



# 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  
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Parwinder Grewal, Dean  
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience  
and  
Vassilis Syrmos, PhD  
Interim Provost  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### HB 1605 HD1 – RELATING TO HUMAN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 1605 HD1. This measure provides the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) with resources for the development of its Human and Community Resilience Institute (HCRI).

Food security and healthy diets are essential for positive youth development, thriving families, and resilient communities. Helping local families become food and nutritionally secure is one of CTAHR's core missions, but the end of the SNAP Ed program by the federal government has led to the loss of 13 food educators at the college. The loss of these trusted community partners will accelerate the already urgent need that more than 30% of Hawai'i households are food insecure.

The proposed new HCRI will be community-based and data-driven uniting our centers and programs with a shared purpose: to increase children's food and nutritional security, increase positive youth development and health outcomes, increase family well-being, foster food and farming entrepreneurship, develop new graduate degrees, and increase community resilience.

HCRI will partner with community organizations and government agencies and leverage the network of CTAHR's Centers for Applied Research and Extension Services (CARES) statewide to build sustainable solutions to food and nutritional insecurity challenges in Hawai'i. The appropriation in HB 1605 HD1 will support statewide community assets.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



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February 25, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1605, HD1**  
RELATING TO HUMAN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Conference Room 308 & Videoconference  
2:00 PM

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, 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 HB 1605, HD1**, which appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i at Manoa College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) for the development of its Human and Community Resilience Institute.

HFB has a long history of working closely with CTAHR on research, extension, and youth development efforts that directly support Hawai'i's farmers, ranchers, and agricultural communities. Programs such as 4-H youth development, nutrition education, and community-based extension play an important role in building a future agricultural workforce, strengthening demand for local agricultural products, and improving community understanding of agriculture.

HB 1605, HD1 seeks to consolidate and strengthen existing CTAHR programs under a coordinated, data-driven framework. HFB understands that recent federal funding changes have reduced CTAHR's capacity in food and nutrition education, and this measure provides an opportunity to stabilize and better align programs that support families, youth, and agricultural communities across the State.

From an agricultural perspective, efforts that improve food and nutrition education, support youth engagement through 4-H, and provide better data and evaluation can complement broader goals to strengthen Hawai'i's food system and agricultural economy. HFB appreciates that this measure focuses on coordination, education, and capacity-building rather than regulation or mandates for farmers and ranchers.

HFB recognizes CTAHR as a critical partner in Hawai'i's agricultural ecosystem and supports HB 1605, HD1 as an investment in education, extension, and community-based programs that ultimately benefit agriculture statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**HB-1605-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:20:02 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Megan Blazak	Hilo County Farm Bureau	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Hilo County Farm Bureau members, our chapter urges the committee to pass HB1605 HD1. The University of Hawaii at Manoa College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience provides vital research, extension, and education services to agricultural producers and beginning farmers across the state. The proposed measure will enhance UH CTAHR's capabilities to continue its critical work to support the current and future farmers of Hawaii.

Thank you,

Megan Blazak  
Chapter President  
Hilo County Farm Bureau



February 23, 2026

To: Chair Representative Chris Todd, Vice Chair Representative Jenna Takenuchi, and the members of the House Committee on Finance

Subject: **HB1605 HD1**, Relating to Human and Community Resilience

Aloha,

I am writing in **support** of **HB1605 HD1**, which appropriates funds to the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) for the development of its Human and Community Resilience Institute.

1-in-3 households experience food insecurity, meaning that they do not have access to enough food to ensure a healthy, active lifestyle<sup>1</sup>. In addition, unhealthy eating habits are leading causes of diet-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, kidney and heart disease, and cancer<sup>2</sup>. It is estimated that Hawai'i spends ~\$1.2 billion annually on obesity and diabetes-related medical costs<sup>3</sup>. **Fostering family and community resilience** through supporting education on healthy eating habits **is a preventative measure against diet-related illnesses and the financial burdens they create.**

**I urge this committee to pass HB1605 HD1**, which invests in our local communities and the future of a healthy Hawai'i.

Mahalo,  
Sydney Haas & the Food+ Policy Team  
#fixourfoodsystem

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**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.

<sup>1</sup>[The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai'i \(2024-2025\)](#)

<sup>2</sup>[Hawai'i Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan 2030](#)

<sup>3</sup>[Hawai'i Coordinated Chronic Disease Framework \(2014-2020\)](#)



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Natalie Urminska  
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Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Finance Committee,

The Hawai'i Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFU supports HB1605.**

HB1605 recognizes the pressing need to fortify Hawaii's resilience against the escalating challenges posed by climate change, economic fluctuations, and social dynamics. The proposed investment in the University of Hawaii at Manoa's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience represents a foundational enhancement of our community's adaptive capacities. By channeling resources into the development of a dedicated institute, HB1605 ensures a concentrated effort toward research and education aimed at fostering robust human and community resilience across our islands.

