HB 2162 HD 1: Relating to Rural Health Care

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by

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Mr. Chairman and members of the House Committee on Higher Education, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 2162 HD 1 establishing the Rural Nursing Program within the University of Hawai‘i.

As you know, Hawai‘i has a shortage of registered professional nurses. The consequences for public health and safety are significant, especially in rural areas of the State. We salute your wisdom in responding to the needs of our rural and neighbor island areas. The School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene is equally committed to providing access to health care for rural settings on all islands. Addressing the needs of the rural health community is a priority for the School, and we are involved in several ways.

Beginning in Fall 2005, the PhD in nursing program was redesigned to an on-line format to increase access for applicants in rural and underserved areas, especially the neighbor islands, with the intent to increase PhD-prepared nurses to help address the faculty shortage in these areas. Students from the neighbor islands are represented in this first cohort of students. The program goal is to have at least 30 percent of students enrolled from rural underserved areas and/or minority status.

The School’s advanced practice nursing master’s program uses state-of-the-art distance education technologies allowing student enrollment from the neighbor islands to attend class and complete clinical rotations on their home islands. Interactive television, videoconferencing, and web-based classes are designed to meet the needs of students in the rural and underserved areas.

Also, in 2005, the Quentin Burdick Interdisciplinary Training Rural Health program successfully competed for federal approval and was funded by HRSA. Unfortunately, the effort was zeroed out and as the home of this program, we would welcome an appropriation of $400,000 to continue its success in increasing the number of healthcare providers in rural health communities. By offering a 6 week neighbor island residential community living experience, the program incorporates capacity building into all aspects of the curriculum and produces tangible results that are community-supported, community-based, and designed to increase the capacity of rural communities to address their specific health needs.
health care needs. University of Hawai‘i students from nursing, dental hygiene, medicine, social work, psychology, medical technology, public health and education participate in the program. Of students who completed the program, forty percent are now working in rural health centers on neighbor islands.

Specific to HB 2162, we believe that providing assistance to students is an important part of a multifaceted response to the nursing shortage. This bill provides an incentive and added opportunity for men and women committed to practicing in under-served rural communities to enter the nursing program. The financial security will allow students to decrease the amount of paid work they undertake while in the program. It is anticipated that this program will increase the nursing workforce in rural areas thus improving the quality of health in this state.

We are confident that we can work collaboratively with those that had the vision to draft this bill so it can be successfully implemented. We respectfully suggest that the loan criteria be revised to include eligibility for part-time as well as full-time enrollment. This year, we were able to use our full state appropriation nursing scholars program of $20,000. We also respectfully request that an allocation of $50,000 be provided to continue support and expand the faculty scholars program to include rural health.

The School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is committed to full partnership with the legislature. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to take any questions.