



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
February 13, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Debora Halbert

Vice President for Academic Strategy
University of Hawai'i System

HB 1967 HD1 – RELATING TO PERMITTING.

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

The University of Hawai'i would like to provide comments on HB 1967 HD1 – Relating to Permitting. The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the intent of this measure, which implements recommendations of the Simplifying Permitting for Enhanced Economic Development (SPEED) Task Force by establishing a permitting workforce pipeline in partnership with UH and the community colleges. UH agrees that workforce shortages in permitting roles present a significant barrier to housing, infrastructure, and economic development statewide, and we appreciate the Legislature's recognition of higher education as a key partner in addressing these challenges.

UH already offers a range of academic and career pathways that align closely with permitting, plan review, and regulatory roles at the state and county levels. These include:

- **Community Colleges**
 - Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) pathways
 - Civil engineering technology, drafting, and construction management programs
 - Environmental science, natural resource management, and sustainability programs
 - Applied business, public administration, and information technology programs that support regulatory operations
- **Four-Year Campuses**
 - Bachelor's and graduate programs in engineering, architecture, environmental studies, urban and regional planning, and public administration
 - Programs in geography, Geospatial Information Science (GIS), and data analytics relevant to land use and permitting review
 - Legal studies and policy-focused curricula that prepare students for regulatory and compliance work

These existing programs can produce graduates who are well-positioned to enter permitting-related careers. There is an opportunity to coordinate in partnership with state and county agencies, rather than duplicating programs that are already in place.

UH seeks clarification on the tuition incentive provisions in Section 2(b), particularly with respect to implementation and equity across campuses and programs. Specifically, it is unclear whether tuition incentives (1) are intended to apply to resident tuition only, or also non-resident differentials, (2) if they should include graduate and professional students, and (3) if community college certificates and associate degrees, as well as bachelor's and graduate programs, should be included.

Second, clarification would be helpful regarding whether tuition incentives would be administered through UH, Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT), or directly through employing agencies. Additional details regarding how tuition incentives would interact with existing state financial aid programs and federal Title IV requirements would be useful as would knowing if tuition incentives are intended to function as upfront waivers, reimbursements, or loan-forgiveness-style benefits tied to service completion.

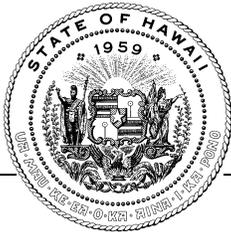
Third, UH recommends clarity regarding the duration and enforceability of service commitments, whether commitments apply uniformly across counties and agencies and how partial service or early separation would be addressed.

To support effective implementation and minimize administrative complexity, UH respectfully suggests consideration of language clarifying that tuition incentives:

- May be structured as reimbursement or post-service forgiveness rather than upfront waivers, to align with existing financial aid and tuition policies. The Legislature may wish to consider language stating that tuition incentives “may be provided through reimbursement, loan repayment, or other post-enrollment mechanisms, as determined by the administering agency in consultation with the University of Hawai‘i.”
- May leverage existing academic programs and credentials at UH and the community colleges, rather than requiring the creation of new degree programs.
- Shall be implemented in consultation with UH to ensure consistency with tuition policy, financial aid administration, and accreditation requirements.

UH supports the goals of this measure and looks forward to continued collaboration with DBEDT, state and county agencies, and the Legislature to strengthen Hawai‘i’s permitting workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF PLANNING
& SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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Statement of
MARY ALICE EVANS, Director

before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Friday, February 13, 2026, 2:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 309

in consideration of
HB 1967, HD 1
RELATING TO PERMITTING.

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

The Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) **supports HB 1967, HD 1**, which implements certain recommendations of the SPEED Task Force. The measure requires the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism to develop a permitting workforce pipeline in partnership with the University of Hawai'i and community colleges and coordinate with state and county permitting agencies on certain tasks related to classification levels, salary and benefits, hiring, and responsibilities of employees.

HB 1967 emerged from the recommendations of the Building Permit Permitted Interaction Group (PIG) of the Simplifying Permitting for Enhanced Economic Development Task Force. By identifying specific staffing gaps, the Task Force has provided a clear roadmap for workforce development that this bill seeks to implement. This measure directly addresses the housing policy directives and emergency proclamations set forth in Governor Green's plan to increase housing inventory across the islands. A primary obstacle to achieving these goals has been the shortage of trained permitting staff available to process the current and projected workload. HB 1967 provides the necessary resources to expand capacity, allowing agencies to streamline the permitting process and clear existing backlogs that have historically delayed critical housing projects.

