways and Means

Testimony by  
Hawaii Government Employees Association

April 5, 2024

H.B. 2720, H.D. 3, S.D. 1 — RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO supports the purpose and intent of H.B. 2720, H.D. 3, S.D. 1, 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. 3, S.D. 1.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira  
Executive Director

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 10:34:18 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Miles Drazkowski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**I'm Miles Drazkowski, a TA from Civil, Environmental, and Construction Engineering, and I support HB 2720 HB3 SD1 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 classes that require TAs to function during their course of study. And that is only considering one class. In most cases, undergrads take multiple classes involving 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**

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 10:34:54 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Randizia Crisostomo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Chair Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen. Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of HB 2720.

My name is Randizia Crisostomo, a PhD candidate in Political Science. 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.

This Spring, I'm a Teaching Assistant for the course Gender, Justice, and Law, where I review and grade multiple assignments for 30 students each week. I also hold two recitation hours per week, where students come and we do a deeper dive into concepts discussed in class. Last Fall semester, I offered an introduction to political science course offered to 20 students, holding 10 hours of one on one instruction and 4 hours of group tutoring classes per week. I also hosted the undergraduate club, and organizing events.

These teaching assistantships paid for 20 hrs of work per week, but occasionally I will work beyond those set hours and yet I'm ineligible for any type of overtime pay. To fulfill my degree requirements (which is why I'm only paid for 20 hours per week, as I'm also a student), I'm working on my research which is focused on intense grief in the Marianas and Micronesia. My work provides crucial context in determining how we can adapt to these changes, and what is necessary for us to do now to avoid the worst outcomes. Despite all my hard work and the labor that I provide the University both in teaching and research, I often find it difficult to manage living in Hawai'i on the salary provided by UH, where I spend 65% of my monthly salary just on rent.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 11:27:11 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Dylan Pilger	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

I'm Dylan Pilger, a Graduate Assistant at UH Mānoa studying public health, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

I have lived in Hawai'i my whole life and am dedicated to improving the health of the people of Hawai'i. However, as a graduate worker and the father of a young child, it can be difficult to get by with the high cost of living. Collective bargaining will allow local graduate workers like myself to be able to negotiate for better working conditions, pay, and benefits and therefore be able to stay in our home and give back to our communities. To make this happen I need your help. Please vote in favor of passing HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1!

Mahalo nui,  
Dylan Pilger

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:26:16 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Neill Amasaki	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:44:24 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Wiwik Dharmiasih	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Wiwik Dharmiasih, a graduate student and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.



**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 1:48:51 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Dorian Daimer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the House Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Dorian Daimer, a PhD candidate in Physics. I live in Kaimuki, and I'm represented in the House by Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, and Sen. Les Ihara 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.

This Spring, I'm a Research Assistant, working on the physics of information processing and attempting to reformulate our understanding of quantum physics. Last Fall semester, I worked as a Teaching Assistant for the introductory physics labs, teaching two classes of 20 students each about electricity and magnetism in a lab setting. Both teaching and research assistantship pay for 20 hrs of work per week, but regularly I will work beyond those set hours and yet I'm ineligible for any type of overtime pay. To fulfill my degree requirements (which is why I'm only paid for 20 hours per week, as I'm also a student), I'm working on my research which is focused on the fundamental costs of performing quantum operations. This work is crucial for estimating and lowering the energetic costs of information processing in years to come. Despite all my hard work and the labor that I provide the University both in teaching and research, I often find it difficult to manage living in Hawai'i on the salary provided by UH, where I spend 60% of my monthly salary just on rent. As an international student, I'm only allowed to work 20 hours per week in a position funded by the University to keep my student visa status valid. This means that the only avenue by which I can legally support myself is through my graduate assistant salary, which is \$15,000 below the annual recommended living wage in Hawai'i for a single person with no dependents.

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-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 1:53:45 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

**LATE**

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Diliaur Tellei	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Diliaur Tellei, Makiki resident and former UH graduate research assistant. I strongly support this bill and urge the committee to pass it. It's been years of uphill battle for grad student workers—who have been ruled public employees by HLRB—to achieve proper union representation. This is one of the final hurdles to establish a collective bargaining unit, which would recognize and be able to respond to the unique needs and context of graduate student workers.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 2:48:16 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Heather Jacobs	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

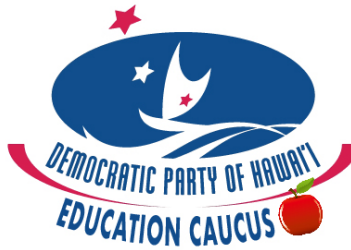
Comments:

Aloha Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Heather Jacobs, and I am a graduate assistant at UH Manoa. I strongly support HB2720 HD3 SD1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

**LATE**



## **HOUSE BILL 2720, HD3, SD1, RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

APRIL 5, 2024 · WAM HEARING

**POSITION:** Support.

**RATIONALE:** The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Education Caucus **supports** HB 2720, HD3, SD1, relating to collective bargaining, which establishes a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i and community college system.

