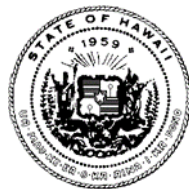


JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



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

January 31, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair  
House Committee on Labor

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

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

Hearing: February 3, 2026, 9:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 309 and Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this measure and provides comments.

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.

As drafted HB1859:

- Supports alignment with DVR's mission by establishing a shared, long-term workforce direction for the State and strengthening coordination through existing workforce governance structures. The bill recognizes that Hawai'i's workforce challenges are systemic and generational, and that progress depends

on real-time data, shared goals, and sustained collaboration across agencies and sectors.

- Preserves agency authority while promoting coordination. DVR supports a workforce system that is aligned and collaborative but not consolidated in a way that compromises federally required roles or the specialized expertise necessary to serve individuals with disabilities effectively. The bill's emphasis on coordination—rather than restructuring or centralization—strikes the right balance.
- Reinforces a shared, long-term vision for Hawai'i's workforce, strengthens coordination across systems, and respects the statutory and regulatory frameworks under which key programs operate. The Generational Workforce Commitment reflects the kind of sustained, values-based approach needed to ensure that all people in Hawai'i—including individuals with disabilities—have real opportunities to succeed.

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.



February 1, 2026

Position: **Support of HB1859**, Relating to Workforce Development

To: Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair  
Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Labor

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

Re: Testimony in Support of HB1859

Hearing: Tuesday, February 3, 2026, 9:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 309, State Capitol

On behalf of the Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women, we would like to thank the committee for hearing this important bill. I would like to express our **strong support of HB1859, with comments**, because a comprehensive, coordinated workforce strategy is essential to advancing economic opportunity and equity for women and girls in Hawaii. The Commission's mission centers on promoting equality, safety, and inclusion, and workforce development is a critical lever for addressing persistent disparities in employment, wages, and access to career advancement for women.

**Women and girls in Hawaii continue to face unique barriers in the labor market, including occupational segregation, gender-based wage gaps, and underrepresentation in leadership roles.** HB1859's unified approach across state agencies can help ensure that workforce programs are inclusive and responsive to the specific needs of women and the barriers they face.

A truly comprehensive workforce strategy must be grounded in principles of equity and inclusion. Alignment of workforce efforts should **incorporate gender-disaggregated data, address systemic discrimination, and actively seek input from women's advocacy organizations.** National best practices highlight the importance of targeted interventions—such as mentorship, childcare support, broadened access, and workplace protections—to remove barriers and foster lasting economic security for women and girls.

To strengthen HB1859, the Commission recommends:

- **explicit language ensuring the workforce strategy incorporates gender equity goals and measures,**
- consultation with **stakeholders representing women and girls,** and
- regular **reporting on progress** toward **reducing gender disparities** in workforce outcomes.

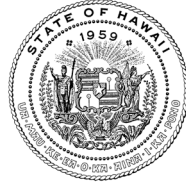
Additionally, I offer the following amendment to this bill for your consideration.:

- Regarding the submission of the Workforce Development Council's annual reports to the Governor and Legislature and what they shall include in their reporting, on page 7, lines 14-19:

(B) Information regarding the workforce development programs offered throughout the State, the ~~number~~ **gender and number** of individuals placed in high-demand or high-growth employment through workforce development programs by departments...

The Commission looks forward to collaborating with the Workforce Development Council and stakeholders, to ensure Hawaii's workforce strategy is inclusive, data-driven, and advances true opportunity for all.

I respectfully urge this Committee to **pass HB1859** and support this cohesive and effective statewide workforce strategy. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.



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

February 3, 2026

To: The Honorable Jackson D. Sayama, Chair,  
The Honorable Mike Lee, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the House Committee on Labor

Date: Tuesday, February 3, 2026  
Time: 9:30 a.m.  
Place: Conference Room 309, State Capitol

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

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

**I. OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

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 the 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-relevant 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 WIOA. The DLIR recommends that aligning workforce development efforts outside of the WIOA federal regulation might be better under a separate law and not amendments to HRS 202.



