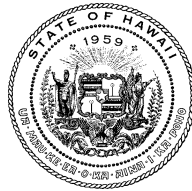


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HAWAI'I WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
BOARD MEETING

Minutes

Date: Wednesday, February 18, 2026

Time: 9:30 am to 12:00 pm

In-Person Meeting Location: Princess Ruth Ke'elikolani Building
830 Punchbowl Street, Room 317
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Agenda: The agenda was posted to the State electronic calendars as required by §92-7(b), Hawai'i Revised Statutes ("HRS")

Board Meeting Materials: Meeting materials are available for review at <https://labor.hawaii.gov/wdc/meeting-docs/>

Attendees:

Members Present:

Rosalee Agas-Yuu, President, Hawaii Nurses' Association, OPEIU, Local 50
Amber Akana, Union Representative, Seafarers International Union of North America
***Jason Benn**, SVP & Chief Transformation and Administrative Officer, Hawaiian Electric Company,
Keith DeMello, Workforce Development Council (WDC) Chair, Senior Vice President of Communication & External Affairs, Ulupono Initiative
Lea Dias, Administrator, Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Division
Dion Dizon, Director, University of Hawai'i (UH) West Oahu Center for Labor Education and Research
Dan Kouchi, Policy Advisor – Office of the Governor, State of Hawai'i
Rosella Guardascione, Chair, Hawaii County Workforce Development Board

Lui Hokoana, Interim Vice President for Community Colleges and Chancellor, UH Maui College
Shelli Ihori, Director, Workforce Development, Hawai'i Pacific Health
Derek Kanehira, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Alexander & Baldwin
Nalani Brun (*Designee-Mayor of Kauai County*), Director, County of Kauai Office of Economic Development

Kehaulani Kukahiko (*Kauai Mayor's Representative to WDC*), Manager of Education and Workforce Development for the Kauai Economic Development Board

Carla Kurokawa, Employment and Training Manager, Alu Like, Inc.

Trang Malone, Manager, Workforce Initiatives, CVS Health

Cary Miyashiro, President, Quad D Solutions

Thomas Chock, (*Designee-Director of Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT)*) Program Specialist

Leslie Wilkins, Chair, Maui County Workforce Development Board; President, Maui Economic Development Board

Rona Fukumoto, President & CEO, Lanakila Pacific

***George Denise**, Director, Project Management, General Contractors Association

Wanelle Kaneshiro (*Designee-Superintendent of Hawai'i Department of Education*), Director, Workforce Development Branch, Hawai'i Department of Education

Jade Rojas-Letisi (*Designee-Mayor of Maui County*), Director, County of Maui Office of Economic Development

Cheryl Cross, Executive Search Consultant, Inkinen Executive Search

Council Members, Excused:

Benson Medina (*Designee-Mayor of Hawai'i County*), Director, County of Hawai'i Department of Research and Development

***Douglas Chang**, General Manager, Turtle Bay Ritz-Carlton O'ahu

Scott Collins, Field Services Officer, MSC/Advocacy, Hawai'i Government Employees Association

Robert Lietzke, Vice President, Indo-Pacific Western Region, Booz Allen Hamilton

Tui Scanlan, President, IATSE Local 665

Lorna Woo, Director of Government Affairs, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, District Council 50

David Rodriguez (*Designee-Director of Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR)*), Equal Opportunity Officer, DLIR

Guests & Staff:

Keala Monaco, (*Designee for Wendy Hensel*), University of Hawai'i (UH) Community Colleges

"Kelly" Jung Yun Ha, Labor Division - Deputy Attorney General

Leanne Yamashiro, Labor Division - Deputy Attorney General

Carey Price, DLIR Office of the Director

Bennette Misalucha, Executive Director (ED), WDC

Jeanne Ohta, Employment Specialist, WDC

Margaret Miura, Program Specialist, WDC

Tyrone Apolinar, Program Specialist, WDC

Jung Yun Ha, Deputy Attorney General, Labor Division, State of Hawai'i

- I. [Video 07:17] Call to Order by **Keith DeMello**, Chair, Workforce Development Council

Chair **DeMello** called the meeting to order at 9:38 a.m. and acknowledged the presence of Vice Chair **Trang Malone**, and Deputy Attorneys General **Lianne Yamashiro** and **Kelly Ha**. Quorum was achieved. 18 members were present at the time of roll call.

