



**UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM**

**‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII**

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

**LATE**

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, February 4, 2025 at 3:15 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

SB 637 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Senate 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 SB 637, relating to UH.**

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, will support the UH West O'ahu positions of the Pre-Nursing program partnership to address the need for additional nurses and other high-need professionals in the health care field in West, Central, and North O'ahu. The UH West O'ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway program student enrollment has increased significantly in the past two years, and further growth is anticipated. An increase in UH West O'ahu Pre-Nursing Pathway student enrollment is necessary 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 rural areas in the state with access to nursing education 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 healthcare workforce needs on Hawai'i Island. The Hawai'i Healthcare Workforce Initiative 2024 Report addresses the increase in open registered nurse (RN) positions from 2022 to 2024, resulting in an over twofold increase in RN positions, from 72 to 159 open RN positions. 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 to the Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, February 4, 2025; 3:15 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 229  
Via Videoconference**

**RE: SENATE BILL NO. 0637, RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.**

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

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill No. 0637, RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines to over 150,000 patients each year who live in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

This measure, as received by your Committee, would:

- (1) Appropriate \$447,936 in general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, and same amount for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the University of Hawaii, West Oahu Nursing Collaboration Phase III;
- (2) Appropriate \$111,984 in general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, and same amount for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the University of Hawaii, Manoa for the online RN to BS Program;
- (3) Appropriate \$424,364 in general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, and same amount for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the University of Hawaii, West Oahu pre-nursing pathway; and
- (4) Appropriate \$297,500 in general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, and \$595,000 for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the University of Hawaii, Hilo to increase its school of nursing cohort size.

**Testimony on Senate Bill No. 0637**  
**Tuesday, February 4, 2025; 3:15 p.m.**  
**Page 2**

This measure would take effect on July 1, 2025.

The State of Hawaii is experiencing a severe shortage of health care professionals in the workforce, especially in rural areas. Recent studies note that the current shortage of physicians is at 20% of the total full-time equivalent positions throughout the State. The shortage is especially severe in the fields of primary care, infectious diseases, colorectal surgery, pathology, general surgery, pulmonology, neurology, neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery, family medicine, cardiothoracic surgery, rheumatology, cardiology, hematology/oncology, and pediatric subspecialties of endocrinology, cardiology, neurology, hematology/oncology, and gastroenterology.

The same can be said for registered and practical nurses, community health workers, social workers, pharmacists, and other disciplines in the field of health care.

The HPCA believes that provision of additional resources for nursing programs at the University of Hawaii will greatly enhance the educational opportunities for future nurses. This is critical because the shortage of nursing in Hawaii is dire.

**Accordingly, the HPCA urges your favorable consideration of this measure.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or [eabe@hawaiiipca.net](mailto:eabe@hawaiiipca.net).



**Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, February 4, 2025 at 3:15 PM  
Conference Room 229 and videoconference**

**By  
Laura Reichhardt, APRN, AGPCNP-BC  
Director, Hawai'i State Center for Nursing  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

**Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 637**

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, 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.

**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.

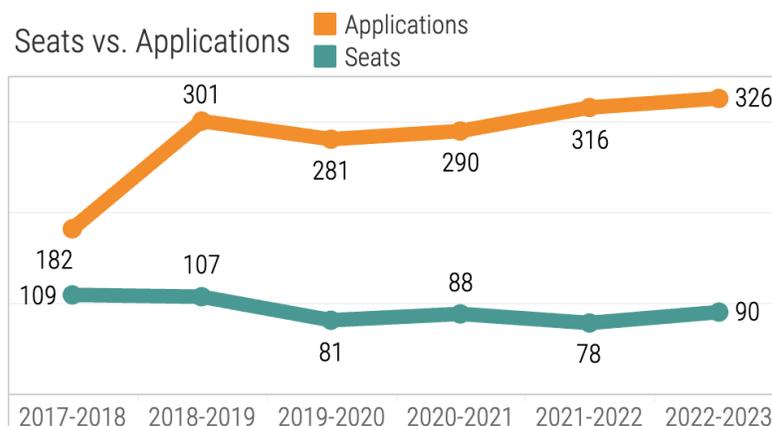


Figure 1: Admission Capacity and Demand for Publicly Funded BSN Programs<sup>2</sup>

<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)

<sup>2</sup> Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (2024). Hawai'i Pre-License RN Program Data, 2018-2023. [https://www.hawaiiicenterfornursing.org/data-reports/dashboards/rn\\_ed\\_dashboard/](https://www.hawaiiicenterfornursing.org/data-reports/dashboards/rn_ed_dashboard/)

*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.*

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

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.

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>3</sup> Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (2023). 2023 Hawai'i Nursing Workforce Supply Statewide Data Tables by License. Retrieved from: <https://www.hawaiiicenterfornursing.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/State-Data-Tables-v.Final-1.pdf>

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**February 4, 2025 at 3:15 pm**  
**Conference Room 229**

**Senate Committee on Higher Education**

To: Chair Donna Mercado Kim  
Vice Chair Michelle N. Kidani

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

Re: **Support**  
**SB 637, 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.

**SB-637**

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 12:12:41 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/4/2025 3:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Anne Scharnhorst	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for your strong support!

**SB-637**

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 2:45:21 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/4/2025 3:15:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Miki Miura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Support for Bill SB637

Aloha,

My name is Miki Miura, and I am a Family Nurse Practitioner (NP) at the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center and St. Luke's Clinic Ala Moana. I am writing to express my strong support for Bill SB637 and to provide some comments.

Nurses, including advanced practice registered nurses like nurse practitioners, play vital roles in Hawai'i's healthcare system. Those who have been educated in Hawai'i are especially important as they provide culturally competent care, having a deep understanding of our communities. These nurses are more likely to remain in Hawai'i and continue serving our people, unlike those who were educated elsewhere and may not be familiar with our unique culture.

Adequate funding for nursing programs at the University of Hawai'i (UH) is essential, as it not only helps to educate highly trained nurses who can serve our community but also provides affordable career opportunities for residents of Hawai'i. By keeping tuition lower than that of private universities, we can encourage more residents to pursue nursing careers.

I firmly believe that appropriating funds for nursing programs at UH is crucial to ensure that our residents receive high-quality care from nurses who understand the culture and needs of our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important bill.

Respectfully,

Miki Miura, DNP, APRN, FNP-C