HEADQUARTERS
HAWAIʻI ARMY NATIONAL GUARD
91-1227 ENTERPRISE AVENUE
KAPOLEI, HAWAIʻI 96707-2150

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2138
RELATING TO HAWAI'I NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

BY

COLONEL NATHAN A. TYAU
ACTING CHIEF OF STAFF
HAWAI'I ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

March 11, 2026

Aloha Chair Bellati, Vice-Chair Iwamoto, and members of the committee:

The Department of Defense (DEF) provides written testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB2138**.

This bill proposes to expand the Hawaiʻi National Guard's (HING) current State Tuition Assistance Program (STAP) policy to award up to 50% tuition assistance for graduate degrees for eligible Hawaiʻi National Guard (HING) members. The bill extends tuition assistance for graduate degrees to qualified enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and company-grade officers (Lieutenant through Captain).

There are three key points I would like to highlight for your consideration. First, extending the state tuition bill to include graduate degrees provides resources to professionalize the workforce. Second, competition for talent across the islands among the military services and the civilian sector is severe. This bill ensures the HING can compete, acquire, and retain the best and brightest to respond to emergencies in our communities and to the Nation when called to do so. Lastly, there is enough flexibility and controls within the existing program, which is currently funded at $250,000, to implement this bill without requesting additional funding.

The following background is provided on the existing program. STAP is a critical recruiting and retention tool providing a financial resource to mitigate tuition costs for both Hawaiʻi Army and Air National Guard members. The current STAP reimbursement program covers 100% tuition at University of Hawaiʻi (UH) school system, community colleges and 4-year colleges. HING enrollment for the current Fall semester utilizing State Tuition includes 54 students attending a variety of programs at community colleges, UH Manoa, West Oahu, and UH Hilo. Top bachelor's degrees pursued through STAP include Business Administration, Public Administration and Liberal Arts degrees.

Currently, the Hawai‘i Air National Guard (HIANG) Federal Tuition Assistance is only available to Active Guard Reserve (AGR) and deployed airmen; therefore, STAP is particularly significant for HIANG part-time drilling members. Overall assessment across the country regarding STAP revealed 40 of the 54 States, Territories, and the District of Columbia offer graduate degree tuition assistance. If approved, this bill will align Hawai‘i’s STAP with other state programs nationwide.

We humbly ask for your support of **SB2138** and appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. The point of contact is Colonel Nathan A. Tyau, nathan.a.tyau.mil@army.mil, 808-351-9481.

Sincerely,



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Nathan A. Tyau
Colonel, Hawai‘i Army National Guard
Acting Chief of Staff

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

STEPHEN F. LOGAN
MAJOR GENERAL
ADJUTANT GENERAL
KA 'AKUKANA KENELALA

PHILLIP L. MALLORY III
BRIGADIER GENERAL
DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL
KA HOPE 'AKUKANA KENELALA

STATE OF HAWAI'I
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA
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TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2138
RELATING TO THE HAWAI'I NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

BY

BRIGADIER GENERAL WALTER R. ROSS, JR.
DIRECTOR
JOINT STAFF, HAWAI'I NATIONAL GUARD

March 11, 2026

Aloha Chair Della Au Belatti, Vice-Chair Kim Coco Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brigadier General Walter Ross, Director of the Joint Staff, Hawai'i National Guard, State of Hawai'i, Department of Defense.

I am presenting this testimony in strong **SUPPORT** of SB2138.

This important legislation enables the Adjutant General of Hawai'i to extend critical tuition assistance for graduate degree programs at the University of Hawai'i to qualified enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and company-grade officers (O-1 to O-3) within the Hawai'i National Guard (HING). By investing in these dedicated HING members, the bill seeks to enhance their professional development and career opportunities.

The expansion of the HING State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate-level education provides HING members with essential skills and knowledge necessary for effective leadership, strategic thinking, and mission readiness. The passage of this legislation will strengthen our capacity to attract top talent and retain our current personnel. This commitment to education ensures that the HING continues to cultivate a highly skilled force, prepared to support our communities and defend our nation as needed.

The Hawai'i National Guard, Department of Defense, supports this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Budget.

For these reasons, I humbly ask for your support with this measure.

Brigadier General Walter R. Ross, Jr., walter.r.ross2.mil@army.mil; 808-844-6087

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
ʻŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAIʻI

Legislative Testimony
Hōʻike Manaʻo I Mua O Ka ʻAhaʻōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Public Safety
March 13, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.
By
Debora Halbert
Vice President for Academic Strategy
University of Hawaiʻi System

SB 2138 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawaiʻi supports SB 2138 – Relating to the Hawaii National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program, which would expand the Hawaiʻi National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate degree programs at the University of Hawaiʻi (UH) for eligible members of the Hawaiʻi National Guard.

The University of Hawaiʻi (UH) strongly supports this measure, which aligns with UH's mission as the State's public system of higher education to serve Hawaiʻi's workforce needs, support military-affiliated students, and strengthen the State's long-term human capital.

The expansion to include graduate programs recognizes the increasing educational and professional demands placed on Guard members. Graduate education plays a critical role in preparing Guard members to meet existing and evolving workforce demands. By extending tuition assistance to graduate programs, this bill would support career advancement for Guard members while enhancing their ability to contribute meaningfully to both state and national missions.

This measure also supports workforce retention within Hawaiʻi. Providing Guard members with access to affordable graduate education at UH encourages them to remain in the State, apply their advanced skills locally, and continue serving Hawaiʻi's communities in both military and civilian capacities. In this way, SB 2138 represents a strategic investment in leadership development, public service, and economic resilience.

As the sole provider of public higher education in the State, UH is committed to serving those who serve Hawaiʻi. Expanding the State Tuition Assistance Program to include graduate degrees strengthens UH's long-standing partnership with the Hawaiʻi National Guard and advances shared goals of readiness, resilience, and opportunity.
Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2138.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2138
RELATING TO THE HAWAII NATIONAL GUARD STATE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

House Committee on Public Safety
Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair
Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Friday, March 13, 2026 at 9:00 AM
Conference Room 411 or via Videoconference

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Military Affairs Council ("MAC") supports SB 2138.

The MAC was established in 1985 when the Chamber was appointed by the State to serve as the liaison to the military. The MAC advocates on behalf of Hawaii's military, and is comprised of business leaders, academic institutions, State and County officials, members of the CODEL, community leaders, labor unions and organizations and retired U.S. flag and general officers. The MAC works to support Hawaii's location as a strategic U.S. headquarters in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region which is crucial for U.S. national and homeland security.

Providing tuition assistance for both undergraduate and graduate studies is a cost-effective way to recruit and retain highly skilled service members, enhance leadership development, and ensure a well-educated force that can better support State and federal missions. This bill also strengthens the long-standing partnership between the Department of Defense and the University of Hawai'i by keeping Guard members in-state for their education and careers.

For these reasons, the Hawaii Military Affairs Council respectfully urges passage of SB 2138.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.