



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
March 27, 2026 at 3:01 p.m.

By

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

SCR 139 / SR 131 – REQUESTING THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL TO RECOMMEND TO THE GOVERNOR, FOR INCLUSION IN THE STATE UNIFIED PLAN, A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT ALL PEOPLE OF THE STATE HAVE A PATHWAY TO A CAREER THAT ENABLES THEM TO LEARN, WORK, AND THRIVE IN THE STATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO A VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY VALUES BY 2045.

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

The University of Hawai'i Supports SCR 139 / SR 131 – Requesting The Workforce Development Council To Recommend To The Governor, For Inclusion In The State Unified Plan, A Comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy To Ensure That All People Of The State Have A Pathway To A Career That Enables Them To Learn, Work, And Thrive In The State And Contribute To A Vibrant Local Economy Grounded In Community Values By 2045.

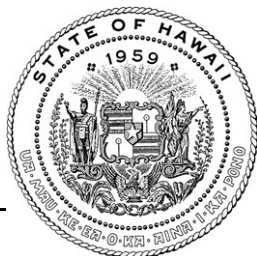
The University of Hawai'i (UH), as a member of the Workforce Development Council, agrees with the intent of the resolution to develop a long-term strategy. No single state entity, including UH, can solve workforce shortages alone. For kama'āina who pursue higher education, outcomes are shaped less by educational preparation than by Hawai'i's labor market and cost of living. Only 43% of the state's four-year college graduates are employed in jobs requiring a degree within five years of graduation, and after accounting for Hawai'i's high cost of living, median wages for these graduates rank among the lowest nationally. As a result, even college-educated workers often cannot access jobs that provide a sustainable living wage in Hawai'i. This mismatch contributes to underemployment, out-migration, and ongoing workforce shortages across both the public and private sectors, including among graduates who wish to remain in the state.

SCR 139 / SR 131 recognizes this sobering reality, and proposes a statewide unified workforce development goal, strategic plan, and metrics for tracking the impact and success of various initiatives over time. Moreover, it explicitly calls for the state to invest in quality career coaching and a robust expansion of the work-based learning ecosystem. National research has long established both of these as the most impactful ways to bridge education and employment, reduce the underemployment rate of college

graduates, and counter brain drain. Indeed, other states' "North Star" workforce development goals have been met through the deliberate alignment of cross-agency efforts, just as the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui, Workforce Development Council, Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i, and others have done over the past 18 months. UH supports codifying the Generational Workforce Commitment in this way, with an organizational structure and embedding it in future State Unified Plans. Together, these provisions provide a mechanism for continuity across planning cycles and administrations, helping to ensure that coordination efforts can build on prior work rather than restart.

In addition to its work with the Workforce Development Council, UH is an active participant in the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui — a community-driven coalition of government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations working together to first develop and now advance Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment. Across multiple analyses and years of shared learning within the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui and beyond, a consistent conclusion has emerged: Hawai'i's workforce challenges are interconnected and long-term in nature, and progress depends on sustained coordination across systems. In order to effectively counter brain drain, address longstanding workforce shortages, and fulfill the fundamental promise of higher education to provide a better life for our graduates, this coordinated strategy will need to expand the work-based learning opportunities available to our students and the number of good jobs graduates can look forward to (especially on the neighbor islands, where there are two well-qualified job seekers for every job that pays a living wage). Both are key goals of the strategy developed through our collaborative process.

Workforce challenges of this scale require time, sustained coordination, and long-term investment. SCR 139 / SR 131 creates the conditions for aligned public and private investment to accumulate over time by establishing shared direction, clarified roles, and durable accountability. For these reasons, the University of Hawai'i supports this resolution, and appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony.



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKĀ'I

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
DIRECTOR

DANE K. WICKER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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Statement of
JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
Director
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY

Friday, March 27, 2026, 3:01 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room #225

In support of
SCR 139 / SR 131

REQUESTING THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL TO RECOMMEND TO THE GOVERNOR, FOR INCLUSION IN THE STATE UNIFIED PLAN, A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT ALL PEOPLE OF THE STATE HAVE A PATHWAY TO A CAREER THAT ENABLES THEM TO LEARN, WORK, AND THRIVE IN THE STATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO A VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY VALUES BY 2045.

Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Committee: The Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT) supports SCR 139 and SR 131, which reinforces the role of the Workforce Development Council (WDC) in advancing a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy aligned with the State Unified Plan.

