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STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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March 20, 2019

TO: The Honorable Representative Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

FROM: Pankaj Bhanot, Director

SUBJECT: **HCR 217 – URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO CREATE A  
COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION ADVISORY BODY**

Hearing: March 22, 2019, 8:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 329, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports HRC 217.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of HCR 217 is to urge DHS to create a Compact of Free Association (COFA) Advisory Board to make recommendations on different aspects of health care coverage for COFA residents.

DHS recognizes the unique circumstances our community members from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau face while navigating their way through systems of care that can struggle to meet their needs, particularly in the areas of health insurance and health care. Beginning in 2015, DHS's Med-QUEST Division (MQD) has facilitated a COFA Stakeholder meeting to provide a forum for ongoing dialog between health providers, COFA community leaders, outreach workers called "kokua," health insurers and members of Hawaii's congressional delegation. We believe that this informal group may serve as a foundation for the establishment of the more formal advisory body that is called for in these resolutions. We look forward to the continued dialog and co-created solution building that will come from this body.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**HCR-217**

Submitted on: 3/21/2019 10:28:55 AM

Testimony for HSH on 3/22/2019 8:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Michael Epp	Kokua Kalihi Valley	Support	Yes

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Michael Epp. For seven years, I was Executive Director of the Pacific Island Health Officers Association, the health leadership body of the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands, including the FSM, Palau and the Marshalls. I now work in management at Kokua Kalihi Valley, a community health center serving a large population of Hawaii’s COFA residents – a third of our patients are COFA residents.

So I’ve had the privilege of working with COFA islanders both in their nations of origin and in Kalihi. They are a gifted and resilient and resourceful people. HCR217, which Kokua Kalihi Valley fully supports, describe in the preambles the significant contributions of COFA islanders to our State economy, culture and security. I will, in the interest of time, not repeat these contribution here.

Having been raised in Hawaii, I understand how each wave of newcomers to our shores faces discrimination. But Hawaii’s COFA residents—despite their significant contributions to our state community—face a particularly insidious form of structural discrimination unlike other comparable immigrant groups: They are excluded from Medicaid and, in the last few years, have been shifted from one comparatively inadequate health plan to another, in a confusing ever-changing maze of administrative and documentation requirements and financial copays.

The result, while surely unintentional, has been devastating. For many of our COFA families in Kalihi, the outcome has been preventable and debilitating illness and death. This is not hyperbole. At Kokua Kalihi Valley, we are completing an assessment of the impact of these economic and administrative barriers among our COFA patients, and the results are deeply discouraging. We look forward to sharing our findings with you soon.

We often hear that the COFA Medicaid issue is primarily a federal problem. And I commend the leadership in my state, for allocating resources for the health benefits that do exist. But the problem of structural discrimination remains, and it is costing the health and lives of our neighbors in Kalihi.

Federal recalcitrance is not an excuse in a State that often serves as an example to the nation, of justice, care and aloha—values that are at the core of our host culture identity and that undergird our success as a community. In the current national political climate

about immigrants, taking such a welcoming and caring stance is more critical than ever. Please pass HCR217, as a key step towards restoring health equity to our COFA families, friends and neighbors.

Thank you

Michael Epp

Kokua Kalihi Valley

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**Dr. Vidalino S. Raatior**

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To: Rep. Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Rep. Nadie K. Nakamura, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

From: Dr. Vidalino S. Raatior

RE: Support for HRC217, Urging the Department of Human Services to Create a Compact of Free Association Advisory Body

Hearing: Friday, March 22, 2019, 8:30 am, Conference Room 329

It is an honor to write this testimonial in strong support of HRC217 “Urging the Department of Human Services to Create a Compact of Free Association Advisory Body.” As a Micronesian educator and Pacific focused education consultant who spent six years working in the University of Hawaii system to support the success of Micronesian and other Pacific Islander students attending schools in Hawai’i, I feel this is a much needed step in the just direction. It provides a formal way for those who provide much needed services for my Micronesian community to be accountable for providing equitable services for our people. It is also a way for our Micronesian leaders to be part of the conversations.

It has been a painful journey for many Micronesians who arrived in the Hawaiian islands since the COFA Treaty was ratified by the US Congress and signed by President Reagan in 1986. We come from Pacific cultures where hospitality is an important cultural tradition particularly for visitors to our respective islands. We expect that same hospitality in the great state of Hawaii, home of the Aloha Spirit. Sadly, I have researched, witnessed, and felt the pain of racial discrimination against Micronesians and even American citizens born of Micronesian parents. That sadness runs deep for those of us who are related in blood to the late Papa Mau Piailug who joined our indigenous communities together through his sharing of our sacred knowledge of wayfinding to the Hawaiian people. I hope that this COFA Advisory Body would become an embodiment of Papa Mau’s “stick” that has already been laid between our peoples and the ocean we all share.

I know healthcare will be an important work for this proposed COFA Advisory Body. But equally important will be the message such a body will communicate to the future generations of Micronesians in the Rainbow State...that they are as much a part of that rainbow as any law abiding, tax paying resident. After all, the success of one Micronesian in the Hawaiian islands adds to the our greater success as a Hawaiian Ohana.

Mahalo! Killisou! Kamagar! Kalahngan! Kulo! Sa Hachichig! Kommo! Mesulang! Thank you for your support.