- II. [Video 00:10:34] Approval of the Minutes of November 18, 2025 (11:09)

The spelling of Lea “Dias” will be corrected in the Minutes of November 18, 2025. **Dion Dizon** motioned to approve the minutes as amended; **Carla Kurokawa** seconded the motion; the motion was carried unanimously.

- III. [Video 00:13:00] Welcome New Board Members (13:08)

Chair **Keith DeMello** welcomed new board members who will be going through the senate confirmation process this session and will be given the oath of office at the Q3 WDC meeting.

The new members, appointed by Governor Green, are:

- A. **Jason Benn**, Senior Vice President, Chief Transformation & Administrative Officer, Hawaiian Electric
- B. **Douglas Chang**, General Manager, Ritz Carlton, Oahu Turtle Bay
- C. **George Denise**, Director, Project Management Hawaii; Workforce Development Chair, General Contractors Association

Chair **DeMello** also recognized **Robert Lietzke** from Booz Allen Hamilton, who has retired and as such will be stepping down as a board member, and thanked him for his 3 years of service to the Council. (Board Member **Wanelle Kaneshiro** arrived at 9:40 a.m., 19 voting members present)

- IV. Presentation: Federal Funding Matters by **Tim Carlton**, National Governor’s Association, Director of Legislative Affairs

Tim Carlton’s presentation was deferred until the next meeting.

- V. [Video 0:15:04] Presentation: Hele Imua Internship Program by **Maricar Pilotin-Freitas**, Administrator, Workforce Development Division; **Denise Yamaguchi**, Executive Director, Hawaii Agricultural Foundation (HAF) and **Liz Stanton**, HAF

The Hele Imua Internship Program, originally limited to the public sector, was expanded to the private sector. **Maricar Pilotin-Freitas** explained that Act 251, signed into law in 2025, expanded the Hele

Imua Program to the private sector. The Hawaii Agricultural Foundation (HAF) secured \$1.8 million for a 12-week paid internship opportunity, pilot program, to address the workforce demand of the agriculture sector.

[Video 00:16:53] **Liz Stanton** reported that the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations and the Hawaii Agricultural Foundation sent out press releases and sent an announcement to 19,000+ members on the HAF listserv. Applications were available on the HAF website for prospective small farms and interns. Small farms were eligible if they had 5 or fewer full-time employees, Hawaii Compliance Express clearance, and had sufficient insurance to meet State of Hawaii requirements. Interns had to be 18 years of age or older, a current or recent graduate of high school or college and demonstrate an interest in agriculture. 42 farms and 36 interns applied for the program.

Of the 42 farms, 25 were qualified. Of the 36 applicants from the counties of Honolulu, Maui, and Hawaii, 34 met the requirements. Three farms, Deep Dirt Farms from North Hilo, Kumano I Ke Ala at Kukuiloloa from Haleiwa, and Flower Farm Hawaii from Wahiawa, were selected and matched with 3 interns.

The interns engaged in a variety of experiences depending on the assigned farm. With one month remaining, some of the successes noted included the quality mentorship from working farmers and skill-based training received by the interns. The Hawaii Ag Foundation provided administrative support for the small farm partners. Challenges included:

- Intern withdrew early in the program, and administrative paperwork took longer than expected
- Securing applicants to match farm applicants on all islands
- Improve marketing the program across the state.

In response to Chair DeMello's question about the pilot program moving forward, **Denise Yamaguchi** suggested the Department of Labor share the information, get the word out to businesses and future interns, and make the process more efficient.

Councilmember **Dion Dizon**, who has worked directly with a Hele Imua intern, expressed her appreciation to **Maricar Pelotin-Freitas**, the Workforce Development Division (WDD), and the Hele Imua Internship Program staff. She noted that the WDD team was excellent to work with and that the process ran smoothly.

