



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

---

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Thursday, February 24, 2022 at 10:00 a.m.

By

Jerris Hedges, MD, Dean and  
Lee Buenconsejo-Lum, MD, FAAFP  
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & DIO, UH JABSOM  
John A. Burns School of Medicine

And

Michael Bruno, PhD  
Provost  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### SB 2657 SD1 – RELATING TO MEDICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. The John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) **supports SB 2657 SD1**, which reestablishes the Hawai'i Medical Education special fund, and seeks funding to expand graduate medical education (residency and specialty fellowship training) to the neighbor islands as well as with the Veterans Affairs (VA), provided that its passage does not replace, or impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

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 Hawai'i (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 areas 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.

JABSOM serves as the Sponsoring Institution for the bulk of the civilian residency programs in Hawai'i, ensuring high-quality and accredited resident education programs or Graduate Medical Education (GME). The Hawai'i Island Family Medicine Residency program, sponsored by the Hilo Medical Center, plays a very important role in addressing the rural family physician shortage, but additional resources are needed to expand training, in numerous high-need specialties throughout Hawai'i. JABSOM faculty provide educational program leadership and clinical supervision of about 230 residents and subspecialty fellow trainees in nineteen specialty programs annually. In Hawai'i, GME costs are largely borne by the University of Hawai'i and its affiliated health systems. Some federal dollars have been used by the health systems to cover a portion of the GME training costs. Even pre-COVID, all health systems that support GME have been fiscally constrained and unable to make significant investments in additional GME training positions, especially on the neighbor islands which are most acutely impacted by physician workforce shortages.

In addition, the GME programs sponsored by JABSOM are considered lower priority for new CMS GME positions based on current Federal definitions and regulations. Thus, to expand residency training, especially on the neighbor islands where it is most needed and in several specialty areas, JABSOM needs annual state investment to cover resident and administrative support personnel positions as well as partial salary support for practicing physicians to supervise and evaluate the trainees.

The Hawai'i Medical Education Council (HMEC) is tasked with monitoring the state's graduate medical education (GME) programs, physician residency and fellowship training, and their ability to meet the health care workforce requirements. According to HMEC's 2022 report to the legislature<sup>1</sup>, GME programs, especially those in primary care, geriatrics, psychiatry (adults and children) and addiction serve a high proportion of the state's most vulnerable populations. Yet, there has been a reduction in the overall civilian GME positions offered in Hawai'i from 241 in 2009 to 230 in 2021. Nationally,

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.hawaii.edu/govrel/docs/reports/2022/hrs304a-1704\\_2022\\_hawaii-medical-education-council\\_annual-report\\_508.pdf](https://www.hawaii.edu/govrel/docs/reports/2022/hrs304a-1704_2022_hawaii-medical-education-council_annual-report_508.pdf)

Hawai'i is in the bottom quintile of GME positions per population. Decreased federal and state funding has had a significant impact on the number of available training positions.

Ongoing funding of both undergraduate medical education (medical school) and GME is vital in addressing the physician shortage in Hawai'i. Reestablishing the Hawai'i Medical Education special fund will allow optimal use of state funding to support GME and assure close monitoring by the university and legislature of the specific application of state funds for GME programs, especially those focused on enhancing neighbor island workforce needs.

There is a strong existing collaboration between JABSOM and the VA 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.

With the state's investment, JABSOM will be able to leverage existing partnerships on the neighbor islands as well as with the VA to educate and train more physicians who will care for Hawai'i's residents, during and following their GME training.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.