



# 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 Economic Development & Technology  
February 13, 2026 at 8:30 a.m.

By

Debora Halbert  
Vice President for Academic Strategy  
University of Hawai'i System

HB 1859 HD1 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i strongly supports HB 1859 HD1 - Relating to Workforce Development. The University of Hawai'i (UH), as a member of the Workforce Development Council, agrees with the intent of the bill to develop a long-term strategy. No single state entity, including UH, can solve workforce shortages alone. For kama'āina who pursue higher education, outcomes are shaped less by educational preparation than by Hawai'i's labor market and cost of living. Only 43% of the state's four-year college graduates are employed in jobs requiring a degree within five years of graduation, and after accounting for Hawai'i's high cost of living, median wages for these graduates rank among the lowest nationally. As a result, even college-educated workers often cannot access jobs that provide a sustainable living wage in Hawai'i. This mismatch contributes to underemployment, out-migration, and ongoing workforce shortages across both the public and private sectors, including among graduates who wish to remain in the state.

As written, the bill establishes a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy tied to a clear long-term goal and requires that strategy to guide future State Unified Plans. It clarifies the Workforce Development Council's role in facilitating interagency alignment via the State Unified Plan while preserving agency authority and links coordination efforts among partner organizations, including UH, to shared metrics and reporting over time. Together, these provisions provide a mechanism for continuity across planning cycles and administrations, helping to ensure that coordination efforts can build on prior work rather than restart.

In addition to its work with the Workforce Development Council, UH is an active participant in the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui — a community-driven coalition of government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations working together to first develop and now advance Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment. Across multiple analyses and years of shared learning within the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui and beyond, a consistent conclusion has emerged: Hawai'i's workforce challenges are interconnected and long-term in nature, and progress depends on sustained coordination across systems. In order to

effectively counter brain drain, address longstanding workforce shortages, and fulfill the fundamental promise of higher education to provide a better life for our graduates, this coordinated strategy will need to expand the work-based learning opportunities available to our students and the number of good jobs graduates can look forward to (especially on the neighbor islands, where there are two well-qualified job seekers for every job that pays a living wage). Both are key goals of the strategy developed through our collaborative process. This process was led by the Workforce Development Council, who are well positioned to plan and implement the long-term transformation of our educational pipeline and workforce development outcomes. This bill establishes their authority to do so. Such coordination is among the best practices used by states such as Maine and North Carolina to achieve their own North Star workforce development goals.

Workforce challenges of this scale require time, sustained coordination, and long-term investment. HB 1859 HD1 creates the conditions for aligned public and private investment to accumulate over time by establishing shared direction, clarified roles, and durable accountability. For these reasons, the University of Hawai'i supports HB 1859 HD1 and appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony.



February 11, 2026

Position: **Support of HB1859 HD1**, Relating to Workforce Development

To: Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Economic Development and Technology

From: Llasmin Chaine, LSW, Executive Director, Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women

Re: Testimony in Support of HB1859 HD1, Relating to Workforce Development

Hearing: Friday, February 13, 2026, 8:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 309, State Capitol

On behalf of the Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women, we would like to thank the committee for hearing this important bill. I would like to express our **strong support of HB1859 HD1**, because a comprehensive, coordinated workforce strategy is essential to advancing economic opportunity and equity for women and girls in Hawaii. The Commission's mission centers on promoting equality, safety, and inclusion, and **workforce development is a critical lever for addressing persistent disparities in employment, wages, and access to career advancement for women.**

**Women and girls in Hawaii continue to face unique barriers in the labor market, including occupational segregation, gender-based wage gaps, and underrepresentation in leadership roles.** HB1859 HD1's unified approach across state agencies can help ensure that workforce programs are inclusive and responsive to the specific needs of women and the barriers they face.

A truly comprehensive workforce strategy must be grounded in principles of equity and inclusion. Alignment of workforce efforts should incorporate gender-disaggregated data, address systemic discrimination, and actively seek input from women's advocacy organizations. National best practices highlight the importance of targeted interventions—such as mentorship, childcare support, broadened access, and workplace protections—to remove barriers and foster lasting economic security for women and girls.

The Commission looks forward to collaborating with the Workforce Development Council and stakeholders, to ensure Hawaii's workforce strategy is inclusive, data-driven, and advances true opportunity for all.

I respectfully urge this Committee to **pass HB1859 HD1** and support this cohesive and effective statewide workforce strategy. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY  
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
KA 'OIHANA PONO LIMAHANA

February 13, 2026

To: The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair,  
The Honorable Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology

Date: Friday, February 13, 2026  
Time: 8:30 a.m.  
Place: Conference Room 423, State Capitol

From: Jade T. Butay, Director  
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR)

**Re: H.B. 1859 HD1 RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The DLIR **appreciates the intent** of this measure in having a comprehensive workforce strategy provided that it does not conflict with any federal regulations. 20 CFR § 679.130 specifies that the State Workforce Development Board is to assist the Governor in development and implementation of a Unified State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and assist in achieving the State's strategic and operational vision and goals outlined in the plan.

The WIOA is intended to increase access to and opportunities for employment, education, training, and support services that individuals need, particularly those with barriers to employment. Thus, the WIOA provides priority services to veterans, low-income youth, low-income adults, and dislocated workers

The WIOA requires a private sector-led state board composed of owners and other high-level employees to guide the training opportunities, "that include high-quality, work-related training and development in in-demand industry sectors or occupations..." so those with barriers to employment obtain skills needed by employers and attain gainful employment and living wages.