VI. [Video 00:24:39:Presentation: 2024-2028 State Unified Plan Modification

Executive Director **Bennette Misalucha** and the following representatives of the core partners provided information on the Modified Unified Plan:

- Maricar Pilotin-Freitas – Title I & III
- Ryan Mandado – Title II
- Lea Dias – Title IV

The State Unified Plan is a roadmap to align programs, priorities, and investments across the workforce system in the state which is required by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) to receive federal funds. The State Unified Plan sets directions, making sure that workforce efforts are coordinated rather than done in silos. The unified plan guides policy and funding priorities, establishes system designs, and sets expectations for performance.

The role of WDC, as the State Board, is to develop, modify, and implement the State Workforce Plan. Two years into each four-year Unified State Plan, a modification is required to reflect changes in the state's workforce conditions, the economy, and other extenuating circumstances. A timeline of the submission process was presented. The process started in November. Each of the agencies worked together, and at the same time, also within their own work group, produced their assigned portion of the plan.

The Council was asked to approve the Modified State Unified Plan for release for public comment. The public comment period is February 19 to March 23, 2026. A special WDC Board meeting will be held on April 2, 2026, for the board to approve the final draft of the Modified State Unified Plan. The Modified State Unified Plan will then be submitted to the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education and other attendant agencies for approval.

The contributions from all WIOA partners shaped the strategy and this collaboration is essential to make sure workforce challenges are addressed effectively. The Plan being presented today is a shared product of the collaborative work and goals by all state partners.

The workforce strategy launched in 2024 identified four pillars:

- Pillar I: Aligning workforce efforts with economic growth – work
- Pillar II: Strengthening partnerships with education and training – learn
- Pillar III: Removing barriers to employment – thrive
- Pillar IV: Creating system synergy and integration – belong

Over the past two years, through extensive convenings and collaboration, this work culminated in the development of Hawaii's North Star. It was refined into Hawaii's generational commitment. Matt Stevens and Keala Peters shared how this movement grew into a powerful, community-driven effort. The generational commitment was grounded in four core values: learn, work, thrive, and belong. It underscored a shift to placing the community at the center and recognized that this was not a short-term initiative but a long-term effort. Each of the core partners then presented their components of the plan.

[Video 00:32:37] **Maricar Pilotin-Freitas**, WDD Administrator (Workforce Development Division) provided an overview of the key changes in the Plan and highlighted items of importance. She reported that the Division's portion of the Plan covered Title I programs, including Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth services, which primarily served low-income individuals. She noted that dislocated workers were those laid off due to business closures or downsizing.

Services were delivered through the American Job Centers (AJC) using a no-wrong-door approach, allowing participants to be served by functional teams and co-enrolled so that funding from multiple programs could be braided.

She stated that a waiver request was submitted for Kauai so that the State Workforce Development Board could serve as the local workforce board. Memoranda of Understanding had been signed, WDD was providing Title I services, and USDOL had approved the partnership.

She also reported that a waiver was being requested for the Youth Program to remove the 50% cap on In-School Youth expenditures, noting that this change would not affect services for Out-of-School Youth. Additionally, older youth aged 18 to 24 could be served under the Adult Program.

A waiver was also being requested for the On-the-Job Training program to increase employer wage reimbursement from the current 50% up to 90%. She noted that this increase was intended to encourage more employers to hire individuals from the adult and dislocated worker populations.

She emphasized that, although this was not a new policy, veterans and their spouses continued to receive priority of service under the federal grants. She noted that the Jobs for Veterans State Grant helped individuals transitioning from military to civilian life. She also reported that the AJC had dedicated veteran staff available to offer individualized counseling.

She reported that Wagner-Peyser, designated as Title III, functioned as the labor exchange system funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and established in 1933. The program provided equal access for employers and jobseekers to services that supported employment in the workforce.

She highlighted Act 214, signed into law in July, which required the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment program to focus on Unemployment Insurance claimants. Under Act 214, individuals filing for unemployment benefits were automatically registered in the program to support their return to the workforce.

