



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 3:00 p.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 Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

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 HD1, 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 UH Mānoa - UH West O'ahu Nursing Collaboration 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.

HAH reported the growing health care workforce needs on Hawai'i Island. The Hawai'i Healthcare Workforce Initiative 2024 Report addresses the increase in registered nurse (RN) vacancy positions from 2022 to 2024, resulting in an over twofold increase in RN positions, from 72 to 159 RN vacancy positions. 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 to the Senate Committee on Higher Education
Tuesday, March 11, 2025; 3:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 229
Via Videoconference**

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

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, 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.



March 11, 2025 at 3:00 pm
Conference Room 229

Senate Committee on Higher Education

To: Chair Donna Mercado Kim
Vice Chair Michelle N. Kidani

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.

March 11, 2025

To: Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education

From: Hawaii Association of Health Plans Public Policy Committee

Date/Location: March 11, 2025; 3:00 pm/Conference Room 229 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony in support of HB442 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 HB442 HD1.

Sincerely,

HAHP Public Policy Committee
cc: HAHP Board Members



**Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
Tuesday, March 11, 2025 at 3:00 P.M.
Conference Room 229 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

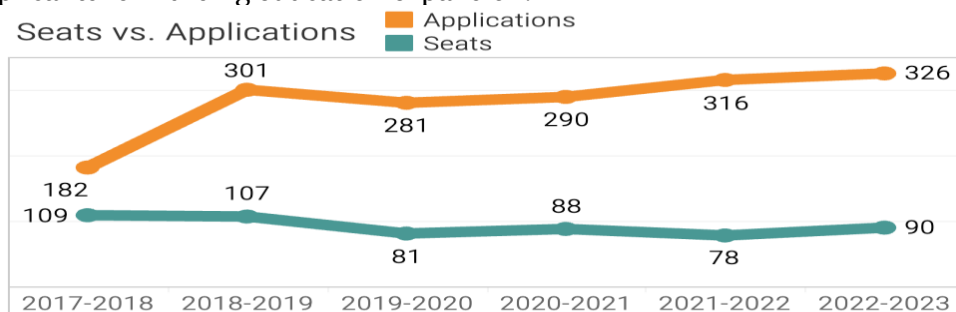
Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the committee:

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.hawaiicenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2022-2023_EdCap_StatewideReport_vFinal.pdf

The mission of the Hawai'i State Center for Nursing is to engage in nursing workforce research, promote best practices and disseminate knowledge, cultivate a well-prepared and well-distributed 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.hawaiicenterfornursing.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.hawaiicenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/State-Data-Tables-v.Final-1.pdf>

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

To: The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Higher Education

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

Hearing: Tuesday, March 11, 2025, 3:00 p.m., Conference room 229

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**.

**Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on HIGHER EDUCATION**

HEARING: Tuesday, March 11, 2025 at 3:00PM

PLACE: Room 229 State Capital and via videoconference



Hawai'i – American Nurses Association (Hawai'i-ANA)

HB442HD1 – Relating to the University of Hawai'i

Chair Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle N. Kidani, and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education, thank you for providing this opportunity for Hawai'i - American Nurses Association (Hawai'i-ANA) to provide testimony **in strong support of HB442, HD1.**

Hawai'i-American Nurses Association (Hawai'i- ANA) is the professional association for over 17,000 registered nurses who live and work in Hawai'i. Our mission is to advocate for the improvement of the healthcare system in the communities where we live and work.

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. Data from the Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (HSCN) 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.

The state's nursing workforce shortage is uppermost on our advocacy agenda at Hawai'i-ANA. The present nurse staffing crisis is one that is multifactorial in nature and will take a sophisticated multipronged approach to resolve. No one factor will solve the crisis. Expanding opportunities for nursing education in the state will increase the number of local graduates whom we can retain in Hawai'i and promote their on-going education without leaving the state.

