



# 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 Health  
Wednesday, April 2, 2025, at 10:30 a.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 Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, 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 ten 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.



March 30, 2025

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HCR96 / HR92: ENCOURAGING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII TO EVALUATE AND EXPAND ITS CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR STUDENTS**

**TO:** Chair Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee on Health

**DATE:** Wednesday, April 2, 2025 **TIME:** 10:30 a.m.

**PLACE:** Conference Room 329 and via videoconference

**FROM:** Health Committee

Dear Chair Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee,

We strongly support HCR96 / HR92, which encourages the University of Hawaii to evaluate and expand its current mental health services for students. This resolution highlights the urgent need to address the mental health challenges facing students and reflects a commitment to fostering a supportive and healthy academic environment.

**Key Reasons for Support:**

1. **Addressing Growing Mental Health Needs:** Students across the nation are experiencing increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. The University of Hawaii must have adequate resources and services to meet these growing demands and ensure that students can thrive both academically and personally.
2. **Reducing Barriers to Access:** Expanding mental health services at the University of Hawaii can help reduce barriers such as long wait times, limited availability of counselors, and stigma. Making mental health support more accessible and visible will encourage students to seek the help they need.
3. **Improving Academic Success and Retention:** Mental health significantly impacts students' academic performance and retention rates. By investing in robust mental health

services, the University can enhance student success and strengthen its academic community.

4. **Promoting Equity and Inclusivity:** Comprehensive mental health services should address the diverse needs of Hawaii's student population, including those from underserved and marginalized communities. Expanding services ensures equitable support for all students, regardless of their background.
5. **Aligning with Statewide Health Goals:** This initiative aligns with Hawaii's broader goals of improving mental health and well-being, as well as creating resilient and supportive communities.

HCR96 / HR92 is an essential step toward ensuring that the University of Hawaii fulfills its responsibility to support the mental health and overall well-being of its students. We urge the Committee on Health to support this resolution and help prioritize the mental health needs of Hawaii's future leaders.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HCR96 / HR92.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Burdick Chair, Health Committee

Melodie Aduja Vice Chair, Health Committee

## Written Testimony Presented Before the House Committee on Health

April 2, 2025 at 10:30 am

by

Kaitlyn Stewart, Student  
University of Hawai'i at Manoa

### **SUPPORT OF HCR 96 - ENCOURAGING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII TO EVALUATE AND EXPAND ITS CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR STUDENTS**

Chair Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kaitlyn Stewart, Wahiawa, I am currently a Masters of Social Work Student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa through the Thompson School of Social Work and Public Health. The views I will express are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of the university. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify **in support of HCR 96**, encouraging the University of Hawaii to evaluate and expand its current mental health services for students.

College student's mental health is highly relevant in the state of Hawaii. In 2020-2021 the Healthy Minds Study reported that "more than 60% of college students met criteria for at least one mental health problem" (American Psychological Association, 2022). This study collects data from 373 campuses in the United States. Another study by the American College Health Association in 2021 stated that "three-quarters of students reported moderate or severe psychological distress (American Psychological Association, 2022). Young adult's mental health needs to be prioritized more effectively and efficiently across all higher education institutions in the State of Hawaii.

Providing adequate resources for students to connect with mental health specialists and ensuring they have access to fundamental needs such as food and housing will allow college students to focus on their studies and gain the higher education they are working hard for. College students often struggle with depression, anxiety, and experience traumatic events with little understanding of who they can reach out to and where to go for help. Addressing mental health within the higher education setting can help prevent further mental health concerns, such as increase suicidal ideation. While I support this bill and its interest, I believe certain amendments can be made to increase its effectiveness. The University of Hawaii provided testimony on March 19th, 2025 regarding this Bill and stated that their objective is to "provide necessary support for student success, including addressing barriers to access, basic needs (such as food and housing insecurity) and holistic health and wellness". While they have addressed these concerns within their plan, there needs to be changes to the way they educate students on these initiatives. I have attended the University of Hawaii at Manoa for four years and have not heard of these plans. As a stakeholder, one of their students, there needs to be more involvement for these processes and information needs to be delivered in manners that students will receive and engage. If there is no engagement from pertinent stakeholders, how can the university verify that their plans are effective and the measured outcome is successful? This may lead to long term outputs that are not utilized by the targeted population. Therefore, I believe this bill can be powerful in addressing mental health services for students because it will encourage the university of Hawaii to encompass more of the population.

Thank you for your time. Kaitlyn Stewart.

**HCR-96**

Submitted on: 3/30/2025 3:31:34 PM

Testimony for HLT on 4/2/2025 10:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tanya Dean	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

Aloha and thank you for considering my strong support for this essential expansion of UH mental health services.

I am a UH Community College professor who sees the effects of insufficient mental health services for our college students. The mental health crisis for college students in Hawai'i and nationally is real. Anxiety, depression, and other disorders impact my students on a daily basis, and even more so since the pandemic.

At our Palamanui campus in Kona, we have NO mental health counselor. None. We rely on the ONE mental health counselor located on the other side of Hawai'i Island to triage students' requests for support. By the time they can be secure a counseling session, it's often too late. They cannot persist in their studies while they wait to find support (via phone or Zoom, never in person). So, the mental health support falls to already exhausted and, quite honestly, ill-prepared faculty and lecturers and academic advisors who want to help their dedicated but stressed students. Students who might otherwise persist in their studies with a little more support routinely drop out and never return. Consider, please, that a typical entry-level English class, for example, includes at least a third to half students with mental health concerns -- conservatively. When we see that many students drop out or barely squeak by, we are losing otherwise capable students and our UH system loses out with poor retention and graduation rates.

Please support this measure and mental health among our UH/UHCC students!

Mahalo on behalf of our students and their families