

TESTIMONY

SB 2205



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Suzanne Marinelli

February 3, 2009

Senator Dwight Takamine, Chair
Senate Committee on Labor
Room 224, Hawaii State Legislature

Re: SB2205, "Relating to the Employer-Union Health Benefits Trust Fund"
Hearing Date: February 4, 2010

Aloha Senator Takamine, Vice-Chair Taniguchi, and committee members.

As Coordinator of the LRB's non-partisan Public Access Room, I am appropriately constrained from publicly opposing or supporting measures under consideration by the Legislature. However, as a participant in the EUTF's "Informed Rx" mail-order prescription drug program, I *do* wish to share some comments about that program in hopes they may be helpful to you.

On September 22, 2009, I sent a letter to the EUTF's Board of Directors regarding the "Informed Rx" drug program, delineating difficulties I was having with the program's execution. On October 28, I attended the EUTF's monthly board meeting and read a second letter to the board, detailing more of my ongoing problems with Informed Rx. Though I haven't written them again, problems persist.

I have some fairly significant health challenges, and take seven different medications, 13 tablets, every day; on rough days, I have two additional drugs I take as needed. For people in my situation – countless thousands of us – it is crucially important to have ready and reliable access to a pharmacy, and to pharmacists, whom we feel we can trust. This is something I once enjoyed through my local CVS/Long's. I miss that help more than I can say.

My experiences with Informed Rx have been unsatisfactory in too many instances and on too many levels to share them all with you through one page of commentary. My two letters to the EUTF board are attached here, however, and can provide you with more details if you need them.

Those experiences have been marvelously varied – I have been given different information from what my doctors have been given; I've received outright incorrect information; I've been given inconsistent information (depending on who I get when I call the Florida pharmacy). I have waited for up to five weeks for medication to arrive from Florida while problems with filling prescriptions were getting straightened out, and once had to wait for 23 minutes for the Florida pharmacy to answer the phone (while being endlessly reminded, of course, about how important my call really was). I have been incorrectly billed, and then had the 'corrected' billing be incorrect. My doctor has been unable to raise any personnel at all when calling Florida, then days later, when trying again, been instructed by voicemail message to leave 'patient name and medication information' so someone could call her back. (She never got that return call.) I have been unable to find specific information on Informed Rx's website (because it's not there), and then had the folks who answer their phone say "I don't know why they don't fix that."

All this while enriching Florida's economy rather than our own! In some ways, that's the hardest part to take. I can't imagine how difficult this process must be for people who are deeply, terribly ill. My heart goes out to them.

I do recognize that the EUTF Board has a nearly impossible task in preserving the state employees' resources; I empathize with their difficulties, and with yours. And too, I hope to have a local pharmacist again someday, one I can rely on, while actively helping Hawaii recover from the fiscal challenges that beset us all. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you accomplish that. I'd be so glad if I could.

Suzanne Marinelli

Paul K. Ferreira
316 Ainaola Drive
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

February 3, 2010

Senator Dwight Y. Takamine
Chair and Members
Committee on Labor
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street, Room 224
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Re: Senate Bill 2205 Relating To Employer-Union Health Benefits Trust Fund

Aloha Senator Takamine and Members:

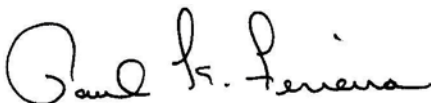
I am a current employee with the County of Hawai'i, with 27 ½ years of service and **strongly support the passage of SB 2205**, Relating to Employer-Union Health Benefits Trust Fund (EUTF), that seeks to allow individual beneficiaries enrolled in a Hawaii employer-union health benefits trust fund health benefits plan to opt out of any requirement to purchase prescriptions by mail order.

During these hard economic times, I am appalled that the State of Hawai'i has opted to require its government employees to purchase their medication from a mainland company through this mail-order program, forsaking the **local pharmacies**. The Governor and the Legislature keeps sending the message that we need to spend locally and support local businesses, yet this ludicrous mail-order drug program was accepted by the EUTF Board. What message is the State of Hawai'i sending to the students that are enrolled in the University of Hawai'i College of Pharmacy, we want to educate you in this honorable profession, but we do not support local pharmacies.

