



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 97/HR 93 – URGING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII TO IMPLEMENT A HOMELESS STUDENT STABILITY AND HOUSING RESOURCE PROGRAM TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF HOUSING INSTABILITY

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HCR 97/HR 93 which encourages the University of Hawai'i (UH) to implement a homeless student stability and housing resource program to address the issue of housing instability.

In 2021, UH hired our first Basic Needs Coordinator in the Office of the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs. This position was created through a redescription of an administrative support position resulting in the new position needing to assist with clerical and fiscal duties in addition to basic needs programming. The similar situation has happened across the University of Hawai'i with some campuses redescribing positions to create a basic needs position while other campuses added duties to existing positions.

Since 2021, the campuses, in collaboration with and guidance from the UH Basic Needs Committee, have continuously and progressively added basic needs programming and services each year based on existing and emerging needs identified by students. This is the first year that the UH Basic Needs Committee has launched our own basic needs survey in an effort to ensure more relevance to our population and geography. The survey closed last Friday and a preliminary analysis is expected toward the end of this semester. UH intends to utilize the results of this survey to develop a plan to address basic needs insecurity within the student population, strengthen mental health services, and increase awareness of, and access to, basic needs resources and support.

UH has elevated our work with one of the vendors that we have a contract with to assist with raising awareness of basic needs resources, including housing, on campus and in the community. A casual hire employee was hired earlier this year to assist with this effort. This is a temporary solution and UH welcomes the opportunity to discuss a longer term option for sustainability of this systemwide work across multiple islands and in partnership with all 10 campuses and education centers across the state.

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