



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committees on Higher Education and  
Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health  
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By

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and

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### SB 735 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII HEALTH CORPS PROGRAM

Chairs Kahele and Baker, Vice Chairs Kidani and Nishihara, and members of the committees:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in **support** of SB 735, which seeks an appropriation to implement and administer the Hawai'i health corps program. The importance of the program is that it provides loan repayment for physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, psychologists and social workers who agree to work in a federally designated professional shortage area or in an area in the state found to be underserved.

Hawai'i has a shortage of over 500 doctors, and almost all other types of primary care and behavioral healthcare workers. Without these healthcare providers, the people of Hawai'i do not have access to the healthcare they need. The shortage is most acute for those on neighbor islands and those with the least resources. One of the fastest and least expensive methods for recruiting providers is loan repayment.

In 2016, 64% of the John A. Burns School of Medicine's (JABSOM) residents and fellows had a current student loan burden. The average student loan indebtedness of our JABSOM MD residents/fellows is \$235,000, with some residents having loans in the \$300,000-600,000 range. These loans, with average minimum monthly payment of \$500, begin repayment while in residency training, in addition to the high cost of living, rent and other living expenses. The high cost of college and medical education results in large student loan debt -- which detracts from physicians choosing primary care specialties and choosing to practice in underserved or rural communities.

If a physician does his or her medical school AND residency (or Graduate Medical Education or GME) training here in Hawai'i, about 80% of them stay in Hawai'i to practice. Having loan repayment options tied to commitments to serve in health professional shortage areas and among underserved populations will help to reduce the healthcare professional shortages in those areas.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.