



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Finance  
February 26, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

By

Debora Halbert

Vice President for Academic Strategy  
University of Hawai'i System

HB 1859 HD1 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i strongly supports HB 1859 HD1 - Relating to Workforce Development. The University of Hawai'i (UH), as a member of the Workforce Development Council, agrees with the intent of the bill to develop a long-term strategy. No single state entity, including UH, can solve workforce shortages alone. For kama'āina who pursue higher education, outcomes are shaped less by educational preparation than by Hawai'i's labor market and cost of living. Only 43% of the state's four-year college graduates are employed in jobs requiring a degree within five years of graduation, and after accounting for Hawai'i's high cost of living, median wages for these graduates rank among the lowest nationally. As a result, even college-educated workers often cannot access jobs that provide a sustainable living wage in Hawai'i. This mismatch contributes to underemployment, out-migration, and ongoing workforce shortages across both the public and private sectors, including among graduates who wish to remain in the state.

As written, the bill establishes a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy tied to a clear long-term goal and requires that strategy to guide future State Unified Plans. It clarifies the Workforce Development Council's role in facilitating interagency alignment via the State Unified Plan while preserving agency authority and links coordination efforts among partner organizations, including UH, to shared metrics and reporting over time. Together, these provisions provide a mechanism for continuity across planning cycles and administrations, helping to ensure that coordination efforts can build on prior work rather than restart.

In addition to its work with the Workforce Development Council, UH is an active participant in the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui — a community-driven coalition of government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations working together to first develop and now advance Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment. Across multiple analyses and years of shared learning within the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui and beyond, a consistent conclusion has emerged: Hawai'i's workforce challenges are interconnected and long-term in nature, and progress depends on sustained coordination across systems. In order to

effectively counter brain drain, address longstanding workforce shortages, and fulfill the fundamental promise of higher education to provide a better life for our graduates, this coordinated strategy will need to expand the work-based learning opportunities available to our students and the number of good jobs graduates can look forward to (especially on the neighbor islands, where there are two well-qualified job seekers for every job that pays a living wage). Both are key goals of the strategy developed through our collaborative process. This process was led by the Workforce Development Council, who are well positioned to plan and implement the long-term transformation of our educational pipeline and workforce development outcomes. This bill establishes their authority to do so. Such coordination is among the best practices used by states such as Maine and North Carolina to achieve their own North Star workforce development goals.

Workforce challenges of this scale require time, sustained coordination, and long-term investment. HB 1859 HD1 creates the conditions for aligned public and private investment to accumulate over time by establishing shared direction, clarified roles, and durable accountability. For these reasons, the University of Hawai'i supports HB 1859 HD1 and appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony.



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February 26, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1859, HD1**  
RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Conference Room 308 & Videoconference  
10:00 AM

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

**The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports HB 1859, HD1**, which requires the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy for inclusion in the State Unified Plan and to facilitate alignment of workforce development efforts across state departments and agencies.

Workforce availability remains one of the most significant challenges facing Hawai'i agriculture. Farmers and ranchers consistently report difficulty recruiting and retaining employees with the technical, operational, and regulatory skills required for modern agricultural operations. These workforce challenges affect not only production agriculture but also food processing, agricultural technology, biosecurity, and natural resource management.

Hawai'i has made meaningful progress in workforce coordination through existing programs and partnerships. However, as recognized in the measure, no single agency or sector can address workforce shortages alone. A coordinated, long-term statewide strategy can help align education, training programs, economic development initiatives, and industry needs under a shared framework with measurable goals.

For agriculture, improved alignment means clearer career pathways for local students, from high school agricultural programs and FFA chapters, to hands-on training at our community colleges, to applied degrees within the University of Hawai'i system, while creating stronger connections to internships and employment opportunities on farms, ranches, food hubs, and within state agricultural and biosecurity agencies. Strengthening

coordination across these programs helps ensure that students from communities on every island can see a viable future in agriculture without having to leave Hawai'i to build a career.

HFB supports the focus on interagency coordination and measurable outcomes. Clear metrics and alignment across departments can improve accountability and ensure that limited public resources are directed toward workforce programs that produce meaningful employment results.

Strengthening Hawai'i's workforce development system is essential to building a resilient economy, expanding local food production, and creating long-term career opportunities for local residents. HB 1859, HD1 represents an important step toward a more coordinated and effective workforce strategy for the State.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



**House Committee on Finance**  
**February 26, 2026 at 10:00 AM**  
**Room 308**

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1859 HD1**

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Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Hawai'i Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations, I would like to offer our comments in **support of HB1859 HD1**, which requires the Workforce Development Council to develop and recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to facilitate alignment of workforce programs across departments and agencies.

The Hawai'i Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations (HANO) is a statewide, sector-wide professional association of nonprofits that works to strengthen and unite the nonprofit sector as a collective force to improve the quality of life in Hawai'i. Since 2006, HANO has been a leading voice for the nonprofit sector, leveraging resources, educating and advocating for policies and practices that promote the professionalism, sustainability, and effectiveness of nonprofits and the communities they serve.