Dina Shek  
Honolulu, HI 96816  
*dinasf@gmail.com*

To: Representative Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Representative Nadine K. Nakamura, Vice Chair  
Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

From: Dina Shek

Hearing: Friday, March 22, 2019, 8:30 a.m., Conference Room 329

**RE: Support for HCR 217, Urging the Department of Human Services to Create a Compact of Free Association Advisory Body**

I write in strong support of HCR 217, “Urging the Department of Human Services to Create a Compact of Free Association Advisory Body.” I also urge this committee to amend HCR 217 using the language of companion resolutions, SCR 201 and SR 161. This resolution would promote equal treatment for Hawai‘i residents legally present under the Compact of Free Association (COFA). COFA residents have lived, worked, and contributed to Hawai‘i’s community and economy for over three decades, and they should be afforded the same access to healthcare as other Hawai‘i residents.

Since 1996 and the implementation of the Welfare Reform Act,<sup>1</sup> COFA residents have been excluded from federal Medicaid and other benefits, despite contributing to local, state, and federal taxes that cover benefits for others. Over the last decade, COFA residents in Hawai‘i have been subjected to devastating healthcare cuts and been forced to navigate inconsistent and confusing systems. This has led to devastating health outcomes that affect us all as neighbors and community members. The passage of HCR 217 would be a critical step towards correcting this unfairness.

As states like Oregon and Washington commit to meaningful and justice-oriented solutions to providing consistent healthcare for COFA residents in their states, Hawai‘i must do the same. Ensuring access to healthcare coverage for all Hawai‘i’s residents benefits us all and promotes justice and fairness for Hawai‘i’s COFA residents, workers, parents, caregivers, and valued neighbors. For these reasons, **please support the passage of HCR 217, with amended language used in SCR 201 and SR 161.**

Thank you for your attention and consideration of this important matter.

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<sup>1</sup> The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105.

**HCR-217**

Submitted on: 3/20/2019 4:56:28 PM

Testimony for HSH on 3/22/2019 8:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Randy Compton	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Please support HCR 217 and its companion resolutions to advance our State toward increased justice and fairness for all Hawaii residents, including our valued COFA friends and neighbors. As Oregon and Washington States commit to meaningful and justice-oriented solutions to providing consistent healthcare for COFA residents, Hawaii must do the same. Ensuring access to healthcare coverage for all of Hawaii's residents benefits everyone and promotes justice and fairness for Hawaii's COFA residents, workers, parents, caregivers, and valued members of our community. Please support the passage of HCR 217.

**HCR-217**

Submitted on: 3/21/2019 9:09:07 AM

Testimony for HSH on 3/22/2019 8:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Megan Kiyomi Inada Hagiwara	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to write in strong support of HCR217 resolution “Urging the Department of Human Services to Create a Compact of Free Association Advisory Board”

I have had the honor of working with our COFA resident community since the proposal of the severely inadequate Basic Health Hawaii healthcare coverage. Over many years there has been much confusion, frustration, and heartbreak around people not getting the care that they need due to the ever changing and inappropriate health plans this community has been shuffled between.

I have seen fierce advocacy in the face of discriminatory policies by our local policy makers, COFA community, and health advocates. I have felt the joy of community abundance as well as the collective grief of losing another loved one to a preventable disease. I have witnessed resiliency of community throughout these events, as well as hopelessness - with people feeling like they have no options, “that I don’t want to be a burden, so I’ll just stop taking my medicine, I’ll just stop going to the doctor”.

It is time we definitively let our COFA community know that they are NOT a burden. That their giving of access to their land and waters to our government, their bravery in our military, their sharing of their cultural knowledge is honored and greatly appreciated. COFA residents are an integral part of our Hawaii Ohana. They are our friends and family. They are doctors and restaurant workers. They are our mentors and students. And just like everyone else, they deserve appropriate access to dignified healthcare. It is time.

I believe support of this task force can help lead to providing equitable care to all of our residents and members of our ever growing community.

**HCR-217**

Submitted on: 3/21/2019 10:43:01 AM

Testimony for HSH on 3/22/2019 8:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Sara K Bauer	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to write in strong support of HCR 217 resolution “Urging the Department of Human Services to Create a Compact of Free Association Advisory Board”

I am a public health nurse and I have the great honor of working with our COFA resident community over the last few years. In over 10 years of public health work, I have witnessed confusion, frustration, and heartbreak around people not getting the care that they need due to the ever changing, inappropriate, beurocratic health plans this community has been shuffled between.

I have seen fierce advocacy in the face of discriminatory policies by our local policy makers, COFA community, and health advocates. I have felt the joy of community abundance as well as the collective grief of losing another loved one to a preventable disease. I have witnessed resiliency of community throughout these events, as well as hopelessness - with people feeling like they have no options, “that I don’t want to be a burden, so I’ll just stop taking my medicine, I’ll just stop going to the doctor”.

It is time we definitively let our COFA community know that they are NOT a burden. That their giving of access to their land and waters to our government, their bravery in our military, their sharing of their cultural knowledge is honored and greatly appreciated. COFA residents are an integral part of our Hawaii Ohana. They are our friends and family. They are doctors and restaurant workers. They are our mentors and students. And just like everyone else, they deserve appropriate access to dignified healthcare. It is time.

I believe support of this task force can help lead to providing equitable care to all of our residents and members of our ever growing community.

Warmly,

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Sara K. Bauer, RN, MN, MA



Project Coordinator, VOCA Grant

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