DBEDT recognizes the importance of coordinated, cross-agency workforce planning to support Hawai'i's long-term economic resilience and diversification. The objectives outlined in this measure are consistent with ongoing efforts already underway through the WDC and partner agencies to align workforce programs with industry needs, education and training pathways, and statewide economic priorities, and reinforce the importance of sustained, long-term coordination across agencies.

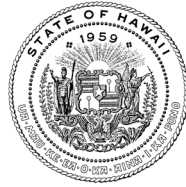
DBEDT also recognizes the value of establishing clear goals and transparent measurement to support continuous improvement of the workforce development system.

As DBEDT currently serves as a participant in the Workforce Development Council, we appreciate the Legislature's continued emphasis on alignment and collaboration across the workforce development system. We believe this measure reinforces the importance of sustaining and strengthening that coordination as workforce needs continue to evolve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

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

March 27, 2026

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

Date: Friday, March 27, 2026
Time: 3:01 p.m.
Place: Conference Room 225, State Capitol

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

Re: S.C.R. 139/S.R. 131 REQUESTING THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL TO RECOMMEND TO THE GOVERNOR, FOR INCLUSION IN THE STATE UNIFIED PLAN, A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT ALL PEOPLE OF THE STATE HAVE A PATHWAY TO A CAREER THAT ENABLES THEM TO LEARN, WORK, AND THRIVE IN THE STATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO A VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY VALUES BY 2045.

The DLIR supports this measure that aligns efforts outside of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) federal regulations and the corresponding State law (HRS Chapter 202). SCR139/SR131 requests that the Workforce Development Council (WDC) request that the Governor include in the Unified State Plan a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy.

20 C.F.R. Part 676 governs the Unified State Plan under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and establishes the framework that states use to carry out the purposes of the Act. WIOA's central purpose is to expand access to and opportunities for employment, education, training, and support services, particularly those with barriers to employment. WIOA prioritizes services for veterans, low-income youth, low-income adults, and dislocated workers. These priority populations receive targeted assistance to help them obtain the skills and support needed to secure and retain meaningful employment.

The Governor must submit a Unified State Plan for the State to receive funding for the six core WIOA programs, which include: the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs authorized under subtitle B of title I of WIOA and administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (U.S.DOL) & DLIR, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) program authorized under title II of WIOA and administered by the U.S.

Department of Education (U.S.DOE) & DOE, the Employment Service program authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933, as amended by WIOA title III and administered by U.S.DOL & DLIR, and the Vocational Rehabilitation program authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA and administered by U.S. DOE & DHS-DVR. These programs collectively form the foundation of the State's WIOA workforce development system and must be addressed within the Unified State Plan.

The Unified State Plan must outline the State's four-year strategy for implementing the core programs and must be developed with the assistance of the State Workforce Development Board (WDC), in coordination with the administrators of each core program. In addition, WIOA requires the State to modify the Unified State Plan no later than two years into the four-year cycle to ensure that the plan remains current, aligned with federal requirements, and responsive to changing economic and workforce conditions.

Key goals of the plan include aligning services across agencies to reduce siloing, prioritizing in-demand industries and occupations, improving access for individuals with barriers to employment, such as low-income populations and people with disabilities; and establishing performance goals and accountability metrics required under WIOA.

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



holomua

COLLABORATIVE

OUR MISSION

To support and advance public policies that make Hawai'i affordable for all working families.

OUR VISION

Collaborative, sustainable, and evidence-based public policies that create a diverse and sustainable Hawai'i economy, an abundance of quality job opportunities, and a future where all working families living in Hawai'i can thrive.

BOARD MEMBERS

Jason Fujimoto
Meli James, *Board Chair*
Micah Kāne
Brandon Kurisu
Brad Nicolai
Mike Pietsch
Sunshine Topping

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Josh Feldman
Brittany Heyd
Alicia Moy
Ed Schultz

Josh Wisch
President & Executive Director

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Page 1 of 2

Committee:

Senate Committee on Labor and Technology

Resolution Numbers:

SCR139 and SR131

REQUESTING THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL TO RECOMMEND TO THE GOVERNOR, FOR INCLUSION IN THE STATE UNIFIED PLAN, A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT ALL PEOPLE OF THE STATE HAVE A PATHWAY TO A CAREER THAT ENABLES THEM TO LEARN, WORK, AND THRIVE IN THE STATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO A VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY VALUES BY 2045.

