



February 19, 2014

To: The Senate Committee on Ways and Means

From: Nathan Chang

Re: SUPPORT of SB 2035,SD1, relating to the Hawai'i Health Authority

Chairperson Ige and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

My name is Nathan Chang, I am a member of the Hawai'i Health Authority, and I am writing today in support of SB 2035,SD1, relating to the Hawai'i Health Authority.

Last year, the State legislature passed a bill (SB 2344) that provided funding for the operation of the Hawai'i Health Authority. Those who testified in support of that bill were able to establish the need for such funding, so there should be no necessity to prove the need again this year. The more relevant question to ask is whether or not the HHA was able to utilize the funds provided for the purposes specified and whether the funding enabled the HHA make adequate progress in fulfilling its responsibilities.

Unfortunately, that question cannot be answered because the appropriated funds were never expended. Although possible candidates for the Executive Director position were identified and engaged, complications in relation to the expending policies and process came up continually, slowing HHA's progress down significantly. In addition, only minimal assistance was provided by the Governor's office (where the legislature chose to place the HHA funding at the recommendation of the administration) in terms of navigating the system. So even though the Governor's office asked to manage the expenditure of the funding appropriated to the HHA, they provided little, if any, assistance when it came time to do so.

It is therefore critical that the same mistake not be made with this appropriation. The legislation establishing the Hawai'i Health Authority in 2011 placed it administratively in the Office of Budget and Finance. That is the office that should manage the expenditure of the funding and, hopefully, they will provide the level of assistance necessary to achieve the purposes specified in the HHA's proposed budget.

After more than two years of operation, the Hawai'i Health Authority continues to struggle in its efforts to fulfill its mandated responsibilities. From the perspective of one who is not fully aware of the circumstances leading to the legislation that established the HHA and who is perhaps politically naïve, it has been a very frustrating two years. It often seems like the HHA is caught in between the intentions of the legislature that established it, and an administration whose agenda has no place for it.

As I stated last year to this body, if the HHA is to accomplish the task that the legislature has mandated of it, then we must be provided with the tools that we need to do it. The members of the HHA accepted our appointments because we believed in the purpose for which it was established and because we wanted to be part of a process that would result in better health for our entire community. Please make it possible for us to accomplish this.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer these comments.