



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Finance  
February 20, 2020 at 1:00 p.m.

By

Donald O. Straney  
Vice President for Academic Planning and Policy  
University of Hawai'i System

### HB 2707 HD2 – RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH

Chair Luke, Vice Chair Cullen, and members of the committee:

The University of Hawai'i (University) strongly supports the intent of HB 2707 HD2 – Relating to Mental Health. Providing scholarship funds for students pursuing a degree in social work would serve the State by increasing the number of qualified social workers to meet mental health needs.

Mental illness a major social and public health concern in the U.S. Mental illness is a leading cause of disability in the U.S. accounting for 25% of all years of life lost to disability and premature mortality. One in five adults in the U.S. experience mental illness, and one-half of all chronic mental illness begins by the age of 14; three-quarters by the age of 24. In Hawai'i, mental illness is a critical issue and indicates the presence of a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder.

The University would welcome financial support to assist students in social work who are effectively trained to provide mental health services to the people of Hawai'i. Professional social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health services providers. In particular, clinical social workers have a master's degree, two years of post-master's experience and must be licensed in the state in which they practice. In high-cost Hawai'i, these scholarships are critical to many social work students who might not be able to pursue higher education degrees without some financial support, and are often forced to take loans to finance their education. A preference ranking for Hawai'i residents would be considered. National statistics show that social work students with loans have a higher debt to earnings ratio than other professions.

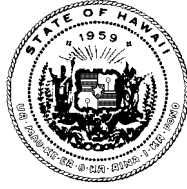
The strong value of financial support for students is viewed within implementation considerations. There would be some mechanical problems issues with administering such a program. For example, providing aid as a scholarship that ends up having to be repaid when students do not complete the program or do not spend five years working for the Department of Human Services will create administrative and logistical issues. These conditions effectively turn the scholarship into a loan program. While the University is willing to find ways to undertake and overcome such challenges for the benefit of having this program, these are processes that must be adequately resourced.

Managing such a program would place an administrative burden on the University to collect monies to reimburse the scholarship for students who do not finish their program or work for the Department of Human Services for five years. It is also possible that students who benefit from the proposed scholarship program could also meet state needs by working in other state departments that employ social workers such as the Department of Health and the Department of Education.

Identifying the appropriate agency to administer this loan collection program and providing for adequately funding those efforts may be necessary in the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.

DAVID Y. IGE  
GOVERNOR



PANKAJ BHANOT  
DIRECTOR

CATHY BETTS  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

February 19, 2020

TO: The Honorable Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair  
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Pankaj Bhanot, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 2707 HD2 – RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH**

Hearing: February 20, 2020, 1:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this bill to build capacity and develop the State's behavioral health workforce, and offers comments. DHS requests that any appropriation not supplant the current budget priorities identified in the executive budget. DHS appreciates amendments of the Committee on Human Services & Homelessness to include other executive departments, the Judiciary, and contract providers. DHS appreciates the amendments of the Committee on Higher and Lower Education clarifying that the five-year service could be with any named agency or branch, and not all. However, the idea of a pathway toward a trained cross-sector workforce is very appealing.

DHS proposes an additional amendment.

**PURPOSE:** Establishes the behavioral health social worker scholarship program at UH, which requires recipients of the scholarship to commit to five years of service with DHS, DOH, PSD, Judiciary, or contracted service providers. Appropriates funds. Takes effect on December 31, 2059. (HD2)

Given the behavioral health needs of Hawaii's multi-generational families and individuals, promoting, supporting, and increasing the behavioral health social work workforce is a necessary investment in the long-term health and well-being of Hawaii's residents.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AGENCY

The Legislature currently contributes general funds to the Hawaii Child Welfare Collaboration (HCWEC). This is a collaboration between the DHS and the University of Hawaii, Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work, to recruit and train master's-level social work students to work at DHS Child Welfare Services (CWS). From 1998 to 2008, 100 students completed the program and became employees of CWS. Unfortunately, during the great recession of 2009-2010, 21% of the CWS work force was reduced through a reduction and force; and in 2011 the program ended following changes in Title IV-E funding.

In 2016, the HCWEC program was refunded to rebuild the CWS work force. The program provides options to students, a two-year program or an advanced standing option for students who enter with a Bachelor's of Social Work. For students who continue to work full time, the program offers a three-year part-time option. Distance education technology allows neighbor island residents to participate from their home island. In 2017, 8 scholars graduated and another 8 in 2018. There are 10 scholars in the current class of 2019-2020.

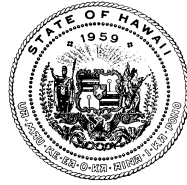
While the priority of DHS is to increase and improve the skills of the workforce of child welfare social workers, behavioral health social workers are needed in other departments and subject matter areas, such as homelessness, assisting families with their aging relatives, assisting families involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and in general, to assist when residents experience significant or chronic life stressors and traumas.

DHS suggests that the Legislature some flexibility and consider amending the second sentence of (c) as follows:

If the recipient fails to complete three years of the required five-year service commitment, the recipient shall reimburse the University of Hawaii for the full amount of the award received from the behavioral health social worker scholarship program. If the recipient ends employment with these departments, branch, or contracted service provider after three years and before the required five-year service commitment, the recipient shall reimburse the University of Hawaii a pro rata share based upon the months remaining in the five-year service commitment.