It has been my experience in refilling a prescription for maintenance drugs that the InformedRX company, operates fraudulently, outside of the information that was passed on to members. There representatives took it upon themselves, with no input from me to contact my physician and change my medication from a Preferred Drug to a generic drug, that in my research is not the same. Then when confronted by me, their representative stated falsely in writing that it was my physician that made the change, not their company. Additionally, because of the delay in processing the order (which was placed well in compliance of their re-order deadlines), because the company was altering the prescription, my medication was delayed causing me to be without the medication for a week.

Another issue I have with the current company is the method in which medication is shipped to a member. The medication is not in any type of tamper proof bottle and is packed simply in a plastic U.S. Postal envelope, that can easily be accessed and the medication tampered with.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns and strongly urge you to pass this legislation.



Paul K. Ferreira
316 Ainaola Drive
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

Testimony for LBR 2/4/2010 2:45:00 PM SB2205

Conference room: 224

Testifier position: support

Testifier will be present: No

Submitted by: Ronald K. Okamura

Organization: Individual

Address: 876 Curtis Street #3803 Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Phone: 808-391-8418

Submitted on: 2/3/2010

Comments:

I am appalled that our retired state government employees are required to go out of state to receive their prescription drug benefit through the mail. The mandate dictates no choice on the part of the retired employee. I believe that the trust fund failed in their duties to serve their membership to craft a drug benefit that provides choice as well as cost benefits.

Sincerely,

Ronald K. Okamura

Senator Dwight Takamine, Chair

Senate Committee on Labor

Re: SB2205 –EUTF..... IN STRONG SUPPORT

February 4, 2010 –Wed. / Rm. 224, 2:45pm

Dear Senator Takamine and Senator Green and fellow committee members.

My name is Sherrie Sato and due to my personal experience with our current prescription carrier, **I am in Strong Support of SB2205.** Last year, as a temporary session hire of the Legislature, I availed myself of the option after session's end to receive COBRA benefits via the EUTF. While the medical and dental benefits I chose were as I expected, I encountered serious grief regarding the only available drug plan provider "Informed Rx."

As a COBRA beneficiary, the very first discrepancy I encountered was in the use of "informed Rx's" coupon monthly payment system. I found this out when I went to fill a prescription and was informed that my coverage had been *terminated*. Why? Because when I finally got hold of their COBRA administrator, she told me that the deadline for payment applied to coverage renewal, even though the coupon clearly stated it as the payment deadline. In fact, the actual payment deadline was from the 1st date listed, e.g. "June 15th to July 15th Payment due." When I pointed out to the administrator how misleading this was in terms of payment, she agreed. She did say she would talk to someone about making changes, but who knows? In the meantime, to make the cutoff deadline, I VISA charged my payment (which also incurred an extra charge for using a credit card).

But this next example of my experience with "Informed Rx" is the one that compelled me to try to get hold of someone at EUTF to find out who I could write a letter to: Because of the close call with having my coverage terminated by going with their unclear coupon dateline, I decided to pay for two months in advance and mail it way before. When next I went to have a prescription filled at a local pharmacy, the person informed me that, **again**, my coverage had been **terminated!** I said that was impossible as I was more than two months current on my coverage. The pharmacist tried calling the customer service number on the back of my coverage card, only to discover that the service person could do nothing about it. By the way, the two or three times I also tried that number, it proved futile because their end is strictly info about the prescriptions.

So, I woke up at about 5:00am the next day, (as the admin people were located in Illinois), made the call describing my flabbergasting experience the prior day, and asked, as before, why? And the individual called up my records and told me, she didn't know why. My record showed my payments!

Finally, just to point out how much more this coverage truly costs, a generic drug I obtained from our local pharmacies for \$5.00 cost me \$20.00 when I finally had to use the Informed Rx mail order system because they only offered the name brand. Thus I had to spend \$60.00 (for their no choice three month supply) versus the \$15.00 it would have cost to go to a local pharmacy.

And may I say, our local pharmacies are hurting, and cutting staff hours, or outright cutting staff as a consequence of this prescription outsourcing. I hope, Senators and committee members, this testimony proves helpful in your decision making process.

Mahalo, for your consideration, **Sherrie Sato**, Aiea, HI 96701