Hearing Date and Time: March 27, 2026, at 3:01pm (Room 225)

Re:

Testimony of Holomua Collaborative- Support

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Committee Members:

We write in support of SCR139 and SR131. The purpose of these resolutions is to improve workforce development in the state by requesting the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to the Governor and to facilitate alignment of state programs to achieve a unified plan for our local workers.

Holomua supports initiatives that help keep all local working families in Hawai'i by addressing the root causes of our affordability crisis. When our residents cannot find a career that pays a living wage, they are forced to look for a future on the continent. Between July 2024 and July 2025, an average of 11 people left Hawai'i *each day*.¹ More Native Hawaiians now live outside Hawai'i than within it. This is a loss of our culture, traditions, and the essence of what makes Hawai'i home.

Data from the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative highlights the scale of this challenge. Over the next decade, approximately 170,000 young residents are expected to enter the local workforce. However, current projections indicate there will be only about 101,000 job openings that pay a true living wage.² This leaves a deficit of nearly 70,000 quality jobs, meaning over 40 percent of our next generation will enter a market that cannot currently support them staying home.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division Estimates, released January 2026; and calculations by the Hawai'i State Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, Hawai'i State Data Center.

https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/popestimate/2025/state-pop/2025_daily_est_state.pdf

² "From Crisis to Coalition: A 2026 Roadmap for Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment" Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative, January 2026.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/640a4ca03eff8f1ba217a185/t/696fdd6df97fee42439956b2/1768938861257/From+Crisis+to+Coalition+A+2026+Roadmap+for+Hawaii+CA%BBi%E2%80%99s+Generational+Workforce+Commitment.pdf>

The findings from the Holomua Collective 2025 Affordability Survey reinforce this urgency.³ This survey of over 3,200 local residents found that 91% of respondents believe the State needs to do more to recruit and retain critical workforce members. This is a near-unanimous mandate for the kind of strategic alignment proposed in SCR139 and SR131. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of our respondents identified wages as one of the top three factors contributing to the unsustainable cost of living in Hawai'i.

A significant barrier to our current efforts is the awareness gap. Nearly 50% of survey respondents report they are unaware of existing workforce programs. This lack of awareness is most severe among 18 to 34-year-olds, hourly workers, and those in the tourism and recreation sectors. Specifically, 49 percent of hourly workers are not at all aware of these opportunities. Without a comprehensive, aligned strategy, these critical workforce members will continue to fall through the cracks.

The workforce development efforts of the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, the University of Hawai'i, Hawai'i P-20, the Department of Education, the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, countless nonprofit partners, and labor unions have made, and continue to make, meaningful foundational progress in increasing workforce development opportunities for local working residents. But despite the great efforts, the stats show that Hawai'i needs to go further – we need a long-term aligned strategy and goal that can reduce awareness gaps and identify and remove any duplicative efforts. Breaking down silos will ensure that workforce efforts are visible, accessible, and aligned with the high-quality career opportunities our families need.

SCR139 and SR131 are an investment in the promise that our children can stay in Hawai'i. It is about ensuring that local is a status that can be maintained for generations to come, rather than a luxury that few can afford.

We respectfully urge the committee to pass SCR139 and SR131. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Matthew Prellberg
Policy and Communications Director

³ 2025 Hawai'i Affordability Survey. <https://holomuacollective.org/survey-25/>



Testimony in Strong Support of SCR 139 and SR 131

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of SCR 139 and SR 131.

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative, where I serve as Executive Director, and in my role convening the Learn Work Thrive Hui — a community-driven coalition of more than 30 organizations, including government agencies, education and training providers, employer and industry partners, and philanthropic organizations working together to advance Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment.

Hawai'i's workforce challenges are not the result of individual failure or short-term disruption. They are the predictable outcome of longstanding structural conditions that shape whether people can build stable lives here — even when they work, even when they pursue education, and even when they do “everything right.”

Over the next decade, approximately 170,000 young people are expected to enter Hawai'i's workforce, while only about 101,000 projected job openings pay a living wage. Even under strong employment conditions, there are simply not enough jobs that pay enough to support a stable life in Hawai'i.

