



SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair

Conference Room 016
Thursday, February 7, 2008 at 1:15 p.m.

Testimony in support of SB 2857.

I am Coral Andrews, Vice President 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 support of SB 2857, which requires all home care agencies to be licensed.

As the health care services sector evolves to respond to consumer demand we've seen growth in home and community based provider markets. More and more elderly and disabled people want to remain living in their homes rather than being institutionalized.

Health services provided in the home may include skilled and non-skilled services. Skilled care is typically provided by registered nurses. The agencies that employ them are known as home health agencies and are licensed by the State.

Home care agencies are differentiated from home health agencies in that they provide supportive services in the home. Examples of these services may include personal care services, companion services, social services, etc. All involve direct contact with the elder or disabled individual. Home care agencies are not licensed. The only requirement for operating a home care business in Hawaii is a general excise tax license.

Also, the similarity in the terms "home care" and "care homes" may be confusing. Care homes are licensed, so many people also believe, incorrectly, that home care agencies are licensed.

Home care services are adjunctive to other health services that residents receive. As such, ensuring a minimum level of competence of those providing these services is imperative.

Consumer safety is at risk. Since home care services are provided to frail and elderly consumers, we have an obligation to protect them from potential abuse, exploitation, and improper care. At a minimum, competence and criminal background checks of the providers of care should be established. Some home care agencies in the community are already aware of situations involving financial exploitation by other home care agencies, but there is no recourse for addressing these concerns unless a licensure system is established. It is vitally important to assure the public that home care services are safe.

This bill directs the Department of Health (DOH) to establish a licensure system that protects the health and safety of clients receiving services from home care agencies. Any home care agency that is not licensed will not be allowed to operate.

This bill has been needed for some time now to protect the many elderly and disabled people who receive home care. Any delay will only extend the potential for abuse at a time when the demand for home and community based services increases.

For the foregoing reasons, the Healthcare Association of Hawaii strongly supports SB 2857.