



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 Labor and Technology
and
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
February 6, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

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

SB 2158 – RELATING TO VETERINARIANS.

Chairs Elefante and Keohokalole, Vice Chairs Lamosao and Fukunaga, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i supports SB 2158 – Relating to Veterinarians as a viable alternative to establishing a new Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program in the state. Last year, the University of Hawai'i (UH) submitted comments about this growing workforce need and possible expansions of our veterinary educational offerings in response to HCR 195/HR 188 (2025).

The UH agrees that Hawai'i faces a shortage of veterinarians, particularly in rural areas and for large animal agricultural services. As there is currently no DVM program within the state, students who wish to pursue veterinary medicine must leave Hawai'i to complete their education on the mainland. UH participates in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) [Professional Student Exchange Program](#) (PSEP), which offers Hawai'i residents the opportunity to study veterinary medicine at participating institutions. The PSEP program does have limitations, including limited slots for participating students, limited support for certain specialties, and higher than in-state tuition rates. Thus, it does not fully address the long-term needs of the state. UH has researched the accreditation and program requirements for establishing a new DVM school in the state and found that doing so would cost an estimated \$50-70 million, plus potentially another \$100 million to construct the required facilities. The approach recommended in SB 2158 is more cost effective and would authorize the Hawai'i Board of Veterinary Medicine to establish and set the parameters for a veterinary workforce loan repayment and scholarship program to incentivize local students to pursue a DVM and return to the state to practice.

UH already has two related academic programs that prepare students to apply to established DVM programs. The Veterinary Technology program at Windward Community College provides valuable entry-level training for students pursuing careers in veterinary medicine. Additionally, UH Mānoa's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) offers a pre-veterinary curriculum and has a strong track

record of Bachelor of Science alumni receiving DVM degrees. Coupled with the loan repayment and scholarship fund at rates set by the state Board of Veterinary Medicine, this approach will incentivize graduates of our existing programs who want to pursue a DVM degree to return to practice locally.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 2158. We look forward to working with the Hawai'i State Board of Veterinary Medicine to address Hawai'i's long-term veterinary workforce needs.

Testimony of the Hawaii Board of Veterinary Medicine

**Before the
Senate Committee on Labor and Technology/Commerce and Consumer
Protection
Friday, February 6, 2026
10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 229 Via Videoconference**

**On the following measure:
S.B. 2158, RELATING TO VETERINARIANS**

Chairs Keohokalole, Elefante and Members of the Committee My name is Adrian Stinardo, and I am the Executive Officer of the Hawai'i Board of Veterinary Medicine. The Board appreciates the intent of this measure and offers comments on S.B. 2158.

The purpose of this bill is to establish the Veterinarian Workforce Development Special Fund; Establish a Veterinarian Workforce Development Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program to assist veterinarians with educational costs and student loan repayment; and Authorize the Board to enter into education and training agreements, including interstate partnerships and memoranda of understanding, to expand veterinary education, clinical training opportunities, and licensure pathways for Hawaii residents.

The Board supports the intent and overall direction of this measure and has long recognized the critical shortage of veterinarians in the State and the unique challenges faced by veterinary professionals practicing in Hawai'i, including high educational debt, limited training pathways, geographic isolation, and workforce demands tied to agriculture, animal welfare, public health, and biosecurity.

As proposed, the special fund would be administered and expended by the Board and used to support loan repayment, scholarships, workforce assessment, and recruitment and retention activities. While these are important policy goals, the Board is concerned that the bill places administrative and fiscal responsibilities on the Board that extend beyond its core statutory mission and operational capacity.

State licensing boards are primarily structured to regulate professions by issuing licenses, adopting rules, and enforcing professional standards. The Board does not

currently possess the staffing, infrastructure, or financial management expertise necessary to administer a special fund of this scope, including oversight of expenditures, program evaluation, and long-term fiscal planning.

Additionally, the Board notes that the bill does not clearly identify a dedicated or recurring funding source sufficient to ensure the sustainability of the special fund. Without a clear demonstration that the fund will meet the requirements of Hawaii Revised Statutes Section 37-52.3, the Board is concerned about the long-term viability of the program and the potential for unfunded administrative obligations to fall on the Board.

The Board respectfully suggests that the Legislature consider assigning administration of the special fund to an agency with existing experience in workforce development financing, grant administration, or loan repayment programs, or alternatively, clarifying the Board's role to be advisory or consultative rather than administrative.

The Board also supports the bill's emphasis on education and training partnerships, including authorization for the Board to collaborate with the University of Hawai'i, the Hawai'i Veterinary Medical Association, and accredited out-of-state colleges of veterinary medicine. These provisions create meaningful pathways to increase access to veterinary education, clinical training, and supervised practice opportunities within Hawai'i, while helping retain graduates who are more likely to remain in the State after completion of their training.