For those who pursue higher education, outcomes are not reliably better. Only 43% of Hawai'i's four-year college graduates are working in degree-requiring jobs within five years of graduation, and after accounting for Hawai'i's cost of living, median wage outcomes for these graduates are among the weakest in the nation. These patterns drive persistent underemployment and continued out-migration from residents who want to stay and contribute locally.

These realities are even more acute on Hawai'i Island, Kauai'i, Lana'i, Maui, and Moloka'i, where job availability is narrower and advancement opportunities more limited. Geography increasingly determines whether someone can remain and thrive in their home community.

The Generational Workforce Commitment was created in response to this reality. It is a shared, long-term goal to ensure that by 2045, all people of Hawai'i have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawai'i and contribute to a vibrant economy grounded in community values.

This is a unifying framework that aligns education, workforce development, economic strategy, and public & private investment around a common statewide goal — treating workforce alignment as core economic infrastructure.

SCR 139 and SR 131 provide formal legislative alignment behind this shared generational goal and clearly embed the Generational Workforce Commitment within the State Unified Plan framework. By affirming this 2045 horizon, the Legislature strengthens continuity across planning cycles and reinforces long-term coordination across agencies and sectors.

By passing these resolutions, the Legislature would:

- Affirm a long-term generational goal that extends beyond any single administration
- Anchor that goal within Hawai'i's workforce planning framework
- Strengthen continuity across planning cycles
- Provide a durable framework for coordination among agencies and sectors

Hawai'i does not lack programs. It does not lack talent. It does not lack commitment.

What it requires is sustained alignment over time.

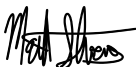
While cross-sector partners are increasingly aligned around this shared goal, durable statewide coordination depends on a stable framework within which agencies and partners can operate. SCR 139 and SR 131 strengthen that framework and reinforce the Workforce Development Council's role in facilitating alignment across planning cycles.

That continuity is essential if we are serious about ensuring that by 2045, all people of Hawai'i have a pathway to learn, work, and thrive here at home.

For these reasons, I strongly support SCR 139 and SR 131 and appreciate your leadership in advancing this work.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,



Matt Stevens
Executive Director
Hawai'i Workforce Funders Collaborative



Statement of
Meli James and Brittany Heyd
Cofounders
Mana Up

SCR139 and SR131

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

We support SCR139 and SR131. These resolutions will improve workforce development in the State by requesting the Workforce Development Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to the Governor and to facilitate alignment of state programs to achieve a unified plan for our local workers.

Mana Up is a statewide initiative that provides entrepreneurs in Hawai'i with the resources and tools to grow their businesses and scale globally. As these entrepreneurs continue to grow, they also contribute to the expansion of our local economy. As part of our mission, we aim to sustain the local economy through economic diversification, local job creation, community giveback, investment, and a regenerative culture of entrepreneurship, providing a better future for generations to come here in Hawai'i.

Our experience working with hundreds of local makers and innovators has shown us that Hawai'i has no shortage of talent, but we do have a shortage of long-term strategy to ensure our talent can find meaningful, well-paying work. Many of our local entrepreneurs struggle to find a workforce to support their businesses. When these positions go unfilled, or when our most creative minds move to the continent to find higher wages, we lose the very fuel that drives economic diversification. These resolutions will provide the "North Star" we need to ensure our workforce development efforts keep pace with the global economy.

By centralizing our strategy through the Workforce Development Council, we can stop the "brain drain" and start a "brain gain." We need to show our keiki and young adults that there is a path to a world-class career right here in Hawai'i. This is an essential step toward building an economy that is resilient, diverse, and capable of supporting our families through 2045 and beyond. Mana Up strongly supports SCR139 and SR131.

Sincerely,

Meli James | Cofounder, Mana Up
Brittany Heyd | Cofounder, Mana Up



**Testimony to
Senate Committee on Labor and Technology
March 27, 2026
3:01pm
Conference Room 225 & VIA videoconference
Hawai'i State Capitol
SCR 139 and SR131**

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

We write in support of SCR139 and SR131, which requests the Workforce Development Council to recommend to the Governor a comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy to be included in the State Unified Plan and be responsible for facilitating the alignment of workforce development efforts and programs conducted by state departments and agencies to achieve the State Unified Plan and the Comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy.

Established in 1904, Hawai'i Gas serves over 70,000 customers on all islands through its utility pipeline infrastructure and propane business, all of whom depend on the company for sustainable, reliable, and affordable gas for water heating, cooking, drying, and other commercial and industrial applications. The company employs approximately 350 professionals, over 75% of whom are covered by collective bargaining.

