



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Health  
Wednesday, February 12, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

By

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### SB 2392 – RELATING TO HEALTH

Chair Baker, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in **strong support** of SB 2392, which would appropriate funds for 'Imi Ho'ōla student stipends or for other 'Imi Ho'ōla student support programs at the discretion of the Department of Native Hawaiian Health (DNHH) of the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM).

The John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) supports the intent of SB 2392, which would ensure the sustainability of student stipends and other student support for 'Imi Ho'ōla participants. The 'Imi Ho'ōla Post-Baccalaureate Program is a proven diversity pipeline program that provides educational opportunities to disadvantaged students pursuing careers in medicine. Since 1973, 'Imi Ho'ōla (Hawaiian meaning those who seek to heal) has successfully equipped deserving local students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to achieve success in the competitive field of medicine. The literature demonstrates that students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are traditionally underrepresented in medicine are more likely to choose primary care and rural settings in which to practice medicine.<sup>1</sup>

### **Addressing the workforce shortage by producing primary care physicians committed to rural and underserved communities**

JABSOM is committed to producing a diverse health care workforce that addresses the health needs of all people of Hawai'i. The Hawai'i physician shortage has created a gap in current services. When applying the national demand model to the Hawai'i, the state indicates a need for 3,483 total FTEs or a shortage of 509 physicians. However, when island geography and unmet specialty specific needs by county are examined, the estimated unmet need for physicians increases to 820 FTEs with Primary Care experiencing the largest shortage statewide (300 FTEs needed).<sup>2</sup> Growing our local physicians has never been more critical, and efforts to create a robust culturally-competent physician workforce committed to Hawai'i and its people are vital.

The mission of 'Imi Ho'ōla is to improve health care for Hawai'i and the Pacific by increasing the number of physicians through a program that enhances disadvantaged students' academic and professional readiness for medical school. The program accepts up to 12 students per year and

once enrolled, participants gain a conditional acceptance to JABSOM. 'Imi Ho'ōla's success is largely due to the longstanding commitment by the medical school, community supporters, and stakeholders. All 'Imi Ho'ōla faculty positions and operational costs are completely institutionalized within the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM). Student stipends in 'Imi Ho'ōla have been generously supported by the Queen's Health Systems for the past 15 years. The current agreement for support is now in its final year of funding.

To date, 278 'Imi Ho'ōla alumni have successfully graduated from JABSOM. Although 'Imi Ho'ōla is not limited to persons of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander descent, a large number of students from these backgrounds have demonstrated that they are from a disadvantaged background and are deemed eligible for the program. 'Imi Ho'ōla's contributions to Pacific Islander diversity at JABSOM are significant for 38% of all Native Hawaiians, 34% of Filipinos, 57% of Micronesians, and 89% of Samoan students accessing medical school and successfully graduating from JABSOM came through this program.

In a 20 year retrospective study (1996-2016), it was found that 'Imi Ho'ōla produced more MDs that remained in Hawai'i for residency (39% vs. 26%) and chose primary care at higher rates compared to JABSOM graduates who did not go through 'Imi Ho'ōla. When combined, 'Imi Ho'ōla significantly produced more MDs who either chose primary care or residency in Hawai'i when compared to non-'Imi Ho'ōla MDs (72% vs 57%). In the study, factors that predicted choosing a primary care practice were female, 1st generation college students, and a higher science GPA. Factors that predict practicing in underserved communities include underrepresented minority status and a demonstrated commitment to serve.<sup>3</sup>

### **'Imi Ho'ōla's contributions are a rarity across the nation**

Based on data from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR) and the Post Baccalaureate survey conducted in 2017, JABSOM is one of only 45 schools across the nation that have a post-baccalaureate program. Of these schools, only 16 programs consider student groups that are underrepresented in the health professions as a criteria for enrollment and only 6 programs grant admissions to an affiliated medical school upon successful completion. 'Imi Ho'ōla not only strengthens our ability to diversify the workforce here in our island state, but is an exemplar for excellence across our nation.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of this measure, provide that its passage does not impact the priorities set forth in the Board of Regents' Approved Budget.

1. Goodfellow et al., *Predictors of Primary Care Physician Practice Location in Underserved Urban or Rural Areas in the United States: A Systematic Literature Review*. *Academic Medicine*, September 2016.

2. *Annual Report of Findings from the Hawai'i Physician Workforce Assessment Project, Report to the 2020 Legislature, December 2019*.

3. Purdy, C. M. *Evaluation of a Post-Baccalaureate Medical Education Program for Disadvantaged Students to Diversify the Healthcare Workforce of Hawai'i (1996-2016)*. University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2019.