The Board remains committed to working collaboratively with the Legislature and stakeholders to address Hawaii's veterinary workforce shortage in a manner that is effective, sustainable, and consistent with the Board's regulatory responsibilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI A KIA'I MEAOLA
1428 South King Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96814-2512
Phone: (808) 973-9560 FAX: (808) 973-9613

SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND CONSUMER
PROTECTION AND THE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2026
10:00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 229**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2158
RELATING TO VETERINARIANS**

Chairs Keohokalole and Elefante, Vice Chairs Fukunaga and Lamosao, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2158. SB2158 establishes the Veterinarian Workforce Development Special Fund and Veterinarian Workforce Development Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program to support qualified veterinarians committed to or currently working in veterinary medicine in the State. SB2158 Authorizes the Hawai'i Board of Veterinary Medicine to enter into agreements with the University of Hawai'i, the Hawai'i Veterinary Medical Association, and accredited out-of-state schools to increase the availability of accredited veterinary programs and licensure opportunities to residents of the State. Appropriates funds. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) supports this measure and provides comment.

In Hawai'i and nationally, there is a shortage of veterinarians in rural, livestock, regulatory and other areas. This measure can attract veterinarians to the state by offsetting their financial loan liabilities used for tuition, education, and training. Cost of education, including out-of-state tuition for professional veterinary degrees, often averages over \$240,000. Loan repayments to veterinarians who commit to working in shortage areas of the State for a minimum period of time to be determined by the board can be very helpful to new practitioners. The DAB provides comment that the type of loan be defined or limited in the measure.

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

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 11:12:04 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Serena Stefanic-Phillip	Testifying for Hawaiian Humane Society	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Senator Jarrett Keohokalole,

This is Serena from Punalu'u, Oahu representing the Hawaiian Humane Society. I am testifying in favor of Bill SB2158.



Hawaiian Humane Society

People for animals. Animals for people.

Date: Feb. 4, 2026

To: Chairs Sens. Jarrett Keohokalole and Brandon Elefante
Vice Chairs Sens. Carol Fukunaga and Rachele Lamosao
and Members of the Committees on Commerce & Consumer Protection
and Labor & Technology

Submitted By: Stephanie Kendrick, Vice President of Community Engagement
Hawaiian Humane Society, 808-356-2217

RE: Testimony in support of SB 2158: Relating to Veterinarians
Friday, Feb. 6, 2026, 10:00 a.m., Room 229 & Videoconference

On behalf of the Hawaiian Humane Society, thank you for considering our support for Senate Bill 2158, which establishes the Veterinarian Workforce Development Special Fund; establishes the Veterinarian Workforce Development Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program to support qualified veterinarians committed to or currently working in veterinary medicine in the State; authorizes the Hawai'i Board of Veterinary Medicine to enter into agreements, including memoranda of understanding, with the University of Hawai'i, the Hawai'i Veterinary Medical Association, and accredited out-of-state schools to increase the availability of accredited veterinary programs and licensure opportunities to residents of the State; and appropriates funds.

The nationwide shortage of veterinary professionals is acutely felt in our island state. As this measure points out, local residents who wish to study to be veterinarians must leave the state to pursue their degrees. Hawai'i's high cost of living and the expense of earning a veterinary medical degree make it extremely difficult to attract veterinarians to return home or relocate to the state.

As the largest animal welfare nonprofit in the state of Hawai'i, the Hawaiian Humane Society is in strong support of this measure. The increased educational opportunities and financial support offered by this measure would create powerful tools to empower local talent to pursue veterinary medicine and bring their skills back home.

Please pass SB2158, which is desperately needed to support our animals, pet owners and overworked veterinary professionals. Mahalo for your consideration.



HAWAII VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 61309, Honolulu, Hawaii 96839-1309

February 4, 2026

Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Chair
Senator Carol Fukunaga, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Labor and Technology
Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair
Senator Rachele Lamosao, Vice Chair

RE: SB 2158 Relating to Veterinarians

Dear Committees on Commerce and Consumer Protection and Labor and Technology:

On behalf of the Hawaii Veterinary Medical Association (HVMA), we would like to express our support for SB 2158 and the establishment of a Veterinary Workforce Development Special Fund and Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program.

The HVMA also finds a continued need for more licensed veterinarians in the State to meet growing consumer demand for veterinary care. The need is particularly great in rural areas that care for livestock in addition to companion pets.

Challenges to drawing veterinarians to Hawaii include the high student debt from attending veterinary school and high cost of living in Hawaii compared to other areas of the country. Additionally, aspiring veterinarians must attend veterinary school out of state as Hawaii does not have the facilities, faculty, or funding to sustain a veterinary school within the state.

