



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 3:00 p.m.

by

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University of Hawai'i System

### HB 1291 HD1 – RELATING TO SCHOLARSHIPS

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

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the intent of House Bill 1291, House Draft 1 (HB1291 HD1). The bill encourages students who previously received special education services to pursue postsecondary education and training by providing access to scholarships at the University of Hawai'i.

The UH encourages all of Hawai'i's residents, including students with disabilities, to pursue education and training beyond high school. Financial assistance is available for students who have disabilities and who enroll in one of the UH's ten campuses. Students who have disabilities have access to need and merit-based scholarships at UH.

HB 1291 HD1 calls UH to award scholarships to high achieving students who have graduated from a public high school in the State and received special education services for two or more years during their enrollment in grades kindergarten through twelve. The bill calls for these students to receive scholarships for both the Hawai'i State Scholars Program, HRS 304A-504, and the Hawai'i Promise Program, HRS 304A-506.

The Hawai'i State Scholars program was established in 2005. As described in HRS 304A-504, the program establishes scholarships for recent Hawai'i high school graduates who are high achieving: valedictorians, 4.0 grade point average or high college admissions test scores. If the legislature elects to make high achieving students who received special education services eligible for this scholarship, we recommend that the criteria be amended, as follows, to facilitate efficient administration to award scholarships to eligible students:

(D) Earned a high school diploma from a public high school in the State with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 as determined for admission to the university if the student provides evidence that they qualified for and received special education services for two or more years during enrollment in grades *nine* through twelve;

Please note that this scholarship is awarded when funds are available. Funds are not currently appropriated for this scholarship.

UH requests that the Hawai'i Promise Program (HRS 304A-506) be removed from the bill. Hawai'i Promise is a "need-based scholarship" which supports all eligible UH Community College students, including students with disabilities, who meet the need-based eligibility criteria. Hawai'i Promise was established to cover the direct "out-of-pocket" costs for all eligible students on the basis of financial need. UH Community Colleges respectfully request that Hawai'i Promise continue to be a need-based scholarship that supports all eligible students. Consistent with the intent of the Hawai'i Promise Program to make college affordable for all students, high achieving students who previously received special education services and have financial need will receive Hawai'i Promise, irrespective of their academic achievement.

In 2019-20, UH Community Colleges awarded Hawai'i Promise scholarships to 1,797 students who had financial need. The average award was \$1,337. Hawai'i Promise scholarship recipients had less student loan debt, earned more credits, earned better grades, were more likely to continue in college and more likely to earn a degree than their peers.

Also, UH Foundation scholarships, established by donors, specifically support students with disabilities:

- Walter Serikawa Memorial Scholarships for part-time students attending any UH Community College who have a disability and for UH Mānoa students, graduate or undergraduate, who are legally blind and/or deaf or hard of hearing,
- Kal Warrington Silvert Scholarships for UH Mānoa undergraduate students who are wheelchair users because of a permanent disability, and
- Masao and Michiko Okasako Scholarships for UH Mānoa undergraduate students and for UH Maui College students who have a documented disability.

UH welcomes the opportunity to support additional scholarships to increase financial support available to students with disabilities, provided that the Legislature funds the additional scholarships.



**S E A C**  
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March 23, 2021

**LATE**

**Special Education  
Advisory Council**

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Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Committee on Higher Education  
State Capitol  
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: HB 1291, HD 1 - RELATING TO SCHOLARSHIPS

Dear Chair Mercado Kim and Members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) **strongly supports** HB 1291, HD 1 which allows special education high school students who graduate with a 3.0 grade point average to apply for scholarship funding through the University of Hawaii State Scholars Program and the Hawaii Community College Promise Program.


Accommodating students with disabilities by creating special education-specific eligibility criteria for these programs is a true example of offering equity while honoring excellence in higher education. As you know, students with disabilities make up about 10% of our public school population. In order to be eligible for special education services, they must show a real need for specially designed instruction in order to benefit from their education. Currently, the majority of these students are significantly underperforming their non-disabled peers on a number of parameters:


- a 45% achievement gap in ELA and a 35% achievement gap in math compared to students without disabilities (SBA 2018-19),
- a 2018 graduation rate of 64% vs. 87% for students with disabilities,
- a 2018 college enrollment rate of 30% vs. 57% for nondisabled peers.

Graduating with a 3.0 grade point average is a considerable achievement given the academic challenges facing students with disabilities. The opportunity to secure a scholarship to one of the UH campuses is both an incentive and a lifeline for students with financial need.

Mahalo for the opportunity to support to this important legislation.