The stability of our local workforce is directly tied to local families' ability to live and work in Hawai'i, and that ability is tied to access to good-paying jobs in fields that boost Hawai'i's economy.

We know that the key to retention is a combination of fair wages, high-quality benefits, and a clear career trajectory. However, as the cost of living continues to skyrocket, the pressure on our working families is reaching a breaking point. SCR139 and SR131 are critical measures because they would have the state look at workforce development through a strategic, long-term lens.

Currently, a series of government, nonprofit, and labor union efforts provide an impressive network of workforce development initiatives, but these efforts are not coordinated, and the public is not aware of the work being done. We need a unified long-term strategy to ensure a steady pipeline of local talent for our critical utilities and other industries, and to communicate it to the workforce at large. By facilitating better alignment between labor, industry, and the state, passage of these resolutions will help bridge this gap and ensure our essential services are powered by the people of Hawai'i.

We urge you to support SCR139 and SCR131, as they represent an investment in Hawai'i's workforce, infrastructure, and long-term prosperity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



March 27, 2026

Committee: Senate Committee on Labor and Technology
Resolution Number: SCR139/SR131
Hearing Date and Time: March 27, 2026, 3:01pm
Re: Testimony of HPM Building Supply in Support

Dear Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Committee Members:

I would like to submit this testimony in support of SCR139/SR131.

HPM Building Supply is a 100% employee-owned company serving Hawai'i's home improvement market and building industry, operating since 1921. With 18 locations across Hawai'i and Washington State, HPM offers a range of services and products, including retail stores, building supply and lumber yards, home design centers, drafting and design services, and manufacturing facilities. HPM is dedicated to enhancing homes, improving lives, and transforming communities.

As an employee-owned organization, we have a unique vantage point on the workforce. We see every day how the ability to have a stake in a local company can change a family's trajectory, yet we also see how difficult it is to find and retain the skilled talent necessary to build Hawai'i's future. The building industry, like many other industries, is currently facing a workforce shortage. This shortage drives up construction costs and slows the production of the very housing our families need. SCR139/SR131 requests the creation of a long-term strategic plan to provide the framework needed to bridge this gap by aligning education and training with high-quality, well-paid careers.

These resolutions are about more than filling job openings; they are about aligning efforts to create a sustainable ecosystem where local people can build the homes their families will eventually live in. By facilitating a unified plan that includes industry-led partnerships, the State can ensure that our youth are aware of and prepared for stable, well-paying jobs. We believe that a coordinated workforce strategy is a prerequisite for a thriving, affordable Hawai'i. We urge your support for SCR139/SR131

Sincerely,

Jason Fujimoto
Chairman & CEO





TITLE GUARANTY
HAWAII

March 27, 2026

Testimony in support of SCR139 and SR131

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Committee Members,

Title Guaranty of Hawai'i respectfully submits testimony in strong support of SCR139 and SR131.

Title Guaranty of Hawai'i is the oldest and largest title company in the State, but at our core, we remain a locally rooted, family-owned business. Since 1896, we have been owned and operated by a kama'āina family, growing steadily alongside Hawai'i's communities. Today, we employ more than 250 local residents across the islands, many of whom have built long-term careers with our company.

The crisis of out-migration is not just a demographic statistic for us; it is a threat to the stability of our neighborhoods and our local economy. When local families leave, the local housing market becomes increasingly dominated by outside interests, further detaching the islands' land from the people who call it home. SCR139 and SR131 are essential because they address the workforce side of this affordability equation. By ensuring our residents have pathways to careers that pay a true living wage, we give them the financial foundation necessary to secure a mortgage, build equity, and stay in Hawai'i for the long term.

A comprehensive, statewide strategy will allow the State to identify and fix the gaps in our workforce development efforts, and in turn help establish the jobs that our 'ohanas need to survive in Hawai'i. We need a unified roadmap to ensure our children are trained for high-value roles that can sustain a mortgage in today's market. Without this alignment, the barriers to entry for local homeowners will continue to rise.

For these reasons, Title Guaranty of Hawai'i strongly urges the Committee to pass these resolutions and support policies that provide local workers with opportunities to advance their careers and earn higher wages.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.
Sincerely,

Mike B. Pietsch
President and Chief Operating Officer
Title Guaranty of Hawai'i





Testimony in Support of SCR139 and SR131

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

We write in strong support of SCR139 and SR131, which requests the development of a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy and improved alignment across state agencies to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce pipeline.

aio is a locally owned company with holdings across a broad range of industries. Our companies are purpose-driven and firmly rooted in local values. At aio, Hawai'i is at our core, and through our products and services, we work hard to make Hawai'i a better place for future generations.

