



HAWAIIAN LIFEGUARD ASSOCIATION

February 28, 2012

The Honorable Senator David Y. Ige, Chair
The Honorable Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Committee on Ways and Means
Hawai'i State Senate
The Twenty-Sixth Legislature
Regular Session 2012
State Capitol
Honolulu Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Ige, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members:

Re: SB 2967, SD 1 Relating to Collective Bargaining

The Hawaiian Lifeguard Association is in strong support of SB 2967, SD 1.

Ocean Safety and Water Safety Officers are all employed by the four counties. The State of Hawaii does not employ lifeguards.

We would like to note that the respective counties, via the County Councils and the four Mayors, have expressed their support for this legislation. Attached is the HSAC Resolution passed by the City and County of Honolulu. Similar resolutions were passed by the County of Kauai and the County of Hawaii.

The State of Hawaii does contract for ocean safety services from the four counties at certain State Parks.

Discussions with the State Parks Division indicated that the expenditure for these contractual services are determined by the Legislature and administered by DLNR.

No additional costs would be incurred by the State of Hawaii thru the passage of this legislation without the express consent of the Legislature.

Thank you in advance for your favorable consideration.

Yours,

Jan Prins, PhD
President

JP/jdh
Attachment

P.O. Box 283324 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96828 • (808) 922-3888
Facsimile (808) 922-0411 • Email: lifeguards@aloha.com

Monty Downs, M.D.
160 Lani Alii Place
Kapa'a, HI 96746
wmdowns2000@yahoo.com

2/25/12

Senator David. Y. Ige, Chair, Committee on Ways and Means
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2967 (Hearing on 2/28/12)

Dear Senators Ige and Kidani, and Ways and Means Committee Members:

I am testifying both as an individual (a Wilcox Hospital ER doctor since 1972) and also as President of the Kauai Lifeguard Association.

What I have witnessed in my ER career has led me to become a #1 fan of our Lifeguards (a.k.a. Water Safety Officers, or WSO's). We all know that Hawaii's beaches are our first and foremost tourist attraction, and when people step off the airplane that's where they want to go. Our beaches and ocean are also fraught with dangers, both seen (e.g. in great spectacle during our famous surfing tournaments), and unseen (e.g. when a rip current gets a hold of an unsuspecting swimmer and takes him/her out over their head and into critical danger).

I have seen all too many ocean-related tragedies, suffered both by our visitors on whom our economy depends, and also by our local families. And therefore there is nothing in the world that makes me happier than when I see our WSO's save a person - and thereby a family -- either by a prevention conversation, or by a simple rescue such as reaching out a hand or a rescue tube, or by a complex and life-threatening-to-all rescue, where they bravely and skillfully head out into highly dangerous conditions to make yet another of our world-class spectacular rescues. Happily for every drowning tragedy, there are dozens and hundreds of rescues, and hundreds and thousands of preventions.

Back in the 1970's, WSO's were arbitrarily - for lack, as I understand it, of a better place to assign them - put into HGEA Bargaining Unit 3, a Unit consisting of 23,000 or so "white collar non-supervisors." Since the 1970's, the WSO's job complexity and expectation has grown such that the job is unrecognizable from those early days. Back then, a WSO brought his lunchbox and sat in a tower at a County Beach Park and guarded the beach in front of him. Now -- with Jetski's with their rescue sleds, with ATV's, with being an integral part of the 911 system -- WSO's are expected to respond to incidents that may take place miles away from their Tower. In fact just a couple of weeks ago (2/6/12) our Hanalei Jetski WSO's rescued 6 (six!) people who had been pulled out by a rip current at Anini Beach, several miles from

their base Tower. They had found a flotation object to hang onto (one of our beach-stationed rescue tubes), and never did they hear and see a happier sight than the Hanalei Jetski screaming and pounding its way to them through our nasty Kauai trade-wind chop, our WSO's soon bringing them all to shore and to their prayerful, and ultimately joyful, families.

Our WSO's have accepted this job expansion with great skill and Aloha. They are international legends. They have not, however, received a salary increase commensurate with this increase in their job description and job demand. For example, on Kauai, their salary at year 5 is less than a McDonald's worker at Year 5!

Trying to negotiate a salary increase while being in Unit 3 – a group of 350 WSO's in the midst of a Unit of around 23,000 members – has proven to be pretty much impossible, unless our economy is in a position which allows a raise for all 23,000. And this is the reason for my strong support of SB 2967. By being in their own Bargaining Unit, at least the WSO's will have a chance to have their issues and circumstances heard and addressed. We all, WSO's included, are well aware that being heard will not, in this economy, guarantee an immediate fix, i.e. a salary increase. The nuts and bolts of improved (and appropriate!) compensation will be worked out over years to come. But at least the avenue will exist.

Giving our WSO's a voice: That to me is a huge step forward in allowing our people -- including our leaders such as yourselves -- to say "Thank You, men and women of Ocean Safety. You have done a remarkable job not only of watching over us and our families, but also of being our ambassadors. We in turn will work hard to support you."

And, I thank you, Officers and Members of our Senate Ways and Means Committee, for considering my testimony in favor of SB 2967. I respectfully urge you to move this Bill forward from your Committee and to continue to shepherd it through future Committees.

Sincerely Yours,

Monty Downs, M.D.