



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
Friday, February 21, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

By

Michael Bruno, PhD, Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
and

Bonnie D. Irwin, PhD, Chancellor
University of Hawai'i at Hilo
and

Maenette Benham, PhD, Chancellor
University of Hawai'i at West O'ahu

HB 442 HD1 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

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

This testimony is presented on behalf of the University of Hawai'i (UH) System, including the UH Mānoa School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene (SONDH), UH West O'ahu, and the UH Hilo School of Nursing (SON), **in strong support of HB 442, relating to the UH.**

We thank and commend the Legislature for their dedication to addressing the nursing workforce shortage and for proposing this bill aimed to increase the capacity of nursing education through appropriations to: 1) UH Mānoa SONDH baccalaureate program for the UH Mānoa - UH West O'ahu Nursing Collaboration Phase III and the Online RN to BS Program; 2) UH West O'ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway; and 3) the UH Hilo SON baccalaureate program. The nursing program initiatives and proposed appropriations in this bill are in alignment with the UH BOR Fiscal Biennium 2025-2027 Budget that was submitted to the Governor and the Legislature.

The Healthcare Association of Hawai'i (HAH) reported a staggering 999 RN vacancies in 2022, and 1,043 openings as of 2024, highlighting a significant shortfall in our healthcare workforce. During the Academic Year 2022-23, the University of Hawai'i System produced 204 graduates from a total of 422 nursing graduates in the state, as noted in the Hawai'i State Nursing Education Capacity Report by the Hawai'i State Center for Nursing. This gap leaves us with a critical deficit of approximately 600 unfilled RN positions that current graduation rates cannot satisfy. A new report funded by the Hawai'i State Center for Nursing soon to be released is expected to confirm that the

utilization of RN services in Hawai'i will steadily increase through 2037. It is essential to strengthen our nursing education programs and address this pressing need for qualified healthcare professionals in our community.

Hawai'i is fortunate to have many students eager to pursue nursing studies at UH and contribute to the future nursing workforce. In fall 2024, the UH Mānoa nursing program received 1,000 applications for 54 admission slots, with 300 applicants being Hawai'i residents. However, both the UH Mānoa and UH Hilo nursing programs face capacity challenges due in large part to insufficient funding for faculty positions, which limits their ability to accept and enroll more students. Appropriated funds would allow our programs to increase enrollment while maintaining the essential faculty-to-student ratio required by accreditors and for ensuring patient safety.

The UH programs are working collaboratively to address the current and future nursing needs of our community. A highlight of these efforts is that it enables nursing students to receive quality nursing education in their home community which includes service learning clinical practicums with patients and families at health care agencies including long-term care, acute care hospitals, and in community settings that reflect the community's culture and values. The intent is that this pipeline of nurses will transition to nursing employment in their community after graduation and strengthen our health care system. Our health care community partners have expressed support to provide clinical training sites in tandem to our efforts.

The UH Mānoa - UH West O'ahu Nursing Collaboration increases access to nursing education and expands UH Mānoa nursing student enrollment by 50%, with an annual spring admission of students from the UH West O'ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway. After admission to UH Mānoa SONDH, students embark on a three-year journey engaging in nursing courses offered by the UH Mānoa SONDH at the UH West O'ahu campus and in clinical settings primarily located in West O'ahu. This initiative is efficient for several reasons. Nursing students from West O'ahu do not have to commute to the UH Mānoa campus (except for selected experiences), and UH West O'ahu maximizes classroom and laboratory spaces. This also helps to avoid duplication of nursing programs through UH Mānoa SONDH's existing robust curriculum and accreditation standing, whereas the start-up of a new program would be resource-intensive and require new nursing program accreditation.