The current state law was created in accordance with the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The DLIR recommends that aligning workforce development efforts outside of the WIOA federal regulation might be better under a separate law.

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



RYAN I. YAMANE  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'ŌKELE

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'ŌKELE

February 11, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
House Committee on Economic Development & Technology

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 1859 HD1 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.**

Hearing: February 13, 2026, 8:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 423 & Video Conference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of the measure, provides comments, and defers to the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations.

The Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is an active member of both the Workforce Development Council and the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui and supports its long-term, generational commitment: "[b]y 2045, all people of Hawaii will have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawaii and contribute to a vibrant local economy grounded in community values". This commitment closely aligns with DVR's core mission: empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment, economic self-sufficiency, and full participation in their communities.

For individuals with disabilities, workforce challenges are often compounded by barriers related to low expectations, access, accommodations, training, and transportation. Addressing these challenges requires intentional coordination across education, workforce development, human services, and economic systems. DVR's participation in the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui

reflects our belief that long-term, cross-system alignment is essential to improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities and for Hawaii's workforce as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**  
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI  
A HO'OMĀKA'IKĀ'I

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LT. GOVERNOR

**JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA**  
DIRECTOR

**DANE K. WICKER**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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Statement of  
**JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA**  
**Director**  
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism  
before the  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY**

Friday, February 13, 2026, 8:30 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room #423

In support of  
**HB 1859, HD1**  
**RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.**

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee: The Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT) supports HB1859, HD1, which affirms the role of the Workforce Development Council (WDC) in advancing a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy aligned with the State Unified Plan.

DBEDT recognizes the importance of coordinated cross-agency workforce planning to support Hawai'i's long-term economic resilience and diversification. The objectives outlined in this measure are consistent with ongoing efforts already underway through the WDC and partner agencies to align workforce programs with industry needs, education and training pathways, and statewide economic priorities, and reinforce the importance of sustained, long-term coordination across agencies.

DBEDT also recognizes the value of establishing clear goals and transparent measurement to support continuous improvement of the workforce development system.

As DBEDT currently serves as a participant in the Workforce Development Council, we appreciate the Legislature's continued emphasis on alignment and collaboration across the workforce development system. We believe this measure reinforces the importance of sustaining and strengthening that coordination as workforce needs continue to evolve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



info@hawaiikidscan.org  
hawaiikidscan.org

February 10, 2026

House Committee on Economic Development & Technology  
Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair

Regarding: **Support for HB 1859 HD1 Relating to Workforce Development**

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee,

**HawaiiKidsCAN strongly supports HB1859 HD1**, which establishes a comprehensive, long-term, statewide workforce strategy to ensure that Hawai'i residents can access living-wage careers and thrive in our communities.

Founded in 2017, HawaiiKidsCAN is a local nonprofit organization committed to ensuring that Hawai'i has an excellent and equitable education system that reflects the true voices of our communities and, in turn, has a transformational impact on our children and our state. We strongly believe that all students should have access to an excellent education that becomes the foundation for a sustainable future on our islands, regardless of family income levels and circumstances.

In pursuit of this mission, HawaiiKidsCAN has worked to expand access to work-based learning opportunities, ensure the alignment of secondary education initiatives with workforce needs, and most recently, supported the passage of Act 154 (SB742, 2025). Act 154 will build long-term, sustainable data-sharing mechanisms across state agencies, underpinning the long-term vision proposed in HB1859 HD1.

Hawai'i faces persistent workforce challenges that affect learners, workers, employers, and communities statewide. Even under favorable employment conditions, this gap creates ongoing pressure on workers and families, contributing to underemployment and continued out-migration. These challenges are especially pronounced on the neighbor islands, where access to training, advancement, and living-wage jobs is more limited.



HB1859 HD1 is designed to build alignment and long-term impact across Hawai'i's workforce ecosystem. By establishing a statewide strategy through the Workforce Development Council and embedding it in the State Unified Plan, the bill creates a shared vision that guides education, workforce training, and economic development efforts toward common long-term goals. It also fosters stronger coordination among public agencies, employers, educators, and philanthropic partners, helping ensure that investments and programs work in concert rather than in isolation.

Importantly, this bill promotes continuity over time, allowing progress to accumulate across planning cycles, leadership transitions, and funding periods. By establishing a durable framework and clarifying roles across state and county agencies, the measure also creates the conditions for sustained progress in workforce development. It ensures that public and private investments build upon prior work rather than restart with each planning cycle or administration, enabling long-term alignment across sectors and consistent support for Hawai'i's residents in attaining meaningful, living-wage employment.

For these reasons, HawaiiKidsCAN strongly supports HB1859 HD1 and respectfully urges the Committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erica Nakanishi-Stanis".

Erica Nakanishi-Stanis  
Advocacy Director  
HawaiiKidsCAN

**HB-1859-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 8:24:39 AM

Testimony for ECD on 2/13/2026 8:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Anna Kelly	AE Consulting LLC	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

A comprehensive statewide workforce strategy is essential for us to overcome the current and future shortages in key sectors. These shortages are worsening as we lose working-age residents to the mainland. *"Residents aged 18-24 comprise only 7.1% of the population but account for 21.2% of out-migrants. Those aged 25-34 represent 12.6% of residents, yet account for 21.4% of departures."* Workforce Implications of Hawai'i's Out-migration Trends, December 2025, AE Consulting, p. 5, <https://tinyurl.com/AEOutmigration>.