While the individual's commitment to complete the service is a priority, we also would like to make this program an attractive choice for students. The HCWEC program offers a 2-year or 3-year commitment depending upon the course of study. We further recognize that demands and needs of families may interfere with both the ability to complete the 5-year commitment and pay back the entirety of the loan if something or life event requires them to leave government employment after 3 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 2707 H.D. 2**  
**RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH**

REPRESENTATIVE SYLVIA LUKE, CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing Date and Time: Thursday, February 20, 2020, 1:00 p.m.

Room: 308

1 **Department Position:** The Department of Health (“Department”) strongly supports this  
2 measure and offers comments.

3 **Department Testimony:** The subject matter of this measure intersects with the scope of the  
4 Department’s Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) whose statutory mandate is to assure a  
5 comprehensive statewide behavioral health care system by leveraging and coordinating public,  
6 private and community resources. Through the BHA, the Department is committed to carrying  
7 out this mandate by reducing silos, ensuring behavioral health care is readily accessible, and  
8 person-centered. The BHA’s Adult Mental Health Division (AMHD) provides the following  
9 testimony on behalf of the Department.

10 The Department strongly supports initiatives introduced by the legislature that address  
11 the need for increasing the number of trained mental health care professionals in Hawaii.  
12 Through the creation of a behavioral health social worker scholarship program at the University  
13 of Hawaii (UH), students will have the opportunity to receive tuition assistance in exchange for  
14 a service commitment with the Department of Human Services (DHS) in the areas of psychiatric  
15 and mental health, or other behavioral health social work.

16 The Department acknowledges that coordination across departments is required in  
17 order to implement a comprehensive continuum of care and looks forward to continued

1 collaboration with other departments including the DHS, Department of Public Safety (PSD) and  
2 Judiciary, and service providers who provide psychiatric and behavioral health services.

3 We support the amendments proposed and comments offered by the DHS in their  
4 testimony.

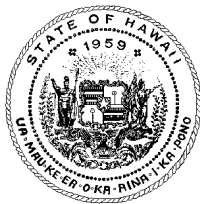
5 The Department thanks the Legislature for its support of programs that increase the  
6 behavioral health workforce in Hawaii.

7 **Offered Amendments:** None.

8 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

9 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department respectfully requests that any appropriations made  
10 available through this measure do not supplant budget priorities identified in the Governor's  
11 executive budget.

DAVID Y. IGE  
GOVERNOR



STATE OF HAWAII  
**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

919 Ala Moana Boulevard, 4th Floor  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96814

**NOLAN P. ESPINDA**  
DIRECTOR

**Maria C. Cook**  
Deputy Director  
Administration

**Shari L. Kimoto**  
Deputy Director  
Corrections

**Renee R. Sonobe Hong**  
Deputy Director  
Law Enforcement

No. \_\_\_\_\_

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY**

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2707, HOUSE DRAFT 2  
RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH.

by

Nolan P. Espinda, Director  
Department of Public Safety

House Committee on Finance  
Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair  
Representative Ty J.K. Cullen, Vice Chair

Thursday, February 20, 2020; 1:00 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 308

Chair Luke, Vice Chair Cullen, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Public Safety (PSD) supports House Bill (HB) 2707, House Draft (HD) 2, which seeks to establish and fund the behavioral health social worker scholarship program at the University of Hawaii. HB 2707, HD 2 requires the recipients of the scholarship to commit to five years of service with the Department of Human Services, Department of Health, Department of Public Safety, the Judiciary, or service providers contracted by these departments and branch. The Department respectfully offers the following comments.

The September 2019 Brazelon Center for Mental Health Law publication identified several evidenced-based community mental health services that have been implemented on a national level for purposes of diversion from incarceration, such as Assertive Community Treatment, Supported Housing, Mobile Crisis Services, and Supported Employment. As stated in the proposed measure, there is clearly a pressing need for educated, trained, and licensed social workers who are committed



to employing specialized and evidenced-based mental health services for this challenging, underserved population in our community and correctional system.

HB 2707, HD 2, provides a means to address one missing component in our higher educational system at the University of Hawaii and largely serves to invest in the future of Hawaii. Social Work is not an eligible discipline for the Scholarship Program of the National Health Service Corps, which administers the program through the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. While the Licensed Clinical Social Worker is an eligible discipline for the Loan Repayment Program of the National Health Service Corps, the complexity of the scoring process of the Health Professional Shortage Area does not always reflect Hawaii's needs.

As specified in the proposed measure, educated and trained social workers are needed in all mental health service areas for justice-involved individuals. The Department respectfully requests your passage of HB 2707, HD 2, to allow for recipients of the social worker scholarship program to meet service commitment requirements at the Department of Human Services, Judiciary, Department of Health, and the Department of Public Safety with the desired outcome of an increased pool of well-trained social workers to serve the current and future needs of the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2707, HD 2.