The first cohort of nursing students was admitted to UH Mānoa SONDH in January 2024 and a second cohort in January 2025, which was made possible with vital funding approved by the Legislature and Governor. In the upcoming third and final implementation phase, the funds appropriated in this bill will support four nursing faculty positions for the students' senior year courses. By the initiative's full implementation in 2026, the UH Mānoa SONDH Bachelor of Science (BS) Nursing Program is projected to increase enrollment by 72 students through three ongoing spring admission cohorts, resulting in the graduation of an additional 24 new nurses annually.

The UH West O'ahu's Pre-Nursing Pathway is essential to the collaboration, which facilitates a nursing student pipeline by offering prerequisite courses, support services, and health-related service learning experiences to prepare students for entry and application to the UH Mānoa nursing baccalaureate program. The funding allocated in this bill will support four positions to help ensure the sustainability of the Pre-Nursing Pathway, which has been temporarily financed by the campus's financial reserves. The positions, separate and distinct from the UH Mānoa Nursing faculty position requests, are critical to both the sustainability of the Pre-Nursing Pathway program and to expanding it to support an increase in the number of students from Central and West O'ahu who are able to pursue nursing education. The UH West O'ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway program student enrollment has increased 139% in the past two years, and further growth is anticipated. An increase in UH West O'ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway student enrollment is essential to support the necessary increase in the BS Nursing enrollment for the UH Mānoa - UH West O'ahu Nursing Collaboration.

The UH Mānoa SONDH's Online RN to BS Program efficiently and seamlessly transitions students from the UH Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) to a baccalaureate degree via a 1-year program. This program enables graduates to continue their academic progression via an online, asynchronous curriculum for didactic courses and complete required clinicals in their home island community. Student enrollment in the Online RN to BS Program has increased by 54%, from 35 students in fall 2022 to 54 in fall 2024. As of fall 2024, 50% of the students enrolled in the program graduated from a UH ADN program. The funds appropriated in this bill will support one nursing faculty position to teach students residing on Kaua'i, where we currently have the most need for faculty. RN vacancies in Kaua'i increased by 145% in two years, from 31 in 2022 to 45 in 2024 (HAH Hawai'i Healthcare Workforce Initiative 2024 report). The program provides access to nursing education in rural areas and is helping to build a highly qualified RN workforce within their home communities. This is especially important as the health care needs of our population become more complex. Additionally, students from this program are well prepared for graduate level studies upon completion of their baccalaureate degree. Several graduates have gone on to immediately complete the school's online Master's Degree in Nursing for Advanced Population Health Nursing, which was recognized this year as one of the top 20% of online nursing master's programs by U.S. News and World Report.

The UH Hilo SON offers the baccalaureate nursing degree with a unique transcultural thread throughout its curriculum facilitating learning pathways for cohorts in a smaller community setting including rural clinic learning experiences. UH Hilo SON has a junior and senior cohort, each currently with 30 students. The funds appropriated in this bill will support five faculty nursing positions and will increase enrollment in each cohort from 30 to 50. An increase in size using a staggered roll-out approach will enable UH Hilo SON to work with clinical sites to adjust to the integration of the increased cohort sizes. This increase in cohort sizes will allow the UH Hilo SON to increase our cohorts by 67%.

In 2024, the UH Hilo SON received 63 applicants to the Hilo cohort and accepted 30, turning away 33 qualified students. Many of these student applicants come from the UH Hilo Exploratory Health Sciences (EXHS) major, which is a pre-nursing program for the UH Hilo SON. In the fall of 2024, there were a total of 128 EXHS majors and 150 in fall, 2023. The intent of the EXHS path is to prepare students for the BSN program, however UH Hilo SON does not have the capacity to accept all EXHS students currently enrolled in this pathway. Additionally, the UH Hilo SON piloted a new High School Direct Entry (HSDE) into Nursing in fall, 2023, admitting three students, and a total of six applications were received during fall, 2024. These HSDE students follow the EXHS pathway for their nursing prerequisites and then enter into the BSN program in the fall semester of their third (junior) year.

The Healthcare Association of Hawai'i (HAH) reported the growing health care workforce needs on Hawai'i Island. The Hawai'i Healthcare Workforce Initiative 2024 Report addresses the increase in vacant registered nurse (RN) positions from 2022 to 2024, resulting in an over twofold increase in vacant RN positions from 72 to 159. This evidence shows the demand for nurses is growing faster than the supply, hence this greater need reflects the increased demand on educational programs to meet the growing need for nurses.

In closing, we are committed to developing our nursing workforce, with each of the campus initiatives contributing to a comprehensive strategy. By building and sustaining educational pipelines, we aim to make a meaningful impact on the nursing workforce in our state. We respectfully request full funding for the UH Biennium Budget request to address the nursing shortage using the capacity-building approaches described in this testimony.

We are grateful to the Legislature's attention to addressing health care shortages and ensuring the well-being of Hawai'i's communities.

**Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
Friday, February 21, 2025 at 10:00 A.M.
Conference Room 308 and videoconference
By
Laura Reichhardt, APRN, AGPCNP-BC
Director, Hawai'i State Center for Nursing
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 442, H.D. 1

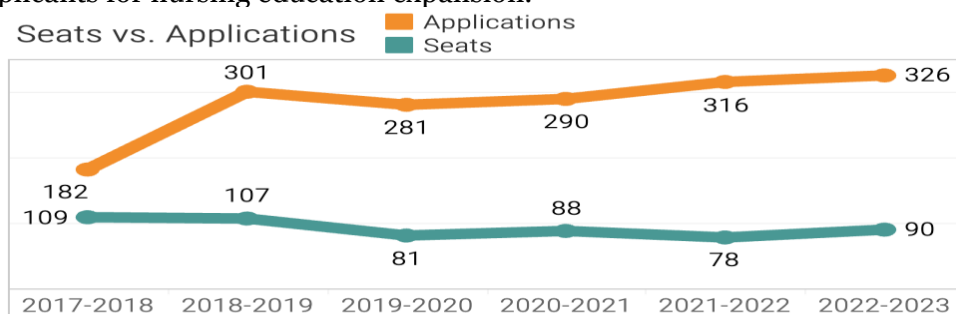
Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee:

Thank you for hearing this measure. This measure appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i (UH) system for pre-nursing and nursing programs at UH West O'ahu, UH Mānoa, and UH Hilo campuses.

The Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (HSCN) conducts research on the nursing workforce at the time of nursing license renewal as well as education capacity of schools of nursing. Overall, the data indicates that there is a demand for nursing education, both for initial education and for nurses who seek to advance their education in nursing. Further, statewide, there is opportunity to grow academic offerings so that nurses continue their educational pursuits in the state.

Demand for BSN Nursing Education in Hawai'i:

- BSN programs receive twice as many applications as they have seats for new students¹. There were 2.2 qualified applications received for everyone opening for a public BSN program in Hawai'i. This indicates that there are adequate eligible students who would be able to fill expanded seats made available through this bill.
- Over time, the number of qualified applications to public BSN nursing programs in Hawai'i has increased. One person may apply to multiple schools, therefore applications may represent a smaller number of individuals. However, the duplication is less likely to occur on neighbor islands due to fewer schools of nursing. Despite duplication, it remains likely that there are adequate qualified applicants for nursing education expansion.



¹ Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (2024). Hawai'i State Nurse Education Capacity Report, Academic Year 2022-2023. https://www.hawaiiicenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2022-2023_EdCap_StatewideReport_vFinal.pdf

The mission of the Hawai'i State Center is to engage in nursing workforce research, promote best practices and disseminate knowledge, cultivate a diverse and well-prepared workforce, support healthy work environments, champion lifelong learning, and strategically plan for sound nursing workforce policy.

Figure 1: Admission Capacity and Demand for Publicly Funded BSN Programs²

As it relates to specifically **Section 3**, the appropriations for the UH Mānoa online RN-to-BS program, HSCN's 2023 Nursing Workforce Supply Survey³ findings indicate that there is a sizable population of nurses who are prime for continuing education.

