HB 902 HD2 SD1 RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Ige and Members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide comments in support of the intent of this bill to alleviate the shortage of physicians in Hawai‘i, especially those in our rural communities, including the neighbor islands.

HB 902 HD2 SD 1 has been amended to be similar to SB 596, a bill which has already been reviewed by this committee and for which we have already provided testimony.

We continue to support the concept of creating a loan repayment program to encourage new physicians to consider service in underserved areas of the state.

Given the importance of addressing the workforce shortage and the reality of rising tuition costs, such programs are needed to complement our other efforts to expand the physician workforce. Future bills should also seek to address educational support for Nurse Practitioners as well.

We believe support for administration of any such program (to include loan officer staff, administrator, collections personnel, overhead, etc) must be provided along with actual funds for the loans. The School’s overall budget has taken a $6 million reduction during the recession so initiating new programs is truly challenging, especially in light of budgetary uncertainties.

Of critical importance in this legislative session is the support requested for the Hilo Medical Center to initiate plans for the Family practice residency in Hilo. This project is at a critical point where funding for the program leader and residents is essential to complete a project that many, both public and private, have already invested in.

Specific testimony on the financial requirements of this program have been submitted for SB 596. We ask that you support this bill in the same fashion that you did SB 596.
In summary, we support the measure provided that the measure does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University’s Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget.

Mahalo.