



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
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By

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SCR 182/SR 175 – REQUESTING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII TO ESTABLISH CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM TO TRAIN COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS AND TO INCORPORATE DISTANCE-LEARNING FOR NEIGHBOR ISLAND STUDENTS

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 182 and Senate Resolution (SR) 175 relating to Community Health Workers. The University of Hawai'i (UH) provides comments.

SCR 182/SR 175 identifies the importance of community health workers in providing a critical service to connecting disadvantaged populations with health care resources in a culturally appropriate manner. 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. SCR 182/SR 175 requests that UH establish a culturally appropriate curriculum to train community health workers, incorporate distance learning options for neighbor island students interested in the community health worker profession and identify other methods to align community health worker programs with the needs of the communities they serve.

UH has three campuses offering Community Health Worker courses and/or certificates: Kapi'olani Community College, Maui College, and Windward Community College. Over the last 3 years, UH Community Colleges have awarded 119 Certificates of Competence for Community Health Workers, and many other students have taken coursework that is part of the Community Health Worker program.

Through a contract with the Department of Health (DOH), Kapi'olani Community College has trained more than 100 Community Health Workers to address community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kapi'olani program specifically aimed to train Community Health Workers statewide and over 25 percent of those trained under the DOH contract were from the Neighbor Islands: 16 from Hawai'i Island, 11 from Maui County (8 Maui, 2 Lanai, 1 Molokai), and 3 from Kaua'i. These Community Health

Workers support healthcare outreach to identified high-risk populations, serving as community navigators and working in tandem with the clinical healthcare professionals and contact tracers. Many program participants have secured positions in hospital systems, non-profit clinics, and social services, working with the unsheltered, immigrant populations, kupuna, and other priority populations.

Whereas some of the Community Health Worker courses may have been available only in person previously, Kapi'olani Community College, and Maui College are now offering the Community Health Worker courses online, and a student may complete the program online from both colleges. All colleges loan laptops and mobile hotspots for internet access for students who need technology support to participate in online learning.

The Community Health Worker programs, at their core, emphasize cultural sensitivity in training community health workers. All programs were developed with input from community partners and have an advisory board of community partners and practitioners to inform the ongoing review of the curriculum and program effectiveness.

UH is committed to continuing our partnership with employers and other stakeholders to align our Community Health Worker programs with the needs of communities. For example, through the DOH contract, the Kapi'olani Community Health Worker program co-hosted an event with Hawaii Public Health Institute entitled, "Community Health Workers (CHWs): Exploring their Roles and Benefits" on October 26th, 2020 with over 200 participants. This event, and many subsequent meetings and events, sought to educate and collaborate with employers who were interested in employing CHWs and/or hosting them as practicum students.

UH is prepared to share more information about its Community Health Worker programs and are encouraged by the opportunity for our Community Health Worker students to contribute to improving the health of their communities throughout the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.