



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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In reply, please refer to:
File:

**House Committee on Health
HCR215, REQUESTING THE CREATION OF A HAWAII MENTAL HEALTH
COMMISSION TO DEVELOP A UNIFIED STATE MENTAL HEALTH
DELIVERY SERVICE**

**Testimony of Loretta J. Fuddy, A.C.S.W., M.P.H.
Director of Health**

March 29, 2011, Room 329

1 **Department's Position:** The Department of Health opposes this measure as it would transfer
2 behavioral health out of the jurisdiction and authority of the Department of Health which is counter to
3 national efforts to integrate behavioral and physical health toward a philosophy of holistic health.
4 Emerging research is revealing increasing connections between mental illness and substance abuse and
5 poor physical health. This measure would hamper current efforts to integrate behavioral health with
6 other DOH programs such as primary care, chronic disease, tobacco control and early intervention
7 services. The department also opposes the creation of another oversight body in addition to the existing
8 21-member State Council on Mental Health and 15-member Hawaii Advisory Commission on Drug
9 Abuse and Controlled Substances.
10 Lastly, accomplishing the transfer of "certain authority, duties, responsibilities, and jurisdiction of the
11 Department of Health, with respect to mental health, mental illness, drug addiction, and alcoholism" to
12 the proposed Hawaii Mental Health Commission would require enactment of enabling legislation rather
13 than adoption of a Concurrent Resolution.
14 **Fiscal Implications:** Unspecified amounts for staffing and operating costs for the proposed Hawaii
15 Mental Health Commission

1 **Purpose and Justification:** The resolution requests the creation of an oversight body to help foster a
2 more unified mental health system, and transfers the authority, duties, responsibilities and jurisdiction of
3 the Department of Health relating to mental health, mental illness, drug addition and alcoholism to the
4 newly-created Hawaii Mental Health Commission.

5 The Department opposes this bill for several reasons:

6 The Department opposes the creation of yet another governmental entity which would create delays in
7 decision making, and would be counterproductive to efforts to “streamline government” and improve
8 accountability.

9 The Department opposes the creation of a silo which separates behavioral health from the other public
10 health functions of the department. Singling out mental health and substance abuse services increases
11 the stigma against those who need services, and does not embody the philosophy of holistic health.

12 The Department opposes this bill as it would take Hawaii in the opposite direction of the rest of the
13 nation to integrate behavioral and physical health. This separation of behavioral health will hamper
14 current efforts to collaborate with the department’s other programs, such as primary care, chronic
15 disease and early intervention. According to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
16 Administration (SAMHSA), 70% of individuals with significant mental health/substance use disorders
17 had at least 1 chronic health condition, 45% have 2 chronic conditions and almost 30% have 3 or more
18 chronic conditions. Hawaii would be moving away from the national trend to foster holistic care where
19 an individual can be screened for depression at the same time they are screened for diabetes and
20 smoking. Medical research is increasingly showing the link between mental illness and substance use
21 and chronic diseases. In a recent California study (JEN Associates, Cambridge, MA, source:
22 SAMHSA), persons with mental illness were two to three times more likely to also suffer from
23 diabetes, ischemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, arthritis and heart
24 failure.

1 The Department opposes the establishment of another oversight body in addition to the existing 21-
2 member governor-appointed State Council on Mental Health and the 15-member governor-appointed
3 Hawaii Advisory Commission on Drug Abuse and Controlled Substances.

4 The department respectfully points out that accomplishing the transfer of “certain authority, duties,
5 responsibilities, and jurisdiction of the Department of Health, with respect to mental health, mental
6 illness, drug addiction, and alcoholism” to the proposed Hawaii Mental Health Commission would
7 require enactment of enabling legislation rather than adoption of a Concurrent Resolution.

8 We respectfully request that this resolution be held.

9 We thank you for this opportunity to testify.