



# 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 Economic Development & Technology  
February 4, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

By

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

#### HB 1967 – RELATING TO PERMITTING.

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i would like to provide comments on HB 1967 – Relating to Permitting. The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the intent of this measure, which implements recommendations of the Simplifying Permitting for Enhanced Economic Development (SPEED) Task Force by establishing a permitting workforce pipeline in partnership with UH and the community colleges. UH agrees that workforce shortages in permitting roles present a significant barrier to housing, infrastructure, and economic development statewide, and we appreciate the Legislature's recognition of higher education as a key partner in addressing these challenges. While UH was not included in the SPEED Task Force, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Task Force to develop possible plans for internships and other ways we can build appropriate opportunities for students interested in positions related to the work of SPEED.

UH already offers a range of academic and career pathways that align closely with permitting, plan review, and regulatory roles at the state and county levels. These include:

- **Community Colleges**
  - Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) pathways
  - Civil engineering technology, drafting, and construction management programs
  - Environmental science, natural resource management, and sustainability programs
  - Applied business, public administration, and information technology programs that support regulatory operations
- **Four-Year Campuses**
  - Bachelor's and graduate programs in engineering, architecture, environmental studies, urban and regional planning, and public administration
  - Programs in geography, Geospatial Information Science (GIS), and data analytics relevant to land use and permitting review
  - Legal studies and policy-focused curricula that prepare students for regulatory and compliance work

These existing programs can produce graduates who are well-positioned to enter permitting-related careers. UH views the proposed pipeline as an opportunity to better coordinate, align, and scale these offerings in partnership with state and county agencies, rather than duplicating programs that are already in place.

UH seeks clarification on the tuition incentive provisions in Section 2(b), particularly with respect to implementation and equity across campuses and programs. Specifically it is unclear whether tuition incentives (1) are intended to apply to resident tuition only, or also non-resident differentials, (2) if they should include graduate and professional students, and (3) if community college certificates and associate degrees, as well as bachelor's and graduate programs, should be included.

Second, clarification would be helpful regarding whether tuition incentives would be administered through UH, Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT), or directly through employing agencies. Additional details regarding how tuition incentives would interact with existing state financial aid programs and federal Title IV requirements would be useful as would knowing if tuition incentives are intended to function as upfront waivers, reimbursements, or loan-forgiveness-style benefits tied to service completion.

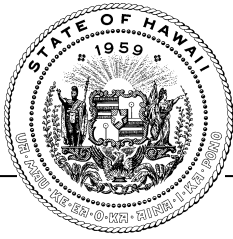
Third, UH recommends clarity regarding the duration and enforceability of service commitments, whether commitments apply uniformly across counties and agencies and how partial service or early separation would be addressed.

To support effective implementation and minimize administrative complexity, UH respectfully suggests consideration of language clarifying that tuition incentives:

- May be structured as reimbursement or post-service forgiveness rather than upfront waivers, to align with existing financial aid and tuition policies. The Legislature may wish to consider language stating that tuition incentives “may be provided through reimbursement, loan repayment, or other post-enrollment mechanisms, as determined by the administering agency in consultation with the University of Hawai‘i.”
- May leverage existing academic programs and credentials at UH and the community colleges, rather than requiring the creation of new degree programs.
- Shall be implemented in consultation with UH to ensure consistency with tuition policy, financial aid administration, and accreditation requirements.

UH supports the goals of this measure and looks forward to continued collaboration with DBEDT, state and county agencies, and the Legislature to strengthen Hawai‘i’s permitting workforce. With appropriate clarification regarding tuition incentives and implementation, this bill can build upon existing UH programs to create a sustainable, long-term workforce pipeline that benefits students, employers, and the broader community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



**STATE OF HAWAI'I  
OFFICE OF PLANNING  
& SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LT. GOVERNOR

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Statement of  
**MARY ALICE EVANS, Director**

before the  
**JOINT HOUSE COMMITTEES ON  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY  
AND TOURISM**

Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 10:00 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 423

in consideration of  
**HB 1967  
RELATING TO PERMITTING.**

Chairs Ilagan and Tam, Vice Chairs Hussey and Templo, and Members of the Joint House Committees on Economic Development & Technology and Tourism,

The Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) **supports HB 1967**, which implements certain recommendations of the SPEED Task Force. The measure requires the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism to develop a permitting workforce pipeline in partnership with the University of Hawai'i and community colleges and coordinate with state and county permitting agencies on certain tasks related to classification levels, salary and benefits, hiring, and responsibilities of employees. Appropriates funds.

