



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Lower & Higher Education
March 15, 2019 at 2:40 p.m.

By
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University of Hawai'i System

SB 457 SD1 – RELATING TO THE PUNA DISTANCE LEARNING CENTER.

Chair Woodson, Vice Chairs Hashem and Perruso, and members of the committee:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports SB 457 SD1 which provides four (4) positions and unspecified funding for a distance learning center in the District of Puna.

There is a critical need to strengthen rural outreach, education and economic development in Puna which is one of the most underserved areas in the state and also the fastest growing district on Hawai'i Island. It would be most feasible and beneficial for the residents of Puna for the Center to be under the University of Hawai'i, with UH Hilo and Hawai'i Community College collaborating and partnering to provide higher education and career options to the people of Hawai'i Island.

Given the geography of Hawai'i Island, Hawai'i Community College is committed to building a “distributed” model of higher education that relies on multiple locations to best serve our community.

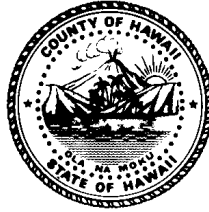
However, a critical missing piece of this plan is the ability to serve the highly populated, geographically remote District of Puna. Establishing an education resource center in Puna would be a tremendous step in establishing an island-wide model of higher education that can help us fulfill our mission to serve “all segments of the Hawai'i Island Community.”

This bill supports the strategic decision to better position Hawai'i Community College as a provider of post-secondary education to the entire island of Hawai'i.

We support SB 457 SD1 on the condition that any requested positions or funds do not supplant any portion of the University's Biennium Budget request.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 457 SD1. Aloha.

Harry Kim
Mayor



Wil Okabe
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March 14, 2019

Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Mark J. Hashem, Vice Chair
Representative Amy A. Perruso, Vice Chair
Committee on Lower and Higher Education

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chairs Hashem and Perruso, and Committee Members:

RE: SB 457, SD1 Relating to the Puna Distance Learning Center

Puna, with a land mass about the size of Oahu, is the largest geographic area in the State of Hawai'i without an institution of higher learning. Its residents, perhaps attracted by the relative affordability of housing, are among the state's lowest income and suffer the highest poverty rates. Much of the district lacks access to reliable, high speed internet, making on-line or web-based learning a challenging hardship, and the long commute to Hilo and its "big city amenities," like the University of Hawai'i at Hilo and Hawai'i Community College, may be prohibitive for reasons of both time and money.

The establishment of a distance learning center within the Puna district would provide essential access to post-secondary education within a reasonable commute distance, thereby enhancing opportunities for students to develop their skills and improve their futures without leaving their home district.

I hope this Committee will act favorably on SB 457, SD1, and also consider including the Center in your priority list for the State budget.

Respectfully Submitted,

Harry Kim
MAYOR