Nonprofits are a core part of Hawai'i's economy, employing approximately 12% of the state's workforce.<sup>1</sup> Beyond their role as employers, nonprofits deliver essential services, provide workforce training, and work closely with individuals facing barriers to employment. As a statewide membership organization, HANO is well positioned to help shape a workforce strategy that meaningfully integrates the nonprofit sector's voice into planning. Doing so will ensure workforce efforts are grounded in community realities and responsive to residents who have historically been underrepresented in workforce systems.

HANO's data-informed resources can further strengthen this work by elevating nonprofit workforce trends that should be considered in a comprehensive statewide strategy. In 2026, HANO will release its Nonprofit Sector Report and Nonprofit Compensation & Benefits Report, offering updated, sector-wide data on employment trends, job quality, compensation, and workforce conditions across Hawai'i. These reports will help identify workforce challenges, needs, and opportunities, as well as inform equitable compensation practices within the nonprofit sector.

HANO stands ready to collaborate with the Workforce Development Council and state partners to ensure the nonprofit sector's contributions are fully reflected in statewide planning. This includes elevating sector-specific workforce insights, aligning nonprofit workforce initiatives with

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *The Economics Daily*, Nonprofits accounted for 12.8 million jobs, 9.9 percent of private-sector employment, in 2022 at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/nonprofits-accounted-for-12-8-million-jobs-9-9-percent-of-private-sector-employment-in-2022.htm> (visited February 3, 2026).

state goals, and supporting cross-sector collaboration to expand career pathways for local residents.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1859.



# MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

**HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 308  
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026 AT 10:00 A.M.**

To The Honorable Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Members of the Finance Committee

## **SUPPORT HB1859 HD1 RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Economic growth and diversification are among the top priorities of the Maui Chamber of Commerce and we recognize the critical importance of a coordinated and strategic approach to workforce development. We support HB1859 HD1 because a skilled and adaptable workforce is foundational to economic resilience, especially as Maui and the broader state continue to recover from recent economic shocks and seek to build a more diversified economy.

The bill's requirement for the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy and facilitate alignment among state agencies directly supports our goals. Effective workforce development encourages higher employment, supports local businesses, and attracts new industries—key drivers of economic growth and diversification. By integrating workforce planning across agencies, the state can better align training and education with emerging industry needs, helping residents access quality jobs and supporting Maui's ongoing recovery.

We respectfully recommend that the implementation process for the statewide workforce strategy includes robust engagement with local businesses across the state and industry stakeholders to ensure the strategy remains responsive to real-world needs.

Sincerely,

Pamela Tumpap  
President

To advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating for a responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.



info@hawaiikidscan.org  
hawaiikidscan.org

February 24, 2026

House Committee on Finance  
Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Regarding: **Support for HB 1859 HD1 Relating to Workforce Development**

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

**HawaiiKidsCAN strongly supports HB1859 HD1**, which establishes a comprehensive, long-term, statewide workforce strategy to ensure that Hawai'i residents can access living-wage careers and thrive in our communities.

Founded in 2017, HawaiiKidsCAN is a local nonprofit organization committed to ensuring that Hawai'i has an excellent and equitable education system that reflects the true voices of our communities and, in turn, has a transformational impact on our children and our state. We strongly believe that all students should have access to an excellent education that becomes the foundation for a sustainable future on our islands, regardless of family income levels and circumstances.

In pursuit of this mission, HawaiiKidsCAN has worked to expand access to work-based learning opportunities, ensure the alignment of secondary education initiatives with workforce needs, and most recently, supported the passage of Act 154 (SB742, 2025). Act 154 will build long-term, sustainable data-sharing mechanisms across state agencies, underpinning the long-term vision proposed in HB1859 HD1.

Hawai'i faces persistent workforce challenges that affect learners, workers, employers, and communities statewide. Even under favorable employment conditions, this gap creates ongoing pressure on workers and families, contributing to underemployment and continued out-migration. These challenges are especially pronounced on the neighbor islands, where access to training, advancement, and living-wage jobs is more limited.



HB1859 HD1 is designed to build alignment and long-term impact across Hawai'i's workforce ecosystem. By establishing a statewide strategy through the Workforce Development Council and embedding it in the State Unified Plan, the bill creates a shared vision that guides education, workforce training, and economic development efforts toward common long-term goals. It also fosters stronger coordination among public agencies, employers, educators, and philanthropic partners, helping ensure that investments and programs work in concert rather than in isolation.

Importantly, this bill promotes continuity over time, allowing progress to accumulate across planning cycles, leadership transitions, and funding periods. By establishing a durable framework and clarifying roles across state and county agencies, the measure also creates the conditions for sustained progress in workforce development. It ensures that public and private investments build upon prior work rather than restart with each planning cycle or administration, enabling long-term alignment across sectors and consistent support for Hawai'i's residents in attaining meaningful, living-wage employment.

