



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 2383 HD1 – RELATING TO THE WORKFORCE PELL GRANT PROGRAM.

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

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of HB 2383 HD1 – Relating to the Workforce Pell Grant Program, which seeks to establish a statewide framework for the implementation of the federal Workforce Pell Grant Program. This legislation is a critical step toward expanding access to short-term workforce education and training programs that align with in-demand and high-wage occupations, ensuring that Hawai'i residents are equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in the modern economy. The University of Hawai'i (UH) also supports the revision of the measure to include representatives from Hawai'i Pacific University and Chaminade University on the approval committee.

UH recognizes the importance of creating clear pathways for workforce development and is committed to playing a central role in this initiative. By requiring stackable credential pathways within the UH system, this bill ensures that learners who pursue Workforce Pell eligible credentials can progress seamlessly in pathways leading to higher-level certificates and degrees. Additionally, the bill's emphasis on secure data-sharing mechanisms and outcomes reporting aligns with UH's commitment to transparency and accountability. Although we do not have access to program-level data for all required data points, specifically for job placement, we look forward to continuing conversations with our state partners about how we can achieve that. By collecting and reporting program-level data on enrollment, completion, job placement, and earnings, we can ensure that workforce education programs are meeting their intended goals and providing meaningful opportunities for Hawai'i's residents.

While UH is supportive, we do have concerns that due to the federal administration not yet having completed its rulemaking process, some of the guidelines and criteria in this bill may be subject to change. UH has been working closely with the Workforce Development Council in anticipation of the final rulemaking and monitoring the federal register for publication of the proposed rule, followed by the 30-day public comment period.

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

OFFICE OF INFORMATION PRACTICES

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To: House Committee on Higher Education

From: Carlotta Amerino, Director

Date: February 13, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 309

Re: Testimony on H.B. No. 2383, H.D. 1
Relating to the Workforce Pell Grant Program

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill, which would create an authorization process and otherwise support implementation of a workforce Pell grant program. The Office of Information Practices (OIP) takes no position on the substance of this bill, but testified previously to recommend amendment of a confidentiality provision in proposed section __-7, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS). The House Committee on Labor made OIP's recommended change in the H.D. 1 version of this bill, and OIP has no further concerns regarding this bill.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



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

JADE T. BUTAY
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

February 13, 2026

To: The Honorable Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair,
The Honorable Terez Amato, Vice-Chair, and
Members of the House Committee on Higher Education

Date: Friday, February 13, 2026
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Place: Conference Room 309, State Capitol

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

Re: H.B. 2383 H.D.1 RELATING TO THE WORKFORCE PELL GRANT PROGRAM

The **DLIR respectfully offers comments** on this measure. H.R.1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA), requires the Governor to consult with the State Workforce Board¹ when designating eligible workforce programs for the expanded Workforce Pell Grants, which will provide financial aid for short-term training. Rulemaking authority rests with the U.S. Department of Education (US DOE), while the U.S. Department of Labor's (US DOL) role is primarily supportive and technical.

US DOL provides technical assistance to states and coordinates with federal workforce programs (such as WIOA and Perkins) to align training program identification with Workforce Pell criteria. Following the finalization of the Workforce Pell's implementing regulations, required to be effective by July 1, 2026, the US DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) will work to provide greater clarity on how Workforce Pell can be utilized alongside Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) funds.

The US DOE has set March 2, 2026, as the deadline for public comments on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) for Workforce Pell. Rulemaking will proceed after the US DOE reviews all submitted comments. The DLIR Director, as represented by the Workforce Development Division and as the grantee responsible for the WIOA grant, participates in a working group being convened by the Workforce Development Council.

The DLIR has extensive experience and expertise in managing federal grants, supported by dedicated staff with specialized knowledge and a proven track record. Federal Pell Grants involve complex compliance, reporting, and audit requirements. Effective administration demands dedicated personnel, specialized expertise, and demonstrated success in managing federal grants.

