



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, February 5, 2025, at 2:00 p.m.

By

Bonnie Irwin, Chancellor
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

HB 443 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT HILO

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 443. The University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UH Hilo) supports HB 443, which seeks to assist UH Hilo in our retention and recruitment efforts through an appropriation for positions and operating funds to support student enrollment management initiatives.

Enrollment management is essential to the long-term success and sustainability of UH Hilo, especially as we face increasing competition and shifting demographics in higher education. Increased focus on student enrollment management will optimize recruitment, admissions, and retention strategies while enhancing services for key student populations. This investment will have a direct impact on increasing enrollment, improving student satisfaction, and enhancing the overall student experience, aligning with our institutional goals of growth, inclusivity, and student success.

Student retention is a critical metric that impacts both the financial sustainability of the institution and the long-term success of our students. A Retention Coordinator will allow for a proactive approach to identifying at-risk students and implementing tailored interventions to support their persistence toward degree completion. This position will also work collaboratively across campus units to enhance existing programs, introduce retention strategies grounded in national best practices, and streamline student support services. By investing in retention, the institution not only improves student outcomes but also generates significant cost savings by reducing dropout rates, ultimately contributing to our strategic goals of student success and institutional sustainability.

Internships are essential for preparing students for post-graduate success, helping them gain practical experience, develop professional networks, and apply classroom learning in real-world environments. An Internship Coordinator will serve as the bridge between students, faculty, and external partners, ensuring that our programs are aligned with industry standards and that students are placed in meaningful internships. This position will also track student outcomes, providing data that can be used to further refine and improve the program. The Internship Coordinator's efforts will directly support career

readiness, increase student retention through engaged learning, and strengthen partnerships with local employers and community stakeholders.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 443.



Hawai'i Island Chamber of Commerce

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION HB 443 - Relating to the University of Hawaii at Hilo – IN SUPPORT

Wednesday, February 5, 2025 2:00 PM

Aloha Chair Andrew Takuya Garrett, Vice Chair Terez Amato, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Carla Kuo, and I am the Executive Officer of the Hawai'i Island Chamber of Commerce, representing over 300 businesses and individual members, primarily on the East side of Hawai'i Island. I am writing to express my **strong support for HB 443**, which allocates funding for a retention coordinator position, an internship coordinator position, and student enrollment management initiatives at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo.

Investing in these positions and initiatives is critical for the growth and sustainability of both our local workforce and economy. A retention coordinator will help ensure that students have the support they need to complete their education, reducing dropout rates and fostering a more skilled and educated workforce. The addition of an internship coordinator will create stronger connections between students and local businesses, providing valuable hands-on experience for students while helping businesses identify and nurture future talent. Student enrollment management initiatives will strengthen the university's ability to attract and retain students, contributing to the overall vibrancy of our community.

These efforts align closely with the mission of the Hawai'i Island Chamber of Commerce, as a strong educational system directly supports the development of a capable, local workforce, which is essential for the success of our member businesses and the economic health of our island. Supporting HB 443 is an investment in the future of Hawai'i Island.

Sincerely,

Carla Kuo

Executive Officer

Hawai'i Island Chamber of Commerce