



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Health and
Senate Committee on Higher Education
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By

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SB 2656 – RELATING TO MEDICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Chairs Keohokalole and Kim, Vice Chairs Baker and Kidani, and members of the committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. The John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) **supports SB 2656** which seeks funding to co-recruit key physician educators with the Veterans Affairs (VA) Pacific Islands Healthcare System, provided that its passage does not replace, or impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget. The additional physician educators who would be recruited to Hawai'i would deliver health care for veterans in Hawai'i while supervising medical student and resident training. The physician educators would allow an expansion of graduate medical education (GME) training in partnership with the VA.

Many Hawai'i residents are unable to obtain timely and appropriate health care due to shortages of physicians and other health care providers in the State. These shortages threaten individual health and cumulatively adversely affect the State's health care costs. The State's neighbor islands, which have been designated by the federal government as medically underserved areas, have been disproportionately adversely affected by shortages of physicians in all areas of practice.

Over the last decade, JABSOM has engaged in multiple strategies to increase the number of physicians in Hawaii (and the neighbor islands), including the following:

- Enrolling more students,
- Providing more full-support scholarships for students with educational need,
- Rotating medical students to the neighbor islands for preclinical (up to 12 weeks) rotations,

- Developing longitudinal third-year clinical rotation sites where a small number of students are in the same location (often on a neighbor island) for 5 months,
- Developing a small number of sites for 4-week fourth-year clinical rotations (often on neighbor islands),
- Developing limited residency or fellowship rotations on neighbor islands, and
- Administering the state's loan repayment program that places recipients in underserved communities in exchange for help reducing educational debt.

Based on the most recent data from the Hawai'i physician workforce assessment project, the State has a shortage of 537 full-time equivalent physicians. However, when island geography and unmet specialty-specific needs by county are examined, the estimated unmet need for full-time physicians increases to 732. Primary care, internal medicine, and some specialty physician shortages represent Hawai'i's greatest disciplines of need. Without these physicians, the people of Hawai'i do not have access to the health care they need. JABSOM has shown that eighty percent of graduates who complete their medical school and residency training in the State remain in Hawai'i to practice.

There is a strong existing collaboration between JABSOM and the Veterans Affairs Pacific Islands Healthcare System, which if expanded can complement the JABSOM strategies to increase the number of physicians in Hawai'i. The VA currently invests in Hawai'i-based residency positions under the oversight of JABSOM using VA-controlled funding to employ physician teachers and support residency training. Residents and Fellows in Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Psychiatry, and Geriatrics currently conduct a portion of their training in the VA system. With additional physician teachers, increased federal GME support through the VA GME funding programs will enable JABSOM to expand the number of residency rotations and create new training opportunities in gynecology and several internal medicine subspecialties.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.