



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 Higher Education
March 25, 2026 at 2:10 p.m.

By

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

SB 2138 HD1 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

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

The University of Hawai'i supports SB 2138 HD1 – Relating to the Hawaii National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program, which would expand the Hawai'i National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate degree programs at the University of Hawai'i (UH) for eligible members of the Hawai'i National Guard.

The University of Hawai'i (UH) strongly supports this measure, which aligns with UH's mission as the State's public system of higher education to serve Hawai'i's workforce needs, support military-affiliated students, and strengthen the State's long-term human capital.

The expansion to include graduate programs recognizes the increasing educational and professional demands placed on Guard members. Graduate education plays a critical role in preparing Guard members to meet existing and evolving workforce demands. By extending tuition assistance to graduate programs, this bill would support career advancement for Guard members while enhancing their ability to contribute meaningfully to both state and national missions.

This measure also supports workforce retention within Hawai'i. Providing Guard members with access to affordable graduate education at UH encourages them to remain in the State, apply their advanced skills locally, and continue serving Hawai'i's communities in both military and civilian capacities. In this way, SB 2138 HD1 represents a strategic investment in leadership development, public service, and economic resilience.

As the sole provider of public higher education in the State, UH is committed to serving those who serve Hawai'i. Expanding the State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate degrees strengthens UH's long-standing partnership with the Hawai'i National Guard and advances shared goals of readiness, resilience, and opportunity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2138 HD1.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
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KA HOPE 'AKUKANA KENELALA

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2138 HD1
RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
BY

MAJOR GENERAL STEPHEN F. LOGAN
ADJUTANT GENERAL
AND DIRECTOR OF THE HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

March 20, 2026

Aloha Chair Garrett, Vice-Chair Amato, and members of the committee:

The Department of Defense provides written testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB2138 HD1**.

This bill authorizes the Adjutant General to award tuition assistance for graduate degrees at the University of Hawaii to qualified enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and company grade officers (O-1 through O-3) in the Hawaii National Guard (HING).

Expanding the HING State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate-level education is important for two primary reasons. First, allowing our servicemembers to pursue graduate degrees continues to professionalize our force which is absolutely critical in this era where our Soldiers and Airman need to be smarter than they have ever been. Second, competition for talent among the military service components and private industry on-island is as challenging as it ever has ever been. The passage of this bill will help ensure the HING can recruit and retain the best and brightest over competing services, and that we will continue to maintain a quality force that is capable of responding to state emergencies in our communities and to defend the Nation when called.

For these reasons, I humbly ask for your support on this measure and appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. Please feel free to call me or our Director of Legislative Affairs, Brigadier General (Retired) Neal Mitsuyoshi at 808-369-3562, neal.s.mitsuyoshi@hawaii.gov, should you have any questions.

MG Stephen F. Logan, Stephen.f.logan@hawaii.gov; 808-672-1001

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TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2138
RELATING TO HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

COLONEL NATHAN A. TYAU
G4/DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF-LOGISTICS
HAWAII ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

March 24, 2026

Aloha Chair Garrett, Vice-Chair Amato, and members of the committee:

The Department of Defense (DEF) provides written testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB2138**.

This bill proposes to expand the Hawai'i National Guard's (HING) current State Tuition Assistance Program (STAP) policy to award up to 50% tuition assistance for graduate degrees for eligible Hawai'i National Guard (HING) members. The bill extends tuition assistance for graduate degrees to qualified enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and company-grade officers (Lieutenant through Captain).

There are three key points I would like to highlight for your consideration. First, extending the state tuition bill to include graduate degrees provides resources to professionalize the workforce. Second, competition for talent across the islands among the military services and the civilian sector is severe. This bill ensures the HING can compete, acquire, and retain the best and brightest to respond to emergencies in our communities and to the Nation when called to do so. Lastly, there is enough flexibility and controls within the existing program, which is currently funded at \$250,000, to implement this bill without requesting additional funding.

The following background is provided on the existing program. STAP is a critical recruiting and retention tool providing a financial resource to mitigate tuition costs for both Hawai'i Army and Air National Guard members. The current STAP reimbursement program covers 100% tuition at University of Hawai'i (UH) school system, community colleges and 4-year colleges. HING enrollment for the current Fall semester utilizing State Tuition includes 54 students attending a variety of programs at community colleges, UH Manoa, West Oahu, and UH Hilo. Top bachelor's degrees pursued through STAP include Business Administration, Public Administration and Liberal Arts degrees.

Currently, the Hawai'i Air National Guard (HIANG) Federal Tuition Assistance is only available to Active Guard Reserve (AGR) and deployed airmen; therefore, STAP is particularly significant for HIANG part-time drilling members. Overall assessment across the country regarding STAP revealed 40 of the 54 States, Territories, and the District of Columbia offer graduate degree tuition assistance. If approved, this bill will align Hawai'i's STAP with other state programs nationwide.

We humbly ask for your support of **SB2138** and appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. The point of contact is Colonel Nathan A. Tyau, nathan.a.tyau.mil@mail.mil or 808-351-9481.

Sincerely,

Nathan A. Tyau
Colonel, Hawai'i Army National Guard
G4/Deputy Chief of Staff-Logistics



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2138 HD1
RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

House Committee on Higher Education
Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair

Wednesday, March 25, 2026 at 2:10 PM
Conference Room 309 or via Videoconference

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

The Hawaii Military Affairs Council ("MAC") supports SB 2138 HD1.

The MAC was established in 1985 when the Chamber was appointed by the State to serve as the liaison to the military. The MAC advocates on behalf of Hawaii's military, and is comprised of business leaders, academic institutions, State and County officials, members of the CODEL, community leaders, labor unions and organizations and retired U.S. flag and general officers. The MAC works to support Hawaii's location as a strategic U.S. headquarters in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region which is crucial for U.S. national and homeland security.

Providing tuition assistance for both undergraduate and graduate studies is a cost-effective way to recruit and retain highly skilled service members, enhance leadership development, and ensure a well-educated force that can better support State and federal missions. This bill also strengthens the long-standing partnership between the Department of Defense and the University of Hawai'i by keeping Guard members in-state for their education and careers.

For these reasons, the Hawaii Military Affairs Council respectfully urges passage of SB 2138 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

SB-2138-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 9:33:31 PM

Testimony for HED on 3/25/2026 2:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kenan Pedro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support the SB2138 bill.