We need to be working in unison towards a collective goal to ensure efficiency, alignment, and success.



# holomua

COLLABORATIVE

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## OUR MISSION

To support and advance public policies that make Hawai'i affordable for all working families.

## OUR VISION

Collaborative, sustainable, and evidence-based public policies that create a diverse and sustainable Hawai'i economy, an abundance of quality job opportunities, and a future where all working families living in Hawai'i can thrive.

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Sunshine Topping

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Page 1 of 2

**Committee:** House Committee on Labor  
**Bill Number:** HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development  
**Hearing Date and Time:** February 13, 2026, at 8:30am (Room 423)  
**Re:** Testimony of Holomua Collaborative- Support

Aloha Chair Ilgan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Committee Members:

We write in support of House Bill 1859 HD1, Relating to Workforce Development. The purpose of HB1859 HD1 is to improve workforce development in the state by requiring the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to the Governor and to facilitate alignment of state programs to achieve a unified plan for our local workers.

Holomua supports initiatives that help keep all local working families in Hawai'i by addressing the root causes of our affordability crisis. When our residents cannot find a career that pays a living wage, they are forced to look for a future on the continent. Between July 2024 and July 2025, an average of 11 people left Hawai'i *each day*.<sup>1</sup> More Native Hawaiians now live outside Hawai'i than within it. This is a loss of our culture, traditions, and the essence of what makes Hawai'i home.

Data from the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative highlights the scale of this challenge. Over the next decade, approximately 170,000 young residents are expected to enter the local workforce. However, current projections indicate there will be only about 101,000 job openings that pay a true living wage.<sup>2</sup> This leaves a deficit of nearly 70,000 quality jobs, meaning over 40 percent of our next generation will enter a market that cannot currently support them staying home.

The findings from the Holomua Collective 2025 Affordability Survey reinforce this urgency.<sup>3</sup> This survey of over 3,200 local residents found that 91% of respondents believe the State needs to do more to recruit and retain critical workforce members. This is a near-unanimous mandate for the kind of strategic alignment proposed in HB1859 HD1. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of our respondents identified wages as one of the top three factors contributing to the unsustainable cost of living in Hawai'i.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division Estimates, released January 2026; and calculations by the Hawai'i State Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, Hawai'i State Data Center.

[https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/popestimate/2025/state-pop/2025\\_daily\\_est\\_state.pdf](https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/popestimate/2025/state-pop/2025_daily_est_state.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> "From Crisis to Coalition: A 2026 Roadmap for Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment" Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative, January 2026.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/640a4ca03eff8f1ba217a185/t/696fdd6df97fee42439956b2/1768938861257/From+Crisis+to+Coalition+A+2026+Roadmap+for+Hawai+%CA%BBi%E2%80%99s+Generational+Workforce+Commitment.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 2025 Hawai'i Affordability Survey. <https://holomuacollective.org/survey-25/>

A significant barrier to our current efforts is the awareness gap. Nearly 50% of survey respondents report they are unaware of existing workforce programs. This lack of awareness is most severe among 18 to 34-year-olds, hourly workers, and those in the tourism and recreation sectors. Specifically, 49 percent of hourly workers are not at all aware of these opportunities. Without a comprehensive, aligned strategy, these critical workforce members will continue to fall through the cracks.

The workforce development efforts of the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, the University of Hawai'i, Hawai'i P-20, the Department of Education, the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, countless nonprofit partners, and labor unions have made, and continue to make, meaningful foundational progress in increasing workforce development opportunities for local working residents. But despite the great efforts, the stats show that Hawai'i needs to go further – we need a long-term aligned strategy and goal that can reduce awareness gaps and identify and remove any duplicative efforts. Breaking down silos will ensure that workforce efforts are visible, accessible, and aligned with the high-quality career opportunities our families need.

HB1859 HD1 is an investment in the promise that our children can stay in Hawai'i. It is about ensuring that local is a status that can be maintained for generations to come, rather than a luxury that few can afford.

We respectfully urge the committee to pass HB1859 HD1. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Matthew Prellberg  
Policy and Communications Director



## **Testimony in Support of HB1859\_HD1**

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of HB1859.

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative, where I serve as Executive Director, and in my role convening the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui — a community-driven coalition of government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations already working together to advance Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment.

Hawai'i's workforce challenges are not the result of individual failure or short-term disruption. They are the predictable outcome of longstanding structural conditions that shape whether people can build stable lives here — even when they work, even when they pursue education, and even when they do “everything right”.

The data make this reality impossible to ignore. Over the next decade, approximately 170,000 young people are expected to enter Hawai'i's workforce, while only about 101,000 projected job openings pay a living wage. Even under strong employment conditions, there are simply not enough jobs that pay enough to support a stable life in Hawai'i.

For those who pursue higher education, outcomes are not reliably better. Only 43% of Hawai'i's four-year college graduates are working in degree-requiring jobs within five years, and after accounting for Hawai'i's cost of living, median wage outcomes for these graduates are the lowest in the nation. These patterns drive persistent underemployment and continued out-migration — including among residents who want to stay and contribute locally.

These challenges are even more acute on Kaua'i, Maui, Moloka'i, Lana'i, and Hawai'i Island, where job availability is narrower and access to advancement opportunities is more limited. In practice, geography — not effort or aspiration —

increasingly determines whether someone can remain and thrive in their home community.