Under the Workforce Pell provisions of the OBBB, Governors must develop written policies and procedures for program approval, identify in-demand occupations and employer needs, and certify that programs meet the federal qualifications of the OBBB before submitting them to the US DOE for approval. DLIR will continue to collaborate with stakeholders convened for this purpose and will draw upon its proven track record and operational infrastructure to ensure alignment with federal regulations.

Our goal is to enable Workforce Pell participants to access financial aid for short-term training under the expanded Pell model, pursue industry-recognized credentials, and secure sustainable wages to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce and economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments.

¹ "(iii) the Governor of a State, after consultation with the State board, determines that the program—" SEC. 30032. WORKFORCE PELL GRANTS.



MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

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 HB2383 HD1 RELATING TO THE WORKFORCE PELL GRANT PROGRAM

Economic growth and diversification are among the Maui Chamber of Commerce's top priorities. The Maui Chamber of Commerce supports HB2383 HD1 as it establishes a statewide framework for the federal Workforce Pell Grant Program, directly addressing the need for a skilled workforce and supporting Maui's ongoing economic recovery.

The bill's focus on short-term workforce education and training programs aligns with best practices for rapidly responding to evolving labor market needs. By providing financial aid for these programs, the measure lowers barriers for residents seeking to upskill or transition into high-demand sectors, including technology, construction, and manufacturing. This approach supports both immediate job placement and long-term economic resilience by cultivating a more adaptable and diverse workforce.

Establishing a Workforce Pell Grant Program Approval Committee within the Workforce Development Council is a prudent step toward ensuring program quality and alignment with Hawai'i's economic priorities. A transparent, stakeholder-driven approval process can help target resources to training that meets real employer needs, encourages investment in new industries, and supports the development of local talent.

We respectfully recommend that implementation prioritize outreach to neighbor island communities and businesses. We appreciate the Legislature's attention to workforce development as a foundation for sustainable economic growth and urge continued collaboration with business and community stakeholders.

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.



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Friday, February 13, 2026 — 2 p.m.

The Workforce Development Council offers comments on HB 2383 HD1, Relating to the Workforce Pell Grant Program.

Dear Chair Garrett 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 respectfully offers comments on HB 2383 HD1, Relating to the Workforce Pell Grant Program. We appreciate the Legislature’s focus on advancing a framework for implementing Workforce Pell in Hawai‘i, and we offer the following comments to ensure alignment with pending federal rulemaking and effective statewide implementation.

At this stage, federal guidance is still emerging, and final program parameters have not yet been issued. As federal statute requires the Governor to consult with the State Workforce Development Board — the Workforce Development Council in Hawai‘i — when designating eligible programs, clarity in state-level governance and consultation processes will be essential to ensure compliance and avoid duplication of roles. Deferring prescriptive statutory language at this time allows the State to avoid misalignment with final federal rules, exercise sound judgment through rulemaking, and remain on track for July 1, 2026, implementation.

From a systems and governance perspective, any statutory framework should preserve sufficient flexibility to align with evolving federal guidance and Hawai‘i’s labor market conditions, particularly with respect to technical definitions such as high-wage, in-demand, and stackable credentials.

In anticipation of implementation, and at the direction of the Office of the Governor, the WDC is already convening a cross-agency working group to support coordinated implementation and rulemaking. The working group is composed of representatives from the University of Hawai‘i, the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations’ Workforce Development Division, the UH Community Colleges, and the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. This group is actively collaborating to ensure the State is positioned to meet the

July 1 implementation timeline without foreseeable disruption. At the same time, we note that the additional administrative and coordination responsibilities contemplated under this framework will require appropriate resources for everyone to effectively carry out these obligations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure. The WDC stands ready to continue working with the Legislature and our partners to ensure successful implemented.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith DeMello
Chair, WDC

Tuia'ana Scanlan
Member, WDC