



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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by

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SB 240 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

Chair Tokuda, Chair Green, Vice Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Baker, and members of the Senate Committees on Education and Health, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.

The UH Mānoa Nursing is in support of this bill, SB 240, that provides support to school health aides through training and clinical direction by the Department of Health in consultation with our school.

As stated by Arne Duncan, U.S. Department of Education Secretary, “school health plays an important role in making sure children are healthy and ready to learn”.¹ Today’s public school population is more medically diverse than before with an increased prevalence of chronic conditions and health risks related to poverty among children. These students fall into three categories, medically fragile, special healthcare needs, or special education students. In addition to health issues, schools must cope with problems caused by immigration, homelessness, divorce, remarriage, poverty, substance abuse, and violence.²

As many as 18% of children have a chronic health condition or problem, including attention disorders, Type 1 diabetes, epilepsy or asthma, and may require help with medication or other assistance. Obesity has more than tripled among adolescents in the past 20 years, and 33% of students are obese or overweight, with related mental and physical health issues, including depression and the growing number of Type 2 diabetes cases. The number of children under age 18 with food allergies grew 18% from 1998 to 2008.

A growing body of research demonstrates the impact that school nurses have on improving health and education outcomes. The Milwaukee Public School System experienced impressive gains in health outcomes of children, as well as educational time restored to teachers and other school staff who previously handled health issues when additional RNs were placed in its schools.¹ North Carolina also experienced improvements when their school nurse ratios improved.

Since Hawai'i doesn't employ school nurses, the demand on the health aide role is magnified. Training and education will provide support to health aides and children alike in our school system.

The recognition of this unmet state need can be addressed by moving forward to allocate resources to increase screening, wellness, and nursing services in our schools through health aide training and development of a model to increase access to nursing services in our public schools. UH Mānoa Nursing is pleased to collaborate with the Departments of Health and Education to support quality health services in Hawai'i's schools.

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa supports the intent of the bill provided it does not adversely affect our UH priorities as set in our budget request, most notably in health and safety and repairs and maintenance issues.

References

1. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (August 2010). "Unlocking the Potential of School Nursing: Keeping Children Healthy, In School, and Ready to Learn". *Charting Nursing's Future*. www.rwjf.org
2. Passarelli, C. (1994). School Nursing: Trends for the Future. *J Sch Nurs*, 10:10–20.