# 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 Labor  
February 3, 2026 at 9:30 a.m.

By

Debora Halbert  
Vice President for Academic Strategy  
University of Hawai'i System

#### HB 1859 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

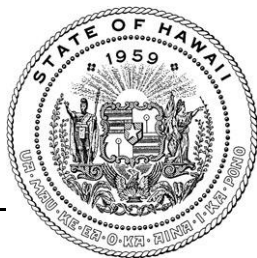
The University of Hawai'i strongly supports HB1859 – Relating to Workforce Development. The University of Hawai'i (UH), as a member of the Workforce Development Council, agrees with the intent of the bill to develop a long-term strategy. *No single state entity, including UH, can solve workforce shortages 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. HB1859 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 HB1859 and appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony.



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

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

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LT. GOVERNOR

**JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA**  
DIRECTOR

**DANE K. WICKER**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

No. 1 Capitol District Building, 250 South Hotel Street, 5th Floor, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
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Telephone: (808) 586-2355  
Fax: (808) 586-2377

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

Tuesday, February 3, 2026, 9:30 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room #309

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

Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee: The Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT) supports HB1859, 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.

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.

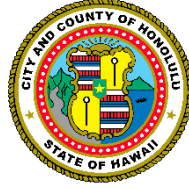
Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



**OFFICE OF ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION**  
**KE KE'ENA HO'OMOHALA WAIWAI**  
**CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

711 KAPIOLANI BLVD., 12TH FLOOR • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
PHONE: (808) 768-2330 • FAX: (808) 768-4242 • WEBSITE: [revitalizeoahu.org](http://revitalizeoahu.org)

RICK BLANGIARDI  
MAYOR  
MEIA



AMY ASSELBAYE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
PO'O HO'OKO

DEBORAH ZYSMAN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
HOPE PO'O

February 3, 2026

The Honorable Jackson Sayama, Chair,  
The Honorable Mike Lee, Vice Chair,  
and Members of the Committee on Labor  
The House of Representatives  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

SUBJECT: HB1859 Relating to Workforce Development

Aloha Chair Jackson Sayama, Vice Chair Mike Lee, and members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB1859.

The mission of the City and County of Honolulu's Office of Economic Revitalization (OER) is to build a strong economy that improves the quality of life for every community, small business, and 'ohana on O'ahu. Our work is grounded in a simple but urgent goal: ensuring every person can prosper and choose to stay and thrive here. HB1859 directly aligns with this work by recognizing that Hawai'i's workforce challenges are not isolated or short-term, but systemic and generational, requiring a shared vision, coordinated action, and long-term stewardship across government, education, industry, and community partners.

From the vantage point at the county level, we see daily how fragmented strategies, misaligned timelines, and disconnected funding streams weaken outcomes for learners, earners, and families. On O'ahu alone, more than 116,000 young people are expected to enter the workforce over the next decade, yet only about 71,500 projected job openings are expected to pay a living wage based on analysis by the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative. This leaves nearly 40% of the next generation without a clear path to economic stability. Even as jobs are created, the fact that the majority of projected openings pay below a living wage underscores a hard truth: growth without coordination will not improve quality of life.

The Honorable Jackson Sayama, Chair,  
The Honorable Michael Lee, Vice Chair,  
and Members of the Committee on Labor  
February 2, 2026  
Page 2

HB1859 strengthens the foundation for collective action by establishing a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy anchored to a common long-term goal, while clarifying the Workforce Development Council's role in aligning efforts across agencies. This alignment is essential to strengthening talent pipelines, expanding work-based learning, improving job quality, and increasing access to living-wage careers. Just as importantly, it affirms our shared kuleana to steward this responsibility for the people of O'ahu and Hawai'i as a whole. By creating continuity across planning cycles and administrations, HB1859 will strengthen and sustain the work already underway and help ensure that progress multiplies over time rather than resets. For these reasons, OER supports HB1859.

Should there be any questions, please contact Su Lazo, OER Workforce Development Program Manager at 808-768-2340 or via email at [su.lazo@honolulu.gov](mailto:su.lazo@honolulu.gov).

Sincerely,

Amy Asselbaye  
Executive Director



## Testimony in Support of HB1859

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Committee Members,

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

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.

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 — including among residents who want to stay and contribute locally.

