

# Cover Letter

Abby Bustamante

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## Education

I am planning to either attend the University of Hawaii at Manoa, a 4-year University in Oahu to study psychology, or New Hope Christian College in Eugene, Oregon, a 4-year private institution to study Christian counseling.

## Hawaii State AFL-CIO Essay 2022

Imagine going into work one morning and your boss tells you your position was cut and you're being let go. There's nothing you can do but pack your things and leave. This is what happened to my aunty when the company decided that her position wasn't needed and they lost approximately 60 dedicated employees because they did not have a union. However, with labor unions, workers are able to defend their positions by uniting together and fighting back against big companies that aren't concerned about the wellbeing of their employees.

The labor unions on Oahu fight hard to get justice for their workers and I was able to be a part of that experience back in October 2018. My dad, who works for a Kyoya hotel, went on strike for 52 days to get a contract for better pay. The company fought against their wishes and their workers were struggling to make ends meet. Luckily, because of the Local 5 Union, the union was able to stand up against the company to create a fair contract. Every day for 52 days straight, since October even through Thanksgiving morning, till the end of November, thousands

of hotel workers were marching around Waikiki chanting “one job should be enough.” The commotion and lack of workers displeased tourists and customers who weren’t getting the service they wanted, so eventually, Kyoya had to do something. After days of negotiating, the company and the union finally settled for a fair contract. The importance of the union is reflected here where the unity of the workers allowed them to gain better pay and benefits that overall better the quality of the lives they live.

I was able to march amongst the workers and see them stand up for their survival. Because the cost of living on Oahu is so high, all they wanted was a reasonable contract that would allow them to survive. Out of the six hours a day for 52 days that they marched, I experienced the strike for only a few hours out of one of those days. In those few hours, I experienced tireless chanting in the scorching heat. Not only were they marching when it was also raining, but they had to walk through the rain of ridicule from tourists and passersby who did not know what was really going on. For the workers, it was a difficult time, since August they were working without a contract, added benefits and pay raises and then having to go through a strike where they weren’t making any money for their families. Even though all of that, they put aside their needs as well as coworker drama, and came together for the betterment of the whole Union.

Not only did the workers end up getting a fair contract in the end, but they also ended up with a closer connection to each other. Being able to go through trials like these together has built a stronger sense of community and respect for each other because they were all working towards one goal. Now when I walk through Waikiki past all of the hotels, I will always remember how hard the union fought and the chants of “one job should be enough.”

Wataru 1

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To whom it may concern,

I am currently a senior at Kaiser High School, Class of 2022. I have grown up around the union my whole life, and I have a deep appreciation for the opportunities it offers its members.

After graduating Kaiser, I intend to attend Honolulu Community College where I will study Fire Science. If I am awarded this scholarship, it will be hugely helpful in my pursuit of my education.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Joseph Wataru

Joseph Wataru

4-2-22

### Hawaii State AFL-CIO 2022 Scholarship

The main purpose of a Union is to give workers the power to negotiate for more favorable working conditions and other benefits. Collective bargaining is the heart and soul of the labor union. One of the benefits of the labor union in Hawaii is the economic growth it can offer to the community. Once unionized, workers enjoy a boost in wages and benefits. Unions promote a fairer economy for all workers based on their robust benefit packages. The labor union helps with productivity in the workforce because Union workers tend to be more loyal to the company, more willing to train new hires, and they are often eager to acquire job-specific training that increases the effectiveness of their work. Union members earn more because they are more productive. Labor unions are important and we need them because they raise wages, reduce inequality and help to close pay gaps by getting more people in the process and helping advocate for the positions that the working class supports. Unions play the crucial role of helping to balance power in our economy and democracy. If the state of Hawaii did not have labor unions then there would be lower wages and people would be working a lot harder for a lot less income. Employer contributions to pensions and health care would be a thing of the past.

Growing up in a union household as a child and with a father who was constantly busy, I didn't like whatever he did because at the time. I thought he was simply working at a job that took him away from spending time with me and my brothers. Some mornings when I was younger, I would wake up from the sound of my dad throwing on his big steel toe boots at 5:00AM, and his carabiner and keychain with a seemingly-infinite number of keys on it swaying

from side to side on the belt loop of his blue paint-stained, faded, distressed jeans. I would always wonder to myself where all those keys belong to and what they unlocked. To this day, I still have no idea. Ever since I was a child and I would go out with my dad, there hasn't been a time when my dad wouldn't get stopped by some person I had never seen in my life and start talking up a storm. Even today I see these kinds of random interactions between my dad and some passerby. Some of these people have become recognizable and yet there are still new faces constantly. I used to hate my dad's job for waking him up early in the morning and keeping him out of the house until late in the evening. It made me feel neglected when I was younger because I never could understand the reasoning. I constantly wondered why he was gone for so long. It was always a special time when he would come back home a little early or every once and awhile he would have a day off. Regardless of how I felt when I was younger, that was just a part of life and I know my dad tried his absolute best to spend time with me. Even if he was exhausted after a long day at work he would always make dinner for the family, and he would always help me to learn to cook and he would always help me out whenever I needed. I remember when I played soccer and I had a tournament all the way in Waipio. Sometimes none of my family would come to watch which I didn't really care; I understood it was a lot to ask of them to make that drive at 7:00AM on a Saturday. In the last tournament I played in, I remember my dad standing in the back of his truck, watching my game. I was wondering how he got away from work. Later, I found out he used his last remaining vacation day to come watch me play. At that moment it turned into a core memory for me because I knew what he gave up just to see my game. I always knew his work was a huge responsibility but he still tried and found the time to support me and show love and care for me. When I was young I never understood what he did or even why he did it. I just thought he did it for the money but I couldn't have been more wrong.

