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February 15, 2011

TO: SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE
DR. JOSH GREEN, CHAIR; CLARENCE NISHIHARA, VICE-CHAIR
FOR HEARING ON FEBRUARY 16, 2011; 02:45 PM
SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM 229
SB 1381 – RELATING TO HEALTH

**LATE
TESTIMONY**

PERSONAL TESTIMONY BY DENNIS ARAKAKI IN STRONG SUPPORT

Honorable Chair Dr. Green, Vice- chair Nishihara and members of the Senate Health Committee, I am Dennis Arakaki, retired legislator, testifying in strong support of SB 1381, re-authorizing the Hawaii Health Authority.

Hawaii has long been known as the "Health State ". Hawaii led the way in the 1970's, being the first state to mandate the provision of health insurance coverage for all employees working 20 hours or more a week with the passage of the Hawaii Prepaid Health Act. As one of the original introducers of the Universal Health Bill over a decade ago in the House, I know that the inception of this landmark bill was due in no small part to the tireless efforts of the late labor and community organizer and University of Hawaii Regent Ah Quon McElrath, one of the architects of the Health Care Authority Act that this bill seeks to extend. Ah Quon recognized the changing economic times and that the Hawaii Prepaid Health Act was no longer enough. Unfortunately, AQ was not just slightly, but far ahead of her time. The bill was finally passed as HB 1504, HD1, SD2, CD1, vetoed by the Governor but overridden by the Legislature as Act 11 on July 15, 2009. Since then no action has been taken on the authority by the previous administration, obviously in opposition to the override and the authority. The need for the Hawaii Health Authority is more compelling than ever with National Health Care or "Obama Care" in the foreseeable future.

While Hawaii's unemployment levels are below the rest of the country, we also have the highest rate of involuntary part - time employment. The current health care system is a poorly woven patchwork quilt, with little to show from its high costs in population health indicators. The United States is one of the only developed countries where health indicators have fallen in recent years. The health care system in the U.S. drastically needs reform, but politicians in Washington D.C. are offering the same tired ideas in response to the crisis. The great state of Hawaii needs to lead by example by providing health care to all of its residents through a comprehensive state health plan.

The creation and implementation of the Hawaii Health Authority is an essential step toward creating a rational plan for comprehensive healthcare services that lowers cost while expanding access to health services to everyone. While there is great hope with President Obama's health care plan for America's citizens, we have the opportunity to stay ahead of the curve and prepare for the federal plan. Let us not be forced into accepting a lower standard of health care by keeping the best of our current health care system.



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The Hawaii Health Care Authority will bring together the finest minds, from the most significant backgrounds in healthcare to plan and prepare for a National Health Care system but also keeping the best of Hawaii's unique system of care and health financing. During these economically challenging times, the extension of this act provides an opportunity to put all the healthcare resources on the table in order to maximize those resources and eliminate duplicity and waste. It is time to envision a comprehensive system of care for all of Hawaii's citizens where no one is left out or left behind and precious resources are balanced between health, wellness and illness.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I wish the best of health to all of you.

HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
STATE CAPITOL

The Senate