The Generational Workforce Commitment was created in response to this reality. It is a shared, long-term goal to ensure that by 2045, all people of Hawai'i have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai'i and contribute to a vibrant economy grounded in community values. It is a unifying framework that aligns education, workforce development, economic strategy, and public investment around a common statewide goal - treating workforce alignment as core economic infrastructure. In doing so, it positions workforce strategy as foundational to long-term economic competitiveness and resilience.

HB1859 moves Hawai'i's workforce strategy from temporary alignment to durable practice by anchoring that shared goal in statute. As written, the bill does three essential things that are not possible today.

First, it establishes a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy with a clear generational goal and requires that strategy to guide every State Unified Plan, regardless of planning cycle — ensuring continuity across administrations so coordination does not reset every few years.

Second, it clarifies responsibility for interagency alignment without centralizing authority, charging the Workforce Development Council with facilitating coordination while preserving each collaborating agency's statutory role.

Third, it links alignment to measurement and accountability over time, making progress visible and comparable rather than dependent on ad hoc efforts or isolated evaluations.

Together, these mechanisms address a long-standing gap in Hawai'i's workforce system. The state has strong programs, committed partners, and sustained investment — but without a codified structure to hold alignment over time, efforts remain fragmented and vulnerable to drift.

Action is needed now. Workforce challenges of this scale require time, sustained coordination, and long-term investment. But each year without durable alignment

has real consequences. Every graduating class enters the same constrained labor market. Each year, more young people confront the same choice: accept work that does not support stability or leave Hawai'i to build a future elsewhere. As more residents leave, employers face increasing difficulty filling critical roles, particularly in specialized and high-growth sectors. At the same time, emerging industries lack the predictable, locally developed talent pipelines needed to scale with confidence. Without durable alignment across education, workforce, and economic strategy, Hawai'i's ability to grow new industries and strengthen existing ones remains constrained.

Without codification, coordination depends on informal relationships and discretionary decisions that are easily disrupted by leadership transitions and planning cycles. Each reset delays progress — and in a system already struggling to keep pace with need, delay compounds loss.

The question before the Legislature is whether Hawai'i will continue relying on episodic coordination, or establish a durable framework that allows progress to accumulate rather than reset with administrations.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support of HB1859. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Stevens".

Matt Stevens  
Executive Director  
Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative



February 13, 2026 at 8:30 am  
Conference Room 423

**House Committee on Economic Development and Technology**

To: Chair Greggor Ilagan  
Vice Chair Ikaika Hussey

From: Paige Heckathorn Choy  
Vice President, Government Affairs  
Healthcare Association of Hawaii

Re: **Testimony in Support**  
**HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development**

The Healthcare Association of Hawaii (HAH), established in 1939, serves as the leading voice of healthcare on behalf of 170 member organizations who represent almost every aspect of the health care continuum in Hawaii. Members include acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, hospices, assisted living facilities and durable medical equipment suppliers. In addition to providing access to appropriate, affordable, high-quality care to all of Hawaii's residents, our members contribute significantly to Hawaii's economy by employing over 30,000 people statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support** of this measure. This measure seeks to create a statewide framework for workforce development that aims to foster collaboration and ensure strong engagement from both the public and private sectors.

The healthcare industry has been a leader in identifying workforce needs and developing programs to meet those demands. The Association's 2024 Healthcare Workforce Initiative Report identified over 4,000 job openings in healthcare across Hawai'i. Entry-level positions such as Certified Nurse Aide, Medical Assistant, Patient Service Representative, and Phlebotomist have been identified by HAH members as some of the most critical roles to fill. These entry-level healthcare jobs represent 44% of all openings reported in 2024 and serve as launch pads to long-term careers with family-sustaining wages directly from high school.

We have deeply appreciated our partnerships with state agencies—and the legislature's support—in establishing and refining programs to meet these needs. We believe this measure will help to strengthen these ties across all industries to support a vibrant economy now and in the future. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our support for this measure, and for the legislature's continued support in fostering the next generation of healthcare workers.

**TO:** HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY  
The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the Committee

**FROM:** Terry George, Chief Executive Officer & President

**RE:** Testimony in Support for HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development

**DATE:** Friday, February 13, 2026 at 8:30 am

**LOCATION:** Hearing Room 423

The Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) **strongly supports** HB 1859 HD 1 relating to workforce development. HB 1859 HD 1 codifies the Generational Workforce Commitment—a long-term, statewide goal to ensure that by 2045 all people of Hawai'i have a pathway to jobs that enable them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai'i. This matters because Hawai'i's workforce challenges are structural and persistent.

The scale of the workforce challenge is large; over the next decade, roughly 170,000 young people are expected to enter Hawai'i's workforce, while only about 101,000 projected job openings are expected to pay a living wage—creating sustained pressure on families and accelerating out-migration.

HB 1859 HD 1 and the Generational Workforce Commitment establishes a clear, shared destination that aligns education, workforce development, and economic strategy. We appreciate that it moves beyond fragmented, time-limited initiatives toward systems-level coordination.

