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## Written Testimony

# HCR15 ESTABLISHING A HAWAII STATE FALL PREVENTION TASK FORCE TO DEVELOP A STATEWIDE APPROACH TO REDUCING FALLS AMONG OLDER ADULTS

Testimony by the Legislative Reference Bureau  
**Ken H. Takayama, Director**

Presented to the House Committee on Health

Thursday, March 18, 2010, 10:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 329

**LATE  
Testimony**

Chairs Yamane, Nishimoto and Members of the Committees:

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify on **House Concurrent Resolution No. 15**, which establishes a state fall prevention task force to develop a statewide approach to reducing falls among older adults.

The Bureau takes **no position** either for or against the measure, but submits the following comments and concerns:

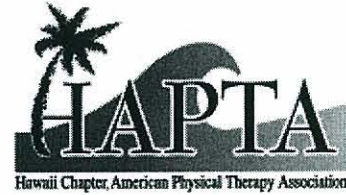
- (1) As always, if the Legislature wants us to undertake this effort, we will do so to the best of our ability with the resources we have.
- (2) The measure directs the Bureau to designate an official convener of the task force, and to provide administrative support to the task force.
- (3) Beyond the unaccustomed role, the subject matter is unfamiliar to the Bureau. The result is that the Bureau will be designating an official convener from a position of ignorance.
- (4) We believe it more appropriate that the Chair of the Task Force be designated by the Legislature.
- (5) We note that Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 32 began as a companion to this measure but was passed out of the Senate in amended form as S.C.R. No. 32, S.D. 1.

- (6) We respectfully recommend that H.C.R. No. 15 be amended along the lines of S.C.R. No. 32, S.D. 1, as follows:
  - (a) Having the University of Hawaii Center on Aging convene the task force;
  - (b) Designating the Director of the Executive Office on Aging as Chair of the task force, with administrative support provided by the Department of Health and the Executive Office on Aging; and
  - (c) Directing the Bureau to assist the Task Force through the drafting of any proposed legislation recommended by the Task Force.
- (7) In all other respects, S.C.R. No. 32, S.D. 1, is essentially identical to H.C.R. No. 15.

Finally, the Bureau stands ready to assist this Committee with any draft or report you may require on this measure.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Written Only - Testimony by:  
Lucy Lessard, PT



**HCR15/HR12, Establishing a Hawaii State Fall Prevention Task Force to Develop a Statewide Approach to Reducing Fall Among Older Adults.**

**Hse HLT/HUS Hearing – Thursday, March 18, 2010  
Room 329 – 10:30 am**

**LATE  
Testimony**

**Position: Support**

Chair Yamane and Mizuno, and Members of the Hse HLT/HUS Committees:

I am Lucy Lessard, P.T., and Chair of the HAPTA Legislative Committee and member of the Hawaii Chapter – American Physical Therapy Association (HAPTA). The Hawaii Chapter – American Physical Therapy Association (HAPTA) is comprised of 300 member physical therapists and physical therapist assistants employed in hospitals and health care facilities, the Department of Education and Department of Health systems, and private practice. Our members represent Hawaii at the national American Physical Therapy Association and are delegates for Pediatrics, Women’s Health, Parkinson’s Disease and other issue sections. We are part of the spectrum of care for Hawaii, and provide rehabilitative services for infants and children, youth, adults and the elderly. Rehabilitative services are a vital part of restoring optimum function from neuromusculoskeletal injuries and impairments.

According to the National Safety Council, falls are a major problem for individuals age 65 and older, with one-third suffering from a fall each year. Falls are the number one cause of hospital trauma admissions, injuries and accident-related deaths in this age group. In 2002, fall-related injuries were the cause of death for approximately 13,000 Americans. The National Safety Council expects the number of people over age 65 to double by the year 2030, which will potentially double the number of falls in this age group.

Physical therapists evaluate and work with the elderly to reduce falls in daily living as well as in long-term care settings. For example, balance training is something physical therapists teach older adults to practice at home by altering support surfaces to increase awareness of sensory cues using tools like rocker boards, narrow beams or foam, as well as practicing balance on one leg. Awareness of sensory cues during the training could be enhanced by being blindfolded, engaged with a reading task or distracted with a pattern on the floor. Older adults can challenge their vestibular system by moving their heads from side to side while speaking to another person or looking at various objects. The vestibular system is responsible for maintaining balance, posture, and the body's orientation in space. This body system also regulates locomotion and other movements and keeps objects in visual focus as the body moves.

In addition, HAPTA members support the “Falls” workshops sponsored by the State at the Healthy Aging Expo.

Your support of this measure is appreciated. I can be reached at (808) 735-6507 if there are any questions. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony.

Good morning. My name is Michael Ebesu and I am a physical therapist on the brain injury floor at the rehab hospital of the Pacific. I would like to first of all thank you for the opportunity to share with you my thoughts on this resolution.

I know there are many statistics both locally and nationally regarding the number of falls which take place each year, and their effect on the cost of healthcare. Statistics show that falls alone causes billions of dollars in health care costs across the nation and undoubtedly millions of dollars here in Hawai'i. I am sure others can tell you specifically on the numbers regarding how falls has overtaken any other reason for visits to the Queens ER. What I am here to do is to talk not about numbers and statistics, but to emphasize how these falls affect real people across our state.

Working as a therapist at a rehab hospital, I have the opportunity to see people who are at the facility due to a fall. And while many of these people actively participate in their rehabilitation and put out such great effort and determination to get stronger and improve, many leave us in a life changing situation. These individuals who may have once been independently caring for themselves and been an active and contributing member of society suddenly find themselves unable to care for themselves and now are dependent on others for assistance. Some are lucky enough to have family members who are willing to help them, but there are others who don't have that luxury and are now at the mercy of the services of the state.

But what is truly disheartening is that every once in a while, these individuals may let their guard down a little as we discuss what the future holds. And when they do, you can see the fear and trepidation of the unknown in their face's and the frustration in their voices over the fact that they are in this situation due to something they consider as minor as a fall. What is even more difficult to accept is when I hear the reason for some of these falls, such as an unsafe house set up or some type of overlooked medical condition or medication-which could have been possibly avoided had the person had the proper information and educated to how they could have avoided these accidents. Honestly, some falls are unavoidable-but there are many which I truly believe could be prevented had the person been given the proper information on how they could have been safer or taken better care of themselves.

This is where I believe this task force could be of such benefit. I think that it could be a starting point of an eventual joint effort in the community to find the best ways to educate our elderly citizens of the risks of falling, and how falls may be avoided. The senior fair back in September was well attended, showing that the seniors of Hawaii would like to find more information on a variety of subjects. This task force may be the start of what could provide the void that we have here in Hawaii regarding fall prevention for the citizens of our state.

**LATE**  
**Testimony**

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