For these reasons, HawaiiKidsCAN strongly supports HB1859 HD1 and respectfully urges the Committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erica Nakanishi-Stanis".

Erica Nakanishi-Stanis  
Advocacy Director  
HawaiiKidsCAN



**February 26, 2026 at 10:00 am**  
**Conference Room 308**

**House Committee on Finance**

To: Chair Chris Todd  
Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi

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

Re: **Testimony in Support**  
**HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development**

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 testify in **support** of this measure. This measure seeks to create a statewide framework for workforce development that aims to foster collaboration and ensure strong engagement from both the public and private sectors.

The healthcare industry has been a leader in identifying workforce needs and developing programs to meet those demands. The Association's 2024 Healthcare Workforce Initiative Report identified over 4,000 job openings in healthcare across Hawai'i. Entry-level positions such as Certified Nurse Aide, Medical Assistant, Patient Service Representative, and Phlebotomist have been identified by HAH members as some of the most critical roles to fill. These entry-level healthcare jobs represent 44% of all openings reported in 2024 and serve as launch pads to long-term careers with family-sustaining wages directly from high school.

We have deeply appreciated our partnerships with state agencies—and the legislature's support—in establishing and refining programs to meet these needs. We believe this measure will help to strengthen these ties across all industries to support a vibrant economy now and in the future. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our support for this measure, and for the legislature's continued support in fostering the next generation of healthcare workers.



# holomua

COLLABORATIVE

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## OUR MISSION

To support and advance public policies that make Hawai'i affordable for all working families.

## OUR VISION

Collaborative, sustainable, and evidence-based public policies that create a diverse and sustainable Hawai'i economy, an abundance of quality job opportunities, and a future where all working families living in Hawai'i can thrive.

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## BOARD MEMBERS

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Meli James, *Board Chair*  
Micah Kāne  
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Sunshine Topping

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Page 1 of 2

**Committee:** House Committee on Finance  
**Bill Number:** HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development  
**Hearing Date and Time:** February 26, 2026, at 10:00am (Room 308)  
**Re:** Testimony of Holomua Collaborative- Support

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members:

We write in support of House Bill 1859 HD1, Relating to Workforce Development. The purpose of HB1859 HD1 is to improve workforce development in the state by requiring the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to the Governor and to facilitate alignment of state programs to achieve a unified plan for our local workers.

Holomua supports initiatives that help keep all local working families in Hawai'i by addressing the root causes of our affordability crisis. When our residents cannot find a career that pays a living wage, they are forced to look for a future on the continent. Between July 2024 and July 2025, an average of 11 people left Hawai'i *each day*.<sup>1</sup> More Native Hawaiians now live outside Hawai'i than within it. This is a loss of our culture, traditions, and the essence of what makes Hawai'i home.

Data from the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative highlights the scale of this challenge. Over the next decade, approximately 170,000 young residents are expected to enter the local workforce. However, current projections indicate there will be only about 101,000 job openings that pay a true living wage.<sup>2</sup> This leaves a deficit of nearly 70,000 quality jobs, meaning over 40 percent of our next generation will enter a market that cannot currently support them staying home.

The findings from the Holomua Collective 2025 Affordability Survey reinforce this urgency.<sup>3</sup> This survey of over 3,200 local residents found that 91% of respondents believe the State needs to do more to recruit and retain critical workforce members. This is a near-unanimous mandate for the kind of strategic alignment proposed in HB1859 HD1. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of our respondents identified wages as one of the top three factors contributing to the unsustainable cost of living in Hawai'i.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division Estimates, released January 2026; and calculations by the Hawai'i State Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, Hawai'i State Data Center.

[https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/popestimate/2025/state-pop/2025\\_daily\\_est\\_state.pdf](https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/popestimate/2025/state-pop/2025_daily_est_state.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> "From Crisis to Coalition: A 2026 Roadmap for Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment" Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative, January 2026.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/640a4ca03eff8f1ba217a185/t/696fdd6df97fee42439956b2/1768938861257/From+Crisis+to+Coalition+A+2026+Roadmap+for+Hawai+%CA%BBi%E2%80%99s+Generational+Workforce+Commitment.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 2025 Hawai'i Affordability Survey. <https://holomuacollective.org/survey-25/>

A significant barrier to our current efforts is the awareness gap. Nearly 50% of survey respondents report they are unaware of existing workforce programs. This lack of awareness is most severe among 18 to 34-year-olds, hourly workers, and those in the tourism and recreation sectors. Specifically, 49 percent of hourly workers are not at all aware of these opportunities. Without a comprehensive, aligned strategy, these critical workforce members will continue to fall through the cracks.

