



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
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HB 1949 – RELATING TO THE JOHN A. BURNS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE SPECIAL FUND

Aloha Chair Choy, Vice Chair Ichiyama and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to voice our strong support for House Bill 1949.

Hawai'i has a shortage of over 600 doctors, and almost all other types of primary care and behavioral health providers. Without these healthcare providers, the people of Hawai'i will not have access to the healthcare they need. The need is most acute for those on neighbor islands and those with the least resources in the first place.

The Physician Workforce Assessment program began by legislation in 2010 and has successfully identified the unmet need for physicians across Hawai'i, and also has implemented programs to recruit and retain healthcare providers such as the Ho'okipa Welcome Wagon Program, partnering with the Hawai'i Physician Recruiters to share information on job openings widely, provide continuing education to over 2,000 providers, and begin a State Loan Repayment Program.

Current Status of Loan Repayment

Loan Repayment is the fastest and most cost effective way to recruit providers to areas of need. In 2012, the University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) Area Health Education Center created a state loan repayment program with private donations from HMSA, Queen's and AlohaCare and received a grant for dollar for dollar matching funds from the federal government. **This loan repayment program has provided repayment of up to \$40,000 a year in educational debt for 19 individuals.** The individuals funded are from all the islands except Kaua'i (so far, but we hope to change that). Nine are Advanced Practice Nurse Practitioners (eight FNPs and one Geriatric/Adult NP), nine are physicians (three family physicians, one pediatrician, one psychiatrist, one obstetrician and one internist) and one is a clinical psychologist. The practice locations are primarily community health centers, with two providers working the prison systems and one provider working in a rural nonprofit setting. These providers have all made a two-year commitment to working in underserved areas, and we hope to extend this commitment by continuing this program.

Federal Loan Matching Money Left on the Table

In September 2014, Dr. Kelley Withy at JABSOM received a 4-year grant for \$311,875 a year in federal funds to be spent on loan repayment in Hawai'i for physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, psychologists, social workers and marriage and family counselors who work in non-profit settings in Health Profession Shortage Areas. But the federal funds can ONLY be spent if there is local funding to match it (dollar for dollar).

Dr. Withy has been able to match \$100,000 of the funds. But more than \$200,000 went unused and the federal government decreased the award to \$225,000 a year. HB 1949 will allow JABSOM to continue the research and intervention activities (recruitment, retention, continuing education in the form of the Health Workforce Summit and ECHO distance learning activities), as well as raise the spending cap so that any money appropriated or donated can be used to bring in the dollar-for-dollar match.

Mahalo for your attention to this important issue.