HCF supports HB 1859 HD 1 as a philanthropic partner in the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative and as part of our CHANGE Framework commitment to economic opportunity and mobility. HCF assisted with incubating the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative because we believe addressing jobs and creating a vibrant economy is important to Hawai'i. Through sustained investment across workforce development, education, and economic mobility, HCF and our partners see firsthand where job quality progress has accelerated, and where system gaps persist. Lasting gains require aligned goals, clarified roles, and continuity.

Codifying the Generational Workforce Commitment enables highly coordinated public and private investments. If enacted, HB 1859 HD 1 increases the likelihood that long-term

investments yield positive outcomes for learners, workers, employers, and communities toward a living-wage future. For these reasons, HCF strongly supports HB 1859 HD 1 and urges its passing.

Friday, February 13, 2026 at 8:30 AM  
Via Video Conference; Conference Room 423

**House Committee on Economic Development & Technology**

To: Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair

From: Michael Robinson  
Vice President, Government Relations & Community Affairs

**Re: Testimony in Support of HB 1859, HD1  
Relating to Workforce Development**

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My name is Michael Robinson, and I am the Vice President of Government Relations & Community Affairs at Hawai'i Pacific Health. Hawai'i Pacific Health is a not-for-profit health care system comprised of its four medical centers – Kapi'olani, Pali Momi, Straub and Wilcox and over 70 locations statewide with a mission of creating a healthier Hawai'i.

HPH supports HB 1859, HD1, which directs the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy for inclusion in the State Unified Plan. The Council will also ensure state workforce programs are aligned to achieve both the Unified Plan and the Statewide Workforce Strategy.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i, with support from business and industry members, developed the 2030 Blueprint for Hawai'i — a comprehensive plan aimed at growing and diversifying the state's economy. As a supporter of the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce Blueprint for Hawaii, HPH recognizes the importance of collaborating with education and workforce partners to strengthen career pathways that are aligned with industry needs. Economic development and workforce development cannot operate separately. As industries evolve and new sectors emerge, employers must be able to work closely with education providers and public agencies to ensure training pathways align with real labor market demand.

Hawaii faces widening economic pressures, including the high cost of living, outmigration of working residents, and limited long-term career pathways for youth, which weaken the State's overall talent pipeline. Despite existing efforts across agencies and sectors, Hawaii lacks a unified long-term workforce strategy that aligns resources, data, and planning toward a common statewide goal. HB 1859 addresses these challenges by requiring the Workforce Development Council to formulate a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy and coordinate interagency alignment, ensuring a cohesive approach

to building a resilient and economically vibrant workforce. The Generational Workforce Commitment recognizes this reality. It establishes a long-term statewide goal to ensure that by 2045, all people of Hawai'i have pathways to careers that enable them to learn, work, and thrive here at home.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**House Committee on Economic Development & Technology**  
**February 13, 2026 at 8:30 AM**  
**Room 423**

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1859 HD1**

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Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Hawai'i Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations, I would like to offer our comments in **support of HB1859 HD1**, which requires the Workforce Development Council to develop and recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to facilitate alignment of workforce programs across departments and agencies.

The Hawai'i Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations (HANO) is a statewide, sector-wide professional association of nonprofits that works to strengthen and unite the nonprofit sector as a collective force to improve the quality of life in Hawai'i. Since 2006, HANO has been a leading voice for the nonprofit sector, leveraging resources, educating and advocating for policies and practices that promote the professionalism, sustainability, and effectiveness of nonprofits and the communities they serve.

Nonprofits are a core part of Hawai'i's economy, employing approximately 12% of the state's workforce.<sup>1</sup> Beyond their role as employers, nonprofits deliver essential services, provide workforce training, and work closely with individuals facing barriers to employment. As a statewide membership organization, HANO is well positioned to help shape a workforce strategy that meaningfully integrates the nonprofit sector's voice into planning. Doing so will ensure workforce efforts are grounded in community realities and responsive to residents who have historically been underrepresented in workforce systems.

HANO's data-informed resources can further strengthen this work by elevating nonprofit workforce trends that should be considered in a comprehensive statewide strategy. In 2026, HANO will release its Nonprofit Sector Report and Nonprofit Compensation & Benefits Report, offering updated, sector-wide data on employment trends, job quality, compensation, and workforce conditions across Hawai'i. These reports will help identify workforce challenges, needs, and opportunities, as well as inform equitable compensation practices within the nonprofit sector.

HANO stands ready to collaborate with the Workforce Development Council and state partners to ensure the nonprofit sector's contributions are fully reflected in statewide planning. This includes elevating sector-specific workforce insights, aligning nonprofit workforce initiatives with

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *The Economics Daily*, Nonprofits accounted for 12.8 million jobs, 9.9 percent of private-sector employment, in 2022 at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/nonprofits-accounted-for-12-8-million-jobs-9-9-percent-of-private-sector-employment-in-2022.htm> (visited February 3, 2026).

state goals, and supporting cross-sector collaboration to expand career pathways for local residents.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB1859.



**Testimony to  
House Committee on Economic Development  
February 13, 2026  
8:30am  
Conference Room 423 & VIA videoconference  
Hawai'i State Capitol  
HB 1859 HD1**

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the Committee,

We write in support of HB 1859 HD1, which requires the Workforce Development Council to recommend to the Governor, a comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy to inclusion in the State Unified Plan and be responsible for facilitating the alignment of workforce development efforts and programs conducted by state departments and agencies to achieve the State Unified Plan and the Comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy.