The workforce development efforts of the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, the University of Hawai'i, Hawai'i P-20, the Department of Education, the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, countless nonprofit partners, and labor unions have made, and continue to make, meaningful foundational progress in increasing workforce development opportunities for local working residents. But despite the great efforts, the stats show that Hawai'i needs to go further – we need a long-term aligned strategy and goal that can reduce awareness gaps and identify and remove any duplicative efforts. Breaking down silos will ensure that workforce efforts are visible, accessible, and aligned with the high-quality career opportunities our families need.

HB1859 HD1 is an investment in the promise that our children can stay in Hawai'i. It is about ensuring that local is a status that can be maintained for generations to come, rather than a luxury that few can afford.

We respectfully urge the committee to pass HB1859 HD1. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Matthew Prellberg  
Policy and Communications Director



**Testimony to  
House Committee on Finance  
February 26, 2026  
10:00am  
Conference Room 308 & VIA videoconference  
Hawai'i State Capitol  
HB 1859 HD1**

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

We write in support of HB 1859 HD1, which requires the Workforce Development Council to recommend to the Governor a comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy to be included in the State Unified Plan and be responsible for facilitating the alignment of workforce development efforts and programs conducted by state departments and agencies to achieve the State Unified Plan and the Comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy.

Established in 1904, Hawai'i Gas serves over 70,000 customers on all islands through its utility pipeline infrastructure and propane business, all of whom depend on the company for sustainable, reliable, and affordable gas for water heating, cooking, drying, and other commercial and industrial applications. The company employs approximately 350 professionals, over 75% of whom are covered by collective bargaining.

The stability of our local workforce is directly tied to local families' ability to live and work in Hawai'i, and that ability is tied to access to good-paying jobs in fields that boost Hawai'i's economy.

We know that the key to retention is a combination of fair wages, high-quality benefits, and a clear career trajectory. However, as the cost of living continues to skyrocket, the pressure on our working families is reaching a breaking point. HB 1859 HD1 is a critical measure because it requires the state to look at workforce development through a strategic, long-term lens.

Currently, a series of government, nonprofit, and labor union efforts provides an impressive network of workforce development initiatives, but these efforts are not coordinated, and the public is not aware of the work being done. We need a unified strategy to ensure a steady pipeline of local talent for our critical utilities and other industries, and to communicate it to the workforce at large. By facilitating better alignment between labor, industry, and the state, HB 1859 HD1 will help bridge this gap and ensure our essential services are powered by the people of Hawai'i.

We urge you to support HB 1859 HD1, as it represents an investment in Hawai'i's workforce, infrastructure, and long-term prosperity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



TITLE GUARANTY  
HAWAII

February 26, 2026

**Testimony in support of HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development**

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

Title Guaranty of Hawai'i respectfully submits testimony in strong support of House Bill 1859 HD1, Relating to Workforce Development.

Title Guaranty of Hawai'i is the oldest and largest title company in the State, but at our core, we remain a locally rooted, family-owned business. Since 1896, we have been owned and operated by a kama'āina family, growing steadily alongside Hawai'i's communities. Today, we employ more than 250 local residents across the islands, many of whom have built long-term careers with our company.

The crisis of out-migration is not just a demographic statistic for us; it is a threat to the stability of our neighborhoods and our local economy. When local families leave, the local housing market becomes increasingly dominated by outside interests, further detaching the islands' land from the people who call it home. HB 1859 HD 1 is essential because it addresses the workforce side of this affordability equation. By ensuring our residents have pathways to careers that pay a true living wage, we give them the financial foundation necessary to secure a mortgage, build equity, and stay in Hawai'i for the long term.

A comprehensive, statewide strategy will allow the state to identify and fix the gaps in our workforce development efforts, and in turn help establish the jobs that our 'ohanas need to survive in Hawai'i. We need a unified roadmap to ensure our children are trained for high-value roles that can sustain a mortgage in today's market. Without this alignment, the barriers to entry for local homeowners will continue to rise. We respectfully urge the committee to pass HB 1859 HD 1 to help keep the dream of homeownership alive for Hawai'i's working families.

For these reasons, Title Guaranty of Hawai'i strongly urges the Committee to pass HB 1859 HD 1 and support policies that provide local workers with opportunities to advance their careers and earn higher wages.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.  
Sincerely,

Mike B. Pietsch  
President and Chief Operating Officer  
Title Guaranty of Hawai'i





## Testimony in Support of HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development

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Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

We write in strong support of HB 1859 HD 1, which would require the development of a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy and improved alignment across state agencies to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce pipeline.

aio is a locally owned company with holdings across a broad range of industries. Our companies are purpose-driven and firmly rooted in local values. At aio, Hawai'i is at our core, and through our products and services, we work hard to make Hawai'i a better place for future generations.

Hawai'i is facing ongoing workforce challenges that affect businesses, families, and our broader economy. Our employees are our greatest asset, and we want to ensure they have access to meaningful career pathways, skills training, and industry needs so that local residents are prepared for in-demand jobs, and businesses can continue to grow and invest in our communities.

