

Pay to Play: A Vicious Cycle

"Let's go, kids! I'm gonna be late to work!" I said as I stumbled out the door into my car. I turned the key in the ignition and sighed as I backed out of my garage. I began to think about all the things I had to do: pay the bills for my student debt, mortgage, electricity, water, car, and somehow manage to put food on the table and provide a good life for my kids. I remembered how my parents had me at the age of nineteen and how they were *still* working to pay off their doctorate degrees, house, and cars. What kind of life was I living where success came with the burden of debt?

Debt is a severe problem within Hawai'i, as it affects people and corrupts visions concerning their pursuit of careers. In Hawai'i especially, seeking high-paying jobs that make generous contributions to society often comes with drawbacks. Today, most jobs require many years of post-secondary schooling. Education costs are so high that people put themselves in more debt attaining a graduate degree than they are able to pay off in the long run. Because of this fear, many people opt to take jobs that require less schooling and as a result, less pay. If education were affordable and could be paid off in a timely manner, our communities would elevate in prosperity and functionality, as well as afford our citizens the ability to live a life that they *truly* deserve to live.

Hawai'i is very dependent on imports, which makes prices on foreign products significantly higher. Fifty years from now, the costs of education and living will be so high that many people will not be able to afford anything. Professions such as those in the medical field would begin to decline within the islands because of an increased debt to income ratio. Hawai'i would begin to lose its economic base and intellectual

infrastructure as debt begins to hinder the pursuit of a higher education. The only people able to afford and pursue these occupations would be those able to pay—the upper class. As of 2014, approximately 11% of Hawai'i's population lives in poverty. In addition to this, the median household income of one family is \$68,201, which is roughly equivalent to one year of college tuition. It becomes clear that with additional costs such as housing, utilities, cars, and a family, the cost of education comes with the price of paying for it for life.

While education prices cannot be stopped, Hawai'i can be the leader in change. The solution to debt in Hawai'i is to begin educating the youth about financial intelligence. This way, they can gain insight as to what can be expected of pursuing an education, and be better prepared for making decisions concerning their future and the future of Hawai'i. Additionally, if a financial forgiveness program is developed, people trying to get a profession aimed towards benefiting the community will be able to get there without expenses getting in the way. By raising awareness and developing a way to absolve the cost of education to ultimately help people, the economy can be boosted, and the islands will be able to inhibit the debt-driven decline of local professionals.

Clarence T.C. Ching's vision is to "dream big and make Hawai'i a better place." He believed that education and hard work were the driving forces that powered success and opportunity for people. His foundation has continuously donated to schools and has provided aid through housing and monetary contributions to low-income citizens. Through generosity and the desire to give back, Ching was able to help Hawai'i as a whole to become a better place by providing funding in an attempt to give people the education

and life they deserve. While debt still exists, The Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation has continued to work to give back to those with the courage to help, as well as provide relief for those who still cannot afford it.

Debt creates a paradoxical situation— people strive to become people that can aid others through their professions, but how are they to do that if they cannot help themselves? By acknowledging this problem, and through infrastructures like the Clarence T.C. Ching Foundation, much can be done to improve the economy of Hawai'i and benefit its people. This way, when I am at that place with my children stumbling out the door into my car, I can turn the ignition and sigh... but this time knowing that I can afford the life I choose to live, *and* give back to the community just as Ching did.