



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 Education
Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 1:02 p.m.

By

Debora Halbert, Vice President for Academic Strategy

and

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

SB 2802 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB 2802 and respectfully submits the following comments regarding the expansion of baccalaureate capacity to address workforce shortages in K-12 education and agriculture.

While the University recognizes the urgent need for more educators and agricultural professionals, we recommend that the resources appropriated in SB 2802 be utilized to implement existing plans to enhance degree alignment between Leeward Community College and UH West O'ahu, rather than establishing separate, independent baccalaureate degrees at the community college level.

The University's position is guided by three primary considerations:

- A core principle of the UH System is to avoid the unnecessary duplication of programs. When a mission-aligned, four-year institution is located in close proximity—as is the case with UH West O'ahu and Leeward CC—the most fiscally responsible approach is to utilize the existing baccalaureate infrastructure of the university partner before establishing new, independent four-year portfolios at a community college.
- UH West O'ahu currently has the capacity to grow. It is essential to fully realize the potential of our existing four-year regional programs first. Once these programs reach capacity, the University can then better determine the need for additional independent degrees to be established in the region.
- There is currently a robust, systemwide effort focused on aligning teacher education and agriculture pathways to enhance transferability. A 2+2 model ensures that students benefit from the specialized, foundational environment of Leeward CC for their first two years, followed by a seamless transition into the upper-division expertise available at UH West O'ahu.

The University is already pursuing a unified vision for this region through the dual appointment of a single Chancellor to lead both campuses. This leadership structure is

designed to co-create a "Regional Comprehensive Educational Ecosystem" by removing administrative barriers. Aligning the funds from SB 2802 toward this integrated model will allow for:

- Seamless Progression: Optimizing curriculum between the two campuses ensures 100% credit transfer, removing the "bottlenecks" that lead to student attrition in both education and agriculture.
- Fiscal Efficiency: Maximizing the impact of state resources and the Hawai'i's Promise scholarship by providing clear pathways without creating duplicative administrative overhead.
- Targeted Workforce Delivery: Delivering upper-division coursework in flexible formats that meet the specific needs of the region's working student and farming populations.

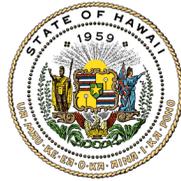
A unified regional approach is the most efficient method to solve workforce shortages while strengthening the long-term health of both institutions.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB 2802, provided its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Board of Regents Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



State of Hawai'i
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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 EDUCATION

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2026

1:02 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM 229 & VIDEOCONFERENCE

**SENATE BILL NO. 2802
RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII**

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testify on Senate Bill No. 2802, relating to the University of Hawaii. This measure appropriates money to establish bachelor's degree programs in education and in agricultural science at Leeward Community College and to fund 2 FTE positions and supplies to support the programs. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department) supports this measure and offers comments.

The Department believes that additional opportunities for higher education are critical to maintaining a consistent pipeline of well-educated applicants for the workforce and to enhance the State's agricultural industries. Many of the Department's positions are specialized and require a Bachelor of Science degree, which includes many related to biosecurity in the Plant Industry Division, such as biosecurity inspectors and noxious weed specialists. While the Department is in support of this measure, the Department believes the agricultural science degree should be offered as a Bachelor of Science degree opposed to a Bachelor of Arts degree due to the fact that agricultural science is often a blend of other scientific fields such as animal/plant biology, integrated pest management, soil science, and agronomy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



February 6, 2026

To: Chair Donna Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani and the Senate Committee on Education

Subject: **SB2802**, Relating to the Establishment of Bachelor Degrees in Education and

Aloha,

I am writing in support of SB2802 which will establish both a bachelor of science degree in education and a bachelor of arts degree in agricultural science. Currently, Hawai'i faces an ongoing shortage of trained, qualified teachers. On any one day, a significant number of Hawai'i students may be taught by 'emergency hires' (unlicensed teachers). The problem is particularly acute for STEM and special education classes. There have been efforts to increase teacher salaries and build some housing for teachers, but these efforts have not lessened the loss of teachers nor significantly increased the recruitment of teachers. At this time, Leeward Community College offers an associate in science degree in teaching and six certificates for competence in various levels of education. After completing the associates degree, the student must then transfer to another campus to complete the bachelor's degree.