By improving interagency collaboration and establishing a clear, shared direction for workforce development, this measure helps build a more resilient economy that supports local workers and employers alike.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1859 HD1.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads "Brandon Kurisu".

Brandon Kurisu  
aio Family of Companies



**TO:** HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair  
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the Committee

**FROM:** Terry George, Chief Executive Officer & President

**RE:** Testimony in Support for HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development

**DATE:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 at 10:00 am

**LOCATION:** Hearing Room 308

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The Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) **strongly supports** HB 1859 HD 1 relating to workforce development. HB 1859 HD 1 codifies the Generational Workforce Commitment—a long-term, statewide goal to ensure that by 2045 all people of Hawai'i have a pathway to jobs that enable them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai'i. This matters because Hawai'i's workforce challenges are structural and persistent.

The scale of the workforce challenge is large; over the next decade, roughly 170,000 young people are expected to enter Hawai'i's workforce, while only about 101,000 projected job openings are expected to pay a living wage—creating sustained pressure on families and accelerating out-migration.

HB 1859 HD 1 and the Generational Workforce Commitment establishes a clear, shared destination that aligns education, workforce development, and economic strategy. We appreciate that it moves beyond fragmented, time-limited initiatives toward systems-level coordination.

HCF supports HB 1859 HD 1 as a philanthropic partner in the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative and as part of our CHANGE Framework commitment to economic opportunity and mobility. HCF assisted with incubating the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative because we believe addressing jobs and creating a vibrant economy is important to Hawai'i. Through sustained investment across workforce development, education, and economic mobility, HCF and our partners see firsthand where job quality progress has accelerated, and where system gaps persist. Lasting gains require aligned goals, clarified roles, and continuity.

Codifying the Generational Workforce Commitment enables highly coordinated public and private investments. If enacted, HB 1859 HD 1 increases the likelihood that long-term investments yield positive outcomes for learners, workers, employers, and communities toward a living-wage future. For these reasons, **HCF strongly supports HB 1859 HD 1 and urges its passing.**



## **Testimony in Support of HB1859 HD1**

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of HB1859 HD1.

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative, where I serve as Executive Director, and in my role convening the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui — a community-driven coalition of government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations already working together to advance Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment.

Hawai'i's workforce challenges are not the result of individual failure or short-term disruption. They are the predictable outcome of longstanding structural conditions that shape whether people can build stable lives here — even when they work, even when they pursue education, and even when they do “everything right”.

The data make this reality impossible to ignore. Over the next decade, approximately 170,000 young people are expected to enter Hawai'i's workforce, while only about 101,000 projected job openings pay a living wage. Even under strong employment conditions, there are simply not enough jobs that pay enough to support a stable life in Hawai'i.

Recent analysis from UHERO reinforces this reality, showing that even when wages appear competitive on paper, Hawai'i's cost of living significantly erodes purchasing power, contributing to some of the weakest adjusted wage outcomes in the nation. These economic conditions confirm what our workforce data already show: without structural alignment, we are not producing enough living-wage opportunities to sustain long-term economic resilience.

For those who pursue higher education, outcomes are not reliably better. Only 43% of Hawai'i's four-year college graduates are working in degree-requiring jobs within five years, and after accounting for Hawai'i's cost of living, median wage outcomes for these graduates are the lowest in the nation. These patterns drive persistent underemployment and continued out-migration from residents who want to stay and contribute locally.

These challenges are even more acute on Kauaʻi, Maui, Molokaʻi, Lanaʻi, and Hawaiʻi Island, where job availability is narrower and access to advancement opportunities is more limited. In the current reality, geography increasingly determines whether someone can remain and thrive in their home community.

The Generational Workforce Commitment was created in response to this reality. It is a shared, long-term goal to ensure that by 2045, all people of Hawaiʻi have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawaiʻi and contribute to a vibrant economy grounded in community values. It is a unifying framework that aligns education, workforce development, economic strategy, and public investment around a common statewide goal - treating workforce alignment as core economic infrastructure. In doing so, it positions workforce strategy as foundational to long-term economic competitiveness and resilience.

HB1859 HD1 moves Hawaiʻi's workforce strategy from temporary alignment to durable practice by anchoring that shared goal in statute. As written, the bill does three essential things that are not possible today.

First, it establishes a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy with a clear generational goal and requires that strategy to guide every State Unified Plan, regardless of planning cycle, ensuring continuity across administrations so coordination does not reset every few years.

Second, it clarifies responsibility for interagency alignment without centralizing authority, charging the Workforce Development Council with facilitating coordination while preserving each collaborating agency's statutory role.

Third, it links alignment to measurement and accountability over time, making progress visible and comparable rather than dependent on ad hoc efforts or isolated evaluations.