Under Title III, she stated that two waivers were requested. The first would allow flexibility in merit staffing to support quicker hiring and prevent service gaps. The second sought flexibility for the Migrant Seasonal Farmworker (MSFW) program. She explained that regulations required dedicated outreach staff, but there were currently no MSFWs in Hawaii under the program definition; therefore, maintaining dedicated staff would not be beneficial.

She noted that registered apprenticeships continued to be a proven model for supporting sustainable wages. During Program Year 2024, the department served nearly 1,500 apprentices statewide, recorded 480 program completions, and supported over 5,000 active apprentices across industries. The program was expanding into non-traditional fields, including education (Teacher Apprenticeship) and healthcare (Pharmacy Technician), and additional partnerships were needed to ensure continued success. She also reported that virtual reality goggles had been purchased for use at the American Job Centers to allow jobseekers to explore occupations before entering training.

(Jade Rojas-Letisi, designee for Maui Mayor Richard Bissen, arrived at 10:12 a.m., bringing the number of voting members present to 20.)

[Video 00:42:54] **Ryan Mandado**, Program Manager for Title II (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act programs), provided an overview of Title II activities. He explained that Title II funding was administered by the Hawaii Department of Education's Office of Curriculum and Instructional Design, Workforce Development Branch, under the leadership of State Director Dr. Wanelle Kaneshiro-Erdmann. The program operated 10 strategic sites statewide and served a diverse population of more than 3,700 adult learners. While the program's reach was broad, its focus remained on transforming lives through foundational and functional literacy.

He reported that core activities included basic and secondary education for adults seeking to obtain their high school equivalency. English language acquisition courses were offered, serving learners predominantly from the Asia-Pacific region. Educational services were also provided in correctional settings to support individuals preparing for reentry into the community.

Mandado stated that, in the coming years, the program would place strong emphasis on integrated education and training (IET), pairing academic instruction with vocational skill development. Moving forward, the strategy would center on alignment, with a strengthened commitment to ensuring every learner was workforce-ready. Goals included increasing the number of GED and High School Equivalency (HiSET) test-takers, expanding IET offerings, and advancing a model in which learning and earning occurred simultaneously.

He added that the program was actively working to bridge the gap between the classroom and industry through partnerships with local employers, unions, and community organizations. He emphasized that GED and HiSET credentials served as springboards toward earning a living wage and that adult learners were both employable and essential to Hawaii's economy.

[Video 00:45:45] **Lea Dias**, Administrator of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Department of Human Services, explained that Title IV served as a full WIOA Core Partner, accountable for measurable outcomes and aligned with the generational commitment. She stated that DVR's mission was to support competitive integrated employment, offering individuals real

careers and real wages. DVR served both youth and adults with the expectation of independence and full participation in the workforce, emphasizing that its work was long-term and focused on employment outcomes and sustainable wages.

She reported that over the past two years, DVR had concentrated on strengthening the program's foundation. Employment outcomes had more than tripled compared to the previous year, and several long-term vacancies had been filled. Staffing stabilization contributed to performance improvements. She also noted increased efforts in early, rapid, and consistent engagement with participants and partners. The division continued to enhance data accuracy, recognizing that performance transparency-built trust at both the federal and state levels.

Dias stated that DVR had successfully closed several corrective action plans issued by the U.S. Department of Education. The modification plan reflected a stable and accountable program. She expressed interest in continued collaboration with core partners, agencies, and businesses to support initiatives such as summer youth employment, Hele Imua, apprenticeships, and other workforce programs, ensuring that training services led to recognized credentials. Workforce Pell was also incorporated into the modification, and she anticipated that new opportunities would benefit both participants and the state's economy.

She added that DVR was examining career pathways within the agency. The State Plan's Comprehensive System for Personnel Development (CSPD) required a description of recruitment, retention, and staff development strategies. As part of the modification, she proposed revisions to minimum qualifications for DVR positions to make them more attractive while maintaining high standards, with the goal of attracting and retaining strong candidates and providing clear advancement pathways within the agency.

