



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 6, 2026, at 2:05 p.m.

By

Bonnie Irwin, Chancellor
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

HB 2617 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT HILO

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

Mahalo for this opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2617. The University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UH Hilo) supports the intent of HB 2617, which seeks to establish the Institute of Indigenous Education, Science, and Outreach (Institute) to be placed within UH Hilo through a collaboration between the UH Hilo 'Imiloa Astronomy Center ('Imiloa) and the UH Hilo college of Hawaiian language, Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani (CoHL).

The legislature established the CoHL under HRS §§ 304A-1301-1302 in 1997, the functions of which include providing a quality education primarily through the medium of the Hawaiian language, as well as the incorporation of Nāwahīokalani'ōpu'u School and other laboratory schools, that now includes three other K-12 charter schools as well as all the 'Aha Pūnana Leo's ('APL) 13 Hawaiian Medium preschools throughout the state.

CoHL faculty and administrators worked alongside community members and agencies to help establish 'Imiloa as an extension of its work to advance the Hawaiian language. 'Imiloa opened its doors in 2006 and is the only bi-lingual science Center in Hawai'i and has become a national and international model for indigenous informal science education, serving its community through local science research, cultural advancement, and environmental stewardship. 'Imiloa has become a critical gathering place for practitioners and scholars, fostering collaborative efforts to advance science education from an indigenous foundation and perspective.

The Institute established by HB 2617 will further solidify the relationship between 'Imiloa and the CoHL, along with its laboratory schools and community partners. UH Hilo has found that both 'Imiloa and the College face many unique situations that require agility to address the State's Hawaiian language needs. This will allow for scheduling courses outside the standard university semesters to provide curriculum and instruction to PreK-12 institutions, teaching at the College's laboratory school program in areas where there are gaps in instruction, utilizing upper-division college students to teach lower division/dual credit courses in beginning Hawaiian for English medium high school students, and being able to provide outreach to learners with distinctive ties to the State

as well as institutions, organizations and agencies looking for support with furthering the learning, use and normalization of the Hawaiian language.

This consortium provides services and support to Hawaiian Language schools and programs statewide via its curriculum and materials development, pre- and in-service teacher training. Furthermore, HB 2617 addresses two accounts currently available to the CoHL's Hale Kuamo'o and 'Imiloa. Expanding the scope of the sources of revenue these funds can take in, and the purposes for which the funds can be used will allow for a more sustainable model for the Institute's programming.

Mahalo nui again for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2617.

HB-2617

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 12:25:55 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

2617 HB RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT HILO.