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Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
Friday, January 31, 2025 at 2:15 p.m.
By
Vassilis L. Syrmos
Vice President for Research and Innovation
University of Hawaiʻi System

HB 546 – RELATING TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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

The University of Hawaiʻi (UH) strongly supports HB 546 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 Hawaiʻi 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 Hawaiʻi.

The University of Hawaiʻi supports HB 546 provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in UH's BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you.

RE: **HB 546, Relating to Artificial Intelligence**

Attention: Chair Andrew Garrett, Vice Chair Terez Amato and members of the Committee

The University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA) supports HB 546, Relating to Artificial Intelligence.

HB 546 establishes and appropriates funds to establish the aloha intelligence institute within the University of Hawaii, including the establishment and funding of faculty positions. To ensure the recruitment and retention of the positions, it is essential for the FTE appropriation to have a recurring, general funded designation.

UHPA supports and requests the passage of HB 546.

Respectfully submitted,

Christian L. Fern
Executive Director
University of Hawaii Professional Assembly

HB-546
Submitted on: 1/28/2025 5:34:51 PM
Testimony for HED on 1/31/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kayla Marie	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose the promotion of AI technologies. Generative AI programs are harmful to the environment. The amount of water needed to run AI programs is not sustainable. These AI programs also plagiarize existing art and writing.

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands	Comments	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Subject: Concerns and Recommendations for H.B. NO. 546 - Aloha Intelligence Institute

Dear House of Representatives & Committee Members

I am writing to share some insights and recommendations regarding House Bill No. 546, which proposes the establishment of the Aloha Intelligence Institute at the University of Hawaii. While I largely support the initiative to advance AI in a way that benefits Hawaii, I have identified several areas of concern along with potential enhancements:

Concerns:

1. Funding Sustainability: The initial funding of $2 million per year is commendable, but there's a need for a strategy to ensure long-term financial support to sustain and expand the institute's activities.
2. Infrastructure: The success of the institute hinges on access to state-of-the-art technology and computing resources. The existing infrastructure at UH might not meet these needs without significant investment or partnerships.
3. Cultural and Ethical Considerations: There's a danger that the rapid advancement of AI might overlook cultural sensitivities or ethical implications specific to Hawaii's diverse community.
4. Talent Recruitment: Attracting and retaining AI experts in Hawaii could be challenging, considering the global competition for tech talent.
5. Community Disconnect: Without active engagement, the institute might not fully address or reflect the needs of all Hawaiian communities.
6. Privacy and Commercial Use: The commercialization of AI must be carefully managed to protect privacy and ensure ethical standards.

7. External Funding Influence: Heavy reliance on external grants could skew research priorities away from what's most beneficial for Hawaii.

Recommendations:

1. Long-term Funding Plan:
   o Develop mechanisms like endowments or state-federal matching grants to secure funding beyond the initial appropriation.
2. Infrastructure Enhancement:
   o Invest in or partner for advanced computing infrastructure, perhaps through cloud services or by expanding physical resources.
3. Ethical and Cultural Framework:
   o Engage deeply with cultural leaders and communities to co-develop ethical guidelines that respect and integrate local cultural values.
4. Talent Attraction Strategy:
   o Offer incentives or programs like research fellowships, housing assistance, or tax benefits to attract AI experts to Hawaii.
5. Community Engagement:
   o Establish ongoing community dialogue through forums or workshops to align the institute's work with community priorities.
6. Privacy and Ethics Education:
   o Incorporate AI ethics into the curriculum and ensure all research and development respects privacy and ethical considerations.
7. Balanced Research Portfolio:
   o Support both immediate, industry-focused projects and foundational research that might yield long-term benefits.
8. Public Education Campaigns:
   o Educate the public about AI to foster understanding and acceptance, reducing potential fears or misconceptions.
9. Inter-Island Collaboration:
   o Extend the institute's reach to all Hawaiian islands, possibly through virtual platforms or satellite offices.
10. Performance Metrics:
   o Define success not only by academic output but also by social impact, ethical practice, and community satisfaction.

