



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
P.O. Box 3378
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96801-3378

In reply, please refer to:
File:

House Committees on Health and Human Services

**H.B. 1641, RELATING TO WAIANAEO COAST COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH
CENTER**

**Testimony of Chiyome Leinaala Fukino, M.D.
Director of Health**

February 17, 2009

1 **Department's Position:** The Department of Health respectfully opposes this measure.

2 **Fiscal Implications:** Requests \$332,000 in fiscal year 2009-2010 for a grant pursuant to Chapter 42F,
3 HRS.

4 **Purpose and Justification:** The purpose of this measure is to request an appropriation of \$332,000 for
5 a grant pursuant to Chapter 42F, HRS for the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center as
6 supplemental funding for emergency services.

7 The Department of Health currently has a contract of \$1,468,000 per fiscal year with the
8 Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center to provide emergency room services between the hours of
9 midnight to 8:00 a.m., 365 days a year. The amount of \$332,000 being requested for fiscal year 2009-
10 2010 is to supplement this contracted amount.

11 The Department appreciates the intent of this measure; however, given the current fiscal
12 difficulties, it would not be prudent to pursue enactment at this time

13 Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this measure.

February 15, 2009

To: Committee on Health Committee on Human Services
 Rep. Ryan I. Yamane, Chair Rep. John M. Mizuno, Chair
 Rep. Scott Y. Nishimoto, Vice Chair Rep. Tom Brower, Vice Chair

RE: **Testimony in Support of HB 1641: Relating to Waianae Coast
 Comprehensive Health Center**

Submitted by: Richard P. Bettini, MPH, MS, Chief Executive Officer
 Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center
 Contact – wcchc@wcchc.com

The Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center must budget at least \$1.8 million to operate its emergency services between the hours of midnight to 8:00am, 365 days a year. With recent budget cuts and other economic downturns, the Health Center is unable to acquire funding to make up for the financial losses it.

The Health Center is requesting that the Legislature restore the \$135,000 that was eliminated from the FY 2008-09 ER budget plus additional funding to cover 100% of the cost of the ER losses from midnight to 8 am. This cost comes up \$332,000.

The State has provided subsidy funding for the Health Center's emergency medical services since 1976, and from 1986, through an increase in State funding, the emergency room has been able to provide services 24-hours a day, 365 days a year.

Without the subsidy, the emergency room operates at a substantial loss. Other rural communities receive a large State subsidy for such services through the State Hospital System. Our emergency room does not get proportionate support.

The necessity for 24-hour emergency medical services on the Waianae Coast has never diminished. Tragic and crisis episodes in the past few years, in particular those that close off access into and out of Waianae and the loss of the MAST helicopter medivac assistance demonstrate how crucial a role the Health Center plays by having 24-hour emergency medical services available in Waianae.

The Health Center's participation and role in the statewide Emergency Medical System is substantial. We are connected to the Emergency Management computer, which connects all the hospitals and the EMS system. The Health Center's emergency room is known as the Trauma Support Clinic for the entire Waianae Coast. The emergency room is also rated as a Type II facility (out of 3 types) for Hospital Capability for Readiness.

The Health Center's emergency room is one of the most heavily utilized on Oahu, serving 14,334 patients through a total of 21,036 visits annually.

Of the total visits, 7,960 (38%) occurred between 8 pm – 8 am Monday through Saturday and all day on Sundays and holidays. Of these visits, 61% (4,837) were visits by patients covered under Medicaid/QUEST, 8% (635) were visits by patients with Medicare and 8% of visits (639) were by uninsured patients.

The majority of emergency room visits are for conditions related to asthma, upper respiratory infection, complications from insulin-dependent diabetes, cardiovascular conditions such as chest pains and heart attacks, threatened labor, and injuries and wounds, many which are violence related. Time is crucial in many of these situations.

In recent years, **when funding for the emergency room was threatened due to State budget cuts, the community spoke up adamantly that emergency services on the Waianae Coast was a necessity.** Concerns from the community included:

1. Due to economic and transportation limitations, access to medical care is a major barrier for Waianae Coast residents.
2. The next emergency room, hospital-based Hawaii Medical Center East (formerly St. Francis West), is located 16 miles from Waianae town (20 miles from Makaha), translating into a 30 - 40 minute drive depending on traffic. The distance, and transportation, is a barrier to many residents.
3. The emergency room at Hawaii Medical Center East serves a large and rapidly growing service area of its own - Kapolei, Ewa, Ewa Beach, Waipahu, Makakilo, Ko Olina, Kunia, etc. The wait time for emergency care can be discouragingly and dangerously long.
4. With only two ambulances serving the Waianae community of 42,000, there can be up to a 40-minute wait for another ambulance when the units are on a call. In a life or death situation, the wait time is unacceptable.

The Health Center's emergency room is also used by the Honolulu Police Department and Child Protective Services. The Honolulu Police Department brings individuals in custody to the emergency room for medical care. If HPD had to take the individual to Hawaii Medical Center East, or another emergency facility, that would decrease police protection in the community. Child Protective

Services uses the emergency room for pre-placement physical exams when children are removed from their parents/guardians.

As the primary medical provider on the Waianae Coast, the Health Center fills a major role in providing health services to the community, which allows the State to focus its limited resources in other areas.

Subsidy funding allows the Health Center to support the difference between fees collected from services rendered and the actual cost of providing the services. Funding supports uninsured visits, staffing of the emergency room, lab, radiology, and security services, as well as other operational costs related to providing services during the hours of midnight to 8:00 am Monday through Saturday and all day on Sundays and holidays.

Without additional funding, and with continued financial losses, the only alternative is closing the ER during weekday evenings.

Mahalo.