OPSD **supports the changes made in HB 1967, HD 1** by the previous committee. By acknowledging existing academic programs tailored to state and county permitting needs, this draft ensures that we are leveraging local educational infrastructure to bridge critical technical gaps in our agencies. Furthermore, OPSD supports the flexibility to structure tuition incentives as reimbursements, loan repayments, or post-service loan forgiveness. Providing these varied financial pathways is essential to address the diverse economic realities of students and early-career professionals. Post-service loan forgiveness in particular serves as a powerful retention

HB 1967 HD1 RELATING TO PERMITTING - SUPPORT
State Office of Planning and Sustainable Development
February 13, 2026

tool, ensuring that the State's investment in a student's education translates directly into long-term institutional stability and expertise within our permitting departments.

OPSD supports HB 1967, HD 1 so long as it does not affect appropriation requests in the administrative budget. We respectfully urge this committee to pass this measure to ensure our workforce has the capacity to meet Hawai'i's housing demands.

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

February 13, 2026

TO: Chair Garrett and Members of the Committee on Higher Education
RE: HB 1967 HD1, Relating to Permitting

Dear Chair Garrett and Committee Members,

We strongly support House Bill 1967 HD1. Permitting delays hinder the timely development of affordable and workforce housing. Our institutions of higher learning have a part to play in addressing these delays.

The State of Hawai'i is presently working to address the root causes of our high regulatory barriers, as most notably demonstrated by the Simplifying Permitting for Enhanced Economic Development (SPEED) Task Force.¹

By directing the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT) to partner with the University of Hawai'i and community colleges, this bill creates a pathway for recruiting skilled professionals into permitting roles. These positions are essential for the timely review and approval of housing projects.

Strengthening this workforce can help address longstanding bottlenecks in the permitting process, which have been widely recognized as a barrier to increasing housing supply.² Let's invite our local students to play a part in ending our housing shortage. **Let's advance HB1967 HD1.**

Thank you,



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¹ The SPEED Task Force is authorized by Act 133, SLH 2025.

² Inafuku, K., J. Tyndall, and C. Bonham. *Measuring the Burden of Housing Regulation in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization, April 2022.

uhero.hawaii.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/MeasuringTheBurdenOfHousingRegulationInHawaii.pdf



HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

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The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii
House of Representatives
Committee on Higher Education

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 13, 2026

H.B. 1967, H.D. 1 – RELATING TO PERMITTING

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO supports the intent of H.B. 1967, H.D. 1, which requires the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism to develop a permitting workforce pipeline in partnership with the University of Hawai'i and community colleges and coordinate with state and county permitting agencies on certain tasks related to classification levels, salary and benefits, hiring, and responsibilities of employees.

Our organization represents hundreds of employees, across all counties, that are involved in the permitting process. For years we have been advocating that the counties put more focus and investment on the recruitment and retention of employees involved in the permitting process – such as increasing the pay, reducing hiring times, professional training, and providing incentives that encourage career growth and promote employment longevity. We would like to note that the counties already possess the authority as proposed in subsection (c). However, we appreciate the intent of this measure as it continues the conversation about ways our counties can look to develop modern and attractive benefits of this century, to recruit and retain a qualified permitting workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 1967, H.D. 1.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira
Executive Director



MAUI
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
VOICE OF BUSINESS

LATE

**HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 309
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2026 AT 2:00 P.M.**

To The Honorable Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
The Honorable Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Higher Education

SUPPORT FOR HB1967 HD1 RELATING TO PERMITTING

The bill's focus on workforce development and interagency coordination aligns closely with our policy priorities. By improving recruitment, training, and retention of permitting professionals, the state can help alleviate bottlenecks that slow the delivery of much-needed housing. Streamlining permitting processes not only accelerates project timelines but also reduces development costs, which is essential for maintaining affordability in both rental and ownership markets. These improvements are especially critical as Hawai'i continues to face rising construction costs and a housing crisis.

We also support the bill's intent to clarify classification levels, salary, and responsibilities for permitting staff. Clearer career pathways and competitive compensation can help attract and retain qualified professionals, ensuring that permitting agencies are adequately staffed to meet the demands of housing and infrastructure projects. The proposed collaboration with educational institutions further strengthens the pipeline by preparing a local workforce with relevant skills and knowledge.

We respectfully recommend that implementation of the permitting workforce pipeline prioritize housing-related permits, given the urgent need for affordable and workforce housing statewide. Additionally, we encourage ongoing collaboration with housing stakeholders to ensure that process improvements translate into meaningful reductions in permitting timelines. We appreciate the Legislature's commitment to addressing systemic barriers and ask that you move HB1967 forward.

We greatly appreciate the work done by the SPEED Task Force and support their recommendations. Mahalo for the opportunity to share our support.

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.

HB-1967-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 5:20:01 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT