

LATE TESTIMONY

Testimony on HB 991 - Written testimony only
House Committee on Higher Education
February 10, 2009 at 2:15 p.m.
Jerris Hedges, Dean, John A. Burns School of Medicine

Aloha. Thank you, Chair Rep. Chang, Vice Chair Rep. Nakashima and members of the House Higher Education Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 991.

I am offering this testimony as an individual, who also happens to be the Dean of the John A. Burns School of Medicine.

The John A. Burns School of Medicine was founded in 1965 to provide opportunity to citizens of Hawai'i – both through the provision of physician education in Hawai'i for state residents and by providing a means to enhance the retention of practicing physicians with ties to Hawai'i within the state.

The current educational debt of the medical school graduates of the John A. Burns School of Medicine exceeds \$85,000 among those with educational debt. Coupled with a higher cost of living and lower physician reimbursement in Hawai'i than elsewhere in the U.S., the retention of medical school graduates in Hawai'i is becoming more challenging. This phenomenon has reached critical proportions on our neighbor islands.

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Senate Bill 991 would provide some relief of this educational debt and assist with the establishment of new physician practices on the neighbor islands. An important feature of SB 991 is that in addition to providing financial support for students who attended medical school in Hawai'i, it also allows financial support to residents schooled elsewhere but seeking post-graduate training in Hawai'i. We have learned that physicians who perform their post-graduate -- or residency training -- in a community have a vested interest in staying in that community as practicing physicians. We also believe the best care available for rural area residents must come from doctors who spend time training in and learning about the community they will serve.

This program will be most successful if coupled with neighbor island educational programs that are underdevelopment by the John A. Burns School of Medicine. An extended exposure to our more rural communities while a medical student, resident (post medical school specialty training) and through such a loan repayment program will enhance long-term career and practice site choices favoring the neighbor islands.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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