

TESTIMONY ON SB3110
RELATING TO THE HAWAI'I NATIONAL GUARD
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

BY
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Aloha Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto and members of the committee:

I am Brigadier General (Ret.) Bruce Oliveira, Director of Civil–Military Programs for the Hawai'i National Guard, State of Hawai'i, Department of Defense.

The Department of Defense (DEF) provides written testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of SB3110.

This bill provides a timely and necessary solution that reflects the continued evolution of the Hawai'i National Guard Youth Challenge Programs. Specifically, it renames the Hawai'i National Guard Youth Challenge Program to the Hawai'i National Guard Civil-Military Program to ensure federal alignment with the United States Department of Defense (DoD).

The DoD Civil-Military Program leverages military training resources in partnership with community organizations to enhance national readiness and expand access to educational and workforce development opportunities for youth, adults, and veterans. Renaming the program ensures national alignment, strengthens oversight, and promotes consistent program standards across jurisdictions. Additionally, this bill formally codifies “**Nā Kula Alaka'i**” (**Leadership Academies**) as the Hawaiian name for the program. This designation was recommended by the National Guard Bureau to establish a culturally appropriate and locally meaningful name.

In 2024, the Youth Challenge Academy in Hilo was restructured into the **Job Challenge Academy**. The Job Challenge Academy provides selected graduates of the Youth Challenge Academy with opportunities to develop vocational skills, earn industry-recognized certifications, and gain access to entry-level employment. Participation in the Job Challenge Program strengthens career pathways, enhances employability, and increases long-term earning potential.

The **STARBASE Academy**, established in 2008, serves the Kea'au community under the Hawai'i National Guard Civil-Military Program. STARBASE exposes youth on the Island of Hawai'i to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning environments, as well as positive civilian and military role models found on Active, Guard, and Reserve installations. Through hands-on instruction and experiential

learning aligned with national standards, the program fosters collaboration, community engagement, and mutual trust.

The **Hawai'i State Approving Agency (SAA)** has also evolved significantly over the decades. Previously housed within the University of Hawai'i system, the agency underwent a pivotal transition in 2021 following the enactment of the Isakson-Roe Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act, which required SAAs to operate independently of state universities to avoid potential conflicts of interest. As a result, the Hawai'i SAA was formally transferred to the State of Hawai'i Department of Defense on October 1, 2021, as part of the Civil-Military Program.

The Hawai'i SAA works with educational and training institutions statewide at various stages of the approval process. These include institutions of higher education offering associate through doctoral degree programs, as well as non-degree institutions providing vocational and certification training in fields such as massage therapy, cybersecurity, esthetics, aviation, and yoga instruction. The approval process is comprehensive and may take several months, particularly for new institutions.

This bill will further improve administrative efficiency by streamlining the processing and tracking of pay and personnel actions and by standardizing hiring procedures once all program positions are consolidated under a single Program ID. These changes will enhance oversight, ensure national alignment, and promote consistent operational standards.

Additionally, the proposal strengthens the integration of military training resources with community partnerships to enhance national readiness and expand access to education and workforce development opportunities for youth, adults, and veterans.

Finally, this Act exempts and excludes positions within the Hawai'i National Guard Youth Challenge Academy, Job Challenge Academy, STARBASE Academy, and Hawai'i State Approving Agency from civil service and collective bargaining requirements. This exemption is necessary to allow the Department of Defense to effectively manage federally imposed wage and personnel constraints established under the Master Youth Cooperative Agreement (MYCA), dated April 24, 2020; the Chief of the National Guard Bureau Manual (CNGBM), dated March 22, 2023; Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1402.05, dated September 11, 2015. The Hawaii Department of Defense respectfully requests that this bill be amended to explicitly include references to the CNGBM and DoDI to ensure full statutory alignment with federal policy.

Recommend to amend 122-44 Youth Challenge Program.

Section 2

- (i) **(The Chief of the National Guard Manual, and Department of Defense Instruction applies to all States which have entered into a cooperative agreement with the National Guard Bureau for the purpose of establishing and operating a National Guard Youth Challenge Program).**

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support of this measure

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of SB3110.

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