

Honolulu, Hawaii

Feb 20, 2009

RE: H.B. No. 1362

H.D. 1

Honorable Calvin K.Y. Say
Speaker, House of Representatives
Twenty-Fifth State Legislature
Regular Session of 2009
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce, to which was referred H.B. No. 1362, H.D. 1, entitled:

"A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO GENETIC COUNSELORS,"

begs leave to report as follows:

The purpose of this measure is to establish a licensure program for genetic counselors within the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs to ensure that individuals seeking genetic counseling receive the highest degree of quality services and professional conduct from licensed genetic counselors. The measure also provides penalties for non-compliance.

Two professors of pediatrics, of the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine, Neonatology Division, and Kapiolani Medical Specialists, the Hawaii Chapter of the March of Dimes, and numerous medical professionals including many physicians, genetic counselors, and other health care providers in the genetic counseling arena provided comments in support of the measure. The Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs submitted testimony in opposition to the measure.

Genetic counselors are frequently the primary providers of genetic information and counseling to pregnant women whose babies may be at risk for birth defects or other genetic conditions. They also are the primary providers of risk assessment for men and women with cancer or a family history of cancer. Genetic



counselors assist in the evaluation and management of both children and adults with heritable conditions.

Currently, genetic counselors have a difficult time being supported by hospitals and clinics. Although the American Medical Association approved a Current Procedural Terminology code for genetic counselors, the code can only be used by licensed professionals. Thus, genetic counselors and health care providers who employ them cannot be reimbursed by third party payors for the services they provide to patients. This threatens the availability of genetic counseling services in the State.

Establishing a licensure program will ensure that genetic counselors are highly skilled and also allow them to be reimbursed for their services as an integral part of a patient's healthcare team, similar to physicians and nurses. In addition, a licensing program would help attract new genetic counselors to practice in the State, where there are currently not enough physicians who are trained in genetics to provide the genetic services and counseling needed by Hawaii's people.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce that is attached to this report, your Committee is in accord with the intent and purpose of H.B. No. 1362, H.D. 1, and recommends that it be referred to the Committee on Finance.

Respectfully submitted on
behalf of the members of the
Committee on Consumer
Protection & Commerce,



ROBERT N. HERKES, Chair



