



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

---

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Higher Education & Technology  
Wednesday, February 10, 2021 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Jerris Hedges, MD, Dean

Kelley Withy, MD, Professor, Department of Complementary and Integrative Medicine  
Hawai'i/Pacific Basin Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Director

John A. Burns School of Medicine

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### HB 313 HD1 – RELATING TO PHYSICIAN WORKFORCE ASSESSMENT

Chair Takayama, Vice Chair DeCoite, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in **strong support** of HB 313 HD1, which repeals the spending caps of the workforce assessment fees and authorizes the John A. Burns school of medicine (JABSOM) to utilize the funds to provide loan repayment to physicians who commit to working in medically underserved areas of the State as part of the federally-matched health care provider loan repayment program JABSOM administers as well as provide scholarships to qualifying JABSOM students who commit to practicing in Hawai'i.

Hawai'i faces a critical need for recruitment and retention of physicians to serve rural and medically underserved areas of the State. The shortage of physicians is as high as 1,008 and is compounded by the fact that Hawai'i has the fifth oldest physician workforce of all the states and more than half of the State's physicians will be over age sixty-five within ten years. The physician workforce assessment project has assisted with malpractice reform, provided thousands of hours of continuing education, coordinates the loan repayment program for physicians working in areas of need, advertises all open practitioner positions in Hawai'i to medical graduates, prepares local students for medical school, provides education regarding the physician shortage, and a host of other physician workforce services for all of Hawai'i.

State-matched loan repayment relief to new providers as well as scholarships for medical students who agree to practice in the areas of highest need have great promise. In many cases, the increasingly high cost of education for medical students and their families impacts their future career decisions. High educational debt discourages physicians from entering primary care fields and/or choosing to practice on the neighbor islands or in rural areas of O'ahu where the need is greatest.

Removing the spending caps for this key fund and expanding the use of funding received through the existing physician workforce assessment project will allow JABSOM to optimally match the federal grant monies received for the physician loan

repayment program it administers. Similarly, supplemental scholarship support will reduce educational debt on the front-end for Hawai'i students at JABSOM. Through this two-pronged approach, Hawai'i can act rapidly to build upon tangible solutions to the state's physician workforce shortage.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.