Together, these mechanisms address a long-standing gap in Hawaiʻi's workforce system. The state has strong programs, committed partners, and sustained investment, but without a codified structure to hold alignment over time, efforts remain fragmented and vulnerable to drift.

Action is needed now. Workforce challenges of this scale require time, sustained coordination, and long-term investment. But each year without durable alignment has real consequences. Every graduating class enters the same constrained labor market. Each year, more young people confront the same choice: accept work that does not support stability or leave Hawai'i to build a future elsewhere.

As more residents leave, employers face increasing difficulty filling critical roles, particularly in specialized and high-growth sectors. At the same time, emerging industries lack the predictable, locally developed talent pipelines needed to scale with confidence. Without durable alignment across education, workforce, and economic strategy, Hawai'i's ability to grow new industries, strengthen its tax base, and maximize the impact of existing public investments remains constrained.

Without codification, coordination depends on informal relationships and discretionary decisions that are easily disrupted by leadership transitions and planning cycles. Each reset delays progress, and in a system already struggling to keep pace with need, delay compounds loss.

The question before the Legislature is whether Hawai'i will continue relying on episodic coordination, or establish a durable framework that allows progress to accumulate rather than reset with administrations.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support of HB1859 HD1. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Stevens".

Matt Stevens  
Executive Director  
Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY  
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
KA 'OIHANA PONO LIMAHANA

February 26, 2026

To: The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair,  
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the House Committee on Finance

Date: Thursday, February 26, 2026  
Time: 10:00 a.m.  
Place: Conference Room 308, State Capitol

From: Jade T. Butay, Director  
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR)

**Re: H.B. 1859 HD1 RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The **DLIR appreciates the intent** of this measure in having a comprehensive workforce strategy provided that it does not conflict with any federal regulations. 20 CFR § 679.130 specifies that the State Workforce Development Board is to assist the Governor in development and implementation of a Unified State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and assist in achieving the State's strategic and operational vision and goals outlined in the plan.

The WIOA is intended to increase access to and opportunities for employment, education, training, and support services that individuals need, particularly those with barriers to employment. Thus, the WIOA provides priority services to veterans, low-income youth, low-income adults, and dislocated workers.

The WIOA requires a private sector-led state board composed of owners and other high-level employees to guide the training opportunities, "that include high-quality, work-related training and development in in-demand industry sectors or occupations..." so those with barriers to employment obtain skills needed by employers and attain gainful employment and living wages.

The current state law was created in accordance with the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The DLIR recommends that aligning workforce development efforts outside of the WIOA federal regulation might be better under a separate law.



**To:** Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee

**From:** Duane Kurisu, Chairman, Hawai'i Executive Collaborative  
Lynelle Marble, Executive Director, Hawai'i Executive Collaborative

**Date:** February 24, 2026

**Re:** Testimony in Support of HB1859 HD1

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB1859 HD1.

The Hawai'i Executive Collaborative (HEC) is a catalytic backbone organization that unites and activates leaders to transform Hawai'i through coordinated, cross-sector action. Our work is grounded in Hawai'i's Soul – a shared way of leading with island consciousness and reciprocity, rooted in Native Hawaiian wisdom and honoring all cultures who call Hawai'i home. We are also participating in the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui, a community-driven coalition of government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations working together to advance Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment.

From our work across sectors and islands, we see clearly that Hawai'i's workforce challenges are not isolated – they are systemic and interconnected, shaped by structural conditions that influence job availability, wage levels, advancement pathways, and whether local families can remain and thrive over time. Addressing these challenges requires durable alignment, stronger coordination, and continuity across planning cycles – all of which HB1859 HD1 helps advance.

HB1859 HD1 supports a long-term approach by strengthening coordination within Hawai'i's workforce governance structures and reinforcing how a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy guides planning and implementation over time. In doing so, the measure helps move Hawai'i from fragmented, parallel efforts toward coordinated action – connecting partners around shared direction, shared measures, and sustained accountability to better serve both local talent and local employers.

For these reasons, Hawai'i Executive Collaborative supports HB1859 HD1 and respectfully urges your favorable consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynelle Marble", written in a cursive style.

Lynelle Marble  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Duane Kurisu", written in a cursive style.

Duane Kurisu  
Board Chair

**Testimony to the House Committee on Finance  
Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair**

**Thursday, February 26, 2026, at 10:00AM  
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference**

**RE: HB1859 HD1 Relating to Workforce Development**

Aloha e Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports House Bill 1859 HD1 (HB1859 HD1), which requires the Workforce Development Council to recommend to the Governor, a comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy to include in the State Unified Plan and be responsible for facilitating the alignment of workforce development efforts and programs conducted by state departments and agencies to achieve the State Unified Plan and the Comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy.