Respectfully,

  
Martha Guinan  
Chair

  
Ivalee Sinclair  
Legislative Committee

**HB-1291-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/21/2021 2:47:11 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/23/2021 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Sean Witwer	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**My name is Sean Witwer. I'm a special education math teacher and have taught at Farrington High School for 22 years. I support HB1291.**

**There's a massive achievement gap between students with and without disabilities in the DOE, as evidenced by their on-time graduation and college going rates.**

**According to the Special Education Take Force Summative Report, the on-time graduation rate for students with disabilities is 59% versus 86% for students without disabilities. The college going rate is only 31% for students with disabilities versus 57% for students without disabilities.**

**This is why I worked with my student, Nicole Dolor-Bala, and Representative Ohno to create HB1291.**

**HB1291 will help to close the achievement gap by providing hope and equitable opportunities for scholarships at UH and the community colleges through the Hawaii Community College Promise Program and I ask you to support it.**

**Thank you**

**HB-1291-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/21/2021 4:47:12 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/23/2021 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Leinaala Kealoha	Testifying for Department of Education	Support	No

Comments:

I support this bill. I am a special education teacher, and am well aware of the inequities my students experience, and this is a way to empower them and provide them with greater opportunities for their future.

**HB-1291-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/21/2021 11:57:57 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/23/2021 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Nicole Dolor-Bala	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Chairman,

My name is Nicole Dolor-Bala, a senior at Farrington High School. In elementary, I felt like a failure for years because of my learning disabilities. At the age of 10, I was diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and anxiety disorder. I have been in the special education program since I was 12.

Although I once struggled with my reading comprehension, scoring in the first percentile, I will now be graduating Summa Cum Laude at Farrington High School. Although I am graduating with honors, I will be the only one in my entire class in special education to reach this goal. In fact, only 51% of students in special education at my school will graduate on time.

There is a massive achievement gap between students in regular education and special education in our public schools. Not only will HB1291 provide hope and financial assistance, it will also provide equal opportunity for special education students to access scholarships.

I worked with my teacher and Representative Ohno to create HB1291. It's important to me and I hope it is to you too.

**HB-1291-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/22/2021 1:20:24 PM

Testimony for HRE on 3/23/2021 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Janet Kim	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**My name is Janet Kim and I serve as the Special Education Recruitment Specialist at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Previous to this position I was a special education teacher for six years at Pearl Harbor Elementary School. My passion lies in uplifting and advocating for our profession and our students.**

**In SY 2019-2020, there were over 17,000 students qualified for special education services in Hawaii public schools. This means at least one out of every ten students are qualified as having a disability and needing specially designed instruction. Unfortunately, in the end, only 31% of students in special education go on to pursue a college degree. I believe longstanding notions of stigma and misconceptions around individuals with disabilities have contributed to this bleak statistic. Almost three-fourths of all students qualifying for special education services fall under three eligibility categories: specific learning disability (44%), other health impairment (17%), and autism (10%). Therefore, the low rate of college-going students with disabilities is especially tragic, knowing these students often have average to superior intelligence and encompass a wealth of skills, knowledge, and admirable character traits often not recognized through standardized measures of educational achievement.**

**The role of a special education teacher is to understand, and then build upon, a student's strengths while providing interventions and support in the areas of need. What many people do not realize is when a child gets referred for special education, it's often accompanied by years and years of struggling in school. Another common misconception is that people sometimes think once a student qualifies for special education, they will always be in special education. On the contrary, the goal of a special education teacher is to make themselves dispensable. When a student develops the skills needed to be successful and independent in their learning, they are then rescinded from special education services. This is an amazing accomplishment and yet there are no award assemblies, certificates of achievement, or any form of recognition given to students who were able to overcome whatever it was that qualified them for special education services in the first place. I believe this bill serves as an opportunity to acknowledge and recognize students who demonstrated persistence through their challenges and have since achieved academic success. As special education teachers, sometimes our first mission is just to revive a**

**student's level of confidence and self-worth so they begin to believe and understand that they are worthy and capable of academic success.**

**To me, the Hawaii State Scholars and Promise Programs recognize the value in providing financial assistance to students from our local communities into pursuing higher education. I believe students with disabilities deserve the opportunity to be empowered, uplifted, and rewarded for their success through these programs. I believe it is necessary to make a targeted and explicit effort in supporting students with disabilities towards pursuing higher education. For too long has there been stigma and misconceptions around students who qualify for special education services. We need to help create awareness in that some people learn differently or need additional support and that these challenges and obstacles do not ultimately define their abilities and potential for their future.**

**Take Amanda Gorman as the most recent example, an incredible poet who delivered her poem at the presidential inauguration. Gorman's love and devotion to poetry stemmed from having a speech impediment as a child and has been diagnosed with auditory processing disorder. HB1291 allows us to cultivate more students with disabilities, like Gorman, right here in Hawaii. Helping them to believe in themselves and giving them the motivation to stay the course and overcome whatever challenges and barriers they face early on. In the end, they need to know that they not only belong in higher education, but that their hard work and perseverance is recognized and rewarded. We hope this bill supports more students with disabilities to be able to afford and pursue higher education, which can then also help counter and destigmatize previous notions around special education and individuals with disabilities.**

**I thank the committee for taking the time to consider such an important initiative.**

**Respectfully,**

**Janet Kim**