



# 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  
March 4, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

By

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#### HB 1596 HD1 – RELATING TO STUDENT BASIC NEEDS SUPPORT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports HB 1596 HD1 – Relating to Student Basic Needs Support at the University Of Hawai'i. The UH serves a diverse student population across ten campuses, many of whom are low-income, first-generation, working students, student parents, and individuals navigating Hawai'i's high cost of living. Findings from the *UH Landscape Assessment of Student Basic Needs Insecurity* published in 2025 demonstrate that food insecurity, housing instability, and limited access to public benefits remain significant and interrelated barriers to student success. These challenges are associated with lower retention, delayed completion, and increased likelihood of stop-out or withdrawal.

HB 1596 HD1 reflects a data-informed and measured approach by authorizing a single-campus pilot program that integrates benefits navigation, coordinated outreach, and targeted housing stability support. This structure aligns closely with the strategies outlined in the *UH Student Basic Needs Master Plan 2.0* published in 2024, which emphasizes system-level coordination paired with campus-level implementation tailored to local needs, capacity, and community partnerships.

Requiring evaluation and accountability of the pilot program are important. The annual student basic needs survey and reporting on service utilization, persistence, and academic progress are consistent with UH's commitment to evidence-based decision-making. The pilot framework will allow UH to better understand which interventions most effectively support students before considering broader expansion.

By strengthening the infrastructure that helps students meet their basic needs, this measure supports not only individual student success but also Hawai'i's broader workforce and economic goals. Students who are able to remain enrolled, persist, and complete their programs are better positioned to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1596 HD1.



March 2, 2026

**Testimony in Support of H.B. 1596 HD1  
Relating to Student Basic Needs Support at the University of Hawai'i**

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

Aloha United Way supports H.B. 1596 HD1, which establishes a basic needs pilot program at a University of Hawai'i campus to improve student stability, persistence, and academic success.

Across Hawai'i, 40%<sup>1</sup> of households are ALICE( Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), meaning they earn above the federal poverty level but still struggle to afford the basic cost of living. Many college students come from these households or are financially independent students facing similar pressures. Housing instability, food insecurity, transportation barriers, and limited access to public benefits can significantly disrupt a student's ability to remain enrolled and make consistent academic progress.

When basic needs go unmet, students are more likely to reduce their course loads, delay graduation, or leave school altogether. These disruptions not only affect individual students, but also weaken Hawai'i's workforce pipeline and long-term economic stability.

H.B. 1596 HD1 takes a thoughtful, data-informed approach by piloting coordinated basic-needs support at a single campus before considering systemwide expansion. By establishing a benefits navigator, strengthening connections to community-based resources, conducting annual basic-needs surveys, and testing targeted housing stability interventions, this measure will help identify effective strategies to support student success.

Investing in students' basic needs is an investment in Hawai'i's future workforce and economic resilience. Ensuring that students can meet their fundamental needs will improve persistence, support degree completion, and help more local residents build stable futures in our state.

For these reasons, Aloha United Way respectfully urges your support for H.B. 1596 HD1.

Mahalo,

Michelle Bartell  
President & CEO  
Aloha United Way

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.auw.org/about/alice-initiative/alice-reports/>



UNIVERSITY OF  
HAWAI‘I  
STUDENT CAUCUS

To: House of Representatives, Committee on Finance  
Date: Wednesday, March 4, 2026  
Time: 10:00am

HB 1596 HD1 - RELATING TO STUDENT BASIC NEEDS SUPPORT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and members of the committee:

We are submitting this testimony on behalf of the University of Hawai‘i Student Caucus (UHSC), the UH system-wide association of all ten campus student governments, collectively representing over 51,000 students in the UH System. The UH Student Caucus stands in **strong support of HB1596 HD1**, which would establish a Basic Needs Pilot Program at one of the UH campuses and we appreciate the Legislature’s continued attention to the basic needs of post-secondary students.

Students across the UH system continue to face significant barriers that directly affect their ability to persist and succeed academically, including housing instability, food insecurity, transportation challenges, and limited access to public benefits. These challenges are particularly acute in Hawai‘i, where the high cost of living disproportionately impacts students who are low-income, first-generation, Native Hawaiian, rural, or parenting students.

HB1596 HD1 takes a thoughtful and responsible approach by establishing a limited pilot program at a single UH campus to better understand how coordinated basic needs support can improve student persistence and academic progress. We are especially encouraged by provisions in the bill that establish a benefits navigator position, require the development of a campus-level basic needs plan, and mandate annual student basic needs surveys. Students often struggle not only with unmet needs, but with navigating fragmented systems of support. A centralized, student-facing role dedicated to connecting students with resources can significantly reduce these barriers and ensure that existing supports are more accessible and effective.

Additionally, the optional housing stability pilot project recognizes that housing insecurity is one of the most disruptive challenges facing students today. Even short-term housing instability can derail a student’s progress or force them to stop out entirely. Targeted housing assistance and case coordination can make the difference between a student leaving school and a student completing their degree.

HB1596 HD1 reflects a growing understanding that student success is inseparable from student well-being. By investing in data-informed, coordinated basic needs support, this measure helps ensure that students who have already overcome significant obstacles to enroll in college are not forced out due to circumstances beyond their control. For these reasons, the University of Hawai‘i Student Caucus respectfully urges your support for HB1596 HD1.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.



**HAWAII APPLESEED**  
CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice  
Support for HB 1596 – Relating to Student Basic Needs Support  
House Committee on Finance  
Wednesday, March 4, 2026, at 10:00 AM

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Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB1596.

Hawai‘i Appleseed supports policies that ensure low-income and working-class residents of Hawai‘i can meet their basic needs and thrive. Access to higher education is one of the most powerful pathways to economic mobility—but students cannot succeed academically if they are struggling to afford rent, food, transportation, or healthcare.

HB1596 would establish a limited basic needs pilot program at one campus within the University of Hawai‘i system, including a dedicated benefits navigator and the option to implement a housing stability pilot project. This is a thoughtful, fiscally responsible approach: start small, gather Hawai‘i-specific data, and evaluate outcomes before considering broader expansion.

A campus-based benefits navigator can help students access public benefits, emergency assistance, and community resources that already exist but are often difficult to navigate. By improving coordination and awareness, the State can better leverage existing federal and state dollars to stabilize students and support their persistence.

The bill’s required annual survey and legislative reporting will provide critical data on housing stability, food security, service use, and academic outcomes. Given Hawai‘i’s high cost of living, local data is essential to guide sound policy decisions.

Even modest, targeted support—particularly for students experiencing housing instability—can make the difference between dropping out and completing a degree. That is a smart investment in both individual opportunity and our state’s workforce and economic future.

Thank you for considering this important bill.