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](mailto:kriscoffield@gmail.com)**

**LATE**



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII LABOR CAUCUS

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS · APRIL 5, 2024

HB 2720, HD3, SD1, RELATING TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i Labor Caucus **supports** HB 2720, HD3, SD1, which establishes a collective bargaining unit for graduate assistants employed by the University of Hawai'i and community college system.

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.**



**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 5:49:10 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Zachary Nachod	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Senator Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Senator Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

I'm Zachary Nachod, a Graduate Assistant, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD3 SD1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 8:05:59 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Shannon Pomaikaʻi Hennessey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. 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 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions

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 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 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. 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.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 8:08:20 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Shree Deshpande	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Shree Deshpande, a graduate student and worker and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 8:14:51 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Breanne Fong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Senator Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Senator Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Breanne Fong, a graduate student and now a graduate research assistant, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

Mahalo and PLEASE pass HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 9:19:08 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Armando Molina Gómez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Armando Molina Gómez, I am an international graduate student at UH Mānoa, and I strongly support HB2720 HD3 SD1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 9:40:55 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Victoria Hart	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

I am Victoria Hart, a graduate student at UH Manoa, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

Sincerely,

Victoria Hart

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 10:40:45 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
jose miramontes jr	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am full support of this bill for the workers of Hawaii!!



**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 12:48:34 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Cardenas Pintor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Mahalo nui to Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Moriwaki, and other members of the committee on Ways and Means.

A collective bargaining unit is needed now. Graduate students are preparing to help the communities they want to work with in the future. They also allow the community by providing research, teachings, administration, note-taking, and more. It is exhilarating to see colleagues and friends who are graduate assistants talk about how much they enjoy their education yet worry about how they burn out quickly, talk about financial problems, and how they will continue to help their community. It is crucial to support and pass this bill.

Mahalo nui,  
Cardenas Pintor

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 7:14:47 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Hannah Manshel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*“Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I’m Hannah Manshel, faculty at UH Manoa, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.”*

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 7:47:26 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kira M Webster	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Kira Webster (a graduate student / GA) and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 7:50:22 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Korey Wetherell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee,

I'm Korey Wetherell, a graduate student and TA in the Department of Geography and the Environment at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and a resident of Mānoa Valley. I am writing you today to urge you to support HB 2720 SD 1 today and stand on the right side of both labor and education history. This bill does not seek any appropriations, and is a direct response to over 50 years of graduate student activism and efforts to gain the same rights as other citizens here in Hawai'i. As graduate student workers were ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions. As enshrined in our State Consitution, it is now the duty of this legislative body to create a new bargaining unit for Graduate Student Workers. I beseech you today to not only make the correct moral choice, but to acknowledge and uphold the laws that make our State what it is today.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Korey Wetherell, MA Candidate and TA

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 8:43:05 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Rachel Hong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Rachel Hong, a [graduate student and TA, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.

Mahalo,

Rachel

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 9:01:25 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jayme Pisciotto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. I'm Jayme Pisciotto, an alumni of UH Manoa and community member, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers were already ruled public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables them to exercise their constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions.*

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 9:37:38 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Lilly Fisher	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Sen Donovan Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Sen Sharon Moriwaki of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. My name is Lilly Fisher; I am a Graduate Assistant in the American Studies Department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As graduate student workers have already been designated public employees by the HLRB, the creation of a collective bargaining unit enables us to exercise our constitutional right to negotiate for better working conditions. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

**LATE**

**HB-2720-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/5/2024 10:15:46 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/5/2024 10:20:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mariko Quinn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kākou,

My name is Mariko Quinn and I am an undergraduate student at UH Mānoa.

I strongly support HB 2720 HD 3 SD 1. This bill does not seek any appropriations. As an undergraduate student, I have directly benefited from the labor of our graduate student workers. Without these workers, our education as undergraduates would not be the same. While we appreciate them greatly, it is imperative that they are able to exercise their constitutional right as public employees to negotiate for better working conditions.

Mahalo, Mariko.