



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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House Committee on Health
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by

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HB 1119, Relating to Rural Primary Healthcare and Workforce Development in the Short-Term

Chair Green, Vice Chair Mizuno, and members of the Committee:

My name is Gary Ostrander and I currently serve as the Interim Dean of the John A. Burns School of Medicine of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. I wish to express support for the intent of HB 1119 Relating to Rural Primary Healthcare and Workforce Development in the Short-Term.

I am pleased to offer my support for the intent of this measure, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as expressed in our Board of Regents-approved Executive Biennium Budget.

We appreciate the fact that this measure would provide much-needed resources for a critical public health program. However, we must emphasize that there are other needs contained in our UH budget request that deserve consideration as well – and have been affirmed through the review process of our University administrators, Board of Regents, and Governor.

The funds requested in the Biennium Budget are crucial to JABSOM's fulfillment of its mission to train physicians to serve Hawai'i and conduct research to improve the lives of our people. We cannot responsibly advocate proposals that would diminish the amount of resources needed to operate our School and execute its mission.

For the past 14 years the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, Family Medicine Residency Program has been training the primary care work force of our State. Eighty-six percent of program graduates remain and practice in Hawai'i or the Western Pacific, often staffing Community Health Centers and serving in medically underserved areas. The residency training program is jointly sponsored by JABSOM and Wahiawa General Hospital (WGH). The acute financial difficulties faced by WGH recently brought the residency program to the brink of closure.

The residency program is important to the medical school and the people of the State for several reasons:

1. It is the only civilian Family Residency program in the State of Hawai'i making it an important pipeline for primary care physicians.
2. The existing primary care workforce in our state is inadequate and aging leading to health care access problems that has become acute and will likely worsen.
3. The JABSOM mission and accreditation are linked to providing frontline doctors for Hawai'i.
4. Without the clinical teaching provided by the Department of Family Medicine, medical students are unlikely to choose primary care careers.
5. The Department and Family Medicine Residency program have a critical clinical role in serving the inpatient and outpatient needs of Central and Northern Oahu at a time when other services in that region are compromised. This role specifically extends to all patients hospitalized at WGH without a physician.

On behalf of the John A. Burns School of Medicine, I wish to express support for your proposal to provide two years of funding to stabilize the residency program and allow the faculty and department to continue their important clinical, teaching, and service roles. The development of Neighbor Island rural training sites, which is currently in progress, would be compromised by any weakening of the base program on O'ahu. Interruption or cancellation of the existing residency program would have far-reaching effects on the future health of the people of this State.

This is a matter that deserves your serious consideration. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.