



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 Agriculture & Food Systems
March 18, 2026 at 9:30 a.m.

By

Lui Hokoana

Interim Vice President for Community Colleges
University of Hawai'i System

SB 2706 SD1 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Community Colleges (UHCC) supports the intent of SB 2706 SD1, which would establish a five-year Agriculture and Biosecurity Workforce Development Pilot Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB), in collaboration with the University of Hawai'i at Leeward Community College (LeeCC) and the Department of Human Resources Development (DHRD). The UHCCs support this measure because it advances a practical and outcomes-driven approach to strengthening Hawai'i's workforce capacity in agriculture and biosecurity, areas that are essential to the state's resilience, food security, and public health. The pilot's emphasis on curriculum development, hands-on training, and real-world work opportunities aligns with best practices for building career pathways that lead to employment and advancement.

While the UHCCs welcome the partnership with DAB and DHRD, we wish to clarify the collaborative framework. To ensure program success and maintain compliance with institutional accreditation, LeeCC will lead the academic development of the curriculum, ensuring that the 'broad spectrum of topics' mandated in Section 1(b)(1) aligns with established higher education standards and lead to recognized industry credentials. This partnership allows DAB to define the 'what' (the skills needed), while the University defines the 'how' (the instructional delivery).

Furthermore, the UHCCs note that the development of a specialized biosecurity curriculum is a resource-intensive endeavor. To successfully launch this pilot, the UHCCs respectfully requests that the legislature consider a specific appropriation for FY 2026-27 to support specialized faculty and the procurement of necessary training materials. Without a dedicated funding stream, the development of this new career pathway may divert resources from existing programs.

LeeCC is prepared to contribute meaningfully to this effort through its established workforce development infrastructure and experience designing and delivering industry-responsive training. LeeCC's role as an open-access institution also positions the

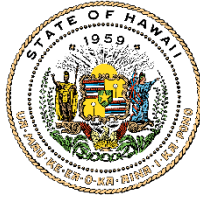
College to serve residents across a range of backgrounds, including working adults and non-traditional learners seeking upskilling, reskilling, and rapid entry into employment.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB 2706 SD1, as long as its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2706 SD1.

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

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

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CHAIRPERSON
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE
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FIRST DEPUTY

CIARA W.K. KAHANE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES
BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Wednesday, March 18, 2026
9:30 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 325

In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2706, SENATE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Senate Bill 2706, Senate Draft 1 establishes a five-year Agriculture and Biosecurity Workforce Development Pilot Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, in collaboration with the University of Hawai'i's Leeward Community College and the Department of Human Resources Development. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Supplemental Budget request.**

The Department supports creating a pilot program for workforce development in agriculture and biosecurity. It recognizes the urgent need to train students who will have the skills and knowledge to work in biosecurity roles across Hawai'i. The Department is aware that there are currently not enough qualified candidates to fill positions at the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB). This workforce development initiative would equip students with the right training and experience to become qualified candidates to join DAB staff and address the state's agriculture and biosecurity challenges.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

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

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



BRENN A H. HASHIMOTO
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

BRIAN K. FURUTO
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMŌHALA LIMAHANA
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Statement of
BRENN A H. HASHIMOTO
Director, Department of Human Resources Development

Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS
Wednesday, March 18, 2026
9:30AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 325

In consideration of
SB2706 SD1, RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and the members of the committee:

The Department of Human Resources Development (HRD) appreciates the intent of SB2706 SD1 and offers the following comments.

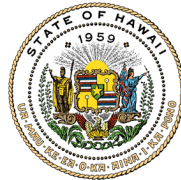
SB2706 SD1 establishes a five-year agriculture and biosecurity workforce development pilot program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, in collaboration with the University of Hawai'i's Leeward Community College and the Department of Human Resources Development.

We are committed to workforce development and training, but the measure does not clearly define our role. Without clarity on our responsibilities, it is difficult to fully evaluate and determine whether additional resources will be needed. We are ready to work with the Legislature to ensure the approach is clear and aligned with existing efforts.

We are available to answer any questions or provide further information as needed.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
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SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026
9:30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2706, SD1
RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testify on Senate Bill No. 2706, SD1, relating to workforce development. This measure establishes a five-year Agriculture and Biosecurity Workforce Development Pilot Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department), in collaboration with the University of Hawai'i's Leeward Community College (LCC) and the Department of Human Resources Development (DHRD); requires a report to the Legislature; sunsets 6/30/2031; and is effective 7/1/2050. The Department supports this measure and offers comments.