These challenges are even more acute on Kaua'i, Maui, Moloka'i, Lana'i, and Hawai'i Island, where job availability is narrower and access to advancement opportunities is more limited. In practice, geography — not effort or aspiration — 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 Hawai'i have a path to a job that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai'i 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 destination.

HB1859 moves Hawai'i'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 Hawai'i'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.

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 failing to keep pace with need, delay compounds loss.

The choice before Hawai'i is not whether to act, but **how** to act: through continued episodic coordination, or through a durable framework that allows progress to accumulate rather than reset. HB1859 takes the latter approach.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Stevens", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matt Stevens  
Executive Director  
Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative

January 30, 2026

To: Honorable Representative Jackson Sayama,  
Chair, Committee on Labor

And

Honorable Representative Mike Lee,  
Vice Chair, Committee on Labor

And

Honorable Members of the Committee on Labor

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

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee,

**HawaiiKidsCAN strongly supports HB1859**, 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.

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 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, HB1859 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, HB1859 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 and respectfully urges the Committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Erica Nakanishi-Stanis  
Advocacy Director  
HawaiiKidsCAN



1/30/2026

## Testimony in Support of H.B. 1859

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the Committee,

Aloha United Ways stands in **strong support** of H.B. 1859, which directs the Workforce Development Council to establish a comprehensive, long-term statewide workforce strategy and better align workforce efforts across state agencies.

In Hawai'i, approximately 40% of households are below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold. These are working families who earn above the federal poverty level but still cannot afford basic necessities. The ALICE Household Survival Budget for a family of four exceeds \$110,000<sup>1</sup> annually, meaning many workers are underemployed, stuck in low-wage jobs, or cycling between multiple jobs without long-term stability.

H.B. 1859 responds to this reality by prioritizing work-based learning, job quality, living-wage employment, and job retention. A coordinated, statewide strategy will help ensure workforce investments lead to real career pathways for our residents, not just short-term placements, while better connecting workers to high-demand, family-sustaining jobs.

Lastly, this bill supports stronger coordination with labor unions, employers, education, and training providers, helping workers gain skills that are valued locally and rewarded with wages that allow them to stay and build a future in Hawai'i.

Mahalo,

Michelle Bartell  
President & CEO  
Aloha United Way

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unitedforalice.org/the-cost-of-basics/hawaii>



**Testimony to the House Committee on Labor  
Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair  
Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair**

**Tuesday, February 3, 2026, at 9:30AM  
Conference Room 309 & Videoconference**

**RE: HB1859 Relating to Workforce Development**

Aloha e Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, 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 (HB1859), 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 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 decreasing the economic viability needed for local residents to operate their businesses and pay for their basic living needs.

The Chamber's leadership in workforce development reflects our belief in a coordinated, demand-driven workforce strategy. Through its Education & Workforce Development team, the Chamber strengthens Hawaii's education-to-workforce pipeline by partnering with employers, educators, and community leaders to build a skilled, local talent pool. By advancing career pathways, work-based learning, and industry-led Sector Partnerships in high-growth fields such as clean energy, healthcare, engineering, information technology, and creative industries, the Chamber aligns education and training with employer needs to support skills attainment, career awareness, and local hiring.

With our expertise in this space, the Chamber finds the Workforce Development Council (WDC) to be another 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





# Chamber of Commerce HAWAII



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. 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.



# holomua

COLLABORATIVE

## 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.

## BOARD MEMBERS

Jason Fujimoto  
Meli James, *Board Chair*  
Micah Kāne  
Brandon Kurisu  
Brad Nicolai  
Mike Pietsch  
Sunshine Topping

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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info@holomuacollaborative.org

HolomuaCollaborative.org

## Committee:

**House Committee on Labor**

## Bill Number:

**HB 1859, Relating to Workforce Development**

## Hearing Date and Time:

**February 3, 2026 at 9:30am (Room 309)**

## Re:

**Testimony of Holomua Collaborative- Support**

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Committee Members:

We write in support of House Bill 1859, Relating to Workforce Development. The purpose of HB 1859 is to improve workforce development efforts in the state by requiring the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to the Governor and facilitate the 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 suggest there will only be 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 currently cannot support their ability to stay 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. 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.