HB 1967 emerged from the recommendations of the Building Permit Permitted Interaction Group (PIG) of the Simplifying Permitting for Enhanced Economic Development Task Force. By identifying specific staffing gaps, the Task Force has provided a clear roadmap for workforce development that this bill seeks to implement. This measure directly addresses the housing policy directives and emergency proclamations set forth in Governor Green's plan to increase housing inventory across the islands. A primary obstacle to achieving these goals has been the shortage of trained permitting staff available to process the current and projected workload. HB 1967 provides the necessary resources to expand capacity, allowing agencies to streamline the permitting process and clear existing backlogs that have historically delayed critical housing projects.

OPSD supports HB 1967 so long as it does not affect appropriation requests in the administrative budget. We respectfully urge the joint committees to pass this measure to ensure our workforce has the capacity to meet Hawai'i's housing demands.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



## **Testimony to the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology (ECD)**

**Representative Gregg Ilagan, Chair  
Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair**

**Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 10:00AM  
Conference Room 423 & Videoconference**

### **RE: HB1967 Relating to Permitting**

Aloha e Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, 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 1967 (HB1967), which implements certain recommendations of the SPEED Task Force to develop a long-term workforce pipeline in partnership with the University of Hawaii and community colleges to support the recruitment and retention of state and county employees that fill these roles.

HB1967 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action. This bill strengthens one of the most important components of the permitting: those who administer the system and ensure timely review of applications. The Blueprint emphasizes the need for strategies, such as this one proposed by the SPEED Taskforce, that improve Hawaii's economic competitiveness by reducing administrative bottlenecks, supporting industry led workforce development, and aligning public systems with private sector needs.

Permitting delays and administrative backlogs are widely recognized as significant impediments to economic growth in Hawaii, affecting housing supply, infrastructure investment, renewable energy deployment, and business expansion. By investing in a long-term strategy to recruit, train, and retain a qualified permitting workforce — including tuition incentives, clear career pathways, and competitive compensation structures — this measure directly targets one of the systemic barriers to expedited project delivery and economic development.

We respectfully ask to pass House Bill 1967. 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.



## HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

RANDY PERREIRA, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii  
House of Representatives  
Committee on Economic Development and Technology  
Committee on Tourism

Testimony by  
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 4, 2026

### H.B. 1967 – RELATING TO PERMITTING

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO supports the intent of H.B. 1967, which requires the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism to develop a permitting workforce pipeline in partnership with the University of Hawai'i and community colleges and coordinate with state and county permitting agencies on certain tasks related to classification levels, salary and benefits, hiring, and responsibilities of employees.

Our organization represents hundreds of employees, across all counties, that are involved in the permitting process. For years we have been advocating that the counties put more focus and investment on the recruitment and retention of employees involved in the permitting process – such as increasing the pay, reducing hiring times, professional training, and providing incentives that encourage career growth and promote employment longevity. We would like to note that the counties already possess the authority as proposed in subsection (c). However, we appreciate the intent of this measure as it continues the conversation about ways our counties can look to develop modern and attractive benefits of this century, to recruit and retain a qualified permitting workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 1967.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira  
Executive Director



# MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

**HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY AND COMMITTEE ON TOURISM  
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 423  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2026 AT 10:00 A.M.**

To The Honorable Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology

To The Honorable Representative Adrian K. Tam, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Shirley Ann Templo, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Tourism

**SUPPORT FOR HB1967 RELATING TO PERMITTING**

The bill's focus on workforce development and interagency coordination aligns closely with our policy priorities. By improving recruitment, training, and retention of permitting professionals, the state can help alleviate bottlenecks that slow the delivery of much-needed housing. Streamlining permitting processes not only accelerates project timelines but also reduces development costs, which is essential for maintaining affordability in both rental and ownership markets. These improvements are especially critical as Hawai'i continues to face rising construction costs and a housing crisis.

