

Bill No. **SB 2890**
Bill title: **Making an Appropriation for Health Care Services**

Committee: Senate Committee on Health
Chair: Sen. David Ige
Co-Chair: Sen. Carol Fukunaga
Hearing Date: Wednesday, 13 Feb
Hearing Location: Conference Room 016, State Capitol

Testimony from: Tom Sheeran
 PO Box 12110, Honolulu, HI 96828
Representing: People living with HIV/AIDS in Hawaii

Dear Committee Chair Ige,

My name is Tom Sheeran and I have lived in Hawai'i since 1949. I have been HIV positive since 1983 and received my AIDS diagnosis in 1995. For many years I was involved in leadership roles in *Hawai'i CARES*, the statewide planning body for AIDS care services, and also served on the *Governor's Committee on HIV/AIDS*. I would like to present written testimony **strongly in favor of SB 2890, Making an Appropriation for Health Care Services.**

I strongly support this bill because it will provide funding for vital services needed by people living with HIV/AIDS in Hawai'i. While recent advances in treatment have allowed AIDS patients to live longer, there is still no cure. Over 3,000 cases of HIV/AIDS have been reported in Hawai'i. More than 1,000 residents are currently living with AIDS, and many more are being treated for HIV disease.

Patients now live longer, but many are unable to return to work due to their poor health, and due to the common and debilitating side effects of the treatments. These patients continue to need housing, nutrition services, and case management as well as life-saving medications, often for many years. While we hope that better treatments will offer a cure, or at least a better recovery, right now that is not the reality.

Unfortunately, the success of the new drugs in reducing deaths has led many to believe that "AIDS is OVER," and to think that there is no longer a crisis, as was so obvious when the epidemic started. This false belief has led to reductions in government funding and private donations, just at the time when more people are seeking treatment and needing services.

While the Federal Government has increased funding for AIDS drugs, the current administration and Congress have not added enough funding in recent years to provide for all persons who seek treatment. At the same time, the current administration has not increased the funding for the *Ryan White Care Act* for other emergency services besides drugs.

The current crisis facing people living with HIV/AIDS in Hawai'i is that new Federal guidelines now require that existing Ryan White funding that formerly provided housing and nutrition services for many in need now be diverted for direct medical services and drugs, without providing adequate amounts to meet ALL the basic needs of patients. In simple terms, they are "robbing Peter to pay Paul," taking already inadequate funding for all services to cover the shortfall in drug costs.

The direct result is that with rising housing costs in Hawaii, many families and individuals throughout Hawai'i may lose their existing rental subsidies putting them at severe risk of homelessness. It should be obvious that without housing, successful treatment (complicated under the best circumstances) will be difficult, if not impossible. As one of those who has benefited from rental assistance, I know how much it means to have this help to find and keep decent housing. It can make all the difference between maintaining one's health and falling seriously ill. Housing IS healthcare!

The same factors will affect dozens, perhaps hundreds statewide who have received nutrition services (hot meals, groceries, often delivered to those who are homebound). How can people retain or regain their health if they are provided medications but denied housing and food?

In conclusion I would like to restate my strong support for passage of **SB 2890**. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for the committee.