A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that an urgent need exists for greater access to mental health services at the University of Hawaii. Nationally, the percentage of teenagers and young adults who report mental distress, depression, and suicidal ideations has increased significantly over the past decade among those aged twenty-six and younger. As anxiety and depression swells among students across the nation, student counseling centers in Hawaii, like their mainland counterparts, are unable to keep up with demand.

Mental health counselors in Hawaii have also noticed that the issues students exhibit are becoming more serious. At the University of Hawaii at Manoa, for instance, anxiety diagnoses have surpassed depression diagnoses, and suicidal ideations have increased in number, according to officials. Despite this situation, students at the University of Hawaii at Manoa are required to wait an average of twenty-three days from their initial call for help to the time that they meet with a licensed
counselor. Furthermore, Leeward community college, whose enrollment is 6,568 students—the highest of any University of Hawaii community college—does not have any psychologists on staff and must refer students to other University of Hawaii campuses.

The International Association of Counseling Services recommends a ratio of one mental health professional for every one thousand to one thousand five hundred students. Only two University of Hawaii campuses—the University of Hawaii at Hilo and Kauai community college—meet this recommended ratio. Most other campuses would require between one and four additional counselors per campus to meet this recommended ratio. The University of Hawaii at Manoa and Leeward community college would each require at least five additional counselors per campus to meet this recommended ratio.

The purpose of this Act is to increase students' access to mental health services across the University of Hawaii system by appropriating funds for additional psychiatrist, psychologist, and counselor positions at all campuses.

SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of $ or so
much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2020–2021 for additional psychiatrist, psychologist, and counselor positions at all campuses of the University of Hawaii system.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the University of Hawaii for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2020.

INTRODUCED BY: 
Report Title:  
UH; Mental Health Services; Appropriation

Description:  
Appropriates funds to increase access to mental health services across the University of Hawaii system.

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