



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
February 13, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.

By

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Vice President for Academic Strategy
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SB 2231 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports SB 2231 – Relating to Workforce Development. Research has established that paid internships with the qualities included in this program significantly reduce the underemployment of college and university graduates. Ensuring that participating interns' duties will mirror those of full-time employees, that qualified internship host agencies are able to articulate a clear career development pathway into full-time employment, and that mentorship is explicitly included in agencies' responsibilities, are all national best practices. The Department of Labor and Industrial Relations has done an excellent job implementing and administering the Hele Imua internship program, which has helped address some long-term vacancies in participating agencies. We fully support the proposed expansion of the state internship program into the legislative and judiciary branches of state government.

We would like to offer a few suggested edits that we believe will increase the recruitment of potential candidates. First, recognizing that not all positions require a bachelor's degree, we suggest adding "or the credential required for a specific position" to page 2, lines 8-10. If a position requires a certificate or associate degree, for example, that should be the relevant credential soon to be earned by a qualified intern.

Secondly, we note that submitting both letters of recommendation and professional or academic references will tap the same individuals since those providing references will most likely be the same people as those who write letters of recommendation. Thus, UH recommends that references be kept but letters of recommendation be removed from the application requirements. If candidates submit contact information for three professional or academic references with their applications, those references can be contacted as needed during the search process and provide letters if needed to transition to full-time paid employment.

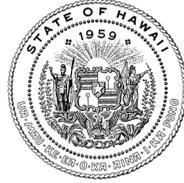
Finally, the current measure requires "Transcripts from each college and university the applicant attended" (page 4, lines 4-5). We recommend that official transcripts be required as a condition of employment once a candidate has been offered a position after an internship, not as part of the internship application process. Official transcripts

can be time consuming and costly for a student to procure, especially if they have attended multiple campuses.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and comments on SB 2231.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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

February 13, 2026

To: The Honorable Brandon Elefante, Chair,
The Honorable Rachele Lamasao, Vice Chair, and
Members of the Committee on Labor and Technology

Date: Friday, February 13, 2026
Time: 3:00 p.m.
Place: Conference Room 225, State Capitol

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

Re: S.B. 2231 RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

I. OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION

The DLIR **offers comments** on this measure, which amends §394-11 the State Internship and Workforce Development Program (Hele Imua) for the public sector by expanding the program to the Legislative and Judicial branches, limiting the internships to full-time placements of ten to eleven months, establishing eligibility criteria, application requirements, and selection preferences; and requiring the DLIR to collaborate with coordinating agencies to promote the program and recruit eligible applicants.

The Department has concerns about expanding Hele Imua at this time, as it is still refining the public sector program. Additionally, Act 251 (SLH, 2025) recently expanded the program into the private sector, and the DLIR is currently conducting a pilot project in the agricultural sector. The purpose of this pilot is to develop refinements for the private sector program and incorporate lessons learned into recommendations for amending §394-10 On-the-Job Training Work Experience Program; Private Sector.

Furthermore, DLIR has formulated interconnected recommendations addressing both §394-10 and §394-11 and has submitted these recommendations to a House Committee as part of its efforts to improve Hele Imua. The department appreciates the opportunity to refine the language of Act 251 and looks forward to continued collaboration with the Legislature to strengthen the program. Hele Imua has proven successful and holds significant potential to address the State's critical workforce shortages by creating a clear bridge from work-based training to employment.

II. CURRENT LAW

The newly enacted Act 251 (SLH, 2025) codified the existing public-sector internship program, Hele Imua, and authorized expansion into the private sector. The Hele Imua Internship Program provides on-the-job training (OJT) work experience for secondary and postsecondary students to provide them with practical work experience in the executive branch and private sector, focusing on high-demand industries.

III. COMMENTS ON THE SENATE BILL

The DLIR offers the following comments on the measure amending §394-11:

- Subsection (a): the DLIR does not support the inflexibility involved in prescribing the period as well as requiring full-time internship opportunities.
- Subsection (b): the Department recommends that the eligibility language in §394-11 mirror that of §394-10.
- Subsection (c): the Department believes this subsection is unnecessary as the DLIR has already developed sufficient internal policies and procedures to effectuate the intent of this proposed subsection.
- Subsection (g): the DLIR suggests the responsibilities outlined in this section are more aligned with the statutory role and capacity of DHRD rather than the Department.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to refine the language of Act 251 and looks forward to continuing to work with the Legislature to improve Act 251 as the Hele Imua program has proved successful and has the potential to address the State's critical workforce shortages by creating a clear bridge from work-based training to employment.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter.



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Labor and Technology
Friday, February 13, 2026; 3:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 225
Via Videoconference**

RE: SENATE BILL NO. 2231, RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill No. 2231, RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines to over 150,000 patients each year who live in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

The bill, as received by your Committee, would clarify the State Internship and Workforce Development Program (Program) for the public sector by expanding the program to the Legislative and Judicial branches, limiting the internships to full-time placements of ten to eleven months, establishing eligibility criteria, application requirements, and selection preferences, and requiring the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) to collaborate with coordinating agencies to promote the Program and recruit eligible applicants.

This bill also appropriates an unspecified amount of general funds for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the Program, including development of an online application system.

The bill would take effect on July 1, 2026.

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The State of Hawaii is experiencing a severe shortage of health care professionals in the workforce, especially in rural areas. Recent studies note that the current shortage of physicians is at 20% of the total full-time equivalent positions throughout the State. The shortage is especially severe in the fields of primary care, infectious diseases, colorectal surgery, pathology, general surgery, pulmonology, neurology, neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery, family medicine, cardiothoracic surgery, rheumatology, cardiology, hematology/oncology, and pediatric subspecialties of endocrinology, cardiology, neurology, hematology/oncology, and gastroenterology.

The same can be said for registered and practical nurses, community health workers, social workers, pharmacists, and other disciplines in the field of health care.

The HPCA believes this Program provides a needed service to our community by preparing students for meaningful employment, diversifying their learning opportunities, and promoting responsible citizenship. In addition, the Program facilitates partnerships between businesses and educators for the creation of mentoring ventures and other opportunities so that Hawaii's youth may gain the practical experience that will enable them to be productive members of our labor force. This is critical for the field of health care, especially in rural communities.

Because of this, the HPCA respectfully requests your favorable consideration of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or eabe@hawaiiipca.net.