

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
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**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
AND EDUCATION**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2026
4:15 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2706
RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Chairs Gabbard and Kim, Vice Chairs Richards and Kidani, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testify on Senate Bill No. 2706, relating to workforce development. This measure establishes a five-year agriculture and biosecurity workforce development pilot program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department), in collaboration with the University of Hawaii's Leeward Community College (LCC) and the Department of Human Resources Development (DHRD); requires a report to the Legislature; and sunsets 6/30/2031. The Department supports this measure and offers comments.

The Department believes that access to a stable, well-trained workforce is key to maintaining biosecurity efforts across the State. The Department believes that creating a workforce development program developed in conjunction with LCC and DHRD, such as the one used by the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement for their officers, enables the Department to do the same for a variety of biosecurity-related roles within the Department. Additionally, this program also has the opportunity to create biosecurity-related capacity outside the Department, increasing the capacity for partners and businesses to also implement biosecurity actions into their operations. Should this measure be passed, the Department is eager to continue working with both DHRD and LCC, who have been supportive of the Department's biosecurity efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



JOSH GREEN, M. D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA

BRENNA H. HASHIMOTO
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

BRIAN K. FURUTO
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STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT
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Statement of
BRENNA H. HASHIMOTO
Director, Department of Human Resources Development

Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Wednesday, February 18, 2026
4:15PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 224

In consideration of
SB2706, Relating to Workforce Development

Chair Gabbard, Chair Kim, and the members of the Committee on Agriculture and Environment and Committee on Education:

The Department of Human Resources Development (HRD) appreciates the intent of SB2706 and offers the following comments.

SB2706 establishes a five-year agriculture and biosecurity workforce development pilot program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, in collaboration with the University of Hawai'i's Leeward Community College and the Department of Human Resources Development.

We are committed to workforce development and training, but the measure does not clearly define our role. Without clarity on our responsibilities, it is difficult to fully evaluate and determine whether additional resources will be needed. We are ready to work with the Legislature to ensure the approach is clear and aligned with existing efforts.

We are available to answer any questions or provide further information as needed.



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 Agriculture and Environment
and
Senate Committee on Education
February 18, 2026 at 4:15 p.m.

By
Lui Hokoana
Interim Vice President for Community Colleges
University of Hawai'i System

SB 2706 – RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

Chairs Gabbard and Kim, Vice Chairs Richards and Kidani, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i Community Colleges (UHCC) supports the intent of SB 2706, which would establish a five-year Agriculture and Biosecurity Workforce Development Pilot Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB), in collaboration with the University of Hawai'i at Leeward Community College (LeeCC) and the Department of Human Resources Development (DHRD). The UHCCs support this measure because it advances a practical and outcomes-driven approach to strengthening Hawai'i's workforce capacity in agriculture and biosecurity, areas that are essential to the state's resilience, food security, and public health. The pilot's emphasis on curriculum development, hands-on training, and real-world work opportunities aligns with best practices for building career pathways that lead to employment and advancement.

While the UHCCs welcome the partnership with DAB and DHRD, we wish to clarify the collaborative framework. To ensure program success and maintain compliance with institutional accreditation, LeeCC will lead the academic development of the curriculum, ensuring that the 'broad spectrum of topics' mandated in Section 1(b)(1) aligns with established higher education standards and lead to recognized industry credentials. This partnership allows DAB to define the 'what' (the skills needed), while the University defines the 'how' (the instructional delivery).

Furthermore, the UHCCs note that the development of a specialized biosecurity curriculum is a resource-intensive endeavor. To successfully launch this pilot, the UHCCs respectfully requests that the legislature consider a specific appropriation for FY 2026-27 to support specialized faculty and the procurement of necessary training materials. Without a dedicated funding stream, the development of this new career pathway may divert resources from existing programs.

LeeCC is prepared to contribute meaningfully to this effort through its established workforce development infrastructure and experience designing and delivering industry-responsive training. LeeCC's role as an open-access institution also positions the College to serve

residents across a range of backgrounds, including working adults and non-traditional learners seeking upskilling, reskilling, and rapid entry into employment.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB 2706, as long as its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2706.