The Department believes that access to a stable, well-trained workforce is key to maintaining biosecurity efforts across the State. The Department believes that creating a workforce development program developed in conjunction with LCC and DHRD, such as the one used by the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement for their officers, enables the Department to do the same for a variety of biosecurity-related roles within the Department. Additionally, this program also has the opportunity to create biosecurity-related capacity outside the Department, increasing the capacity for partners and businesses to also implement biosecurity actions into their operations. Should this measure be passed, the Department is eager to continue working with both DHRD and LCC, who have been supportive of the Department's biosecurity efforts. The Department is currently actively recruiting 17 line biosecurity inspectors, one noxious weed specialist, and 3 pest control technicians across the State. This program would enhance recruitment and also enable the Department to phase in additional positions specifically for pest survey, control, and eradication work.

Testimony of Sharon Hurd

March 18, 2026

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The Department respectfully requests that 2 (FTE) positions be provided to administer the program with an appropriation of \$166,000, and for approximately \$4,500 per pilot program participant for program registration/fees, supplies, books, and other related expenses.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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March 18, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON SB 2706, SD1
RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
9:30 AM

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice-Chair Kusch, 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 SB 2706, SD1, which establishes a five-year agriculture and biosecurity workforce development pilot program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, in collaboration with the University of Hawaii's Leeward Community College and the Department of Human Resources Development.

Workforce shortages remain one of the most significant challenges facing Hawai'i agriculture and biosecurity. Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers continue to age, and many multigenerational operations face uncertainty due to the lack of a trained next generation prepared to enter agricultural and biosecurity careers. Without intentional workforce development efforts, agricultural lands risk falling out of production, increasing Hawai'i's reliance on imported food, and weakening our biosecurity system.

HFB also notes that both agricultural operations and agricultural agencies face increasing difficulty recruiting qualified candidates due to the specialized education, training, and background experience required for many positions. Farming and ranching jobs today often demand technical skills in equipment operation, pest and disease management, compliance, and safety, while positions within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity require scientific, regulatory, or inspection expertise that can be difficult to fill. These workforce gaps highlight the need for targeted training programs that prepare candidates with the skills necessary to succeed in agriculture and biosecurity careers.

HFB has consistently supported initiatives that strengthen agricultural education, training, and career pathways. Prior workforce efforts have demonstrated the importance of

hands-on learning, internships, and clear pathways into employment. SB 2706, SD1 builds on these principles by emphasizing practical training, collaboration with educational institutions, and alignment with workforce needs within agriculture and biosecurity.

HFB also supports the pilot structure of this program. A defined timeframe allows the State to evaluate outcomes, identify best practices, and make informed decisions about long-term workforce investments. Continued engagement with farmers, ranchers, and industry stakeholders will be essential to ensure that training programs remain relevant and responsive to on-the-ground needs.

Developing a skilled agricultural and biosecurity workforce is critical to growing agriculture in Hawai'i and achieving statewide goals such as doubling local food production, strengthening farm-to-school programs, diversifying the economy, and protecting natural resources. SB 2706, SD1 represents an important step toward addressing the workforce challenges that must be overcome to reach these objectives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

**Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems
Representative Cory M. Chun, Chair
Representative Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair**

**Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 9:30AM
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference**

RE: SB2706 SD1 Relating to Workforce Development

Aloha e Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports Senate Bill 2706 Senate Draft 1 (SB2706 SD1), which establishes a five-year Agriculture and Biosecurity Workforce Development Pilot Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, in collaboration with the University of Hawai'i's Leeward Community College and the Department of Human Resources Development.

SB2706 SD1 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillars for 21st Century Agriculture and Economic Action. These pillars prioritize workforce development and increased resilience and productivity within Hawaii's food system. This bill supports the development of a skilled workforce that can meet the states need to food self-sufficiency and improved biosecurity.

The creation of a five-year pilot program will provide sufficient time for the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to fully develop this program and demonstrate the success of this investment. With workforce shortages remaining as a significant headwind to the agriculture industry, measurable outcomes will be key to the demonstrating the success of this program. The Chamber recommends that certain performance metrics be defined in the language of this legislation to more clearly illustrate the desired outcomes of this program, such as the number graduates, employment rate after graduation, increased compensation earned through additional training and credential attainment, and more.

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.

We respectfully ask to pass Senate Bill 2706 Senate Draft 1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-2706-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2026 6:37:24 AM

Testimony for AGR on 3/18/2026 9:30:00 AM

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

Comments:

SUPPORT! MAHALO!