



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 Human Services & Homelessness
February 17, 2026 at 9:30 a.m.

By

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

Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the Committee:

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.



February 13, 2026

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

Aloha Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, 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%¹ 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 do not only affect individual students – they 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

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

LATE

February 16, 2026

To: Chair Lisa Marten, Vice Chair Ikaika Olds and the House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness.

Subject: **HB1596 HD1**, Relating to Student Basic Needs Support at the University of Hawai'i

Aloha,

We are writing in support of HB1596 HD1, which establishes a Basic Needs Pilot program at a single University of Hawai'i campus and authorizes a Housing Stability Pilot Project.

The capability of students to reach their greatest potential, depends not only on their academic prowess, but also their ability to meet their most basic needs. Housing instability, food insecurity, and limited transportation options can be a roadblock for many students who are attempting to be productive members of society. In the state of Hawai'i where the cost of living is amongst the highest in the country, this roadblock has unfortunately become even more prevalent.

Additionally, federal nutrition programs such as SNAP have been targeted in recent times, further increasing the uncertainty that many students already face. As these federal programs become progressively less reliable, it is up to the state to ensure that residents are able to access the basic resources that they need. The benefits navigator position that this bill introduces, would further ensure that not only are these resources available, but those who need them actually are aware of their existence.

Furthermore, this measure would provide Hawai'i specific data that could guide future policy decisions. This bill itself recommends a fiscally responsible limited pilot program. This program would not only serve the students of that campus for the duration of the program, but would also provide essential data that could guide future policies to be as grounded in evidence as possible.

Supporting the basic needs of students is not just a social service, it is an investment in the future of Hawai'i. When students are able to complete their degrees, the state benefits from a stronger more locally rooted workforce.

Mahalo,
The Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.