

Late Testimony

Hawaii State Legislature
Senate Ways and Means Committee
SB2493

Testimony of Kelley Withy, President of Hawaii State Rural Health Association
2010

2/23/2010

The Hawaii State Rural Health Association would like to express our strongest support for SB2493. We have conducted published research on the rural health care needs across the State and found that while all communities are unique, there are some themes that are common throughout the state. Needs that are commonly identified in our rural and underserved communities include:

1. Financial assistance (insurance coverage, medication, free services)
2. Expanding services that are available to rural communities (including telehealth, CHCs, community services)
3. Improving access to available services (Long term care, primary care, specialty care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, health care training and other services)
4. Decreasing drug use
5. Increasing health education and training opportunities for community members
5. Increasing the number of health care providers working in rural areas
6. Increasing cultural sensitivity of providers

The most recent assessment of physicians in the State of Hawaii performed by my office under the auspices of Act 219, SL2009 estimates that we have 500 providers less than we need to meet the demand estimated by population mix. Furthermore, this deficit may grow to 1,500 providers by 2020 if no action is taken. There are many actions that must be taken to meet the growing demand for health care providers and Senate Bill 2493 is an essential step toward meeting the need for providers in Hawaii.

The Hawaii State Rural Health Association supports legislation that will increase services to rural communities, including legislation that supports expanding the health workforce, developing assistance programs for rural areas, and expanding the facilities available to rural citizens. We expect this to be done in culturally appropriate ways with significant grass roots community involvement at all steps of the process. We feel strongly that SB2493 does this and appreciate your support.

Sincerely,
Kelley Withy, MD, PhD
President, Hawaii State Rural Health Association