- 19% of in-state nurses hold an ADN, equivalent to 2,720 nurses
- The ADN population is greater represented on Neighbor Islands. Approximately 33% of Maui, Kaua'i and Hawai'i County nurses, each, reported an ADN as their highest degree.
- 6% of all RNs were currently enrolled in a degree program
- 27% were enrolled in a BSN program
- 29% were enrolled in a program offered in-state

The Hawai'i State Center for Nursing commends the Legislature for addressing the opportunities for people of Hawai'i to become nurses, and for nurses to advance their education in-state.

² Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (2024). Hawai'i Pre-License RN Program Data, 2018-2023.

https://www.hawaiiicenterfornursing.org/data-reports/dashboards/rn_ed_dashboard/

³ Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (2023). 2023 Hawai'i Nursing Workforce Supply Statewide Data Tables by License.

Retrieved from: <https://www.hawaiiicenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/State-Data-Tables-v.Final-1.pdf>

The mission of the Hawai'i State Center is to engage in nursing workforce research, promote best practices and disseminate knowledge, cultivate a diverse and well-prepared workforce, support healthy work environments, champion lifelong learning, and strategically plan for sound nursing workforce policy.



February 21, 2025 at 10:00 am
Conference Room 308

House Committee on Finance

To: Chair Kyle T. Yamashita
Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi

From: Paige Heckathorn Choy
AVP, Government Affairs
Healthcare Association of Hawaii

Re: **Support**
HB 442 HD 1, Relating to the University of Hawaii

The Healthcare Association of Hawaii (HAH), established in 1939, serves as the leading voice of healthcare on behalf of 170 member organizations who represent almost every aspect of the health care continuum in Hawaii. Members include acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, hospices, assisted living facilities and durable medical equipment suppliers. In addition to providing access to appropriate, affordable, high-quality care to all of Hawaii's residents, our members contribute significantly to Hawaii's economy by employing over 30,000 people statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support** of this measure, which would provide funding to expand nursing education programs across the University of Hawaii system. Addressing Hawaii's nursing workforce shortage is essential to ensuring access to quality care for residents across the state and providing more opportunities within our state's university system will help us to achieve that goal.

Hawaii continues to experience a growing demand for skilled nursing professionals, particularly as our aging population increases and healthcare needs become more complex. At the same time, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and other healthcare providers struggle to recruit and retain enough nurses to meet these needs. Expanding in-state nursing programs is one of the most effective strategies to build a sustainable workforce and reduce dependence on costly out-of-state recruitment.

The investments outlined in this measure will directly support the development of a stronger nursing pipeline and help to alleviate workforce shortages, especially in underserved areas. We appreciate the legislature's continued commitment to strengthening our healthcare system, especially in bolstering our workforce. Thank you for the opportunity to support this measure.

HB-442-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 12:06:09 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elena Cabatu	Hilo Benioff Medical Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please accept our strong support of HB442 HD1. Hilo Benioff Medical Center and our patients are beneficiaries of the University of Hawaii at Hilo's School of Nursing. They produce high quality nurses to ensure care to our community. Every year, we train recent graduates in our Nurse Residency Program. These nurses, in turn, dedicate their careers for caring for our patients. A stronger, better supported nursing school in Hilo means we will have more nurses to staff our hospital that is half way through our major construction project to expand by 55 beds. Please advance HB442 HD1. Mahalo!