Hawai'i-ANA thanks your committee for its commitment to the people of Hawai'i in ensuring their access to high-quality health care by supporting local healthcare education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

Contact information for Hawai'i – American Nurses Association:

President: Dr. Denise Cohen, PhD, APRN, FNP-BC, president@hawaii-ana.org

Vice President: Dr. Linda Beechinor, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, vicepresident@hawaii-ana.org

Executive Director: Elizabeth M. Kahakua, BSN executivedirector@hawaii-ana.org

phone (808) 779-3001 500 Lunalilo Home Road, #27-E, Honolulu HI 96825

HB-442-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/7/2025 3:37:17 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/11/2025 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Hilo Benioff Medical Center fully supports HB442 to expand the Univeristy of Hawiaii at Hilo's nursing school class size. After graduation, many of the graduates are hired into our Nurse Residency Program that acclimates them into the nursing units. This has been a tried and true progression of the nursing school path. In addition, our hospital and clinics are expanding to meet the growing needs of the community. This growth will require more nurses to be educated and trained into our workforce. Mahalo for considering this bill for a healthier Hawaii.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB442

TO: The Senate Committee on Higher Education (HRE)

FROM: Theo Dominic Morella

DATE: March 11, 2025

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

My name is Theo Dominic Morella, and I am a first-semester Nursing student attending the School of Nursing & Dental Hygiene at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. I am writing to express my strong support for HB422. I believe that appropriating funds for Nursing programs in the University of Hawai'i system is essential to address inequities in healthcare among the community while fostering a workforce that understands the challenges and disparities that its population continuously encounters.

I was born here on the island of O'ahu and was raised in Wai'ianae my entire life. I am familiar with the stigmas and challenges associated with my community. These challenges include financial hardships, accessibility to resources, and other social determinants affecting Wai'ianae and communities around the islands. My experience of these challenges strengthened my desire to become a nurse who provides medical care and advocates for those who feel unheard and underserved.

However, the financial burden and access to educational institutions that offered a Nursing program led me to reconsider my decision and assess the feasibility of pursuing this career path. The University of Hawai'i at West Oahu Pre-Nursing Pathway gave me the access, preparation, and support I needed to pursue this career. This institution opened up the opportunity for me and

others living on the Leeward side, allowing us to take the first step toward a nursing career that may have otherwise been out of reach.

The program focuses on academic preparation and actively assists its students in gaining valuable experience and credentials through collaboration with institutions that offer Nurse Aide, Medical Assistant, and EKG technician courses and healthcare employment opportunities.

Additionally, courses within the program incorporate classes that offer Indigenous perspectives that emphasize culturally competent care and ways to improve health outcomes for our local communities across O‘ahu.

After finishing my pre-requisite courses and other requirements at UH West Oahu, I applied to the School of Nursing & Dental Hygiene at Manoa through the UH West O‘ahu to UH Manoa Bachelor of Science pathway. I was blessed with the Spring 2025 semester admission and am eager to continue my education here in O‘ahu. The UH Mānoa faculty has incredibly supported me and my fellow cohort members. However, one of the most impactful aspects of the program is its emphasis on developing skilled nurses and nurse leaders equipped with the knowledge to lead, innovate, and improve patient care outcomes within our communities.

By supporting this bill, Hawai‘i is investing in future nurse leaders. The allocated funds to these programs will open up opportunities for our people to fill the healthcare shortages. I believe that the most effective advocates and healthcare leaders will be those who call Hawai‘i home, have firsthand experience with the social determinants impacting our healthcare system, and have been mentored by faculty and supported by resources dedicated to the well-being of our communities.

Statement of Testimony in Support of HB442 HD1

Before the Senate Committee on Higher Education

Hearing Date: 3/11/25 15:00

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

Aloha e Chairperson Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education,

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 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 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. 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 to pass this bill and 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.

Mahalo nui,

Aaron B. Ramirez

aaronbr@hawaii.edu