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February 18, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

TESTIMONY ON SB 2706
RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
4:15 PM

Aloha Chairs Gabbard and Kim, Vice-Chairs Richards and Kidani, and Members of the Committees:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports SB 2706, which establishes a five-year agriculture and biosecurity workforce development pilot program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, in collaboration with the University of Hawaii's Leeward Community College and the Department of Human Resources Development.

Workforce shortages remain one of the most significant challenges facing Hawai'i agriculture and biosecurity. Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers continue to age, and many multigenerational operations face uncertainty due to the lack of a trained next generation prepared to enter agricultural and biosecurity careers. Without intentional workforce development efforts, agricultural lands risk falling out of production, increasing Hawai'i's reliance on imported food, and weakening our biosecurity system.

HFB also notes that both agricultural operations and agricultural agencies face increasing difficulty recruiting qualified candidates due to the specialized education, training, and background experience required for many positions. Farming and ranching jobs today often demand technical skills in equipment operation, pest and disease management, compliance, and safety, while positions within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity require scientific, regulatory, or inspection expertise that can be difficult to fill. These workforce gaps highlight the need for targeted training programs that prepare candidates with the skills necessary to succeed in agriculture and biosecurity careers.

HFB has consistently supported initiatives that strengthen agricultural education, training, and career pathways. Prior workforce efforts have demonstrated the importance of hands-on learning, internships, and clear pathways into employment. SB 2706 builds on these principles by emphasizing practical training, collaboration with educational institutions, and alignment with workforce needs within agriculture and biosecurity.

HFB also supports the pilot structure of this program. A defined timeframe allows the State to evaluate outcomes, identify best practices, and make informed decisions about long-term workforce investments. Continued engagement with farmers, ranchers, and industry stakeholders will be essential to ensure that training programs remain relevant and responsive to on-the-ground needs.

Developing a skilled agricultural and biosecurity workforce is critical to growing agriculture in Hawai'i and achieving statewide goals such as doubling local food production, strengthening farm-to-school programs, diversifying the economy, and protecting natural resources. SB 2706 represents an important step toward addressing the workforce challenges that must be overcome to reach these objectives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.



February 17, 2026

To: Chair Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair Tim Richards and the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment; Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle N. Kidani, and the Senate Committee on Education

Subject: **SB2706**, Relating to Workforce Development

Aloha,

I am writing to support SB2706 with comments. This measure would establish a five-year agriculture and biosecurity workforce development pilot program in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, Leeward Community College within the University of Hawai'i, and the Department of Human Resources Development. A report to the Legislature would also be required.

Hawai'i has the potential to become self-sufficient in food production and we know this because for centuries indigenous peoples of this land were familiar with how to use natural resources strategically and efficiently to feed its people. More farmers means more people equipped with tools to take the power back in being reliant on our own resources instead of needing to import foods from foreign places, and we know how important this is from seeing the effect an epidemic such as COVID-19 in 2020 had across our islands.

Civil Beat reported in 2024 that 6% of farmers in Hawai'i are under the age of 35 and nearly half of the farmer makeup are over the age of 65.¹ Encouraging younger generations to become activated as farmers is crucial to our self-sufficiency. Investing in workforce development for the younger generation to learn skills within the agriculture sector is investing in our communities' future so we can continue to work towards self-reliance.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this measure and thank you for your consideration.

Mahalo,
Sydney Haas & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

¹ Terrell, J. (2024, December 3). Data Dive: Hawaii Has The Oldest Farmers In The U.S. Honolulu Civil Beat. <https://www.civilbeat.org/2024/12/data-dive-hawaii-has-the-oldest-farmers-in-the-u-s/>

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.

SB-2706

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 11:12:59 PM

Testimony for AEN on 2/18/2026 4:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

2706 SB RELATING TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

SB-2706

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:26:52 AM

Testimony for AEN on 2/18/2026 4:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

GOOD IDEA.