**Testimony to the House Committee on Finance
Friday, February 21, 2025; 10:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 308
Via Videoconference**

RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 0442, HOUSE DRAFT 1, RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

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

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** House Bill No. 0442, House Draft 1, RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines to over 150,000 patients each year who live in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

This measure, as received by your Committee, would:

- (1) Appropriate unspecified amounts of general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, and fiscal year 2026-2027 for the University of Hawaii, West Oahu Nursing Collaboration Phase III;
- (2) Appropriate unspecified amounts of general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, and fiscal year 2026-2027 for the University of Hawaii, Manoa for the online RN to BS Program;
- (3) Appropriate unspecified amounts of general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, and fiscal year 2026-2027 for the University of Hawaii, West Oahu pre-nursing pathway; and
- (4) Appropriate unspecified amounts of general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, and fiscal year 2026-2027 for the University of Hawaii, Hilo to increase its school of nursing cohort size.

This measure would take effect on July 1, 3000.

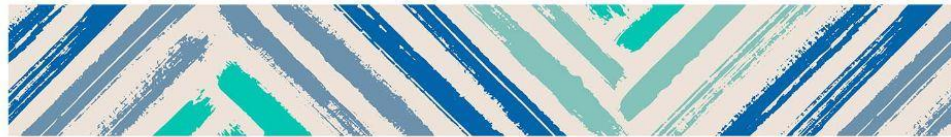
The State of Hawaii is experiencing a severe shortage of health care professionals in the workforce, especially in rural areas. Recent studies note that the current shortage of physicians is at 20% of the total full-time equivalent positions throughout the State. The shortage is especially severe in the fields of primary care, infectious diseases, colorectal surgery, pathology, general surgery, pulmonology, neurology, neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery, family medicine, cardiothoracic surgery, rheumatology, cardiology, hematology/oncology, and pediatric subspecialties of endocrinology, cardiology, neurology, hematology/oncology, and gastroenterology.

The same can be said for registered and practical nurses, community health workers, social workers, pharmacists, and other disciplines in the field of health care.

The HPCA believes that provision of additional resources for nursing programs at the University of Hawaii will greatly enhance the educational opportunities for future nurses. This is critical because the shortage of nursing in Hawaii is dire.

Accordingly, the HPCA urges your favorable consideration of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or eabe@hawaiiipca.net.



February 21, 2025

To: Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance (FIN)

From: Hawaii Association of Health Plans Public Policy Committee

Date/Location: February 21, 2025; 10:00 am/Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony in support of HB 442 HD1 – Relating to the University of Hawaii.

The Hawaii Association of Health Plans (HAHP) appreciates the opportunity to support HB 442 HD1. HAHP is a statewide partnership that unifies Hawaii's health plans to improve the health of Hawaii's communities together. A majority of Hawaii residents receive their health coverage through a plan associated with one of our organizations.

HAHP commends the legislature for strengthening Hawaii's nursing workforce and expanding educational opportunities for local students. By investing in University of Hawaii programs, we can enhance healthcare access, particularly in underserved and rural areas, better address the needs of our aging population, and improve working conditions for our healthcare professionals.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to support HB 442 HD1.

Sincerely,

HAHP Public Policy Committee
cc: HAHP Board Members



ALOHA CARE

To: The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager
Sarielyn Curtis, External Affairs Specialist

Hearing: Friday, February 21, 2025, 10:00 a.m., Conference room 308

RE: **HB 442 HD1 Relating to the University of Hawaii**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of HB442 HD1**, which appropriates funds to the UH system for various nursing programs.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 70,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 37 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

AlohaCare is committed to improving access to care. We support this measure as a critical and effective way to address chronic healthcare workforce shortages and expand the pipeline of nurses and other allied professions.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support of HB442 HD1**.

Aloha mai kakou,

My name is Candace Owens, and I am a former UH West Oahu Pre-Nursing Student, and currently a third semester student in the UH Manoa SONDH program. I am a very proud nursing student of the first collaboration cohort between UH West Oahu and UH Manoa's SONDH that started in Spring (January) of 2024. I am currently on the board of the UH Manoa Student Nurses' Association as the Digital Media Director, and on the board of the Hawaii Student Nurses' Association which represents all of Hawaii's student nurses' association chapters and serves as the co- secretary.

