



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Thursday, February 24, 2022, at 9:30 a.m.

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SB 2882 SD1 – RELATING TO COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

Chairs Baker and Dela Cruz, Vice Chairs Chang and Keith-Agaran, and members of the committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill (SB) 2882 Senate Draft (SD) 1 relating to Community Health Workers. The University of Hawai'i (UH) provides comments.

SB 2882 SD1 would establish the Community Health Worker certification program within the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs. The bill requires that Community Health Workers complete a program at the UH system to be certified, unless they had completed 3,000 hours as a “supervised trained health worker” between 2005 and 2020.

Community Health Worker is an emerging field. Labor market information estimates 390 Hawai'i jobs classified as Community Health Workers with 53 openings in 2020. In 2020, the average wage of Hawai'i's Community Health Workers was \$42,224, slightly below national comparisons, as reported in UH's Career Explorer tool: careerexplorer.hawaii.edu. In Hawai'i, within the last 12 months, employers have posted 32 unique jobs within the Community Health Worker classification (based on the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics categories). Salary range of posted jobs was \$27,498-65,125. The most common job titles posted were Community Liaison, Guest Advocate, Cultural Advisors, Community Health Navigators and Contact Tracers; jobs were posted by healthcare organizations, higher education institutions and retail merchants.

In healthcare, public health and social services fields, Community Health Workers are valued for their strong connection to the communities they serve. They bridge the gap between providers and patients of differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Community Health Workers facilitate access to healthcare and social services for minorities, and improve the cultural competence of services. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the key role of Community Health Workers—in urban and rural communities—in conducting outreach and serving as trusted navigators for underserved individuals and

communities. In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, UH trained more than 100 Community Health Workers to support healthcare outreach to identified high-risk populations, serving as community navigators and working in tandem with the clinical healthcare professionals and contact tracers.

State certification would provide professional recognition for Community Health Workers and establish standard minimum educational requirements for those who are certified. State certification would provide a greater opportunity for Medicaid or Managed Care Organizations to reimburse for services provided by Community Health Workers, as is the case in 25 other states (as of 2020). This would lead to more accessibility of services provided by Community Health Workers and increased compensation for Community Health Workers.

At the UH, we have four campuses offering Community Health Worker courses and/or certificates. UH is committed to continuing our partnership with employers and other stakeholders to align our Community Health Worker programs with needs of the field and for certification. We are especially encouraged by the opportunity for our Community Health Worker students to contribute to improving the health of their communities and to receive greater professional recognition, including compensation, for their education and training.

We encourage the legislature to conduct a sunrise study on licensing or certifying Community Health Workers to further develop plans for certification or licensure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.