For Hawaii's farmers, the impacts of climate change are not merely theoretical; they constitute daily challenges that require immediate and innovative responses. By focusing on resilience, HB1605 promises to empower local farmers with the knowledge and tools necessary to adapt to environmental changes, thereby safeguarding Hawaii's agricultural heritage and food security. The integration of advanced research and community outreach can foster more resilient agricultural systems that are better equipped to withstand environmental stressors and contribute to a healthier ecosystem.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin  
Advocacy Director  
Hawai'i Farmers Union

Date: February 25, 2026

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: House Bill 1605 HD1, Relating to Human and Community Resilience

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Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) is a statewide cross-sector collaborative designed to improve the system of care for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. ECAS partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

**ECAS supports House Bill 1605 HD1 which would appropriate funds to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience for the development of its human and community resilience institute.**

Recent changes to federal policy and funding streams have threatened our local social safety net and will put further stress on a local population that already suffers from a housing crisis, food insecurity, and a quickly rising cost of living.

However, the College of Tropical Agriculture & Human Resilience is uniquely positioned to help address the needs of our local community. The specific programs that would form this new institute are experts in these matters with long track records of collaboration with both government agencies and community organizations. Moreover, they have proven their ability to identify and address the needs of our community's most vulnerable members.

This measure, which would direct resources to stand up a dedicated institute, will have outsized impact on our community's overall resilience.

For this reason, ECAS supports House Bill 1605 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

**HB-1605-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:31:41 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

1605 HB RELATING TO HUMAN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE.

TO INCLUDE WORKING WITH WAI'ANAE COAST COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH  
CENTER - ELEAPIO PROGRAM

**HB-1605-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:21:31 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Randy Cabral	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support

**February 24, 2026**  
**Personal Testimony Provided by Barbara DeBaryshe**  
**In Support of HB 1605**  
**Relating to Human and Community Resilience**

Aloha e Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

I am writing to express my **strong support** for HB 1605. Urge you to pass and fully fund HB 1605 for the following reasons:

- Hawai'i's families and communities are blessed with many strengths that stem from our aloha spirit, intergenerational ties, pride of place, and multicultural heritage. At the same time, our families and communities are stressed by a housing crisis, spiraling cost of living, food insecurity, and the potential for political and social conflict at the national level. For example:
  - 45% of households are ALICE households earning less than the basic survival budget (United for ALICE, 2025).
  - 32% of households experience food insecurity (over 40% in Maui and Hawai'i Counties) resulting in hunger, anxiety, and preventable health problems (Hawaii Food Bank, 2024-2025).
  - 34% of high school students report depression and 26% have had suicidal thoughts (Hawai'i Health Matters, 2023).
  - Child care is a frequent to daily source of worry for 57% of families with young keiki (C & C of Honolulu Early Childhood Family Survey, 2025).
- Recent and pending changes in federal policies and funding threaten the social safety net and will only make the current situation worse.
- The College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience is uniquely suited to address these community needs. The programs that will form the new Human and Community Resilience Institute (EFNEP, CHL, 4-H, Center on the Family) have expertise and long histories of collaborating with state agencies and community organizations. They work hand-in-hand with stakeholders to conduct needs assessments and design and deliver innovative research-based programs that enhance family and community resilience and well-being.
- Funding will offset the loss of 13 SNAP educator positions and increase CTAHR's capacity to serve the community and respond to emerging needs. The new institute will focus on food and nutritional security, positive family and youth development, and the collection of timely data to drive policy and track progress.

This institute embodies what is best about the Land Grant University system. It will be good for UH and good for the state. Please vote to pass and fund bill 1605.

In the interest of full disclosure, note that I have been a University of Hawai'i faculty member for over 30 years. Although this experience informs my perspective on the bill, I submit this testimony as a private individual and concerned citizen.

**HB-1605-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:47:36 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Sarah Yuan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

I strongly support HB 1605\_HD1 and respectfully urge your favorable vote.

Families and communities face growing challenges in meeting basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare, while recent and pending federal funding changes threaten to weaken the social safety net.

The proposed Human and Community Resilience Institute within the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience will expand community-engaged education and research efforts to support food and nutrition security, youth and family development, and data-driven policymaking. This new institute will integrate existing expertise and resources within the College to ensure excellence and long-term stability in protecting essential services and strengthening community resilience.

In full disclosure, I have been a University of Hawai'i faculty member for 20 years, but submit this testimony as a concerned citizen.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully,  
Sarah Yuan