



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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by
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HCR 325/HR 269 – DEVELOPING HAWAII'S NATIONAL DISASTER PREPAREDNESS TRAINING AND CONSULTATION PROGRAM FOR PRIVATE, GOVERNMENTAL, AND NON-PROFIT ENTITIES WITH AN EMPHASIS ON AT-RISK COMMUNITIES.

Chair Evans, Vice Chair Har, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this briefing on the National Disaster Preparedness Training Center at the University of Hawai'i.

As an island state, recent events have reminded us of how vulnerable we are to a myriad of natural hazards. Over the past 4 years, the Governor has issued numerous disaster proclamations including the Mānoa flood in October 2004, the March 2006 flood and Ka Loko dam failure, the October 2006 earthquake, and brush fires on the Big Island and the North Shore of O'ahu. The ability of the general public to prepare for and respond to natural disasters is a key component in our ability to withstand and recover from such events.

As a land, sea, and space grant institution with national and international recognition for its academic and research excellence in the fields of urban planning and earth sciences, the University of Hawai'i has the expertise and research and training programs in the fields of disaster management and related topics to conduct research and develop specific models and tools for monitoring natural hazards and evaluating risk to urban areas. Planning for the response, recovery and reconstruction of communities affected by natural disasters will include a special emphasis on islands and at risk vulnerable populations.

The National Domestic Preparedness Consortium was established by Congressional Mandate in September 1998 (House Conference Report [H.R.2267]) and reconfirmed in Public Law 107-273 in 2001. The original members (Center for Domestic Preparedness, Louisiana State University, Nevada Test Site, New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, and Texas A&M University) of the Consortium addressed counterterrorism preparedness needs of our nation's emergency responders within the context of chemical, biological, radiological, and explosive (Weapons of Mass Destruction [WMD]) hazards. Re-authorized in Homeland Security legislation (H.R.1) in 2007 through FY 2011, the Consortium's mission was expanded to include all hazards, including technological and natural hazards. Two new members were added to the Consortium (Transportation Technology Center, Inc. and the National Disaster Preparedness Training Center at the University of Hawai'i). Within DHS, the Consortium is located within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the National Preparedness Directorate.

On August 3, 2007, President Bush signed H.R. 1 "Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007" which authorized the establishment of the National Disaster Preparedness Training Center (NDPTC) at the University of Hawaii. UH is uniquely positioned to develop and deliver natural disaster preparedness training to governmental, private, and non-profit entities, incorporating urban planning with an emphasis on community preparedness and at-risk populations.

The focus of the NDPTC is on building community resilience to all hazards by developing and providing training to first responders, decision makers, policy analysts, and urban planners. Additionally, we will need to reach key management and administrators in the public and private sectors who are responsible for facilities with high occupancies such as hotels, condominiums, public venues, and schools.

The NDPTC will partner with key federal, state, local and international partners to develop and implement training on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery relevant to the special needs and conditions of Pacific island communities and others at risk from natural and technological hazards. In addition to meeting with the other Consortium members at our quarterly meetings, we have had productive meetings with FEMA's Emergency Management Institute and others within the Department of Homeland Security involved with training and community preparedness, response and recovery. We have also interacted with the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado, Boulder as well as other national and international training and research partners. We have been also working closely with other entities and organizations within Hawaii and the region involved with disaster management. It is evident that the work of the NDPTC will play an important role in addressing needs of both Pacific island communities and also other coastal communities as well as those affected by natural disasters throughout the nation.

The NDPTC will provide training consisting of formal degrees and certificate programs, as well as specialized courses, workshops and conferences; coordinate the sharing of data and information related to disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery; and serve as an incubator for new ideas, technologies, business and partnerships between academia, business and government.

Because the Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (DMHA) certificate program in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning forms the foundation for the NDPTC, there is a critical need to expand the instructional and research capacity of the DMHA program. In addition to transforming existing curriculum so that it is appropriate for our diverse training constituencies, we need to increase the DMHA program to address areas focusing on at-risk populations, community-based emergency planning, and the impact of climate change on coastal communities.