UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
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By
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SB 2687 – RELATING TO CANCER

Chair Tokuda, Vice Chair Dela Cruz, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawaiʻi Cancer Center strongly supports this bill.

The UH Cancer Center is one of only 69 institutions in the United States that hold the prestigious National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation, and is the only NCI-designated center in the Pacific. The NCI designation provides cancer researchers in Hawaiʻi with greater access to federal funding and research opportunities, and gives the people of Hawaiʻi and the Pacific region access to many innovative and potentially life-saving clinical trials without the necessity of traveling to the mainland.

This bill will launch a sorely needed public colorectal cancer screening and awareness program. The goal of the program is to increase colon cancer screening rates in Hawaiʻi in conjunction with the "80% by 2018" initiative of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths, killing nearly 60,000 people in the United States and more than 250 people in Hawaiʻi each year. Regular colorectal cancer screening in men and women over age 50 can reduce these deaths by more than 40 percent, with the potential to save 100 lives in Hawaiʻi each year.

Recommended colorectal cancer screening tests include colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, and stool blood tests. Costs for these tests range from $600 for colonoscopy every 10 years to $25 - $30 for annual stool tests. In contrast, the cost of treating colon cancers ranges from $10,000 (early stage disease) to $40,000 (late stage disease) per person. This tremendous cost burden does not consider the debilitating morbidity and loss of productivity associated with colorectal cancer and its treatment.

Currently, approximately 72 percent of United States men and women age 50 and over have been screened for colorectal cancers. Hawaiʻi's screening rates for this group is approximately 64 percent. However, when we look at differences by gender, ethnicity,

location, education, or income, the colorectal cancer screening rates are much lower – often less than 40 percent for people over age 50 in some groups. The UH Cancer Center is currently conducting research designed to improve the uptake of colorectal cancer screening in several key underserved groups, including rural and Native Hawaiian populations, and we are meeting with great success in improving screening rates.

We believe that launching a state-led colorectal cancer screening and awareness campaign will provide the "rising tide that raises all ships" to help improve colorectal cancer screening rates in all at-risk groups, and to help Hawai‘i achieve and perhaps surpass the CDC's goal of having 80 percent of Hawai‘i's men and women over age 50 regularly screened for colorectal cancer by 2018.

We respectfully urge you to pass this bill.