HB1859 HD1 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action. This bill promotes the statewide, interagency coordination necessary for the efficient and effective deployment of workforce development funds and services. The Chamber believes that a comprehensive Statewide Workforce strategy is key to remediating the discrepancy between local wages and cost of living. As noted in the bill language, 45% of households in Hawaii fall below the ALICE survival budget. Cost of living remains a consistent challenge for the people of Hawaii, forcing outmigration and comprising the economic viability necessary for local residents to successfully operate their businesses and pay for their basic living needs.

The Chamber finds the Workforce Development Council (WDC) to be a leading workforce development agency that is well positioned to facilitate this effort. The WDC is already statutorily charged with preparing, updating, and overseeing Hawai'i's Unified State Plan under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), giving it both a mandate and structural role in aligning workforce programs across state and county agencies. Because the Council's membership includes key public and private sector representatives and serves as a leading coordinating entity for workforce development efforts statewide, it is uniquely positioned to integrate economic trends, education and training systems, and employer needs into a coherent Statewide Workforce Strategy that best unifies, coordinates, and optimizes diverse state workforce development resources.

It is for these reasons the Chamber respectfully asks to pass House Bill 1859 HD1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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.



Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Finance  
Thursday, February 26, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.  
By  
Stephen Schatz, Executive Director  
Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education

HB 1859 HD1 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education, a department of the University of Hawai'i System and the State Career and Technical Education Office, which administers federal Perkins V funds for secondary and postsecondary career and technical education programs statewide, respectfully submits testimony in support of HB 1859 HD1.

This measure strengthens Hawai'i's workforce development system by establishing a long-term workforce strategy that extends beyond federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) planning cycles. By providing sustained direction for workforce development efforts, the bill supports alignment among education, workforce, and economic development systems, while preserving the statutory purposes and responsibilities of each program and complementing existing federal initiatives, including WIOA and Perkins V.

The bill further reinforces the role of the Workforce Development Council in facilitating interagency coordination and data-informed planning, supporting a more intentional and cohesive statewide approach to advancing workforce outcomes for Hawai'i's residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this measure.

Testimony of  
Jonathan Ching  
Head of Government Relations

Before:  
House Committee on Finance  
The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair  
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Thursday, February 26, 2026  
10:00 a.m.  
Via Videoconference  
Conference Room 308

**Re: HB 1859, HD1, Relating to Workforce Development.**

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and committee members, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1859, HD1 which requires the state Workforce Development Council to recommend to the Governor, a comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy to inclusion in the State Unified Plan and be responsible for facilitating the alignment of workforce development efforts and programs conducted by state departments and agencies to achieve the State Unified Plan and the Comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy.

**Kaiser Permanente Hawai‘i SUPPORTS HB 1859, HD1.**

Kaiser Permanente Hawai‘i is one of the nation’s largest not-for-profit health plans, serving 12.6 million members nationwide, and more than 271,000 members in Hawai‘i. In Hawai‘i, more than 4,200 dedicated employees and more than 650 Hawai‘i Permanente Medical Group physicians and advance practice providers work in our integrated health system to provide our members coordinated care and coverage. Kaiser Permanente Hawai‘i has more than 20+ medical facilities, including our award-winning Moanalua Medical Center. We continue to provide high-quality coordinated care for our members and deliver on our commitment to improve the health of our members and the people living in the communities we serve.

Kaiser Permanente Hawai‘i is a participating organization in the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui — a community-driven coalition of government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations working together to advance Hawai‘i’s Generational Workforce Commitment. Learn, Work, Thrive Hui is jointly facilitated by Hawaii Workforce Funders Collaborative and the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii.

The healthcare sector underscores these workforce challenges in especially urgent ways, while also representing one of Hawai‘i’s strongest engines for career mobility and economic opportunity. A 2024 report from the Hawai‘i State Rural Health Association found that 39% of medical professionals on

Maui are considering leaving the state. Statewide, Hawai‘i faces a shortage of 4,669 non-physician, patient-facing positions, along with an additional deficit of 768 physicians. These gaps are intensified by demographic shifts: the proportion of working-age adults continues to decline, and 24% of Hawai‘i’s physicians are now over the age of 65. As a sector that offers a wide range of career pathways with family-sustaining wages, healthcare is central to strengthening local economic opportunity. These trends highlight the need for a sustained, statewide commitment to growing our own healthcare workforce so residents can enter, advance, and thrive in careers that also support the health of Hawai‘i’s communities.

As written, HB 1859, HD1 establishes a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy tied to a clear long-term goal and require that strategy to guide future State Unified Plans. They clarify the Workforce Development Council’s role in facilitating interagency alignment via the State Unified Plan while preserving agency authority, and they link coordination efforts to shared metrics and reporting over time.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 25, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 1859 HD1 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.**

Hearing: February 26, 2026, 10:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 308 and Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of the measure, provides comments, and defers to the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations.

The Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is an active member of both the Workforce Development Council and the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui and supports its long-term, generational commitment: "[b]y 2045, all people of Hawaii will have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawaii and contribute to a vibrant local economy grounded in community values." This commitment closely aligns with DVR's core mission: empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment, economic self-sufficiency, and full participation in their communities.

