



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
and
Senate Committee on Education
February 13, 2026 at 3:02 p.m.

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

SB 2138 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

Chairs Fukunaga and Kim, Vice Chairs Lee and Kidani, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i supports SB 2138 – Relating to the Hawaii National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program, which would expand the Hawai'i National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate degree programs at the University of Hawai'i (UH) for eligible members of the Hawai'i National Guard.

The University of Hawai'i (UH) strongly supports this measure, which aligns with UH's mission as the State's public system of higher education to serve Hawai'i's workforce needs, support military-affiliated students, and strengthen the State's long-term human capital.

The expansion to include graduate programs recognizes the increasing educational and professional demands placed on Guard members. Graduate education plays a critical role in preparing Guard members to meet existing and evolving workforce demands. By extending tuition assistance to graduate programs, this bill would support career advancement for Guard members while enhancing their ability to contribute meaningfully to both state and national missions.

This measure also supports workforce retention within Hawai'i. Providing Guard members with access to affordable graduate education at UH encourages them to remain in the State, apply their advanced skills locally, and continue serving Hawai'i's communities in both military and civilian capacities. In this way, SB 2138 represents a strategic investment in leadership development, public service, and economic resilience.

As the sole provider of public higher education in the State, UH is committed to serving those who serve Hawai'i. Expanding the State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate degrees strengthens UH's long-standing partnership with the Hawai'i National Guard and advances shared goals of readiness, resilience, and opportunity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2138.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STEPHEN F. LOGAN
MAJOR GENERAL
ADJUTANT GENERAL
KA 'AKUKANA KENELALA

PHILLIP L. MALLORY III
BRIGADIER GENERAL
DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL
KA HOPE 'AKUKANA KENELALA

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
3949 DIAMOND HEAD ROAD
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96816-4495

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2138
RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
AND
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

BY

MAJOR GENERAL STEPHEN F. LOGAN
ADJUTANT GENERAL
AND DIRECTOR OF THE HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

February 11, 2026

Aloha Chairs Fukunaga and Mercado Kim, Vice-Chairs Lee and Kidani, and members of the committee:

The Department of Defense provides written testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB2138**.

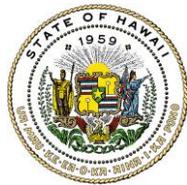
This bill authorizes the Adjutant General to award tuition assistance for graduate degrees at the University of Hawai'i to qualified enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and company grade officers (O-1 through O-3) in the Hawai'i National Guard (HING).

Expanding the HING State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate-level education is important for two primary reasons. First, allowing our servicemembers to pursue graduate degrees continues to professionalize the force which is absolutely critical in this era where our Soldiers and Airman need to be smarter than they have ever been. Second, competition for talent among the military services and industry on-island is as challenging as it ever has ever been. The passage of this bill will help ensure the HING can recruit and retain the best and brightest over competing services, and that we will continue to maintain a quality force that is capable of responding to state emergencies in our communities and to defend the Nation when called.

For these reasons, I humbly ask for your support on this measure and appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. Please feel free to call me or our Director of Legislative Affairs, Brigadier General (Retired) Neal Mitsuyoshi at 808-369-3562, neal.s.mitsuyoshi@hawaii.gov.

MG Stephen F. Logan, Stephen.f.logan@hawaii.gov; 808-672-1001

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STEPHEN F. LOGAN
MAJOR GENERAL
ADJUTANT GENERAL
KA 'AKUKANA KENELALA

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TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2138
RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
AND
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

BY

BRIGADIER GENERAL WALTER R. ROSS, JR.
DIRECTOR
JOINT STAFF, HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD

February 11, 2026

Aloha Chair Carol Fukunaga, Chair Mercado Kim, Vice-Chair Chris Lee, Vice-Chair Kidan, and Members of the Committees:

I am Brigadier General Walter Ross, Director of the Joint Staff, Hawai'i National Guard, State of Hawai'i, Department of Defense.

I am presenting this testimony in strong **SUPPORT** of SB2138.

This important legislation enables the Adjutant General of Hawai'i to extend critical tuition assistance for graduate degree programs at the University of Hawai'i to qualified enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and company-grade officers (O-1 to O-3) within the Hawai'i National Guard (HING). By investing in these dedicated HING members, the bill seeks to enhance their professional development and career opportunities.

