

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2567 HD1  
A BILL RELATING TO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

PRESENTATION TO THE  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & MILITARY AFFAIRS

BY

MAJOR GENERAL ROBERT G. F. LEE  
DIRECTOR OF CIVIL DEFENSE

February 14, 2008

Chair Evans and Committee Members:

I am Major General Bob Lee, Director of Civil Defense, State Department of Defense. I am providing written testimony on House Bill 2567 HD1.

We support the intent of House Bill 2567 HD1 so long as it does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the Executive Supplemental Budget Request.

A study to assess the structural integrity of hospitals and nursing homes in Hawaii is consistent with our emergency preparedness planning goals. We are concerned, however, about the timeline to perform an assessment of all hospitals and nursing homes throughout the entire State in a 6- to 12-month period.

If this measure is passed, we will work closely with various agencies including health care facility owners and operators to ensure appropriate assessments are performed.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on this important measure.



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & MILITARY AFFAIRS

Rep. Cindy Evans, Chair

Conference Room 309

February 14, 2008 at 9:15 a.m.

**Testimony in support of HB 2567 HD 1.**

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 HD 1, 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 HD 1.