After reviewing HB442 and the testimony written on behalf of the UH West Oahu Pre-Nursing Program, I can wholeheartedly attest to the need of the program and their goals of upbringing our future keiki and adult returning students (like myself), from our own home here in Hawai'i to serve in our communities as skilled nursing professionals.

This brings me many emotions as I speak of UH West Oahu Pre-Nursing Program and what they have provided to me as not only a student but as an individual. Why does it bring out many emotions for me? Because the moment I stepped on that campus, I felt a sense of belonging. I am not just saying this, I truly mean it, the aloha, the compassion, and the support that I got from every faculty member I encountered at that campus is unmatched. The curriculum incorporated into their Pre-Nursing Program, not only teaches western medicine and sciences, but they also include one of the most important aspects for our upcoming nursing students to care for our people in our own home and communities, which is our culture here in Hawai'i.

Through these unique required courses we were able to learn the culture of the people we are going to care for, who they are, and where they come from which is vital knowledge especially here in Hawai'i. It is something I find very important in caring for our patients and is what will make us that much more valuable, trusted, and compassionate as nurses and healthcare Professionals in our own home. What this Pre-Nursing program stands for and incorporates into their teaching, is what sets them apart from any other.

Working in healthcare, in an ICU here in Hawaii for the past 10 years and what I experience in my clinical settings for school I can truly say that I see and feel the shortage of nurses needed to care for our patients, and the statistics provided truly is felt from our patients care and our burnt out nurses, and no temporary staff nurses and travel nurses are not the answer to temporarily fill vacancies. This can sometimes be more overwhelming than it is helpful for both patients and in the hospitals, well in my experiences and opinion.

As we are located on the west side of the island our goal and focus is to serve our community on the west side. It is one of the most underserved parts of the island where the majority of our houseless community reside, and unfortunately where many healthcare barriers exist due to many reasons, one being nursing shortages. Focusing on the admissions of students who reside and most likely grew up on the west side of the island is vital in helping our

west side communities to break down those healthcare barriers, and to help them thrive by creating positive and accepting connections between the community and their future healthcare professionals. Doing my clinicals out on the west side I felt very connected to my patients and in return many of them were super comfortable with me in their care and I know it is truly because of that connection, that deeper understanding of who they are and where they come from, that understanding of their culture, that extra teachings that was provided to me in the Pre-Nursing program that I was able to carry on with me as a Nursing student.

With that being said, I believe the finances that are being requested to fund our UH West Oahu Pre-Nursing program to hire more faculty is definitely reasonable, to build a better future in our healthcare system that will fulfill the demands and vacancies of nurses here in Hawaii. I have witnessed the tremendous growth in their amazing program, and have been hearing a lot of positive talk about it since the beginning of my journey there. Even the staff at UH Manoa have voiced that there is something truly special about our cohorts at UH West Oahu.

The issue they do face is the ratio of faculty to applicants they are receiving. I have seen the countless hours that the staff running the program have put in, not only to the program but to us as students as well, from early mornings to late nights to ensure every need possible is met. They have created such an amazing program that the growth and success can speak for itself, but they need that extra help. Like short staffed burnt out nurses, we don't want that for our faculty, to reach our end goals as a thriving community in Hawaii, breaking those healthcare barriers, by creating more nurses through this stepping stone program, we need our program to be thriving, which starts with a thriving fully staffed faculty and the finances to support that.

Besides our amazing professors and instructors that teach the courses within the programs, I can speak about two amazing staff members, Dr. Rebecca Romine and Nurse Nicole Akana, who work countless hours and are a huge part of the success of this program and myself. I mention them because on top of teaching courses within the program, they are also a huge face of the admission to the Pre-Nursing program and the transition of their Pre-Nursing students to the UH Manoa SONDH program. Providing them the financial support they need to hire more faculty can assure that the amount of students UH West Oahu can maximize into their Pre Nursing program can be met, with the appropriate amount of faculty to assure we are upbringing our future generations of nurses with the adequate student to faculty ratios. These ratios are crucial to our learning and the success of the program.

