
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICERS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the department of
2 health has long recognized that the district health officer in
3 each of the three neighbor island counties should be a licensed
4 physician; ideally, a physician with experience in both
5 community medicine and public health. However, at some point,
6 the role of Hawaii county's acting district health officer was
7 filled by a non-physician.

8 The legislature further finds that when the department's
9 response to public health issues in Hawaii county is compared to
10 its response in Maui county, it is evident that the issues were
11 addressed more proficiently, and with greater community
12 satisfaction, in Maui county. This disparity is illustrated by
13 the department's respective responses in each county to two
14 major public health crises: the 2002 dengue fever outbreak and
15 the recent outbreak of rat lungworm disease. In both instances,
16 the legislature believes that the department's engagement with
17 community members was much more effective in Maui county.



1 The legislature finds that the Maui county district health
2 officer's visit to Hawaii county during its dengue fever
3 outbreak was much appreciated by Hawaii county residents,
4 because the physician was able to communicate valuable
5 information to the community. The legislature cannot ignore the
6 fact that Hawaii county residents felt devalued and even
7 disrespected by the department's lack of a community-based
8 physician. This was reflected in their highly critical audits
9 of the department's response to disease outbreaks. As a result,
10 members of the Hawaii county council petitioned the legislature
11 to require that all district health officers be physicians.

12 It is evident to the legislature that communities benefit
13 from the "boots on the ground" approach of physicians who serve
14 as district health officers. A physician's knowledge and
15 experience facilitate the position's day-to-day responsibilities
16 and allow the officer to serve as a dedicated community
17 resource.



1 The legislature concludes that requiring experience as an
2 on-site, community-based physician to serve as a district health
3 officer is critical to the department of health's ability to
4 provide community support and education and to address the
5 communities' needs and concerns in the face of public health
6 issues.

7 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to codify the long-
8 standing practice of having licensed physicians in the roles of
9 district health officers.

10 SECTION 2. Chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
11 amended by adding a new section to part I to be appropriately
12 designated and to read as follows:

13 "§321- District health officer; physician. Each
14 district health officer of the department of health shall be a
15 physician licensed under part I of chapter 453. To the extent
16 practicable, the physician shall have experience in public
17 health, primary care, emergency services, epidemiology, or
18 tropical medicine."

19 SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.

20 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2019,
21 provided that any incumbent district health officer who is



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1 employed by the department of health on the effective date of
2 this Act and who does not meet the Act's requirements shall
3 remain in that position until replaced by the department of
4 health or until December 31, 2019, whichever occurs sooner.

5

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H.B. NO. 147

Report Title:

DOH; District Health Officers; Physicians

Description:

Requires each district health officer for the Department of Health to be a licensed physician.

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