Hawai'i is facing ongoing workforce challenges that affect businesses, families, and our broader economy. Our employees are our greatest asset, and we want to ensure they have access to meaningful career pathways, skills training, and industry needs so that local residents are prepared for in-demand jobs, and businesses can continue to grow and invest in our communities.

By improving interagency collaboration and establishing a clear, shared direction for workforce development, this measure helps build a more resilient economy that supports local workers and employers alike.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SCR139 and SR131.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brandon Kurisu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brandon Kurisu
aio Family of Companies





info@hawaiikidscan.org
hawaiikidscan.org

March 25, 2026

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

Regarding: **Support for SCR139 / SR131 Relating to Workforce Development**

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

HawaiiKidsCAN strongly supports SCR139 and SR131, which establish a comprehensive, long-term, statewide workforce strategy to ensure that Hawai'i residents can access living-wage careers and thrive in our communities.

Founded in 2017, HawaiiKidsCAN is a local nonprofit organization committed to ensuring that Hawai'i has an excellent and equitable education system that reflects the true voices of our communities and, in turn, has a transformational impact on our children and our state. We strongly believe that all students should have access to an excellent education that becomes the foundation for a sustainable future on our islands, regardless of family income levels and circumstances.

In pursuit of this mission, HawaiiKidsCAN has worked to expand access to work-based learning opportunities, ensure the alignment of secondary education initiatives with workforce needs, and most recently supported the passage of Act 154 (SB742, 2025). Act 154 will build long-term, sustainable data-sharing mechanisms across state agencies, underpinning the long-term vision proposed in SCR139 and SR131.

Hawai'i faces persistent workforce challenges that affect learners, workers, employers, and communities statewide. Even under favorable employment conditions, this gap creates ongoing pressure on workers and families, contributing to underemployment and continued out-migration. These challenges are especially pronounced on the neighbor islands, where access to training, advancement, and living-wage jobs is more limited.

SCR139 and SR131 are designed to build alignment and long-term impact across Hawai'i's workforce ecosystem. By establishing a statewide strategy through the



Workforce Development Council and embedding it in the State Unified Plan, the resolution creates a shared vision that guides education, workforce training, and economic development efforts toward common long-term goals. It also fosters stronger coordination among public agencies, employers, educators, and philanthropic partners, helping ensure that investments and programs work in concert rather than in isolation.

Importantly, this resolution promotes continuity over time, allowing progress to accumulate across planning cycles, leadership transitions, and funding periods. By establishing a durable framework and clarifying roles across state and county agencies, the measure creates the conditions for sustained progress in workforce development. It ensures that public and private investments build upon prior work rather than restart with each planning cycle or administration, enabling long-term alignment across sectors and consistent support for Hawai'i's residents in attaining meaningful, living-wage employment.

For these reasons, HawaiiKidsCAN strongly supports SCR139 and SR131 and respectfully urges the Committee to adopt this resolution.

Mahalo for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erica Nakanishi-Stanis".

Erica Nakanishi-Stanis
Advocacy Director
HawaiiKidsCAN



March 26, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT** of **SCR139/SR131**, REQUESTING THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL TO RECOMMEND TO THE GOVERNOR, FOR INCLUSION IN THE STATE UNIFIED PLAN, A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT ALL PEOPLE OF THE STATE HAVE A PATHWAY TO A CAREER THAT ENABLES THEM TO LEARN, WORK, AND THRIVE IN THE STATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO A VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY VALUES BY 2045.

To: Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair
Senator Rachele Lamosao, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Technology

From: Llasmin Chaîne, LSW, Executive Director, Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SCR139/SR131, REQUESTING THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL TO RECOMMEND TO THE GOVERNOR, FOR INCLUSION IN THE STATE UNIFIED PLAN, A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT ALL PEOPLE OF THE STATE HAVE A PATHWAY TO A CAREER THAT ENABLES THEM TO LEARN, WORK, AND THRIVE IN THE STATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO A VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY VALUES BY 2045.