She noted the importance of employer engagement, stating the need for more employer-driven input. She asked what employers required and how work-based learning and sector partnerships could be expanded to ensure individuals with disabilities could compete for job opportunities in growth industries.

She emphasized that Title IV played a critical role in ensuring individuals with disabilities had a permanent place at the workforce table. She reiterated that disability was not a separate workforce issue but one embedded in every sector and integral to all labor market strategies.

[Video 00:56:31] **Chair DeMello** called for a motion for the Board to act on the first draft of the Plan. Council **Vice Chair Trang Malone** moved to ratify the first draft and release it for public comment, to be posted on the WDC website beginning February 19, 2026, and concluding on March 23, 2026. The motion was seconded by **Member Cheryl Cross**.

Chair DeMello recommended proceeding proactively with public comment to gather authentic feedback on the State Plan. After confirming that there were no further discussions, he requested a roll-call vote. The motion passed with 20 aye votes, zero no votes, and no abstentions.

VII. [Video 01:02:29] Presentation: Learn, Work, Thrive Hui - **Matt Stevens**, Hawaii Workforce Funders Collaborative and **Keala Peters**, Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii

Keala Peters provided an update on the Learn, Work, Thrive Hui--a statewide group of stakeholders who met five times over ten months. She and Matt Stevens led the Workforce Synergy Pillar for the Unified State Plan. With guidance from the National Governors Association, stakeholders identified the value of establishing a statewide North Star goal that evolved into a promise, the promise being Hawaii's Generational Workforce Commitment:

By 2045, all people of Hawaii will have a path to a career that enables them to learn, work, and thrive in Hawaii and contribute to a vibrant local economy grounded in community values.

The generational commitment, **Peters** explained, is the umbrella that represents and includes workforce efforts of individual organizations throughout the state of the four main sectors:

- Government & nonprofit organizations
- Employers & industry
- Education & training
- Philanthropic community

Peters and **Matt Stevens** identified the Hui's initial goals or workstreams: (1) the adoption of the Generational Commitment and (2) the daily coordination to strengthen systems, align investments, and deliver results based on that promise.

Stevens further highlighted recent reports from the Hawaii Workforce Funders Collaborative found at <https://www.hawaiiwork.org/reports/from-crisis-to-coalition-2026>. He emphasized the importance of codifying the Generational Commitment to set shared milestones, establishing foundational priorities across education, economic development, and equity, and supporting continued, incremental progress. Twenty organizations provided testimony on HB 1859. The Governor and 30 organizations publicly endorsed the Generational Workforce Commitment.

In addition to supporting upcoming bills on internships, apprenticeships, upskilling, and lifelong learning, **Stevens** encouraged members to refer other organizations interested in joining the Hui.

In closing, **Keala Peters** underscored that the State Unified Plan would be the vehicle to guide the Hui and vice versa. Every four years, as the Plan is updated, it will reflect the input of the Hui and this broad statewide coalition.

(The presence of Cheryl Cross and Chris Lum Lee was acknowledged by Bennette Misalucha, 22 voting members present.)

VIII. [Video 01:2238] Presentation: Holomua Collective - **Joshua Wisch**, Holomua Collective

Joshua Wisch explained that the Holomua Collective, a non-profit, was organized around four years ago with the mission of making sure that all local working families could afford to stay in Hawaii. The Holomua Collective focuses on cost of living, housing, groceries, economic revitalization and workforce development. The organization started so that working families will have a chance to thrive rather than reacting to crisis. Holomua invested a lot of time to bring people from different backgrounds together and convened almost 250 cross-sector leaders from for-profit and non-profit organizations, county and state government, and labor unions in 60 in-person sessions so far, working to build trusting relationships.

It was reported that Holomua had achieved a 40% success rate on its priority bills at the legislature. Much of its work was conducted in person, as this was considered an effective way to build trust. The organization's efforts were grounded in data, including Aloha United Way's ALICE report. The "missing middle" was identified through the annual employee affordability survey, which showed that most respondents were lifelong or long-term Hawai'i residents, nearly all registered voters, and 61% earning more than \$100,000 per year. Despite their earnings, many continued to face challenges. It was also noted that trust in local institutions had declined, with nonprofit organizations being the only sector receiving a net positive rating above 50%.

