



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
Senate Committee on Labor and Technology
Tuesday, February 11, 2025 at 3:05 p.m.

By

Vassilis L. Syrmos
Vice President for Research and Innovation
University of Hawai'i System

SB 1622 – RELATING TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Chairs Kim and Aquino, Vice Chairs Kidani and Lee, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) strongly supports SB 1622 which appropriates funds to establish an artificial intelligence (AI) institute within UH. As AI is rapidly transforming almost every aspect of daily life worldwide by enabling computers to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity, and autonomy, it is important for the state to stay ahead of this unprecedented evolution in technology.

The AI institute will take a unified approach for AI insertion within activities involving UH, the state, and the greater community to address guidelines and policy, workforce development and training, and research and development in services, industries and clusters. These areas, where both UH and the state have capacity and have made investments, include: clean/renewable energy, climate resilience, space sciences and engineering, health, sustainable agriculture, additive manufacturing, creative media, and cultural preservation.

The intent of this measure is to formalize and integrate the efforts, expertise, activities and approaches across UH's ten-campus system to serve as a resource for UH and the broader community to encourage economic development that is aligned with the state's needs. The University of Hawai'i intends to invest in the AI institute from revenue generated by its research activities and is asking the state to make an investment as a partner in this important initiative for the benefit of Hawai'i.

The University of Hawai'i supports SB 1622 provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in UH's BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you.



The Committee on Higher Education
&
The Committee on Labor and Technology
February 11, 2025
Room 229
3:05 PM

RE: **SB 1622, Relating to Artificial Intelligence**

Attention: Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani and Members of the
Committee

The University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA) **supports SB 1622**, Relating to
Artificial Intelligence.

SB 1622 establishes and appropriates funds to establish the aloha intelligence institute within
the University of Hawaii, thereby enabling the State to stay ahead of the ongoing evolution of
technology. Included in SB 1622 is the establishment and funding of faculty positions to
develop, support, and advance artificial intelligence initiatives statewide. To ensure the
recruitment and retention of the positions, it is essential for the FTE appropriation to have a
recurring, general funded designation.

Respectfully submitted,

Christian L. Fern
Executive Director
University of Hawaii Professional Assembly

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Higher Education
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair**

**Tuesday, February 11, 2025, at 3:05PM
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference**

RE: SB1622 Relating to Artificial Intelligence

Aloha e Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports Senate Bill 1622 (SB1622), which establishes and appropriates funds to establish the aloha intelligence institute within the university of Hawai'i to develop, support, and advance artificial intelligence initiatives statewide.

SB1622 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Military and Defense. This bill promotes policies that drive economic growth, enhance workforce opportunities, and improve the quality of life for Hawaii's residents.

As AI transforms industries, Hawaii must establish a research hub to drive innovation, create higher-paying jobs, and equip residents for a competitive, AI-driven economy. This bill establishes the Aloha Intelligence Institute at the University of Hawaii to advance AI research in climate resilience, agriculture, renewable energy, healthcare, and cultural preservation. It will offer AI-focused education, workforce training, and public-private partnerships to spur job creation and entrepreneurship while ensuring AI development aligns with Hawaii's values.

With its research expertise and industry ties, the University of Hawaii is well-positioned to lead AI innovation. The bill allocates \$2 million annually for two years to support faculty, research, and infrastructure. By integrating AI into Hawaii's economy, the institute will promote sustainable growth, higher wages, and workforce resilience. The Chamber supports this initiative as it strengthens the state's economic future and aligns with the 2030 Blueprint's vision.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.

We respectfully ask to pass Senate Bill 1622. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-1622

Submitted on: 2/7/2025 9:28:22 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/11/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacob Wiencek	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee Members,

The continued development of artificial intelligence technologies will have profound and global impacts. Hawaii will not be immune to these developments; we have to be ready. This is a common sense measure that will help Hawaii better understand the impacts of AI and allow us to properly integrate it into society.

I urge this Committee to SUPPORT this bill!

Testimony in Support of SB1622 (INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN)
Senate Committees on Higher Education and Labor & Technology

Hearing Date: February 11, 2025, at 3:05 PM
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference

Aloha Chairs Kim and Aquino, Vice Chairs Kidani and Lee, and Members of the Committees,

I am writing in strong support of **SB1622**, which seeks to establish and fund the **Aloha Intelligence Institute** within the University of Hawai'i. A statewide effort to organize the implementation and research of artificial intelligence (AI) is **critical** to ensuring that AI is developed and deployed **safely and effectively** in Hawai'i. **The University of Hawai'i is the right home for this effort**, leveraging its unique expertise and statewide reach to guide AI development in a way that benefits all residents while respecting our Native Hawaiian heritage.

AI is transforming industries and redefining workforce needs across healthcare, climate science, agriculture, renewable energy, and beyond. Establishing the Aloha Intelligence Institute is a **vital investment** in Hawai'i's workforce development, ensuring that our students, researchers, and professionals are equipped with the tools and training necessary to compete in an AI-driven future.

Furthermore, this **state investment will significantly enhance Hawai'i's ability to secure federal funding**. In my work, I use AI to advance cancer detection and risk assessment. **The John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) and the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center (UHCC) are working hand in glove** on major initiatives, demonstrating a strong collaborative framework to integrate AI into medical research. In January, these institutions, along with the **UH Computer Science Program**, jointly applied for a **major NIH grant** aimed at establishing the **Pacific Center for Artificial Intelligence and Data Science in Medicine (PAC-AID)**. This center is designed to train the next generation of AI researchers and clinicians, ensuring that Hawai'i remains at the forefront of AI innovation in healthcare. If awarded, the **PAC-AID COBRE has the potential to bring in \$13.5 million over 15 years to the state**, further reinforcing the economic and scientific impact of AI investment in Hawai'i.

The **Aloha Intelligence Institute** is **urgently needed** to ensure that AI is developed in a way that is **ethical, inclusive, and beneficial to all the people of Hawai'i**. It will provide the necessary infrastructure and leadership to **coordinate AI efforts across multiple sectors**, ensuring that our approach to AI respects the cultural, ethical, and economic priorities of our state. Additionally, the **Aloha Intelligence Institute will serve as a focal point to attract private investment, greatly compounding the impact of the state's investment with a high return on investment**. By fostering public-private partnerships, the institute will drive innovation and create long-term economic growth for Hawai'i.

For these reasons, I **strongly support SB1622** and urge the Legislature to pass this bill and allocate the necessary funding.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.



John Shepherd, PhD
Chief Scientific Officer, University of Hawai'i Cancer Center
University of Hawai'i