



# 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  
Friday, February 7, 2025, at 2:00 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 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the House Committee on Higher Education:

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 University of Hawai'i.**

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 Higher Education  
Friday, February 7, 2025 at 2:00 p.m.  
Videoconference and University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Bachman Hall  
Board of Regents Conference Room 106  
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**

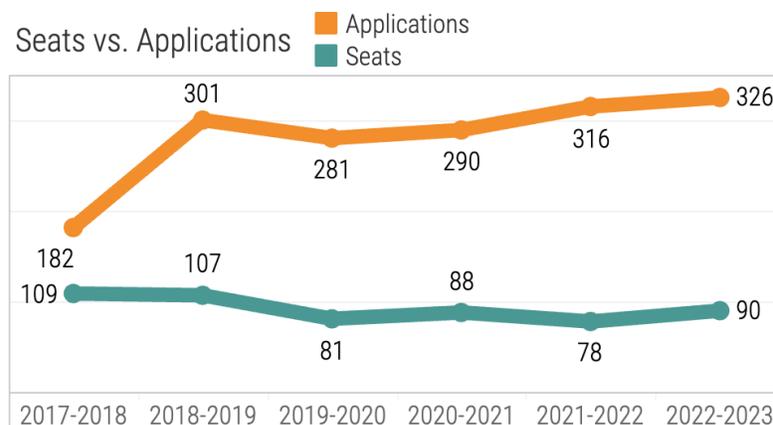
Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and members of the committee:

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 students<sup>1</sup>. There were 2.2 qualified applications received for every one opening for a BSN program in Hawai'i.
- 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.



<sup>1</sup> 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](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 Programs<sup>2</sup>

As it relates to specifically **Section 3**, the appropriations for the UH Mānoa online RN-to-BS program, HSCN's 2023 Nursing Workforce Supply Survey<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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/](https://www.hawaiicenterfornursing.org/data-reports/dashboards/rn_ed_dashboard/)

<sup>3</sup> 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 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 7, 2025 at 2:00 pm**  
**University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Bachman Hall**  
**Board of Regents Conference Room 106**

**House Committee on Higher Education**

To: Chair Andrew Takuya Garrett  
Vice Chair Terez Amato

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

Re: **Support**  
**HB 442, 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**

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 3:34:14 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/7/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Elena Cabatu	East Hawaii Region of Hawaii Health Systems Corporation	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We are in strong support of HB442 that will fund various nursing programs in the state, including the University of Hawaii at Hilo's School of Nursing. Our hospitals and clinics provide places of employment for these quality nursing students who will, in turn, care for our community!



ALOHA CARE

To: The Honorable Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair  
The Honorable Terez Amato, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Higher Education

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

Hearing: Friday, February 7, 2025, 2:00 p.m., University of Hawai'i at Mānoa,  
Bachman Hall, Board of Regents Conference Room 106, 2444 Dole  
Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

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

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AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of HB442**, 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**.



# Academic Labor United

## Testimony from Academic Labor United (ALU)

**LATE**

Attention: House Committee on Higher Education  
Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair  
Senator Terez Amato, Vice Chair

Re: Comments for HB442 Appropriates funds to the UH system for various nursing programs

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We fully support H.B. NO. 442 which provides necessary funding for undergraduate nursing students. We believe the time is now to update and expand the UH System's ability to provide quality undergraduate nursing education to answer the dire needs of the State's healthcare system. The passing of the bill assures us that nursing education is currently a prioritized agenda item at the local and state governmental levels. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity to present comments for this bill to emphasize to the committee and to the public at large, **that graduate nursing education is equally critical in Hawai'i**. The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program at UH plays a vital role in training advanced practice providers, educators, and healthcare leaders — professionals essential to Hawai'i's healthcare workforce. Without investment in these students, the state will face worsening shortages of primary care providers, particularly in rural and underserved areas where advanced practice nurses serve crucial roles.

However, despite the urgent need for DNP-trained providers, UH Manoa's School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene (SONDH) has revoked tuition waivers for all incoming DNP students beginning Fall 2025. Previously, these students benefited from Graduate Assistant (GA) positions, which provided tuition waivers while allowing them to work within the UH system. Due to advocacy efforts by ALU members and supporters, currently enrolled DNP GAs were "grandfathered in," preserving their benefits, but this critical financial support will no longer be available for future students. **Without tuition waivers, the ability of the DNP program to enroll and train skilled healthcare providers across the state will be severely diminished, as paying for full tuition will serve as a huge barrier for anyone looking to enroll in the nursing graduate program.**



# Academic Labor United

As this bill will allocate \$1,876,784 of state funds to undergraduate nursing programs of UH Mānoa, West O‘ahu and Hilo, I urge the committee to consider amending the bill to include reinstating tuition waivers for DNP students to ensure the sustainability of Hawaii’s healthcare workforce. This is a necessary investment in the future of the state’s healthcare system and the well-being of its residents. All current Nursing GAs are already greatly disheartened by the UH administration’s lack of budgetary priorities — the removal of tuition waivers for DNP students signals a lack of their commitment to the very professionals Hawai‘i needs most.

The funding proposed under H.B. NO. 442 for undergraduate nursing education is commendable, but it is equally vital that we address financial support for graduate nursing education. Appropriating funds to reinstate tuition waivers for DNP students will strengthen Hawaii’s healthcare workforce, particularly in underserved communities.

Sincerely,

*Samuel Todahl*

Sam Todahl  
Family Nurse Practitioner, DNP Student and Graduate Assistant  
School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene Alaka‘i Council (GA Representative)  
Academic Labor United

**LATE**

**HB-442**

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 8:20:30 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/7/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Dianne Deauna	Individual	Comments	In Person

Comments:

The funding proposed under H.B. NO. 442 for undergraduate nursing education is commendable (a total of \$1,876,784), but it is equally vital that we address financial support for graduate nursing education. Appropriating funds to reinstate tuition waivers for DNP students will strengthen Hawaii’s healthcare workforce, particularly in underserved communities.