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In reply, please refer to:
File:

Committee on Health

HB 2567, Relating to Disaster Preparedness

**Testimony of Chiyome Leinaala Fukino, M.D.
Director of Health**

Wednesday, January 30, 2008, 8:00 a.m.

1 **Department's Position:** We appreciate the intent of this measure, provided that its passage does not
2 replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the Executive Supplemental Budget Request. The
3 Department defers to the Department of Defense as the appropriate lead agency for this initiative.
4 **Fiscal Implications:** This measure seeks to appropriate \$2,000,000 to the Department of Health to
5 undertake a study to assess the structural integrity of all hospitals and nursing homes in the State
6 determine the ability of each facility to withstand the likely effects of category one through five
7 hurricanes and earthquakes as strong as magnitude 8.5.
8 **Purpose and Justification:** The recent hurricanes in the Gulf Coast and the earthquake that shook
9 Hawaii have directed our attention to the challenges of protecting our vulnerable populations. As state
10 and county civil defense and emergency management agencies are the lead agencies for disaster
11 preparedness planning, we feel that it would be more appropriate for the Department of Defense to
12 address the relative merit of this measure and to be the agency to which questions regarding its potential
13 implementation are directed. The Department of Health will nevertheless gladly collaborate with the
14 Department of Defense toward ensuring the health of the vulnerable population that will depend on the
15 structural integrity of hospitals and nursing homes. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Rep. Josh Green, M.D., Chair

Conference Room 329
Wednesday, January 30, 2008 at 8:00 a.m.

Testimony in support of HB 2567.

I am Rich Meiers, President and CEO of the Healthcare Association of Hawaii, which represents the entire spectrum of health care, including acute care hospitals, two-thirds of the long term care beds in Hawaii, as well as home care and hospice providers. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of HB 2567, which appropriates funds to assess the structural integrity of hospitals and nursing homes to determine their ability to withstand natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes.

The Healthcare Association was able to directly observe the destructive effects of Hurricane Katrina. One of its staff, the leader of the Hawaii Disaster Medical Assistance Team, went to Louisiana immediately after the hurricane to provide health care to those in need. During the course of its work, the team observed the overall damage, paying particular attention to health care facilities. It became apparent that smaller residential health care facilities in particular were not constructed to withstand strong winds.

In Hawaii, recent discussions with nursing home executives revealed that they were uncertain whether their facilities could resist the effects of a hurricane. Most felt that they would be compelled to evacuate their residents because of this uncertainty. However, the capacity of emergency shelters that are specially designed for nursing home residents is not sufficient to accommodate them. The optimal alternative is to "shelter in place" nursing home residents. However, this alternative requires confidence in the structural integrity of nursing homes.

Hawaii experienced a strong earthquake on October 15, 2006 that caused structural damages to houses and buildings. It was fortunate that the quake was not more severe. The quake reminded us of the power of nature and its unpredictability. It also reminded us that we need to be prepared for future earthquakes, because we know that they will occur, but we just don't know when.

Hospitals are generally more prepared to address disasters than nursing homes. However, the Katrina experience and the recent Hawaii earthquake underscore the need to assess hospital facilities and nursing homes to determine their ability to withstand natural disasters.

The information derived from the assessment will be used by the owners and operators of the health care facilities. It will also be used by civil defense officials to support evacuation decisions.

For the foregoing reasons the Healthcare Association strongly supports HB 2567.

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