

**HB 1504**

Testimony on House Bill 1504  
Ways and Means Committee  
April 2, 2009

**LATE**

Dear Chair Kim and Committee members,

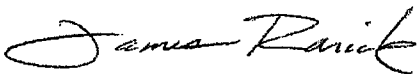
The Hawaii Public Health Association and the Hui Ola Pono strongly support House Bill 1504. Access to health care is a human right, and it is being systematically violated for tens of millions of Americans. It is time for Hawaii to unambiguously reject this violation of human rights through the creation of the Hawaii Health Authority, with a mandate to create a plan for universal coverage of all state residents by 2010. While we understand that it is tempting to wait and follow President Obama's lead during the ongoing health reform initiative, President Obama recently applauded states for their initiative, urging states to "continue to experiment, provided they meet the minimum standards of the national plan".

As a state, we have long been leaders in health care, but the landmark Hawaii Prepaid Health Act has gradually lost relevance in the face of shifting demographic and economic circumstances. The current employer-based health system is failing to cover Hawaii's population. The recently deceased A.Q. McElrath, the legendary community organizer who helped shape the Hawaii Prepaid Health Act, recognized this and was a longtime supporter of the current bill.

We deplore the fact that many of Hawaii's residents are excluded by the current system of financing the provision of health care, with their first point of access to the health system being the emergency room, with often tragic and costly results. As public health professionals, we further recognize that access to medical care is only part of ensuring health for all. Any plan for providing coverage must focus on prevention, health promotion and equity.

Fixing a broken system is no small task, but finding a way to provide *comprehensive* health care to all residents of Hawaii is necessary for a number of social, economic and health reasons. It also is simply the right thing to do. We thank the Committee and its members for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



James Rarick  
President, Hawaii Public Health Association

Kris Coontz  
HPHA Board Member  
President, Hui Ola Pono

Graduate Student group  
The Department of Public Health Sciences  
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The Twenty-Fifth Legislature  
Regular Session of 2009

THE SENATE  
Committee on Ways and Means  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Shan S. Tsutsui, Vice Chari

**LATE**

State Capitol, Conference Room 211  
Thursday, April 2, 2009; 9:30 a.m.

**STATEMENT OF THE ILWU LOCAL 142 ON H.B. 1504, HD1, SD1  
RELATING TO HEALTH**

The ILWU Local 142 supports H.B. 1504, HD1, SD1, which creates the Hawaii Health Authority to develop a health plan to provide universal health care in Hawaii.

Hawaii's Prepaid Health Care Act ensures that employers provide health care coverage for employees who work more than 20 hours a week for four consecutive weeks. Some employers skirt the law by employing their workers less than 20 hours a week. The employer saves money while the worker is saddled with a huge burden to provide for his or her own health care needs. Family coverage may be provided, but at an often enormous cost to the worker. As individual plans are expensive, many workers just do without.

It is understandable that employers will balk at the expense of providing for health care. The cost of providing coverage is the biggest expense, next to wages, to employ a worker. Yet coverage is essential if workers are to avoid going bankrupt when a catastrophic illness or injury strikes or if more costly medical procedures are to be avoided by prevention or early intervention. In addition, healthy workers mean greater productivity.

H.B. 1504, HD1, SD1 establishes the Hawaii Health Authority to provide ultimately for universal health care in Hawaii. All possibilities will be considered and the best, most cost-effective and fair course of action must be adopted. Hawaii, like the rest of the nation, cannot continue to be held hostage by the ever-rising cost of health care. If other countries are able to provide health coverage to all its citizens (and even non-citizens), the U.S. with its technological and financial might should be able to do the same or better. Hawaii, with its landmark legislation for Prepaid Health Care, should lead the nation.

Ah Quon McElrath, retired ILWU social worker, long advocated for universal health care. She tirelessly walked the halls of the Capitol and spoke with every legislator who would listen about the absolute need to provide for the health care needs of everyone in the state. Ah Quon passed away in December. We carry on in her memory to appeal for universal health care for Hawaii residents.

The ILWU urges passage of H.B. 1504, HD1, SD1. Thank you for the opportunity to share our views on this important matter.

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