



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
Friday, February 13, 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 Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, 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 CTHAR'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 Reserach 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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Keeping Hawai'i clean,
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February 10, 2026

Re: Testimony In Support Of HB1605, HD1 -- *Relating to Human and Community Resilience*

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Outdoor Circle supports HB1605, HD1, which would provide funding to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience to establish a Human and Community Resilience Institute.

For more than a century, The Outdoor Circle has worked to protect Hawai'i's natural environment and strengthen the quality of life for those who call these islands home. We have long understood that environmental stewardship and community well-being are inseparable. Resilient communities are better positioned to care for their surroundings, plan thoughtfully for the future, and sustain the sense of place that defines Hawai'i.

HB1605, HD1 represents a practical investment in that resilience. By supporting coordinated research, education, and outreach focused on food systems, nutrition, youth development, and community capacity, the State would be advancing work that helps families thrive while building long-term stability across our islands.

This approach aligns closely with The Outdoor Circle's policy priorities. Environmental education fosters lifelong stewardship. Strong communities are more capable of protecting the resources upon which we all depend. Efforts that improve public health, expand local knowledge, and prepare future generations for leadership ultimately contribute to a more sustainable Hawai'i.

Equally important, this bill recognizes the value of collaboration. The challenges facing our state — from food security to climate pressures — do not exist in silos. They require integrated, evidence-based responses grounded in local expertise. CTAHR is well positioned to serve as a convener and catalyst for that work.

While HB1605, HD1 focuses on human resilience, its downstream benefits extend to the environmental resilience that organizations like ours strive to advance every day. Communities that are informed, prepared, and connected are far more capable of protecting the landscapes and cultural heritage that make Hawai'i unique.

For these reasons, The Outdoor Circle supports passage of HB1605, HD1.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony,

Winston Welch, Executive Director



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February 13, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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

Conference Room 309 & Videoconference
2:00 PM

Aloha Chair Garrett, Vice-Chair Amato, 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.

**Testimony on HB 1605, HD1
Relating to the Human and Community Resilience Institute (CTAHR)
Position: Support**

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

My name is Austin Tom, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of **Hawaiian Earth Recycling** in strong support of HB 1605, HD1.

HB 1605, HD1 strengthens coordination among existing programs within the **University of Hawai'i College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience** that support agriculture, youth development, and community education across the State of Hawai'i. By improving alignment and collaboration, this measure enhances the effectiveness of programs already serving farmers, ranchers, students, and communities.

CTAHR plays an essential role in Hawai'i's agricultural ecosystem through applied research, extension services, and long-standing youth programs such as 4-H. These programs help equip the next generation of agricultural leaders with practical skills while supporting today's producers through science-based guidance, food and nutrition education, and community outreach. CTAHR's work directly contributes to increased local food production, improved farm viability, and stronger rural economies.

As an organization dedicated to composting, soil health, and organic waste diversion, Hawaiian Earth Recycling understands firsthand the importance of education, research, and data coordination in building resilient agricultural systems. Healthy soils are foundational to food security, climate resilience, and water quality, and CTAHR's educational and research efforts help ensure that best practices in soil management and land stewardship are accessible to producers and communities statewide.

Importantly, HB 1605, HD1 focuses on education, coordination, and capacity-building rather than imposing new regulatory burdens on farmers. This approach respects the realities faced by Hawai'i's agricultural community while strengthening the support systems they rely on to succeed. Investing in CTAHR is an investment in long-term resilience—supporting sustainable land use, local food systems, workforce development, and community well-being.

For these reasons, Hawaiian Earth Recycling respectfully urges the Committee to support HB 1605, HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully,
Austin Tom
On behalf of Hawaiian Earth Recycling



February 12, 2026

To: Chair Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Vice Chair Representative Terez Amato, and the members of the House Committee on Higher Education

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.

Resilience is defined as the ability to withstand and adapt in the face of challenges. As exhibited during the pandemic and recent cuts to food assistance programs, any disruptions to our food system can easily devastate local families and communities. 1-in-3 households experience food insecurity, meaning that they do not have access to enough food to ensure a healthy, active lifestyle¹. In addition, a lack of adequate access to nutritious food and unhealthy eating habits are leading causes of diet-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, kidney and heart disease, and cancer². In order to foster family and community resilience, we need more community food system leaders, which begins with education and outreach.

I urge this committee to pass HB1605 HD1, which will support the education of our future community food system leaders by encouraging healthy eating habits and reconnecting them to their food system.

Mahalo,
Sydney Haas & 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.

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

²[Hawai'i Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan 2030](#)



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Aloha Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the House Higher Education 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

February 11, 2026
Personal Testimony Provided by Barbara DeBaryshe
In Support of HB 1605
Relating to Human and Community Resilience

Aloha e Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the House Committee on Higher Education,

I am writing to express my **strong support** for **HB 1605**. Urge you to vote in favor of HB 1605 for the following reasons:

- Hawaii's families and communities are blessed with many strengths, but also face **challenges that threaten their health and wellbeing**. 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 (Hawai'i 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. It will also contribute to the development of new **educational pathways** for UH students.

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 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: 2/12/2026 9:51:13 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Phillipson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

Supporting 4H, and other ag related programs for the benefit of our keiki is needed. Thanks for your consideration and support.

Mahalo,

Mark Phillipson

HB-1605-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 10:51:10 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jimmy Gomes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in total support with this bill HB 1605 and stand with HFB testimony.

HB-1605-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 10:53:33 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaelin Sylva	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

HB 1605, HD1 – Human and Community Resilience Institute (CTAHR)

Position: Support

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

My name is Kaelin Sylva, and I am an agricultural supporter from O‘ahu. I am submitting testimony in support of HB 1605, HD1.

HB 1605, HD1 supports the University of Hawai‘i College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) by strengthening coordination of existing programs that support agriculture, youth development, and community education.

CTAHR plays a vital role in Hawai‘i’s agricultural ecosystem through research, extension, and programs such as 4-H that help develop the next generation of agricultural leaders.

Efforts that improve food and nutrition education, youth engagement, and data coordination also help strengthen demand for local agricultural products.

HB 1605, HD1, focuses on education, coordination, and capacity-building, not on the regulation of farmers. Supporting CTAHR is an investment in agriculture and our communities.

Please support HB 1605, HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-1605-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 11:17:04 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Yuan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the House Committee on Higher Education,

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 help offset the loss of SNAP educators and expand coordinated, research-based 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

HB-1605-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 1:29:59 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Randy Cabral	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support

HB-1605-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 1:55:53 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sandy Chong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to support HB1605. The College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience thrives through community collaboration, bridging the gap between families, non-profit organizations, and government agencies through data-informed decision-making. The new Human and Community Resilience Institute will support and strengthen families in Hawai‘i, especially through nutritional education and access to healthy foods.

Guiding the youth in their food and nutritional habits will make a lasting impact on who they become as adults, as it shapes the type of Hawai‘i we wish to see in the future.

In full disclosure, I have been a University of Hawai‘i staff member for 6 years, but I submit my testimony as an individual citizen.

thank you,
Sandy Chong