We also support the bill's intent to clarify classification levels, salary, and responsibilities for permitting staff. Clearer career pathways and competitive compensation can help attract and retain qualified professionals, ensuring that permitting agencies are adequately staffed to meet the demands of housing and infrastructure projects. The proposed collaboration with educational institutions further strengthens the pipeline by preparing a local workforce with relevant skills and knowledge.

We respectfully recommend that implementation of the permitting workforce pipeline prioritize housing-related permits, given the urgent need for affordable and workforce housing statewide. Additionally, we encourage ongoing collaboration with housing stakeholders to ensure that process improvements translate into meaningful reductions in permitting timelines. We appreciate the Legislature's commitment to addressing systemic barriers and ask that you move HB1967 forward.

We greatly appreciate the work done by the SPEED Task Force and support their recommendations. Mahalo for the opportunity to share our support.

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.



# 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

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**Committee:** House Committee on Economic Development and Technology  
**Bill Number:** HB 1967, Relating to Permitting  
**Hearing Date and Time:** February 4, 2026 at 10:00am (Room 423)  
**Re:** Testimony of Holomua Collaborative- Support

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Committee Members:

We write in support of House Bill 1967, Relating to Permitting. The purpose of HB 1967 is to develop a permitting workforce pipeline in partnership with the University of Hawai'i and community colleges and coordinate with state and county permitting agencies on certain tasks related to classification levels, salary and benefits, hiring, and responsibilities of employees.

Holomua supports initiatives that help keep all local working families in Hawai'i by addressing the root causes of our affordability crisis, and we believe that streamlining our permitting process is one of the most significant steps the state can take toward that goal. This bill is not just an administrative update; it is a vital economic development measure that addresses the systemic bottlenecks currently stifling our state's growth.

For too long, the slow pace of permitting has acted as an invisible tax on every project in Hawai'i, from affordable housing developments to critical infrastructure. These delays drive up carrying costs for builders, which are inevitably passed down to residents in the form of higher rents and home prices. The SPEED Task Force identified that a primary reason for these delays is a lack of capacity and staffing within our regulatory agencies. HB 1967 offers a comprehensive solution by focusing on the workforce pipeline. By partnering with the University of Hawai'i and our community colleges to create tuition incentives and clear career paths for permit technicians and plan reviewers, we are investing in the human capital necessary to move our economy forward.

Furthermore, this bill recognizes that the state cannot compete for talent if public sector compensation remains disconnected from the private market. When our agencies lose their most experienced reviewers to the private sector, the entire system slows down, creating a cycle of stagnation that hurts everyone. By ensuring competitive pay and establishing emergency hiring procedures, HB 1967 provides the tools needed to maintain a high-functioning government that can keep pace with the needs of a modern economy.



A thriving economic environment requires predictability and efficiency. When businesses and developers face years of uncertainty in the permitting phase, it discourages investment and limits job creation. By passing HB 1967, we can clear the path for more housing, better infrastructure, and a more robust economic future for Hawai'i's working families. We respectfully urge you to pass this measure and mahalo for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Matthew Prellberg  
Policy and Communications Director



**HB-1967**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:39:07 AM

Testimony for ECD on 2/4/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good idea. Support.

**HB-1967**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 6:31:19 PM

Testimony for ECD on 2/4/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dr. Jennifer Salisbury	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a member of the SPEED Task Force, I am PROUD to support this. We need more locally educated, locally housed and locally employed folks in our own State. YES!