



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM 'ŌNAEHAHA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony
Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on HIGHER EDUCATION & TECHNOLOGY
Wednesday, February 8, 2023 at 2:15p.m.
By
RACHEL SOLEMSAAS, Chancellor
University of Hawai'i System/Hawai'i Community College

HB532 – RELATING TO HAWAII COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela and Members of the Committee(s):

Hawai'i Community College seeks your support in the passing of HB 532 relating to an appropriation of funds for the salaries and fringe benefits of five positions within the Kō Education Center (hereafter referred to as KōEC), a distance education site located in Honoka'a, which helps Hawai'i Community College to meet its goals of serving Hawai'i Island-wide.

The importance of KōEC for Hawai'i Island

The Kō Education Center is considered "remote rural" because the center is located an hour or more away from its sister campuses in Hilo and Kona and exists to serve all the communities of North Hilo, along the Hamakua coast to Honokaa, throughout Kamuela, and the areas of North and South Kohala. The public and charter schools included in this Hamakua-North Hawai'i region are: Laupahoehoe CPCS, Honoka'a HS, Kanu O Ka Aina PCS, and Kohala HS.

KōEC, formerly known as North Hawai'i Education and Research Center or "NHERC" when established by University of Hawai'i at Hilo in 2006, was created to meet the college and workforce needs of the Hamakua-North Hawai'i communities. At that time, there was a critical need for UH to provide reskilling for a workforce that had been negatively impacted by the closure of the sugar plantations in the early 1990s. Fortunately, many of the region's families found employment in the growing resort industry on Hawai'i Island's golden Kohala coast. However, as Hawai'i emerges from the impacts of COVID-19 on its tourism industry, the Hamakua-North Hawai'i communities once again need to find new skills and pursue new types of degrees that will help secure Hawai'i's economic future.

Unintentional outcomes that caused a staffing crisis for KōEC

In July 2019, KōEC was transferred to Hawai'i Community College from UH Hilo, and the legislature had already appropriated \$9 million for a renovation project that is underway. Two positions were vacated by retirement in Spring 2019 and three had recently been awarded in the 2019 legislative session to support the expansion of the campus. All five vacancies were on hold pending the administrative and financial transfer of assets from UH Hilo to Hawai'i Community College.

Thus, when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and SB126 was enacted, all five vacant positions were swept. As a result, personnel capacity at KōEC has been at 40% for over two years and the campus does not have adequate staff to meet the commitments of extramural contracts or reopen for the public use of its meeting rooms or to serve the educational and workforce needs of the region in general. These positions include:

- \$114,750 for one full—time equivalent (1.0 FTE) auxiliary and facility services officer;
- \$114,750 for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) career 16 and technical education and career pathways specialist;
- \$91,800 for one full—time equivalent (1.0 FTE) lab 19 coordinator for the new career and technical education wing of KōEC;
- \$91,800 for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) 2 administration and fiscal specialist; and
- \$107,100 for one full—time equivalent (1.0 FTE) 4 faculty for programs in the new career and technical 5 education wing

Justification for the Restoration of KōEC Positions

Hawai'i Community College currently serves about 270 students from Hamakua Coasts, North and South Kohala and North Hilo. When fully staffed, KōEC has the ability to double or triple the current enrollment by providing:

- Early College outreach and/or dual-enrollment support for the 128 HS seniors who typically do not pursue college or career training after graduation,
- Non-traditional student recruitment and support, including student-parent programs, for the 900 students who stopped out of college or the 7,600 of residents aged 18-44 who have a HS degree or less.

In addition to the needs of the population served, Indigenous-serving community colleges in rural areas need to be fully staffed with trained personnel for several reasons:

1. Cultural Competence: Indigenous-serving community colleges serve a unique population with distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Having staff who understand and respect these backgrounds is crucial in creating a welcoming and inclusive learning environment.
2. Student Support: Rural and indigenous students often face unique challenges, such as limited access to resources, transportation, and family support. Having trained personnel to provide counseling, academic advising, and other support services can help ensure students succeed in their academic pursuits.
3. Quality Education: To provide a high-quality education, colleges need to have a well-trained and qualified faculty and staff. This includes knowledgeable and experienced instructors, administrative personnel, and support staff who can effectively deliver educational programs and services to students.
4. Community Outreach: Indigenous-serving community colleges in rural areas often play a key role in supporting local economic development and improving quality of life. Having

trained personnel to engage with the community and collaborate with local organizations can help the college effectively serve the needs of the community.

Overall, having a fully staffed and trained personnel is essential to the success and sustainability of indigenous-serving community colleges in rural areas, and to ensuring they fulfill their mission of providing accessible and equitable higher education to these historically underserved populations.

Examples of Rural- and Indigenous-serving College Education Centers

A "model rural-serving education center" refers to a college or university campus that is specifically designed and equipped to serve the educational needs of rural communities, often those with significant indigenous populations. These schools typically offer programs and services tailored to the unique cultural and economic needs of rural and indigenous communities, with a focus on fostering local development and self-sufficiency.

