



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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House Committee on Finance  
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by

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and on behalf of

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SB 665 SD1 HD1 – Relating to Health

Aloha and thank you for allowing us to testify today. The John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) supports the intent of SB 665 SD1 HD1, which would support our Native Hawaiian Center of Excellence, expand education to train primary care physicians, and fund an educational loan repayment program to attract and retain rural health care providers.

### **Native Hawaiian Health and Primary Care**

To ensure the future health of Hawai'i's people, JABSOM is committed to producing a diverse health care workforce dedicated to meeting the health needs of all people of Hawai'i and the Pacific.

Native Hawaiians continue to suffer high rates of diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and obesity while remaining severely under-represented in all health professions. Only 4% of licensed physicians in Hawai'i are of Native Hawaiian descent, even though 26.2% of the population is of that ancestry. The good news: Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander health care providers are more likely than others to return to serve their home communities and provide services to those populations most in need.

Specifically, SB 665 SD1 HD1 would support the sustainability of the 'Imi Ho'ola Program, a post-baccalaureate, labor-intensive pre-medical school preparatory program for disadvantaged students, and the Native Hawaiian Center of Excellence (NHCOE), which help the medical school produce more primary care providers while simultaneously boosting the numbers of Native Hawaiians in the health professions.

The Native Hawaiian Center of Excellence (NHCOE) creates paths for Native Hawaiian students to succeed in health careers. Through community and educational

collaborations (i.e. Na Pua No'eau-Center for Gifted and Talented Native Hawaiian Children, and Ahahui O Na Kauka-Association of Native Hawaiian Physicians), NHCOE is able to extend its reach annually to over 2,500 students spanning K-12, undergraduate, and post-baccalaureate. NHCOE's Native Hawaiian Student Pathway to Medicine program works with promising Native Hawaiian students to become competitive applicants to health professions schools, such as JABSOM. Due to NHCOE's pipeline efforts, nearly 25% of 'Imi Ho'ōla applicants for the 2013 entering class are Native Hawaiians.

The 'Imi Ho'ōla program, whose students have been generously supported by The Queen's Health Systems, provides educational opportunities to aspiring MDs from disadvantaged backgrounds who demonstrate a commitment to underserved communities of Hawai'i. Students who complete the program automatically earn enrollment in the next JABSOM MD Class. To date, 226 'Imi Ho'ōla alumni have successfully graduated from JABSOM. Of these graduates, 38% are Native Hawaiian, 85% are providing primary care services, and 96% are practicing in underserved and/or disadvantaged populations.

### **Supporting Primary Care Graduate Medical (Post-MD) Education**

SB 665 SD1 HD1 would allow JABSOM's existing Family Medicine Residency-Program to expand faculty and increase its number of training positions.

Residency trainees are newly minted physicians working under our faculty's supervision in order to prepare for their licensure and board certification. They are the closest step in the educational pipeline to the point where they may become full-fledged doctors.

Currently, Hawai'i produces only six board-eligible Family Medicine Physicians per year. A comprehensive approach to address the physician workforce shortage is needed.

A robust primary care workforce is associated with improved population health outcomes and lower overall health care costs. As the Legislature knows by funding JABSOM's Hawai'i Health Workforce Assessment, our State's own physician shortage is worsened by the fact that a large percentage of doctors practicing in Hawai'i are reaching retirement age.

### **Physician and Nurse Practitioner Loan Repayment Program**

The average debt our MD students carry upon graduation is \$104,000. Inspired by the Hawai'i State Legislature's creation of a Hawai'i Health Corps, JABSOM sought private funding and Affordable Care Act monies to launch the unfunded health corps program concept. Through the generosity of HMSA and The Queen's Medical Center, and recently Aloha Care, this year we have begun paying back up to \$40,000 a year in educational debt for two physicians and two nurse practitioners who have committed to serve at least two years in rural centers on O'ahu, Maui and Hawai'i Island. Next year, an additional nine loan repayment contracts will be drawn up. With the Legislature's

support, such as that offered in SB 665 SD1 HD1, we hope to increase the number of loan repayment contracts to 50 a year, which would significantly address the shortage of rural-area health care providers.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.