The Veterinary Workforce Development Fund and Loan Repayment or Scholarship Program would help ease some of the financial burdens facing newly graduated veterinarians and allow locals to return to Hawaii and serve their home communities as many want to do.

We greatly appreciate the legislature acknowledging this need and working to find a solution to help ensure continued availability of veterinary care in Hawaii. We urge you to please pass SB 2158. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill Yoshicedo".

Jill Yoshicedo, DVM
Executive Vice-President
Hawaii Veterinary Medical Association

I support SB2158 for the following reasons:

The nationwide shortage in veterinary professionals is acutely felt in our island state. Hawai'i's high cost of living and expensive housing make it extremely difficult to attract veterinarians to return home or relocate to the state, even for salaries that are competitive with mainland locales. This measure would be a powerful tool to empower local talent to pursue veterinary medicine and bring their skills back home.

Judith Aikawa, MD, 37 Apali Way, Kula, HI, 96790

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 4:19:08 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vivian S. Toellner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill. There is a shortage of all doctors in the State, including Veterinarians. It would be a useful and productive way of using our tax dollars. Aloha & Mahalo

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 4:38:00 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy Monden	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SB2158 is a worthwhile concept, and using taxpayer funds to support veterinary education in the State of Hawai‘i could be beneficial. However, state resources are limited, and any use of public funds should include clear accountability. Students who receive state-funded support should be required to provide repayment through both monetary reimbursement and a defined period of service to the state.

Hawai‘i’s humane societies and animal welfare organizations are overwhelmed by overpopulation, particularly of cats and dogs that are not spayed or neutered and continue to reproduce. A service requirement could help address this ongoing issue. For example, recipients of state funding could be required to provide five years of free or reduced-cost veterinary services focused on spay and neuter care.

The cost of living in Hawai‘i is extremely high, and spay and neuter services are often unaffordable for many pet owners. A structured service obligation tied to SB2158 would help control animal overpopulation while ensuring that taxpayer dollars deliver a meaningful public benefit.

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 7:03:48 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
carole richelieu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

shortage in veterinary professionals is acutely felt in our island state. Hawaii Kai voter.

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 8:25:40 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lois Crozer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support this bill to help entice more veterinarians working here. We are critically short staffed.

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 9:14:15 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
lynne matusow	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is a very important bill. We have a shortage of veterinarians in Hawaii, following the shortage of other doctors. This would be an important tool to empower locals to pursue veterinary medicine and bring their skills back home.

Please move this bill forward.

Lynne Matusow

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 1:54:37 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Chiwa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Senator Keohokalole, Vice Chair Senator Fukunaga and Members of the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection, and Chair Senator Elefante, Vice Chair Senator Lamasao and Members of the Committee on Labor and Technology.

Please support SB 2158, which to my understanding, would provide incentives to veterinarians to work here despite Hawaii's high cost of living. This bill would be helpful not only to veterinarians, but also to pet owners.

Mahalo.

Jennifer Chiwa

Makiki and life long resident of Oahu

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 2:43:10 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marian Hussenbux	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SB2158 Relating to Veterinarians.

We understand that the nationwide shortage in veterinary professionals is acutely felt in your state. Hawai'i's high cost of living and expensive housing make it extremely difficult to attract veterinarians to return home or relocate to the state, even for salaries that are competitive with mainland locales. This measure would be a powerful tool to empower local talent to pursue veterinary medicine and bring their skills back home.

This can only be of benefit to everyone, especially the animals.

We would like to endorse this important Bill.

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 8:39:34 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natalie Graham-Wood	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB2158. My name is Natalie Graham-Wood and I am a resident of Sunset Beach, Oahu.

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 7:24:34 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melanie Kim	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill in a nutshell Hawaii does not have enough veternians. Establishing a fund will help keep vets in the State of Hawaii rather than moving to the Mainland due to the high cost of living which makes paying school loans, running a business and living in Hawaii challenging.

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 5:41:21 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Grace Lin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We need to support our already low number of veterinarians in state by helping them financially and also the programs that can develop more qualified veterinarians. The existing good veterinarians are already overworked and overwhelmed. We need to support them better as a state. Please help!

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:21:50 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JOANNE PARKER	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,.

Please support this bill.

My friend is a vet and is so over worked and she works for a very good clinic. They all need your help.

Mahalo,

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:57:57 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Diane Shaw	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Veterinary care is a problem in all areas of the country but especially in Hawaii. This would help and hopefully bring more vets to the state to help with the issues at hand. Appreciate that you are looking at moving this forward.

SB-2158

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 8:56:05 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/6/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jane E Arnold	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support SB2158. Hawaii has a shortage of veterinarians, which is part of the reason that we have so many roaming cats. (It is difficult to get appointments at the Humane Society to have these cats spayed/neutered.). This bill would encourage local veterinarians to practice here instead of relocating to the mainland.