Established in 1904, Hawai'i Gas serves over 70,000 customers on all islands through its utility pipeline infrastructure and propane business, all of whom depend on the company for sustainable, reliable, and affordable gas for water heating, cooking, drying, and other commercial and industrial applications. The company employs approximately 350 professionals, over 75% of whom are covered by collective bargaining.

The stability of our local workforce is directly tied to the ability of local families to live and work in Hawai'i, and this ability is tied to access to good paying jobs in fields that boost Hawai'i's economy.

We know that the key to retention is a combination of fair wages, high-quality benefits, and a clear career trajectory. However, as the cost of living continues to skyrocket, the pressure on our working families is reaching a breaking point. HB 1859 HD1 is a critical measure because it requires the state to look at workforce development through a strategic, long-term lens.

Currently, a series of government, nonprofit, and labor unions provide an impressive network of workforce development efforts, but these efforts are planned together and the public lacks an awareness of the work being done. We need a unified strategy that ensures a steady pipeline of local talent for our critical utilities and other industries that can be communicated to the workforce at large. By facilitating better alignment between labor, industry, and the state, HB 1859 will help bridge this gap and ensure our essential services are powered by the people of Hawai'i.

We urge you to support HB 1859, HD1 as it represents an investment in Hawai'i's workforce, infrastructure, and long-term prosperity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



TITLE GUARANTY  
HAWAII

February 13, 2026

**Testimony in support of HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development**

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Committee Members,

Title Guaranty of Hawai'i respectfully submits testimony in strong support of House Bill 1859 HD1, Relating to Workforce Development.

Title Guaranty of Hawai'i is the oldest and largest title company in the State, but at our core, we remain a locally rooted, family-owned business. Since 1896, we have been owned and operated by a kama'āina family, growing steadily alongside Hawai'i's communities. Today, we employ more than 250 local residents across the islands, many of whom have built long-term careers with our company.

The crisis of out-migration is not just a demographic statistic for us; it is a threat to the stability of our neighborhoods and our local economy. When local families leave, the local housing market becomes increasingly dominated by outside interests, further detaching the islands' land from the people who call it home. HB 1859 HD 1 is essential because it addresses the workforce side of this affordability equation. By ensuring our residents have pathways to careers that pay a true living wage, we give them the financial foundation necessary to secure a mortgage, build equity, and stay in Hawai'i for the long term.

A comprehensive, statewide strategy will allow the state to identify and fix the gaps in our workforce development efforts, and in turn help establish the jobs that our 'ohanas need to survive in Hawai'i. We need a unified roadmap to ensure our children are trained for high-value roles that can sustain a mortgage in today's market. Without this alignment, the barriers to entry for local homeowners will continue to rise. We respectfully urge the committee to pass HB 1859 HD 1 to help keep the dream of homeownership alive for Hawai'i's working families.

For these reasons, Title Guaranty of Hawai'i strongly urges the Committee to pass HB 1859 HD 1 and support policies that provide local workers with opportunities to advance their careers and earn higher wages.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.  
Sincerely,

Mike B. Pietsch  
President and Chief Operating Officer  
Title Guaranty of Hawai'i





## Testimony in Support of HB 1859 HD 1, Relating to Workforce Development

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Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the Committee,

We write in strong support of HB 1859 HD 1, which would require the development of a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy and improved alignment across state agencies to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce pipeline.

aio is a locally owned company with holdings across a broad range of industries. Our companies are purpose-driven and firmly rooted in local values. At aio, Hawai'i is at our core, and through our products and services, we work hard to make Hawai'i a better place for future generations.

Hawai'i is facing ongoing workforce challenges that affect businesses, families, and our broader economy. Our employees are our greatest asset, and we want to ensure they have access to meaningful career pathways, skills training, and industry needs so that local residents are prepared for in-demand jobs, and businesses can continue to grow and invest in our communities.

By improving interagency collaboration and establishing a clear, shared direction for workforce development, this measure helps build a more resilient economy that supports local workers and employers alike.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1859 HD1.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads "Brandon Kurisu".

Brandon Kurisu  
aio Family of Companies





Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Economic Development & Technology  
Friday, February 13, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.

By  
Stephen Schatz, Executive Director  
Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education

HB 1859 HD1 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee:

Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education, a department of the University of Hawai'i System and the State Career and Technical Education Office, which administers federal Perkins V funds for secondary and postsecondary career and technical education programs statewide, we respectfully submit testimony in support of HB 1859 HD1.

This measure strengthens Hawai'i's workforce development system by establishing a long-term workforce strategy that extends beyond federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act planning cycles. By providing sustained direction for workforce development efforts, the bill supports alignment among education, workforce, and economic development systems, while preserving the statutory purposes and responsibilities of each program and complementing existing federal initiatives, including WIOA and Perkins V.

The bill further reinforces the role of the Workforce Development Council in facilitating interagency coordination and data-informed planning, supporting a more intentional and cohesive statewide approach to advancing workforce outcomes for Hawai'i's residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this measure.



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY  
Friday, February 13, 2026 — 8:30 a.m.

**The Workforce Development Council supports HB 1859, HD1.**

Dear Chair Ilagan and Members of the Committee:

We are Keith DeMello and Tuia'ana Scanlan, members of the State of Hawai'i Workforce Development Council (WDC) delegated with the authority to represent the WDC's legislative policy positions. Pursuant to [HRS Chapter 202](#), the WDC is an advisory commission comprised of both public and private-sector representatives selected by the Governor to serve on the basis of their interest in and knowledge of workforce development programs in Hawai'i and how to support economic development throughout the state.