In 2025, 42% of respondents reported that it was very difficult to save money from their paychecks, an increase from 34% in 2024. These respondents, many earning \$100,000 or more annually, indicated that despite their income, they did not feel financially secure. One of the most striking findings was the "to leave or stay?" question, which showed that about 75% of residents were considering relocating within five years. Those with the financial means were seriously evaluating moves to lower-cost areas, posing a significant potential impact on the state's tax base if they depart.

The survey also asked respondents for their ideas on potential solutions. Their suggestions included establishing a dedicated local housing market, supporting higher-wage jobs, streamlining permitting processes, expanding upskilling and reskilling opportunities, strengthening skill-based employment pathways, promoting entrepreneurship, and improving school-to-job pipelines. These priorities closely align with the focus areas of WDC, demonstrating consistency between what residents say is needed and the work already underway.

Hope for homeownership was reported to be very low, with 67% of respondents indicating they were very or somewhat unhopeful about ever owning a home. **Wisch** also recommended the book *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, which argues that cities with lower rates of unsheltered homelessness are those that have built more housing.

He explained that the generational commitment is important because, despite the many workforce programs available statewide, 45% of respondents reported being unaware of them, highlighting the ongoing need for public education about available resources. He noted that HB 1859, the Generational Commitment Bill, continues to advance and has passed the House Labor Committee. Based on the information gathered, the Holomua Collective has focused primarily on two initiatives: developing a dedicated housing market for local families and expanding economic opportunities by strengthening the workforce development pipeline.

VIII. [Video 01:38:19] Presentation on Workforce Pell - **Bennette Misalucha** (Executive Director, WDC), **Keala Monaco** (UH Community Colleges), and **Judy Oliveira** (UH Finance office)

Designated by the Governor to attend the Workforce Pell Academy, Misalucha, Monaco, and Oliveira were tasked with unpacking/implementing the Workforce Pell. **Bennette Misalucha** continued by saying that while traditional Pell Grants are tied to long-term degrees, associate or bachelor's degrees, Workforce Pell expanded federal grant eligibility to high-quality, short-term training programs (150 to 600 clock hours). Bridging the gap between the traditional academic degree and the urgent training needs of Hawaii's labor market, it does not merely allow for a condensed education and training time frame, Workforce Pell expands the opportunity for individuals to enter a pipeline to high-demand, high-wage careers.

The rationale behind the implementation was to provide Pell-funded certification that carries the same weight as traditional degrees in the eyes of employers. Workforce Pell addressed the following:

- Skills Gap - to meet the increasing demand for skilled workers in various sectors
- Economic Mobility - reducing barriers to education for the underserved populations by providing financial assistance
- Cost Efficiency - lowering the financial barrier for essential credentials that do not require a full degree

The working group outlined a multi-step process for certifying qualifying programs:

1. The working group will determine the criteria for qualifying programs.
2. The University of Hawai'i (UH) will audit existing programs for initial vetting by the working group.
3. Following the working group's recommendations, the State Board will certify eligible programs and submit them to the Governor for endorsement to the U.S. Secretary of Education.
4. The U.S. Secretary of Education will review and verify the State's adherence to federal regulations.
5. Upon receipt of federal validation, programs may begin accepting applicants on or after July 1, 2026.
6. The University will be responsible for compliance, monitoring, and reporting to ensure continued adherence to federal and state standards.

Misalucha reported that the working group is currently at Step 1 of the process. The Workforce Development Council (WDC) is expected to pass a resolution at its meeting on February 18, 2026,

establishing a timeline for implementation of all steps. The next major milestone will be the Board's vote on program criteria and certification at the May 20, 2026, meeting.

It was further acknowledged that the certification of new programs will be ongoing, with recertification scheduled every two years.