Hearing: Friday, March 27, 2026, 3:01 p.m.
Conference Room 225, State Capitol

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women **supports SCR139/SR131**, advancing a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy through the Hawaii Workforce Development Council and the State Unified Plan.

As a statewide feminist government body, the Commission is dedicated to promoting equality, equity and inclusion. This bill is significant to our mission **because workforce development policies shape access to economic opportunity, career advancement, and financial security, factors that are critical to achieving gender equity and eliminating barriers faced by women in the workforce.**

A unified and comprehensive workforce strategy has the potential to address persistent disparities, such as occupational segregation, wage gaps, and underrepresentation of women in high-growth sectors. By coordinating statewide efforts, the bill aligns with best practices that emphasize data-driven decision making and inclusive policy development. Ensuring that the perspectives and needs of women and girls are integrated into workforce planning will help create pathways for economic advancement and support the broader goals of equity and inclusion. **Incorporating gender-disaggregated data and targeted strategies** will further strengthen the plan's implementation and evaluation.

We respectfully urge this Committee to **pass SCR139/SR131**, ensuring statewide workforce strategies enable opportunities for everyone to learn, work, and thrive. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.



SENATE COMMITTEES ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY
Friday, March 27, 2026 — 3:01 p.m.
Conference Room 225

The Workforce Development Council strongly supports SCR 139 / SR 131.

Dear Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamusao and Committee Members:

We are Keith DeMello and Tuia'ana Scanlan, members of the State of Hawai'i Workforce Development Council (WDC) delegated with the authority to represent the WDC's legislative policy positions. Pursuant to [HRS Chapter 202](#), the WDC is an advisory commission comprised of both public and private-sector representatives selected by the Governor to serve on the basis of their interest in and knowledge of workforce development programs in Hawai'i and how to support economic development throughout the state.

The WDC **strongly supports SCR 139 / SR 131**, which requests the development of a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy to ensure that all people in Hawai'i have a pathway to a career that enables them to learn, work and thrive, and contribute to a vibrant local economy grounded in community values.

This resolution is closely aligned with the WDC's core responsibilities under the **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**, which charges the State Workforce Development Board to **develop, modify and implement the State Unified Plan**. SCR 139 appropriately reinforces this mandate by calling for a long-term, statewide framework that can be embedded within and guide future iterations of the State Unified Plan.

We note that the vision articulated in this resolution mirrors Hawai'i's **Generational Workforce Commitment** — a shared guiding star — which calls for ensuring that, by 2045, all residents have access to career pathways that allow them to learn, work, thrive and belong in Hawai'i. The emphasis on long-term alignment, measurable outcomes, and coordinated action across sectors reflects the very approach the WDC has been advancing through the State Unified Plan.

The WDC strongly agrees that Hawai'i must move toward a more **coordinated, system-level approach** to workforce development. While significant progress has been made across agencies, education partners, employers, labor, and community-based organizations, efforts are often fragmented. SCR 139 provides an important opportunity to strengthen alignment across these stakeholders and to organize our collective work around shared goals, metrics and outcomes.

The resolution's focus on key areas — including work-based learning, job quality, economic resilience, sector partnerships, and job retention — is both timely and necessary. These priorities are consistent with WIOA's emphasis on career pathways, industry engagement, and performance accountability, and they reflect the realities facing Hawai'i's workforce, including high cost of living, outmigration pressures, and the need to build stronger local talent pipelines.

The WDC also supports the resolution's recognition that data, coordination, and shared accountability are essential to long-term success. As the State Workforce Development Board, the WDC is well positioned to help facilitate this alignment, working in partnership with state agencies, counties, education systems, and the private sector.

In closing, SCR 139 / SR 131 reinforces the direction Hawai'i is already moving toward: one grounded in collaboration, data-informed decision-making, and a long-term commitment to our people and economy.

The Workforce Development Council stands ready to support the Legislature, the Governor, and our partners in advancing this important work through the State Unified Plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith DeMello
Chair, WDC

Tuia'ana Scanlan
Member, WDC

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Labor and Technology
Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair
Senator Lamosao, Vice Chair**

**Friday, March 27, 2026, at 3:01 PM
Conference Room 225 & Videoconference**

RE: SCR139/SR131 REQUESTING THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL TO RECOMMEND TO THE GOVERNOR, FOR INCLUSION IN THE STATE UNIFIED PLAN, A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE STRATEGY TO ENSURE THAT ALL PEOPLE OF THE STATE HAVE A PATHWAY TO A CAREER THAT ENABLES THEM TO LEARN, WORK, AND THRIVE IN THE STATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO A VIBRANT LOCAL ECONOMY GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY VALUES BY 2045.