For individuals with disabilities, workforce challenges are often compounded by barriers related to low expectations, access, accommodations, training, and transportation. Addressing these challenges requires intentional coordination across education, workforce development, human services, and economic systems. DVR's participation in the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui

reflects our belief that long-term, cross-system alignment is essential to improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities and for Hawaii's workforce as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**  
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI  
A HO'OMĀKA'IKA'I

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LT. GOVERNOR

**JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA**  
DIRECTOR

**DANE K. WICKER**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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Statement of  
**JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA**  
**Director**  
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism  
before the  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

Thursday, February 26, 2026, 10:00 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room #308

In support of  
**HB 1859, HD1**  
**RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.**

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee: The Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT) supports HB1859, HD1, which affirms the role of the Workforce Development Council (WDC) in advancing a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy aligned with the State Unified Plan.

DBEDT recognizes the importance of coordinated cross-agency workforce planning to support Hawai'i's long-term economic resilience and diversification. The objectives outlined in this measure are consistent with ongoing efforts already underway through the WDC and partner agencies to align workforce programs with industry needs, education and training pathways, and statewide economic priorities, and reinforce the importance of sustained, long-term coordination across agencies.

DBEDT also recognizes the value of establishing clear goals and transparent measurement to support continuous improvement of the workforce development system.

As DBEDT currently serves as a participant in the Workforce Development Council, we appreciate the Legislature's continued emphasis on alignment and collaboration across the workforce development system. We believe this measure reinforces the importance of sustaining and strengthening that coordination as workforce needs continue to evolve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



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Statement of  
**Meli James and Brittany Heyd**  
Cofounders  
Mana Up

HB1859 HD1, Relating to Workforce Development

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

We support HB1859 HD1, Relating to Workforce Development. This bill will improve workforce development in the state by requiring the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to the Governor and to facilitate alignment of state programs to achieve a unified plan for our local workers.

Mana Up is a statewide initiative that provides entrepreneurs in Hawai'i with the resources and tools to grow their businesses and scale globally. As these entrepreneurs continue to grow, they also contribute to the expansion of our local economy. As part of our mission, we aim to sustain the local economy through economic diversification, local job creation, community giveback, investment, and a regenerative culture of entrepreneurship, providing a better future for generations to come here in Hawai'i.

Our experience working with hundreds of local makers and innovators has shown us that Hawai'i has no shortage of talent, but we do have a shortage of long-term strategy to ensure our talent can find meaningful, well-paying work. Many of our local entrepreneurs struggle to find a workforce to support their businesses. When these positions go unfilled, or when our most creative minds move to the continent to find higher wages, we lose the very fuel that drives economic diversification. HB 1859 HD1 will provide the "North Star" we need to ensure our workforce development efforts keep pace with the global economy.

By centralizing our strategy through the Workforce Development Council, we can stop the "brain drain" and start a "brain gain." We need to show our keiki and young adults that there is a path to a world-class career right here in Hawai'i. This bill ensures the state's resources are used to train residents for the jobs our growing local companies desperately need to fill. This is an essential step toward building an economy that is resilient, diverse, and capable of supporting our families through 2045 and beyond. Mana Up strongly supports HB 1859 HD1.

Sincerely,

Meli James | Cofounder, Mana Up  
Brittany Heyd | Cofounder, Mana Up



February 24, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT** of **HB1859 HD1**, Relating to Workforce Development

**To:** Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Finance

**From:** Llasmin Chaine, LSW, Executive Director, Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women

**Re:** Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1859 HD1, Relating to Workforce Development

Hearing: Thursday, February 26, 2026, 10:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women recognizes the importance of coordinated workforce development efforts in advancing economic opportunity and gender equity across Hawaii. The Commission **supports HB1859 HD1**, as a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy can help ensure that the unique needs and barriers faced by women and other underrepresented groups are addressed within the State's workforce initiatives.

**Centralizing the responsibility for developing and aligning the workforce strategy with the Workforce Development Council has the potential to reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and foster stronger interagency collaboration.** When county and state entities work together under a unified plan, there is greater potential to identify and address gaps in services, particularly those that disproportionately affect women, such as access to training, childcare, and non-traditional career pathways.

However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on the inclusivity of the strategy development process. It is essential that the comprehensive statewide workforce strategy explicitly considers the needs of women, including those from marginalized communities, and incorporates input from organizations and stakeholders with expertise in gender equity. **Best practices in workforce planning emphasize the importance of disaggregated data and targeted interventions to close persistent gender gaps in employment and wages.**

We encourage the inclusion of gender-specific benchmarks and accountability measures in annual reporting and in the State Unified Plan. Such steps will help ensure that the benefits of a coordinated workforce strategy are equitably realized by all residents of Hawaii.

The Commission **urges prompt passage of HB1859 HD1**. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.