



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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by

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INFORMATIONAL BRIEFING ON THE CANCER RESEARCH CENTER OF HAWAII

Chair Tokuda, Chair Chang and Members of the Committees:

Mahalo for the opportunity to share information on the significance of the Cancer Research Center of Hawai'i (CRCH) to the people of Hawai'i, including our recognition as one of only 65 National Cancer Institute (NCI) designated Cancer Centers in the country.

Having worked with four Cancer Research Centers during my career, I have great respect for the life saving advances created by such programs. I have also participated in efforts to secure and renew NCI designation for such centers and recognize that the standards are high and challenging to meet. To earn NCI designation, a cancer center must prove itself capable of making a major contribution to the nation's war on cancer. The designation process typically takes years – and, in the case of our Cancer Research Center, that designation was first awarded in 1996. Our current goal is to renew that designation.

NCI designation is special in that it is, in essence, a stamp of quality as a distinguished cancer-research organization, characterized by scientific excellence and the ability to bring a diversity of research approaches to bear on the problem of cancer. According to the NCI, its designated centers "are the major sources of new knowledge relating to the nature of cancer and of new and more effective approaches to prevention, diagnosis and therapy."

Besides prestige, NCI designation carries with it a renewable Cancer Center Support Grant, which strengthens a cancer center's research infrastructure and provides the financial flexibility necessary for investigators to pursue new scientific opportunities as they arise. In addition, NCI designation increases the opportunities and success of an institution to compete for other federal, State and private research grants. For example, the two recent stimulus grants obtained by our CRCH were only available for competition among the 65 NCI designated centers – and we earned two of the 30 grants available – a high rate of success and great recognition of our program.

Our Cancer Center is at a pivotal point in the renewal of its NCI designation, so our team is moving forward with vigor and making significant progress on the goals needed to qualify which include:

- Recruitment of additional funded investigators to increase its grant funding base and fulfill programmatic requirements for NCI designation.
- Partnering with the community of health care providers in the State of Hawai'i to develop a matrix system of cancer care delivery that will rely on the Cancer Center's strengths in research and utilize the existing clinical facilities in the community.
- Construction of a new, state-of-the-art research facility that will properly support our current faculty and provide additional space to attract the number and quality of researchers required for designation.

I should also mention the return on the investment that the Cancer Center provides – a \$2.7 million dollar investment of general funds helps generate \$30 million in research dollars. Typically 80% of grant funding is spent on employing people who live and spend in our community. In addition, the construction of the new facility will put many different members of our construction industry to work quickly – a welcome opportunity for many of our citizens.

Of course, the major impact of having a cancer center for Hawai'i is to ensure the health and well being of our people. That requires two outcomes:

1. generating new advances to diagnose, treat, cure and prevent cancer and
2. ensuring that the people of Hawai'i have full access to those advances.

Every year, about 6,700 people in Hawai'i are diagnosed with cancer. That means in a typical week more than 100 Hawai'i residents will hear that dreaded diagnosis – I am sure that many of us in this room and our loved ones have faced that challenge. In this case, I speak from experience, because I am a cancer survivor and thriver.

What such centers accomplish is life saving and NCI has high expectations for such centers to provide the following outcomes:

- 1) "Offer patients options for prevention, diagnosis and treatment that may not be available elsewhere;"
- 2) "Benefit patients through better access to the latest therapies and better opportunities to take part in early trials of promising treatments;" and
- 3) "Play an important role in their communities and regions and serve to influence standards of cancer prevention and treatment."

Those are also our expectations and, along with our partners, we are striving to demonstrate those capabilities to NCI and secure our renewal.

In conclusion, I respect the many partnerships enabling the Cancer Center to meet those expectations and I, professionally and personally, thank you for your commitment. I look forward to the day we celebrate the renewal of our designation and opening of the new facility – that will truly fulfill the Native Hawaiian saying, "By working together, we make progress." Mahalo for your partnership in improving the health and well being of the people of Hawai'i.