Leeward Community College also offers an associate of science degree in agriculture with certificates of competence in plant biology and tropical agriculture. The emphasis is placed on hands-on, science-based training in tropical crops, aquaculture, and native plant conservation. The large, on campus farm plus the Wahiawa Value-Added Product Development Center provide training opportunities for immersion in farming practices.

Creating a pipeline to increase the number of trained qualified teachers would be a step in meeting the State's current and future education needs. Since a program already exists it would be financially prudent to increase college staffing and grant this degree. For agriculture, much effort has gone into the State's effort to transform agriculture and reduce the reliance on food shipped from the Mainland. Enhancing the established program with additional course work and granting the degree would facilitate the continued transformation of Hawai'i's agriculture.

I urge this committee to pass SB2802 to establish a bachelor of science degree in education and a bachelor of arts degree in agricultural science programs at Leeward Community College. These programs would facilitate meeting the needs of the Hawaiian population now and in the future.

Mahalo,

Carlin McFadden & the Food+ Policy Team

#fixourfoodsystem

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.



Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

SB2802

RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Monday, February 9, 2026, 1:05 PM
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports SB802** which appropriates moneys to establish bachelor's degree programs in education and in agricultural science at Leeward Community College and to fund 2 FTE positions and supplies to support the programs.

Establishing a career pathway to agriculture is crucial for the industry, as the population of farmers and ranchers continue to age. The industry has cited shortage of labor and entry into the industry as barriers to growth. This includes labor shortages across the entire supply chain, including production, processing, and transportation. An agricultural science degree at LCC can provide an option for local students to get into the agricultural sector and contribute to their local communities.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this measure. The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council (HCC) is the Statewide umbrella organization comprised of the four county-level Cattlemen's Associations. Ranchers produce a high-quality protein and are the stewards of almost 750 thousand acres of land in Hawaii, or nearly 20% of the State's total land mass. We represent the interests of Hawaii's cattle producers.

Nicole Galase
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council
Managing Director





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February 18, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

TESTIMONY ON SB 2802
RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
1:02 PM

Aloha Chair Kim, Vice-Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

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 2802, which appropriates funds to establish a Bachelor's Degree program in agricultural science at Leeward Community College and to fund positions and supplies to support the programs.

Workforce availability remains one of the most significant challenges facing agriculture in Hawai'i. Farmers and ranchers consistently cite difficulty finding and retaining trained employees with the technical, scientific, and operational skills required for modern agricultural operations. Expanding access to applied agricultural education at the community college level helps address this gap while keeping students in Hawai'i to complete their degrees.

The proposed program supports practical, hands-on learning aligned with Hawai'i's unique agricultural systems and labor needs. By integrating agricultural education within Leeward Community College, SB 2802 creates opportunities for students who may not otherwise pursue four-year degrees, while strengthening the pipeline of future producers, managers, and agricultural professionals. This investment directly supports the development of Hawai'i's agricultural workforce and strengthens long-term career pathways for local students interested in agriculture.

Investments in agricultural education are essential to growing, not just sustaining, agriculture in Hawai'i. Programs like this help advance broader state goals related to local food production, farm-to-school initiatives, economic diversification, and natural resource stewardship.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

SB-2802

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 9:00:30 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Mendelson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Erin Mendelson, and I serve as a special education teacher with over two decades of experience in the Leilehua-Mililani-Waialua complex area.

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the initiative to establish four-year degree programs in Education and Agricultural Science. Expanding these offerings at Leeward Community College is a logical and necessary step, given the college's existing high-quality facilities and the specific workforce demands of our region.

The commute to town to complete a Bachelor's degree at UH Mānoa is often out of reach for residents of Wahiawa and Waialua. By offering these degrees centrally, we can remove barriers to higher education and better address the critical shortage of certified teachers in our schools.

Does this need to be corrected to a Bachelor's of Arts in Education and a Bachelor's of Science in Agricultural Science?

Sincerely,

Erin

SB-2802

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 10:31:43 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 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