

Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa

"E Ho`ohanohano a E Ho`omau...

...To Honor and To Perpetuate"

PO Box 1111, Kalaupapa, Hawaii 96742

Committee on Finance
Chairman Marcus R. Oshiro
Vice Chair Marilyn B. Lee

Date: Wednesday, April 2, 2008
Time: 2 p.m.
Location: Conference Room 308
Hawaii State Capitol

Agenda No. 1

Item SB3228

Dear Chairman Oshiro, Vice Chair Lee and members of the Committee on Finance:

Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa, a nonprofit organization made up of Kalaupapa residents, their family members, descendents, friends and others, writes in strong support of SB 3228, which would increase the annual pension of the retired patients who have not received a raise in many years.

Because of illnesses and previous commitments by 'Ohana board members, we will not be able to testify at this hearing in person. We hope you understand.

At the 2006 annual meeting of the 'Ohana, the patients requested that our group contact our State Legislators about the need to increase their pensions. We did and the Legislature responded by passing such a bill, but the patients have yet to receive their increases because of concerns over the language that was raised by the Attorney General. The patients asked us again to see if the Legislature could help this session.

Many people do not realize that the Kalaupapa patients once comprised a large part of the workforce at Kalaupapa. They were hospital orderlies and attendants, truck drivers, trail maintenance workers, food service workers, office workers, electricians, plumbers and painters. These jobs were not easy ones – they required employees who were responsible and capable with the ability to handle difficult tasks.

The Sisters of St. Francis, who staffed the Kalaupapa Hospital for many years, have said that the orderlies and district health workers (all patients) were essential to the hospital operating efficiently. One district health worker was credited with saving many lives at Kalaupapa because she was able to convince people in need of more intense medical treatment to be admitted to the Kalaupapa Hospital – something that even the doctors weren't able to do. This woman would have qualified for the pension increase, but she died last fall.

Despite their hard labor and strong work ethics, most of the patients were paid extremely low wages – some people who began working in the 1940s have said they were paid as little as \$1 a day. In the mid-1980s, a group of patients was represented by the American Civil Liberties Union to get them some back pay because they had been so poorly paid. From what our organization understands, it has been nearly 20 years since they have received any cost-of-living adjustments to their pensions.

While it is true that the patients get free housing, food, utilities and other benefits from the Department of Health, these same amenities are made available at no charge to today's Health Department workers who are also paid much higher wages and who will receive a much higher pension. This is not a criticism of today's workers – many of them are a beloved part of the community who also work hard – but the patients are simply asking for equal treatment.

Please pass SB 3228 and give the people of Kalaupapa what is fairly due them.