Keala Monaco reported that the University of Hawai'i is developing a list of courses that meet the established criteria. She noted that UH has conducted Workforce Pell workshops and asked campuses to identify courses they believe may qualify. She further explained that UH does not anticipate that many courses will meet the required thresholds of 599 hours and 16 weeks, or the minimum of 150 hours over 8 weeks.

[Video 01:49:19] **Carey Price**, Program Specialist with the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, read a statement on behalf of **Jade Butay**, Director of the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. In response to the statement emphasizing the importance of an administering entity capable of managing the complex compliance and audit requirements associated with federal Pell Grants, Executive Director **Misalucha** clarified that the program would not be administered by the Workforce Development Council, but rather by the University of Hawai'i.

Keala Monaco added that the university financial aid offices administer the Pell Grants and Workforce Pell is another layer of financial aid that is offered to students. Council Member **Lui Hokoana** added that the UH administers hundreds of millions of dollars in Pell Grants and regularly conducts compliance audits. UH will work out the details of the Workforce Pell grants to be good partners, meeting the training needs for the State of Hawaii.

Chair De Mello asked for a motion to ratify the WDC Resolution, "Establishing the State Planning and Implementation Framework for the Federal Workforce Pell Grant Program," noting that this is an interim step since the U.S. Department of Education has not yet released the final rules. **Lui Hokoana** motioned to ratify the resolution, **Dion Dizon** seconded the motion.

Chair DeMello asked the staff to conduct the roll call vote. The motion was carried with 20 aye votes, 0 no votes, and 0 abstentions.

X. [Video 02:01:37] Governor's Time - **Dan Kouchi**, Policy Advisor, Designee for Governor Josh Green

Dan Kouchi referenced the Governor's report included in the board packet. He noted that during the Governor's State of the State Address, the Governor highlighted ongoing priorities, including lowering the cost of living, increasing housing, reducing homelessness, strengthening healthcare, and protecting Hawai'i's environment. The Governor also emphasized the need to expand the State's film and tax credits to support local hiring and maintain creative industries, as

well as the importance of diversifying and growing investments in career pathways such as healthcare, conservation, and construction. Additionally, he addressed strengthening public-private partnerships across the healthcare, energy, and education sectors.

Kouchi reported that the Governor has been asked to continue serving as the national president for the Council of State Governments and will also assume the role of incoming chair of the Western Governors Association. As chair, his initiative will focus on expanding access to mental health care. **Kouchi** stated that he will work with the Council to support collaboration on national opportunities related to these priorities.

- XI. [Video 02:05:34] Labor Director's Update – **Carey Price** on behalf of David Rodriguez, Designee for Department of Labor Director Jade Butay

Carey Price from the DLIR Director's Office provided a brief update on the department's legislative priorities. She reported that the Governor's package includes two measures: updating the workers' compensation statute to align with the new automated system and repealing the Hastings Machine Operators Advisory Board (HMLAB) along with the duplicative state crane operator certification requirement.

Price also summarized key points from the January budget briefings regarding federal funding. The department administers multiple workforce development grants, each with distinct target populations and regulatory requirements. Most grants are managed by the Workforce Development Division, apart from WIOA, under which the Workforce Development Council supports the Governor in developing and modifying the state plan and allocating funds to local areas.

She noted that federal grant allocations are influenced significantly by Hawaii's unemployment rate relative to the national average. Workforce funding has faced delays, reductions, and temporary eliminations—such as the suspension and later restoration of CSEP. These uncertainties have complicated planning efforts and require reprioritization of staffing resources.

- XII. [Video 02:08:04] Fiscal Reports: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Grants - **Ariel Nault**, Administrative Services Office and Bennette Misalucha

Ariel Nault presented the WIOA Grant Summary Report as of December 31, 2025, providing an overview of grant balances, expenditures, and projected spending for the current and prior program years. For Program Year 2023, as of June 30, 2025, approximately \$6.9 million had been expended, with \$2.8 million in lapsed funds and \$1.9 million encumbered for high school Ready-to-Work programs.