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

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber respectfully supports SCR139/SR131, which advances the development of a unified, statewide workforce strategy. Over the past decade, Hawaii has made meaningful progress in expanding workforce development initiatives across sectors, institutions, and communities. As these efforts have grown in scale and sophistication, the state is now well-positioned to take the next step—aligning and consolidating these initiatives into a more coordinated and strategic framework.

A unified statewide approach will help ensure that existing investments are deployed as effectively as possible. Greater alignment across programs and stakeholders can reduce unnecessary duplication, streamline service delivery, and improve clarity for both employers and jobseekers. By coordinating around shared goals and metrics, the state can enhance productivity, strengthen outcomes, and maximize the return on workforce investments.

As the lead convener of Sector Partnerships, the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is encouraged that this legislation recognizes the impact of this programming. Sector Partnerships are designed to bring employers, education providers, and community organizations together to address workforce needs collaboratively. This method of coordinated strategy has been highly effective, and the Chamber believes this strategy can provide the State Unified Plan with the structure needed to scale and align statewide workforce development efforts more effectively across industries and regions. The Chamber stands ready to partner with the state and fellow stakeholders in advancing a unified workforce strategy that supports both economic growth and opportunity for Hawai'i's residents. We respectfully urge the Committee to adopt SCR139/SR131.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030

Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.

We respectfully ask to pass SCR139/SR131. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



March 26, 2026

**Testimony in Support of SCR 139 AND SCR 131
Relating to a Comprehensive Statewide Workforce Strategy**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in strong support of SCR 139 and SR 131.

I submit this testimony as a member of the Learn Work Thrive Hui, a cross-sector coalition that brings together government agencies, education and training providers, employers, workforce organizations, and philanthropic partners. Together, we are working to advance Hawai'i's Generational Workforce Commitment.

Hawai'i continues to experience ongoing workforce and economic challenges that impact residents, businesses, and communities statewide. These challenges are not due to a lack of effort or investment; rather, they stem from longstanding structural issues, including slow wage growth, a high cost of living, geographic barriers, and fragmented coordination across systems.

These challenges are reflected in the lived experiences of working families across the state. According to Aloha United Way's ALICE¹ (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data, approximately 40% of households in Hawai'i cannot afford even a basic household survival budget, despite many working full time. This underscores a critical reality: employment alone does not guarantee economic stability, and too many local families continue to struggle to make ends meet.

Looking ahead, projections indicate that approximately 170,000 young people will enter Hawai'i's workforce over the next decade, while only about 101,000 jobs are expected to offer a living wage. This gap places continued strain on local families and employers, even in strong economic conditions.

Research from the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization further highlights that the issue is not solely the high cost of living, but that wages have not kept pace with those costs over time. As a result, many residents experience reduced purchasing power, increased underemployment, and are more likely to leave the state—even when they would prefer to stay.

Through years of collaboration and shared learning, a clear understanding has emerged: Hawai'i's workforce, education, and economic challenges are deeply connected and require long-term, coordinated solutions. Addressing these issues effectively depends on sustained alignment across systems.

The Generational Workforce Commitment reflects this vision. It establishes a statewide goal that by 2045, all people in Hawai'i will have access to pathways that allow them to learn, work, and thrive locally, while contributing to a strong, community-centered economy.



SCR 139 and SR 131 represent an important step toward achieving this goal by calling for the development of a comprehensive, statewide workforce strategy aligned with the State Unified Plan. These resolutions emphasize coordination and long-term planning rather than creating new programs. They also call for measurable progress through reporting on key indicators such as work-based learning opportunities, job quality, underemployment, sector partnerships, and retention.

By doing so, the resolutions recognize workforce development as essential economic infrastructure—one that requires alignment across sectors rather than isolated efforts.

Many stakeholders across Hawai'i are already contributing meaningful work in this space. However, what has been lacking is a consistent framework to connect and sustain these efforts over time. SCR 139 and SR 131 provide that needed structure.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to pass SCR 139 and SR 131.

Thank you for your leadership and thoughtful consideration.

Mahalo,

Michelle Bartell
President & CEO
Aloha United Way

¹ <https://www.auw.org/about/alice-initiative/alice-reports/>