The expansion of the HING State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate-level education provides HING members with essential skills and knowledge necessary for effective leadership, strategic thinking, and mission readiness. The passage of this legislation will strengthen our capacity to attract top talent and retain our current personnel. This commitment to education ensures that the HING continues to cultivate a highly skilled force, prepared to support our communities and defend our nation as needed.

The Hawai'i National Guard, Department of Defense, supports this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Budget.

For these reasons, I humbly ask for your support with this measure.

Brigadier General Walter R. Ross, Jr., walter.r.ross2.mil@army.mil; 808-844-6087

HEADQUARTERS
HAWAII ARMY NATIONAL GUARD
91-1227 ENTERPRISE AVENUE
KAPOLEI, HAWAII 96707-2150

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2138
RELATING TO HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
AND
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

BY

COLONEL RONALD D. HOGSTEN
CHIEF OF STAFF
HAWAII ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

February 13, 2026

Aloha Chair Fukunaga, Chair Mercardo-Kim, Vice-Chair Lee and Vice Chair Kidani

The Department of Defense (DEF) provides written testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB2138**.

This bill proposes to expand the Hawai'i National Guard's (HING) current State Tuition Assistance Program (STAP) policy to award up to 50% tuition assistance for graduate degrees for eligible Hawai'i National Guard (HING) members. The bill extends tuition assistance for graduate degrees to qualified enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and company-grade officers (Lieutenant through Captain).

There are three key points I would like to highlight for your consideration. First, extending the state tuition bill to include graduate degrees provides resources to professionalize the workforce. Second, competition for talent across the islands among the military services and the civilian sector is severe. This bill ensures the HING can compete, acquire, and retain the best and brightest to respond to emergencies in our communities and to the Nation when called to do so. Lastly, there is enough flexibility and controls within the existing program, which is currently funded at \$250,000, to implement this bill without requesting additional funding.

The following background is provided on the existing program. STAP is a critical recruiting and retention tool providing a financial resource to mitigate tuition costs for both Hawai'i Army and Air National Guard members. The current STAP reimbursement program covers 100% tuition at University of Hawai'i (UH) school system, community colleges and 4-year colleges. HING enrollment for the current Fall semester utilizing State Tuition includes 54 students attending a variety of programs at community colleges, UH Manoa, West Oahu, and UH Hilo. Top bachelor's degrees pursued through STAP include Business Administration, Public Administration and Liberal Arts degrees.

Currently, the Hawai'i Air National Guard (HIANG) Federal Tuition Assistance is only available to Active Guard Reserve (AGR) and deployed airmen; therefore, STAP is particularly significant for HIANG part-time drilling members.

Overall assessment across the country regarding STAP revealed 40 of the 54 States, Territories, and the District of Columbia offer graduate degree tuition assistance. If approved, this bill will align Hawai'i's STAP with other state programs nationwide.

We humbly ask for your support of **SB2138** and appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. The point of contact is COL Ronald D. Hogsten, ronald.d.hogsten.mil@army.mil, 808-844-6464.

Sincerely,

Ronald D. Hogsten
Chief of Staff, Hawai'i Army National
Guard



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2138
RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Senate Committee on Public Safety & Military Affairs
Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Education
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Friday, February 13, 2026 at 3:02 PM
Conference Room 016 or via Videoconference

Chairs Fukunaga and Kim, Vice Chairs Lee and Kidani, and Members of the Committees:

The Hawaii Military Affairs Council ("MAC") supports SB 2138.

The MAC was established in 1985 when the Chamber was appointed by the State to serve as the liaison to the military. The MAC advocates on behalf of Hawaii's military, and is comprised of business leaders, academic institutions, State and County officials, members of the CODEL, community leaders, labor unions and organizations and retired U.S. flag and general officers. The MAC works to support Hawaii's location as a strategic U.S. headquarters in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region which is crucial for U.S. national and homeland security.

Providing tuition assistance for both undergraduate and graduate studies is a cost-effective way to recruit and retain highly skilled service members, enhance leadership development, and ensure a well-educated force that can better support State and federal missions. This bill also strengthens the long-standing partnership between the Department of Defense and the University of Hawai'i by keeping Guard members in-state for their education and careers.

For these reasons, the Hawaii Military Affairs Council respectfully urges passage of SB 2138. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 7:02:14 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB2138. Enlisted Guard personnel should be allowed to participate in the State Tuition Assistance Program that includes graduate degrees at the University of Hawai'i.

