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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