Examples of indigenous college campuses that fit this description include:

- Diné College, located on the Navajo Nation in Tsaile, Arizona
- Salish Kootenai College, located on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Pablo, Montana
- Cankdeska Cikana Community College, located on the Spirit Lake Nation in Fort Totten, North Dakota
- Haskell Indian Nations University, located in Lawrence, Kansas.
- Klamath Community College, located on the Klamath Tribes reservation in Klamath Falls, Oregon
- Little Big Horn College, located on the Crow Indian Reservation in Crow Agency, Montana
- College of the Muscogee Nation, located in Okmulgee, Oklahoma
- Ilisagvik College, located in Barrow, Alaska
- White Earth Tribal and Community College, located in Mahnomon, Minnesota.

These colleges provide access to higher education for rural and indigenous communities that might otherwise have limited options for post-secondary education. The benefits to the local economy can include:

1. An educated workforce that can attract Indigenous-owned businesses and support local economic development,
2. Increased opportunities for job training and career advancement for Indigenous-serving industries,
3. Reinforcement of local culture and tradition, and the preservation of Indigenous languages and knowledge.

Overall, Indigenous-serving community colleges located in remote areas play a crucial role in supporting the socioeconomic well-being of rural and Indigenous communities.

Long-term Value for Hawai'i Island

When fully staffed, KōEC and its unique strategic and cultural position for the Hamakua-North Hawai'i region, is able to provide long-term value for its residents and the island by providing:

1. Access to higher education for very rural communities which can have significant socioeconomic benefits, including:
 - a. Improved economic opportunity: College graduates earn more and have lower rates of unemployment, which can help lift families out of poverty and provide a pathway to sustainable income.
 - b. Increased workforce development: College graduates are better equipped to enter high-demand fields, such as health care, technology, and education, which have already been identified as critical workforce needs for Hawai'i.
 - c. Boosted local economies: Colleges located in remote areas can serve as engines of economic growth, generating new jobs and businesses, and attracting investment.
 - d. Improved quality of life: College graduates are more likely to participate in their communities, vote, and volunteer, leading to stronger, more vibrant communities.
 - e. Access to new ideas and cultural experiences: Higher education, especially with an indigenous-serving college, can broaden student's horizons, exposing individuals to new perspectives and cultures, and helping to build a more informed, global society.

In contrast, when rural, Indigenous-serving education centers are not fully staffed and not providing access to higher education in remote areas, various negative outcomes may occur, including:

1. Brain drain: Without access to higher education, talented individuals from rural areas may be forced to leave their communities in search of opportunities, leading to a depletion of human capital and a decline in local economies.
2. Limited economic growth: Without a highly educated workforce, rural communities may be unable to attract and retain businesses and industries that require a skilled workforce, stifling economic growth and development.
3. Persistent poverty: Without access to higher education, many individuals in rural areas may be stuck in low-paying jobs, unable to move up the income ladder or improve their quality of life.
4. Widening income inequality: The lack of access to higher education in rural areas can exacerbate income inequality and limit social mobility.
5. Decreased civic engagement: Without access to higher education, individuals in rural areas may be less likely to engage in their communities, vote, or participate in local decision-making processes, leading to a decline in community resilience.

By not providing access to higher education in remote areas, we risk perpetuating poverty, geographic inequality, and socioeconomic stagnation, which has the potential to undermine the long-term well-being of these historically resilient rural communities.



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House Committee on Higher Education & Technology
Wednesday, February 8, 2023, at 2:15 p.m.
By
Erika Lacro, Vice President for Community Colleges
University of Hawai'i System

HB 532 – RELATING TO HAWAII COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of HB 532, which appropriates positions and funds for the Kō Education Center (KōEC).

The KōEC was established to be a model rural-serving education site that meets the educational and workforce needs of the Hāmākua community. In 2019, KōEC was transferred to Hawai'i Community College from UH Hilo, and the legislature has appropriated \$9 million for a renovation project that is underway.

As a result of Act 9, SLH 2020, five vacant positions were abolished, and the campus no longer has adequate staff to reopen the use of its meeting rooms to the public or to serve the needs of the community in general.

Hawai'i Community College serves about 270 students from Hamakua Coasts, North and South Kohala, and North Hilo. In addition, the center intends to outreach and support approximately 128 high school seniors who typically do not pursue college or career training after graduation, 900 students who dropped out of college, and 7,600 residents aged 18-44 who have a high school degree or less.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of HB 532, on the condition that any funds appropriated in support of this program does not supplant any portion of the University's budget request.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 532.



The House Committee on Higher Education and Technology
Wednesday, February 8, 2023
Room 309, Videoconference
2:15 pm

RE: **HB 532 Relating to Hawaii Community College**

Attention: Chair Amy Perruso, Vice Chair Jeanne Kapela and members of the Committee

The University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA) **supports and requests the passage of HB 532** relating to the appropriation of funds for five positions for the Hawaii Community College.

UHPA appreciates the legislature recognizing the loss of positions at the ko education center during the coronavirus pandemic and their willingness to now fund those five positions. Section 2 of this Bill clearly states the intention of the legislature to general fund five full-time equivalent permanent positions.

UHPA supports and requests the passage of HB 532.

Respectfully submitted,

Christian L. Fern
Executive Director
University of Hawaii Professional Assembly