Please pass this bill.

Mike Golojuch, Sr., Lt Col, USAF(Ret)

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 1:10:45 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
M. Leilani DeMello	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I KĀKO‘O this bill.

Mahalo,

M. Leilani DeMello

‘Ōla‘a, Puna, Hawai‘i

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 10:21:00 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

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

Comments:

SUPPORT

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 10:54:05 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Blazak	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chairs Fukunaga and Mercado Kim, Vice Chairs Lee and Kidani, and Members of the Committees,

I strongly support this measure. Qualified enlisted personnel in the Hawaii National Guard deserve affordable access to higher education, including graduate degrees, at the University of Hawaii. Please pass this bill.

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 4:14:58 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deborah Kwan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I serve as a part-time citizen-soldier for the Hawaii Air National Guard and I am writing to express my strong support for **SB 2138**, which expands the State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate-level education at the University of Hawaii and eligibility to officers.

Continuing education is not just encouraged, it is often required for advancement and professional development in the Guard. We are volunteers who stand ready to serve at a moment's notice, whether for natural disasters, emergencies, or deployments. This bill demonstrates the State's commitment to the Hawaii National Guard members who protect our communities by making higher education more accessible.

For me, I took out student loans for my master's degree because the STA was not available to me. I'm still paying them off 15 years later and it continues to be a expense that I needed to take to advance my career. An expanded STA would have a blessing.

I hope that you will consider expanding this benefit for Guard members now and in the future.

Mahalo,

Deborah Kwan, Capt. Hawaii Air National Guard

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 10:42:07 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
An Huynh	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing as a member of the Hawaii National Guard to express my strong support for SB 2138 and HB 1751-HD1, which expands the State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate-level education at the University of Hawaii.

Continuing education is not just encouraged, it is often required for advancement and professional development in the Guard. We are volunteers who stand ready to serve at a moment's notice, whether for natural disasters, emergencies, or deployments. This bill demonstrates the State's commitment to the Hawaii National Guard members who protect our communities by making higher education more accessible.

I hope this will help my fellow Soldiers with their education goals and retain their enlistment with the National Guard.

This bill invests in the professional growth of Hawaii's citizen-soldiers, improves retention, and strengthens our state's workforce and I respectfully request your "aye" vote.

Mahalo,

SFC An Huynh

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 8:09:39 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Krystelle Kenney	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Honorable Committee Chair and Members,

I am writing as a member of the Hawaii National Guard to express my strong support for **SB 2138**, which expands the State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate-level education at the University of Hawaii.

Continuing education is not just encouraged; it is often required for advancement and professional development in the Guard. We are volunteers who stand ready to serve at a moment's notice, whether for natural disasters, emergencies, or deployments. This bill demonstrates the State's commitment to the Hawaii National Guard members who protect our communities by making higher education more accessible.

I hope to pursue a Master's in Cyber Security and AI to strengthen my technical and leadership skills so that I may better serve Hawaii. Graduate tuition assistance would make this goal financially possible while maintaining readiness and fulfilling my Guard duties.

This bill invests in the professional growth of Hawaii's citizen-soldiers, improves retention, and strengthens our state's workforce and I respectfully request your "aye" vote.

Lt Col Krystelle Kenney

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 10:02:21 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Col Regina Komine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Honorable Committee Chair and Members,

I am writing as a member of the Hawaii National Guard to express my strong support for **SB 2138 and HB 1751-HD1**, which expands the State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate-level education at the University of Hawaii.

Continuing education is not just encouraged, it is often required for advancement and professional development in the Guard. We are volunteers who stand ready to serve at a moment's notice, whether for natural disasters, emergencies, or deployments. This bill demonstrates the State's commitment to the Hawaii National Guard members who protect our communities by making higher education more accessible.

I personally have numerous Airmen and Soldiers who continue to go above and beyond, sacrificing time with their families; missing birthday's, children's sporting events, important family and life milestones to represent our country and this great State of Hawaii. I know that many of them will use this benefit to further their education.

This bill invests in the professional growth of Hawaii's citizen-soldiers, improves retention, and strengthens our state's workforce and I respectfully request your "aye" vote.

Regina Komine

LATE

SB-2138

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 4:51:14 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/13/2026 3:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Junnel Udaundo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support this and would love an opportunity to use it if it passes!