As a new program, and the success and growth in this short amount of time, I can only imagine the amount of further success and growth in the near future, providing our home, our Hawaii, with some of the top and unmatched skilled nursing professionals for our people and communities. As a student myself, I personally value this school, program, and the amount of pride and time the staff put into each and every one of us. This program played a huge part in my successes as a nursing student and has helped shape me into who I am today. It created a sense of community, pride, and belonging, in my life and as I venture into deeper grounds as a nursing student I will always remember where I started and the opportunities this program has opened for me.

This Pre-Nursing program is such a crucial stepping stone into the UH Manoa's Nursing program. It is also a success for the UH Manoa Nursing program as well as this collaboration creates additional admissions into Manoa's Nursing Program allowing them to admit additional nursing students not only in the fall semester but also now in the spring semesters, which will allow for our nursing shortages to be fulfilled by these upcoming nursing students like me.

Mahalo for all that you do and for taking the time to listen to my testimony and letting my voice be heard in something that I stand for, believe in, and value as an individual, nursing student, and most importantly a former UH West Oahu Pre-Nursing Student. It is in my hopes that you approve the requested amount of funding to this program which will allow for them to hire more faculty in order for them to continue to reach full potential that I believe this UH West Oahu Pre Nursing program has to offer and for the future of our skilled nursing professionals here in Hawaii.

Mahalo Again,
Candace Owens

Statement of Testimony in Support of HB442 HD1

Before the House Committee on Higher Education

Hearing Date: 2/21/25 10:00A

Submitted by: Aaron B. Ramirez, UH Mānoa-UHWO Cohort 1 Nursing Student by way of UHWO Pre-Nursing Pathway

Aloha e Committee Members,

My name is Aaron Ramirez, and I am honored to submit testimony in strong support of HB442 HD1, which provides critical financial support to the University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu (UHWO) Pre-Nursing Pathway. As a current nursing student and an advocate for increasing access to healthcare education, I have personally experienced the impact that programs like this can have in shaping the future of Hawai'i's healthcare workforce.

After twenty years of working toward my goal of becoming a nurse, I am proud to say that I am now a student in the UH Mānoa School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene BSN program. However, my journey would not have been possible without the foundational support I received from UHWO's Pre-Nursing Pathway. This program not only helped me navigate my academic progression but it also connected me to valuable mentorship and community initiatives that reinforced my commitment to serving vulnerable populations.

Why This Funding Matters

Hawai'i is currently experiencing a severe shortage of nurses, particularly in rural and underserved communities like Wai'anae, where I have spent the last several years working in community health. Through my work as a Research Coordinator at the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center (WCCHC), I have seen firsthand how culturally competent and community-rooted healthcare providers improve health outcomes.

Expanding the UHWO Pre-Nursing Pathway will help address this crisis by creating a sustainable pipeline of local students who reflect and understand the communities they will serve.

Beyond my personal experience, this program has proven to be a critical access point for aspiring healthcare professionals. The appropriation outlined in HB442 HD1 will ensure that UHWO can:

- Expand academic support services and advising for students,
- Increase faculty and program capacity to accommodate the growing interest,
- Provide scholarships and financial assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and
- Strengthen partnerships with local high schools to encourage early engagement in healthcare career pathways.

A Call to Action

HB442 HD1 represents an opportunity to make a lasting investment in Hawai'i's healthcare workforce and community well-being. I urge you not only to pass this bill but to ensure that this funding is fully appropriated and sustained beyond this biennium, so that UHWO can continue developing the next generation of compassionate, skilled nurses who will serve our communities for years to come.

Mahalo for your time and consideration. I am happy to provide any further insights on how this program has shaped my journey and why it deserves continued support.

Respectfully submitted,

Aaron B. Ramirez

aaronbr@hawaii.edu