<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+Hawaii%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 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. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Matthew Prellberg  
Policy and Communications Director



TITLE GUARANTY  
HAWAII

February 3, 2026

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

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Committee Members,

Title Guaranty of Hawai'i respectfully submits testimony in strong support of House Bill 1859, 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 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 needed to survive in Hawai'i. We need a unified roadmap that ensures our children are trained for the 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 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 and support policies that allow local workers the opportunities to grow their careers and 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, Relating to Workforce Development

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Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the Committee,

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, Hawaii is at our core, and through our products and services, we work hard to make Hawaii a better place for future generations. **We write in strong support of HB 1859.**

To ensure a better place for those future generations, we must address the reality that many of our youth currently feel their only path to success leads away from Hawaii. HB 1859 is about changing that narrative.

By requiring the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive strategy for the Governor, this bill creates a unified, long-term, vision for our state. This alignment is essential to making sure that every resident, regardless of industry, has the resources and the pathway to a career that allows them to learn, work, and thrive here.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Brandon H. Kurisu'.

Brandon Kurisu  
aio Family of Companies



**HB-1859**

Submitted on: 1/30/2026 11:38:23 AM

Testimony for LAB on 2/3/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sam Dorios	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of HB1859, Relating to Workforce Development.

HB1859 is an important step toward building a more coordinated, accountable workforce system for Hawai‘i. The bill would require the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy that can serve as a long-term “North Star” and guide the State Unified Plan over time. Just as importantly, it emphasizes measurable progress—by calling for specific plans and metrics related to work-based learning, economic opportunity and resilience, job quality and underemployment, living-wage employment, industry-led sector partnerships, and job retention.

In my view, Hawai‘i has many committed partners and programs, but too often they operate in silos. The result is that residents—especially young people and those seeking better opportunities—can face unclear pathways into stable, well-paying careers, while employers struggle to find and retain qualified workers. A clearer statewide strategy, paired with cross-agency alignment and transparent metrics, can help the State identify what’s working, reduce duplication, and invest more effectively in pathways that lead to real results for people and communities.

I also appreciate that the bill directs the Workforce Development Council to facilitate alignment across departments and agencies. If implemented well, this can help ensure that education, training, supportive services, and employer partnerships reinforce one another rather than competing or working at cross purposes.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB1859.

Mahalo for your consideration.

-Sam Dorios

February 1, 2026

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1859

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee:

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

I submit this testimony as an individual helping to lead 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 a statewide North Star workforce goal - Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment.

Like many of you, my two young adult children have chosen to remain on the continent after college to begin their careers. My own family is contributing to Hawai'i's brain drain and yet as a workforce development professional, I spent much of my career working to ensure Hawaii's young people could see a future for themselves here at home.

Recent data underscore the scale of this challenge. 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 are expected to pay a living wage.

For those who pursue higher education, outcomes are mixed. Only 43% of Hawai'i's four-year college graduates are working in degree-requiring jobs within five years of graduation, and after accounting for Hawai'i's cost of living, median wage outcomes for these graduates rank among the lowest nationally. These patterns contribute to underemployment and continued out-migration, including among individuals who wish to remain in Hawai'i.

While there are many agencies, employers, educators, and community organizations advancing meaningful workforce goals, it is abundantly clear there is no shared, long-term framework connecting those efforts to a common generational outcome. What is needed is a unifying structure that aligns existing work, clarifies shared direction, and supports sustained coordination over time.

The Hawai'i Generational Workforce Commitment (the Commitment) emerged from this recognition. The Commitment is a North Star workforce goal that is now articulated as a clear, generational goal: that by 2045, all people of Hawai'i will have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai'i and contribute to a vibrant economy grounded in community values.

The Commitment is not a single program or funding stream, but a framework intended to align education, workforce development, economic strategy, and public investment toward shared outcomes.

HB1859 supports this framework by strengthening coordination within Hawai'i's existing workforce governance structures.

As written, the bills establish 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.

Workforce challenges of this scale require time, sustained coordination, and long-term investment. HB1859 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, I support HB1859 and appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Keala Peters  
Workforce Development Consultant