THE SENATE
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026
STATE OF HAWAII

S.B. NO. 2020

JAN 21 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that long-term science, technology, engineering, and mathematics workforce development programs foster a sustainable and economically diverse base for advanced technology companies, particularly on the neighbor islands. Supporting advanced technology industries in the State will stimulate economic growth and ensure that Hawaii's youth can remain in Hawaii to pursue long-term, stable careers in these high-need areas.

The legislature further finds that the university of Hawaii can create viable career pathways through its network of campuses and engagement with students in grades kindergarten through twelve. The demand continues to grow for educational, research, and career opportunities in the space sciences and engineering fields especially with the renewed federal and international interest in expanded space exploration. However, less than fifteen per cent of engineering schools nationwide

currently have dedicated programs directly supporting these career paths.

The legislature also finds that increased space mission and space monitoring activities in Hawaii, as well as the existing ground-based observatory facilities on Maunakea and Haleakala, provide appropriate platforms for instrumentation and detector technology development, facility innovation, and operational upgrade and advancement investigations. These resources can expand employment opportunities for Hawaii's high-tech workforce.

In addition, a new facility dedicated to engineering education and the development and fabrication of astronomical instruments was previously funded by the legislature and is now in the design phase. This new building on the university of Hawaii at Hilo campus will support Hawaii's students by expanding student internships, undergraduate research opportunities, and students' exposure to engineering careers in astronomy and other fields.

The legislature further finds that the university of Hawaii's new space science and engineering initiative is recruiting an initial cohort of dedicated engineering faculty

within the college of engineering through recent appropriations from the legislature. The new engineering faculty will be located at the university of Hawaii at Manoa and the institute for astronomy's facility at the university of Hawaii at Hilo. The faculty will focus on teaching, research, and engineering applied to astronomy, aerospace, and advanced technologies. For the first time, an engineering degree pathway will be available to university of Hawaii at Hilo students.

A cornerstone of the initiative is providing the new faculty access to the high-tech development and instrumentation at the observatories on Maunakea and Haleakala. Together, the observatories have facilities worth over $1,000,000,000 and regularly support advances in research, education, and technology.

Furthermore, the legislature recognizes that these globally significant investments in Hawaii, which together generate more than $200,000,000 annually statewide, can serve as the basis for a workforce development program that substantially deepens the long-term benefits of these investments for Hawaii students, businesses, and communities. The most cost-effective approach to creating a workforce development program is to integrate

successful, existing programs into a continuum of support from kindergarten students to career professionals by linking students to hands-on learning opportunities and, ultimately, employers. The building blocks for a workforce development program are substantially in place, but additional resources are needed to expand this foundation and create a robust and globally unique end-to-end science, technology, engineering, and mathematics workforce development program.

The legislature additionally finds that the Maunakea scholars program and the new Maunakea observatories internship program are developing the next-generation workforce at the high school and undergraduate levels. The Maunakea scholars program is a partnership between the department of education, university of Hawaii, and Maunakea observatories. The program began as a pilot program in 2016 involving students at both Kapolei and Waiakea high schools. More than one thousand two hundred students have since participated in the program in schools on the islands of Oahu, Lanai, Molokai, Maui, and Hawaii.

The Maunakea observatories internship program pairs high school students with mentors, including graduate students at the university of Hawaii institute for astronomy. The mentors help

the students design and execute their own research projects using all observatories on Maunakea and several observatories on Haleakala. The program focuses on rural public schools and includes students at varying academic levels. The program is designed to empower students to envision themselves as individuals who can engage in a variety of professions, including astronomy, engineering, computer science, data analytics, and systems design.

The legislature further notes that, through mentoring and collaboration, numerous Maunakea scholars have pursued science, technology, engineering, and mathematics degrees, including astronomy degrees at the university of Hawaii at Manoa and university of Hawaii at Hilo, and employment in the astronomy, education, and engineering fields.

Spinoff projects include the new Waipahu high school observatory, the only professional-grade high school observatory in the State. The observatory serves ten public high schools, representing its full capacity given currently available resources. Expanding the reach of the observatory to all public high schools and including additional disciplines, such as

engineering, are viable possibilities but will require additional staff and resources.

The legislature believes that a successful workforce development program must leverage existing programs, such as those developed by the institute for astronomy and the college of engineering, to provide career pathways into jobs for Hawaii students. A holistic approach will include ongoing mentoring to help bridge the historic gaps between education and employment tracks for Hawaii students, leading the students to fulfilling, long-term careers.

Moreover, the legislature finds that the institute for astronomy, the nexus of many workforce development components, is the most logical place to host a next-generation workforce development program. Coordinating the development of this program and providing sustained funding to cover operational costs will be essential to maintain existing investments and enable the kindergarten-to-career approach. The legislature emphasizes the importance of growing Hawaii's workforce, not only in space sciences but also in all engineering disciplines.

Therefore, the purpose of this Act is to appropriate moneys to support the university of Hawaii's space science and

engineering initiative workforce development program and the coordination and integration of various programs and projects supporting pathways to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics careers.

SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of $ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to provide salaries, office supplies, stipends and other operational expenses for the university of Hawaii institute for astronomy, to be allocated as follows:

(1) $ for salaries and fringe benefits for the following positions:

(A) full-time equivalent (FTE) university of Hawaii space science and engineering initiative workforce development program manager;

(B) full-time equivalent (FTE) Maunakea scholars program coordinator; and

(C) full-time equivalent (FTE) administrative clerk for the university of Hawaii space science and engineering initiative workforce development program; and

(2) $ for office equipment and supplies, operational costs, and internship stipends for high school and college students.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the university of Hawaii for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

INTRODUCED BY: Ignacio R. Gonsalves

S.B. NO. 2020

Report Title:
UH; Institute for Astronomy; Space Science and Engineering Initiative; Workforce Development Program; Internship Program; Appropriation

Description:
Appropriates moneys to the University of Hawaii Institute for Astronomy's Space Science and Engineering Initiative Workforce Development Program.

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