



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Health
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HCR 226/HR 193, Requesting the University of Hawaii’s John A. Burns School of Medicine to provide admission preference to students that mirrors the demographics of rural health professional shortage areas of the state to address the shortage of physicians on our neighbor islands.

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

The John A. Burns School of Medicine appreciates the intent of HCR 226 to address the shortage of physicians on our neighbor islands.

However, we must respectfully submit that the resolution, as written, will be difficult to enact. As a student traverses through the higher education system and prepares for medical school, it is unclear at best whether there is any increased likelihood that the student will practice primary care in a rural area, given they were raised in a rural area.

Graduates of medical schools are faced with an ever-increasing educational debt. When faced with poor reimbursement in rural areas and a large educational debt, these graduates often elect a specialty that can be practiced in a more urban setting and that will result in better reimbursement.

It is important that we re-direct this discussion to how we can make rural practice more attractive to John A. Burns School of Medicine graduates. Modifying admission practices to favor students who grew up in rural areas may run afoul of federal discrimination laws. It also may encourage the acceptance of students who may be under-prepared for medical school, simply to fulfill a demographic target.

We respectfully suggest a more meaningful approach to this issue would be the development of a commission that includes hospital administrators, insurance payers, rural practitioners, members of the Hawai‘i Medical Association, medical students, and the John A. Burns School of Medicine leadership. Such a commission would review the barriers to medical students selecting a rural Hawai‘i practice site and propose actions to overcome those barriers. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.