



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Health
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By

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and

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SB113 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII STATE LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM

Aloha Chair Green, Vice Chair Wakai, and members of the committee:

The University of Hawai'i strongly supports SB113, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget. Compared to the U.S. average, Hawai'i has a shortage of over 800 doctors for its demographics, and almost all other categories of primary and behavioral health care providers. Without these healthcare providers, the people of Hawai'i will not have ready access to the healthcare they need. The need is most acute for those on neighbor islands; and those with the least economic resources. The fastest and most cost effective way to recruit providers to areas of need is by paying back their loans in return for continuous service to that area. Indeed, Hawaii may lose newly trained health care providers to other states with will effective loan payment programs.

In 2012, the John A. Burns School of Medicine's (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 16 individuals. The individuals funded are from all the islands except Kaua'i (a future priority). Nine are Advanced Practice Nurse Practitioners (eight FNP's and one Geriatric/Adult NP) and seven are physicians (two family physicians, two pediatricians, one psychiatrist, one obstetrician and one internist). The practice locations are primarily community health centers, with one provider working at the Hālawā Correctional System and one provider working at a non-profit in a rural area. These providers have all made a two year commitment to working in underserved areas.

In September, 2014, JABSOM's Kelley Withy, MD, PhD, received a four year grant for \$311,875 a year in federal funds to be spent on loan repayment in Hawai'i, but the money can only be spent if there is local funding to match it. Dr. Withy has been able to

raise \$50,000, but no more. Without State funds, \$261,875 of federal money will go unspent despite a severe provider shortage.

Recently the loan program has been expanded beyond physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants to include social workers, psychologists, marriage and family counselors, as needed in more rural regions. This is an important program, and it will end if there is no State funding support. We respectfully request that you pass SB113.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.