By considering these aspects, H.B. NO. 546 can be crafted into a robust foundation for an AI institute that truly serves Hawaii's unique needs. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this discussion and look forward to any further dialogue on how to best implement this visionary project.

Sincerely,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, HRM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Fuchser	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I believe there should be no widespread use of AI in any capacity in the University of Hawai'i (UH), much less funded by the state. AI seems like the perfect tool - solutions to the world's problems at the click of a button - but the reality is far from it. Whatever meager benefits AI might offer, they are outweighed by its horrible environmental costs, its inherently unethical nature, and its destruction of interesting creation.

Let me first talk about AI plainly. It does not create anything itself. Everything AI populates for you comes from somewhere else, a thousand models programmed into its system and rearranged for you. Why are we preferring this faceless tool over the people who have the skills to do the same things for us? Do their skills not matter enough to compensate them for their work? Why give money for a new institute around AI and teaching people the skills for AI when we could be using the money to teach people the actual skills to do these things themselves? In my opinion, for this alone, AI is inherently unethical.

When we consider the environmental costs, it becomes even worse. Not only would we rather the faceless tool over a colleague, we would rather kill the environment than pay a human being. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), AI has a negative impact in multiple areas. "The proliferating data centres that house AI servers produce electronic waste. They are large consumers of water, which is becoming scarce in many places. They rely on critical minerals and rare elements, which are often mined unsustainably. And they use massive amounts of electricity, spurring the emission of planet-warming greenhouse gases."

In Hawai'i specifically, we already have electricity and water concerns. It's unethical and shocking to even consider promoting something that would use these resources to a degree that we cannot support. Just last year, CBC posted an article about the water crisis (found [here](#)). UNEP reported that AI "data centres use water during construction and, once operational, to cool electrical components. Globally, AI-related infrastructure may soon consume six times more water than Denmark." After Red Hill, the building of large freshwater pools on Oahu, and other environmental impacts on rainfall, we do not have the resources to spare for AI.

As for electricity, Hawai'i had multiple shortage related outages last year. Civil Beat reported "there was not enough generation or stored energy available on the island to serve

the demand. This occurred four times recently, once on Oahu (Jan. 8) and three times (Jan. 30, Feb. 13 and April 15) on Hawaiʻi island" ([Civil Beat](), June 5, 2024). If we are already having shortage related power outages, why are we considering building a center that would require even more energy? According to UNEP, "data centres that host AI technology need a lot of energy, which in most places still comes from the burning of fossil fuels, producing planet-warming greenhouse gases. A request made through ChatGPT, an AI-based virtual assistant, consumes 10 times the electricity of a Google Search." Where is this energy coming from? What communities on our islands are going to have less electricity to cover the AI costs?

I don't believe we can talk about AI and what it might do for us without discussing the harm it has already been shown to cause. AI has been used to create false propaganda images, images and audio of female celebrities and students of unauthorized sexual nature, and plagiarism. A tool that can do this unchecked has no place in our schools or our state. You can argue that any tool can also be destructive if used improperly, but what regulations are there on AI? You can ask it to create anything for you and there is nothing stopping it from using any information it can find. Does anyone who's face or words has ever been put online deserve to be mashed together by a computer program they know nothing about? Did they agree to that when they posted their photos or wrote their articles? Why are we trying to make things faster and easier instead of cherishing the effort that goes into making them?

When we talk about AI as a tool and a source of interest for the future, I urge our policymakers to consider what its widespread use would mean for our communities. HB546 says AI will increase "development in areas such as renewable energy, climate resilience, space sciences and engineering, health, sustainable agriculture, additive manufacturing, creative media, and cultural preservation." What about the experts and students studying these fields? How is AI worth more to us and our future than the human minds already working on these things? I don't believe AI can replace the minds of people working together. Like I said earlier, AI only draws on what already exists. It doesn't create new ideas. It is simply a mimic - true, unique idea synthesis is a human ability. I don't believe even the chance that AI might be able to do this someday is worth all of the negative costs. I would rather state funds go to support human innovation and growth of the skills people would otherwise teach to AI.

UNEP article can be found here: https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/ai-has-environmental-problem-heres-what-world-can-do-about