**The WDC supports HB 1859, HD1**, which strengthens Hawai'i's workforce governance framework by requiring the WDC to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy for incorporation into the [State Unified Plan](#) and to facilitate alignment across state agencies to advance shared workforce objectives.

This bill operationalizes that alignment by embedding a durable, statewide workforce strategy within statute. This measure complements the WDC's existing responsibilities under WIOA and HRS Chapter 202. While the State Unified Plan ensures compliance with federal workforce requirements, HB 1859 elevates workforce development from a planning obligation to a long-term statewide economic strategy grounded in Hawai'i's priorities and values.

Importantly, this framework recognizes that workforce development is not the responsibility of any single agency. It requires coordinated action across departments, education partners, employers, counties, and community stakeholders. Codifying this alignment function provides clarity of purpose and strengthens accountability. The WDC is already engaged in cross-sector collaboration to improve coordination, data sharing, and strategic planning. HB 1859 formalizes and reinforces this work while providing a durable framework to guide Hawai'i toward 2045 and beyond.

We respectfully note that effective implementation of a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy will require sustained coordination capacity and appropriate resources to support data analysis, performance measurement, and interagency collaboration. The WDC stands ready to work closely with the Legislature, state agencies, counties, employers, and education partners to implement this framework in a manner that ensures Hawai'i's residents have clear pathways to careers that allow them to learn, work and thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith DeMello  
Chair, WDC

Tuia'ana Scanlan  
Member, WDC



Testimony of  
**ALASKA AIRLINES and HAWAIIAN AIRLINES**

Before the House Committee on  
**Economic Development & Technology**

**Friday, February 13, 2026**  
**8:30 A.M.**  
**Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 423**

In consideration of  
**HOUSE BILL 1859, H.D. 1**  
**RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology  
The Honorable Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology  
Members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology

**Re: Testimony in Support of H.B. 1859, Relating To Workforce Development,**

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the joint committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.B. 1859, H.D.1.

Alaska Airlines and Hawaiian Airlines are major employers in Hawai'i and active participants in industry partnerships, including the Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i. From a business standpoint, the State's workforce challenges directly impact our ability to grow, remain competitive, and continue investing in Hawai'i's communities. As the bill recognizes, Hawai'i faces a critical demographic and economic crossroads.

Over the next decade, approximately 170,000 young people are expected to enter the workforce. Without better alignment between education, training, and industry demand, underemployment and outmigration will continue to shrink the local talent pool employers rely on.

Aviation is foundational to Hawai'i's economy. Our airlines support thousands of jobs across the islands, many of which are high-skill and safety-critical. We actively support workforce development in Hawai'i through pilot training pathways and aircraft maintenance technician training programs, helping create clearer routes into living-wage aviation careers for local residents.

H.B. 1859, H.D.1 strengthens coordination by requiring a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy and clearer alignment across agencies. It establishes a long-term framework through 2045 to ensure residents have pathways to careers that allow them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai'i.

Importantly, it builds on existing structures rather than creating new regulatory burdens.

For employers, continuity, measurable outcomes, and industry partnerships are essential. This bill moves Hawai'i toward a more aligned, accountable, and responsive workforce system.

For these reasons, Alaska Airlines and Hawaiian Airlines respectfully urge passage of H.B. 1859, H.D.1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



# MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

**HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY  
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 423  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2026 AT 8:30 A.M.**

To The Honorable Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology

## **SUPPORT HB1859 HD1 RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Economic growth and diversification are among the top priorities of the Maui Chamber of Commerce and we recognize the critical importance of a coordinated and strategic approach to workforce development. We support HB1859 HD1 because a skilled and adaptable workforce is foundational to economic resilience, especially as Maui and the broader state continue to recover from recent economic shocks and seek to build a more diversified economy.

The bill's requirement for the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy and facilitate alignment among state agencies directly supports our goals. Effective workforce development encourages higher employment, supports local businesses, and attracts new industries—key drivers of economic growth and diversification. By integrating workforce planning across agencies, the state can better align training and education with emerging industry needs, helping residents access quality jobs and supporting Maui's ongoing recovery.

We respectfully recommend that the implementation process for the statewide workforce strategy includes robust engagement with local businesses across the state and industry stakeholders to ensure the strategy remains responsive to real-world needs.

Sincerely,

Pamela Tumpap  
President

To advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating for a responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.



**Testimony to the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology  
Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair**

**Friday, February 13, 2026, at 8:30AM  
Conference Room 423 & Videoconference**

**RE: HB1859 HD1 Relating to Workforce Development**

Aloha e Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports House Bill 1859 HD1 (HB1859 HD1), which requires the Workforce Development Council to recommend to the Governor, a comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy to include in the State Unified Plan and be responsible for facilitating the alignment of workforce development efforts and programs conducted by state departments and agencies to achieve the State Unified Plan and the Comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy.

HB1859 HD1 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action. This bill promotes the statewide, interagency coordination necessary for the efficient and effective deployment of workforce development funds and services. The Chamber believes that a comprehensive Statewide Workforce strategy is key to remediating the discrepancy between local wages and cost of living. As noted in the bill language, 45% of households in Hawaii fall below the ALICE survival budget. Cost of living remains a consistent challenge for the people of Hawaii, forcing outmigration and decreasing the economic viability needed for local residents to operate their businesses and pay for their basic living needs.

