



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 Higher Education
Wednesday, March 19, 2025, at 2:15 p.m.

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

HCR 96/HR 92 – ENCOURAGING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII TO EVALUATE AND EXPAND ITS CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HCR 96/HR 92 which encourages the University of Hawai'i (UH) to evaluate and expand its current mental health services for students.

UH appreciates this resolution that shares many of our sentiments and recognizes the impact of mental health on students' academic journeys. To acknowledge the significance of mental health to students' success, UH included the following into our Strategic Plan 2023-2029, Hawai'i's University for Today and Tomorrow:

Imperative: Develop successful students for a better future

Objective: Provide necessary support for student success, including addressing barriers to access, basic needs (such as food and housing insecurity) and holistic health and wellness.

In addition, and to effectively meet the basic needs of UH students, the UH System established a dedicated committee with necessary resources such as staffing and education/training. Last year, the committee released the Student Basic Needs Master Plan (2024-2027), which responds to measured changes in student basic needs insecurity and resource availability, including access to healthcare to promote sustained mental and physical well-being.

The two guiding documents above set a firm foundation upon which work to advance mental health across all 10 UH campuses continues to build on. Each campus regularly evaluates and enhances the mental health services provided by their staff and through third party vendors.

Campuses continue to face hiring challenges due to competitive pay outside UH, alternate work modalities and other factors outside UH's control. Of the six mental health positions that UH received from the legislature last year, all are actively in the hiring process with three positions currently posted and close to filling, the other three scheduled to post by the end of this month and a few campuses filling positions with casual hires until the permanent process is completed. UH remains committed to enhancing the mental health services provided to students.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this resolution.