For Program Year 2024, a similar level of funding was available. As of June 30, 2025, \$6.9 million had been spent, with \$2.8 million projected to lapse by June 30, 2026. Of the remaining funds, \$1.9 million is contracted with the Department of Education for the Ready-to-Work program, and \$822,000 is expected to be obligated in the coming months. **Nault** also noted that Rapid Response funds remain unspent.

Executive Director **Misalucha** added that WDC staff meet with local areas monthly to look over the monthly results, monitor challenges, and share successes. The board is welcome to attend the quarterly Performance Management and Finance Committee meetings for a closer look at the financial report and action being taken.

XIII. [Video: 02:11:44] Certification of the Kauai American Job Center - **Bennette Misalucha**, ED, WDC

Usually, the certification of the American Job Centers is a responsibility of the local workforce boards. Since Kauai doesn't have a local board, the certification rests with the Workforce Development Council (State Board). The certification process was conducted earlier last year; it granted provisional certification with conditions. WDC is asked to ratify the recommendation of the Executive Committee recommendation to extend the certification from January 31, 2026, to May 30, 2026. The extension will allow staff time to work on the corrective action plan.

Chair De Mello asked more a motion to extend the conditional certification of the Kauai American Job Center to May 30, 2026. **Lui Hokoana** made the motion, **Lea Dias** seconded the motion, a roll call vote was taken; the motion carried with 20 aye votes, 0 no votes, and 0 abstentions.

XIV. [Video 02:17:00] Legislative Plans for 2026 Legislative Session - **Keith De Mello**

Chair **De Mello** reported that the Workforce Development Council provided testimony on two legislative measures. The first, HB1859, supports strengthening the Hawai'i Workforce Governance Framework by requiring the Council to recommend a comprehensive statewide workforce strategy for inclusion in the State Unified Plan. This measure continues to advance.

The second measure, HB2383, concerns the Workforce Pell Grant program. The Council offered comments rather than support or opposition, reiterating that implementation planning is underway and noting that federal rulemaking is still in progress. The Council advised caution against incorporating overly prescriptive requirements into state law before additional federal guidance is issued, to ensure continued alignment with forthcoming federal regulations.

To date, two private-sector members (**DeMello** and **Scanlan**) were designated to represent the Workforce Development Council at legislative hearings. **DeMello** proposed that when either designated representative is unavailable, the WDC Executive Director serves as a backup. This

authority does not replace the primary representatives, Sunshine Laws are met, and the Council retains full oversight. Under the proposed resolution, the Executive Director or a designee may testify or respond to legislator questions only when both designated representatives are unavailable.

Chair **DeMello** asked for a motion to approve the resolution authorizing a backup representation by WDC staff for legislative matters as stipulated in Resolution 2026-2. **Dion Dizon** made the motion; **Trang Malone** seconded the motion. After a roll call vote, the motion was carried with 20 aye votes, 0 no votes, and 0 abstentions.

- XV. [Video 02:24:57] Executive Director's Report - **Bennette Misalucha**
Misalucha announced that the United State Secretary of Labor will be attending the Hawaii Internship Summit on March 4.
- XVI. [Video 02:26:02] Acceptance of Written Reports from Core Partners
Chair **DeMello** noted that the written reports are in the Board Meeting Packet.
- XVII. [Video 02:27:04] Acceptance of Written Reports from Local Workforce Development Boards
The written reports are included in the Board Meeting Packet.
- XVIII. [Video 02:27:40] Acceptance of Written Reports from the WDC Standing Committee
The written reports are included in the Board Meeting Packet.
- XIX. Workforce Development Council's Next Meeting
- Leslie Wilkins**, Chair of the Maui Workforce Development Board, announced that applications for the MEDB STEMWorks Innovation Internship are now open at STEMWorkshawaii.org. She noted that the program is seeking both employer hosts and intern applicants, with a goal of placing 150 paid interns statewide this summer.
- Tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, May 20, 2026 at 9:30 am-12 noon. Virtual videoconferencing via Zoom and in-person at 830 Punchbowl Street, Room 317, Honolulu, HI 96813
- XX. Adjournment
Chair De Mello adjourned the meeting at 12:01 p.m.