The Chamber finds the Workforce Development Council (WDC) to be a leading workforce development agency that is well positioned to facilitate this effort. The WDC is already statutorily charged with preparing, updating, and overseeing Hawai'i's Unified State Plan under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), giving it both a mandate and structural role in aligning workforce programs across state and county agencies. Because the Council's membership includes key public and private sector representatives and serves as a leading coordinating entity for workforce development efforts statewide, it is uniquely positioned to integrate economic trends, education and training systems, and employer needs into a coherent Statewide Workforce Strategy that best unifies, coordinates, and optimizes diverse state workforce development resources.

It is for these reasons, the Chamber respectfully asks to pass House Bill 1859 HD1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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.

**HB-1859-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 10:20:01 AM

Testimony for ECD on 2/13/2026 8:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT

**In Support of HB1859 (HD1)  
Relating to Workforce Development**

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Angela Chock. I am a Native Hawaiian and a former Hele Imua Intern with the Workforce Development Council, and I testify in strong support of HB1859.

Last summer, I spoke at the Workforce Synergy Summit as an undergraduate student studying in the continental United States, sharing my hope to return home and build my future in Hawai'i. At the time, I had completed an undergraduate research project for a sociology course examining the Native Hawaiian diaspora. Using publicly available data, I observed a consistent pattern: Native Hawaiians living outside of Hawai'i appeared to earn significantly more, on average, than those who remain in-state, even after adjusting for cost of living. The pattern was sobering, yet I remained certain that I would find a way back because of a cultural commitment to be one more Hawaiian in Hawai'i.

Since then, I have become engaged to someone who is not from Hawai'i and has no roots or connections here. As we plan our future together, our decisions are shaped not only by *my* love for this place, but by whether Hawai'i can realistically support two early-career professionals committed to serving the community and raising a family here. He plans to become a mental health therapist. I plan to pursue sociological research focused on Native Hawaiian communities. Both fields *could* contribute directly to the well-being of our state. Yet when we consider wage levels, housing costs, student debt, and the expense of maintaining family ties on the continent, returning home feels increasingly uncertain.

At the Synergy Summit, the Workforce Development Council unveiled Hawai'i's Generational Commitment:

“By 2045, all people of Hawai'i will have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai'i and contribute to a vibrant local economy grounded in community values.”

The word “thrive” means a lot. Thriving requires more than cultural connection. It requires that education pathways, labor markets, and economic development move in alignment so that preparation leads to actual stability. When misalignment exists, commitment alone is not enough to anchor people here.

HB1859 strengthens the Council's responsibility to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy and to facilitate better unity across departments in support of the Unified Plan. For people like me, alignment determines whether education translates into success. If service-oriented careers cannot realistically sustain housing and family life at entry-level wages, then returning becomes only aspirational; it stays a dream. That is how members of my generation, especially those with deep roots and kuleana in Hawai'i, become part of the diaspora.

As a Native Hawaiian who hopes to raise future generations of kanaka here (regardless of blood quantum), I care deeply about whether Hawai'i can support families. An improved workforce strategy makes it more possible for those with roots here, and those who choose to build roots here, to stay and contribute.

HB1859 will not solve every structural constraint facing our state. It does, however, reinforce the alignment necessary to make long-term thriving more attainable.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Angela Chock

February 13, 2026

## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1859**

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB1859.

I submit this testimony as an individual helping to lead the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui – a community-driven coalition of government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations working together to advance a statewide North Star workforce goal - Hawai‘i’s Generational Workforce Commitment.

Like many of you, my two young adult children have chosen to remain on the continent after college to begin their careers. My own family is contributing to Hawai‘i’s brain drain and yet as a workforce development professional, I spent much of my career working to ensure Hawaii’s young people could see a future for themselves here at home.

The stark data tells us that over the next decade, approximately 170,000 young people are expected to enter Hawai‘i’s labor market, while only about 101,000 projected job openings are expected to pay a living wage. At the same time, only 43% of Hawai‘i’s four-year college graduates are working in degree-requiring jobs within five years. These dynamics contribute to underemployment and outmigration, shrinking the local talent pool that employers rely on.

While there are many agencies, employers, educators, and community organizations advancing meaningful workforce goals, it is abundantly clear there is no shared, long-term framework connecting those efforts to a common generational outcome. What is needed is a unifying structure that aligns existing work, clarifies shared direction, and supports sustained coordination over time.

The Hawai‘i Generational Workforce Commitment (the Commitment) emerged from this recognition. The Commitment is a North Star workforce goal that is now articulated as a clear, generational goal: that by 2045, all people of Hawai‘i will have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai‘i and contribute to a vibrant economy grounded in community values.

The Commitment is not a single program or funding stream, but a framework intended to align education, workforce development, economic strategy, and public investment toward

shared outcomes. HB1859 supports this framework by strengthening coordination within Hawai‘i’s existing workforce governance structures.

As written, the bill establishes a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy tied to a clear long-term goal and require that strategy to guide future State Unified Plans. They clarify the Workforce Development Council’s role in facilitating interagency alignment via the State Unified Plan.

Workforce challenges of this scale require time, sustained coordination, and long-term investment. HB1859 creates the conditions for aligned public and private investment to accumulate over time by establishing shared direction, clarified roles, and durable accountability.

For these reasons, I support HB1859 and appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Keala Peters  
Workforce Development Consultant