As I grew up I slowly started to get an understanding of what it means to have a job. More importantly, I learned what it meant to have a position as important as that of a union leader. He was not just working for himself, or even simply to provide for our family. He was working for the good of hundreds of other people who relied on him to fight for their fair treatment at work. He was never doing anything for himself; he was always working for others and for his loved ones, which I truly admired and respected about him. To me, the importance of the labor union in Hawaii goes beyond the work that goes into fighting for its members. It is the mindset, the lessons you learn, the experiences, the work ethic, the connections, and the bonds you make. I learned that his job is about working for others not because he has to or is forced to, but because it was his truest passion and calling. That is what the union means to be, and it has always inspired me from childhood to now.

# Bryce Oshiro

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Future School	Committed to Portland State University, an undergraduate public research university.

Dear Hawaii AFL-CIO,

Thank you for the opportunity to receive \$1,000 which would be used to help pay for my future education. My family really wants me to go to the mainland for college and so I tried to pick a college that would not be too taxing on my family's financial standing. Although my family may not be financially struggling, I would like to put as little burden on my parents as possible. They have to already pay for my older brother's education and possibly would have to pay for med school if he chooses to apply for it next year. I hope that you will closely consider me for this great opportunity of \$1,000.

Sincerely,

Bryce Oshiro

## The Importance of Labor Unions in Hawaii

Labor unions are one of the most important organizations to ever be created. Labor unions are the organization of workers coming together to form an authority that can change their lives for the better, whether in the workplace or in their daily lives. To understand the importance of labor unions, the history of labor unions must be looked at.

In Hawaii, the birth of labor unions were met with countless hardships. In the mid 1900s, there was a labor shortage in Hawaii's sugar plantations, so around 50,000 Chinese immigrants were brought to Hawaii. ("Labor Organizing Changed the Hawaiian Islands Forever"). The treatment and the pay to the workers was cruel. Workers complained to the plantation owners, but were met with a threat to be easily replaced by more immigrant workers. In the 1880s, immigrants started to come from all over the world. ("Labor Organizing Changed the Hawaiian Islands Forever"). Plantation owners knew the power of unions so they paid different wages to different nationalities and they were segregated into different camps.

In 1909, the first strike towards the unionization of laborers happened when 5,000 Japanese workers, or 70% of the plantation stopped working. This made the owners pay other races more in order to fill the gap in the workforce ("Labor Organizing Changed the Hawaiian Islands Forever"). Eventually, the owners had to pay everyone the same amount in order for the Japanese to come back and continue working. This was the first strike of many that showed the impact a union can make.

In the early 1920s, the economy had become inflated because of World War I, so the organization of Japanese Buddhists held a meeting on the topics of cost of living and wages. In order to get increased pay to counteract the inflation, the workers all across the islands went on strikes and of course got their raise ("Labor Organizing Changed the Hawaiian Islands Forever").



Also the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, which was the most followed group of workers in Hawaii, started a social welfare program to alleviate the worst parts of plantation life. This showed the importance of unions because they help to make social reforms to benefit society and the workers.

In 1946, workers had realized that the more people that came together, the more power the workers will have. The first multi ethnic union called the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) was formed. On August 31, the ILWU went on a strike for 79 days, which crippled the sugar cane industry. During the 79 days, the ILWU had recruited more people and held special events to let everyone have fun (“Labor Organizing Changed the Hawaiian Islands Forever”). This in return made everyone in the union closer and like family. This last strike opened the gate way for social and political change driven by the union in order to help the workers and their families even in today’s world.

Today, the labor unions hold the same core principles of organizing and protecting workers. Union workers often receive more benefits and better wages than non-union workers. It is very important for labor unions to exist and for everyone to join them because it helps to balance the dynamic between employer and employee (“FAQs”).

Some benefits of labor unions are: better terms and conditions, more holidays, higher wages, an easier parent lifestyle, security and stability, equal opportunities, health and safety, retirement, and legal support (Marcus).

In recent years, the labor unions have been more important than ever, with the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic brought the highest unemployment rate in over 50 years. By April 2020, almost 19.5% of adults were unemployed (“Why unions are good for workers—especially in a crisis like COVID-19: 12 policies that would boost worker rights, safety, and wages”). This

period of unemployment exacerbated existing inequalities. Low wage workers have been the least employed due to low wage work usually having more social contact. People of color, women, and asians were less likely to be hired. During this time of need, the union had supported thousands of workers to survive through their hardships.

President Trump's administration had failed to provide essential workers with basic protection and other necessities during the pandemic. The union negotiated with employers and the government to get better pay, health and safety measures, paid sick leave, and job preservation ("Why unions are good for workers—especially in a crisis like COVID-19: 12 policies that would boost worker rights, safety, and wages"). For non-union workers, the pandemic has been rough. They were forced to work without protective equipment and paid leave. Also when they asked for health and safety protection or wage increase they were usually shut down or even fired. However, the non-union workers still needed to work and so there ended up being many more deaths than there should have been. This just goes to show how important it is to have and be a part of unions.

In my life, the union seems like a very helpful organization. My father has been part of the union for almost 45 years now and my two older brothers have also been a part of the union for the last 10 years. My brothers had had very bad grades in high school so I worried how they would fair in the real world. However, my worries were for nothing because their job straight out of high school had paid well and provided many benefits because they were a part of the union. I remember how my brother would brag about getting paid more than his friends that got a degree. I am thankful to the union for providing a place for my brothers and helping countless people better their lives. To me, the union is very important because it not only helps people, it makes a

family. In the future I hope that the union continues to support their workers and make more reforms in the workplace for the better of society.

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