*The Judiciary, State of Hawai‘i*

**Testimony to the House Committee on Finance**

Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair  
Representative Ty J.K. Cullen, Vice Chair

Thursday, February 20, 2020, 1:00 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 308

by  
Jason M. Minami  
Human Resources Director

Dwight Sakai  
Probation Administrator  
Adult Client Services Branch

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY**

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**Bill No. and Title:** House Bill No. 2707, HD2, Relating to Mental Health.

**Purpose:** Establishes the behavioral health social worker scholarship program at UH, which requires recipients of the scholarship to commit to five years of service with DHS, DOH, PSD, Judiciary, or contracted service providers. Appropriates funds. Takes effect on December 31, 2059. (HD2)

**Judiciary's Position:**

The Judiciary supports House Bill 2707, H.D. 2, Relating to Mental Health.

The Judiciary supports the establishment of the behavioral health social worker scholarship program which seeks to increase the number of mental health care professionals, not only to address the needs of the criminal justice system but also the general public at large.

The Judiciary requests that it be included in language requiring collaboration with the University of Hawai‘i to determine the number of scholarships awarded annually and the establishment of policies and procedures for the program.



House Bill No. 2707, HD2, Relating to Mental Health  
House Committee on Finance  
Thursday, February 20, 2020  
Page 2

The number of individuals with mental illness who are placed on court ordered supervision continues to increase. Often, due to their mental illness, these individuals find it difficult to adhere to the terms and conditions of supervision. This vulnerable population requires extensive treatment and service needs that traditional supervision was not designed to address. The Judiciary recognized this need and established a Mental Health Court in the First Circuit Court. The Mental Health Court has proven successful as it takes a mental health approach to the supervision of those individuals with Severe Mental Illness (SMI). Supervision of individuals with mental illness involves understanding the mental health disorders, including severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI), treatment methods and levels of care, psychotropic medications, crisis intervention, knowledge of community resources, and risk and need levels of those with mental illness.

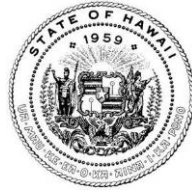
Social Worker positions that supervise individuals with mental health typically have minimal or no formal subject matter education, training or experience in behavioral health. Having social workers with the requisite education, knowledge, understanding, and experience in behavioral health would save tax dollars by diverting clients away from prisons and hospitals, as they would be better skilled to help clients effectuate change and live a pro-social lifestyle, thereby reducing recidivism and improving public safety.

Mental health services are critical in serving our juvenile population as evidenced in the wrap around services that are necessary in treating this population. Social workers skilled in mental health would be effective in formulating a case plan specific to this population's need.

Our recent experience shows that Social Worker positions are becoming increasingly difficult to recruit for and fill. We believe that a scholarship program, such as the one provided for in this bill, may entice students to pursue a course of study in the area of social work and, in turn, greatly assist the criminal justice system and the general public by building the workforce in the area of mental health.

In consideration of the information presented above, the Judiciary supports the passage of this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 2707, H.D.2.



**EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS**  
HONOLULU

**DAVID Y. IGE**  
GOVERNOR

February 20, 2020

**TO:** The Honorable Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair  
House Committee on Finance

**FROM:** Scott Morishige, MSW, Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness

**SUBJECT: HB2707 HD2 – RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH**

Hearing: Thursday, February 20, 2020, 1:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

**POSITION:** The Governor's Coordinator supports this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact budget priorities.

The Coordinator appreciates the amendments by the House Committee on Human Services and Lower and Higher Education to include the option of completing the five years of required services at either the Judiciary, Department of Health (DOH), Department of Public Safety (PSD), Department of Human Services (DHS), or service providers contracted by these departments and branch.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this bill is to establish the behavioral health social worker scholarship program at the University of Hawaii, which requires recipients of the scholarship to commit to five years of service with DHS, DOH, PSD, and service providers contracted by these departments and branch for services in the areas of psychiatric and mental health or other behavioral health social work. The bill also appropriates funds for Fiscal Year 2021 for the behavioral health social worker scholarship program.

The Coordinator recognizes that multiple departments have a need for well-trained social workers to address the behavioral health needs of clients, including individuals directly experiencing homelessness. While this measure does not specifically address the needs of

homeless individuals, there is a clear overlap between individuals experiencing severe mental illness and/or substance use disorders and individuals experiencing homelessness.

The Hawaii Interagency Council on Homelessness (HICH), a 27-member advisory council chaired by the Coordinator, recently voted to prioritize support for behavioral health reforms and programs as part of its 2020 legislative priorities to address homelessness. In addition, HICH supports strengthening the capacity of the homeless services sector through the development of a professional workforce, including individuals that specialize in the field of behavioral health.

Over the past four years, the State has developed and implemented a range of new programs to divert homeless individuals experiencing severe mental illness or substance use disorders to appropriate treatment and support. These new programs include the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program, intensive case management for homeless individuals, CARES, and the Assisted Community Treatment (ACT) program. A professional trained workforce is needed for implementation of this array of programs to be most effective.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

**HB-2707-HD-2**

Submitted on: 2/18/2020 12:42:28 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2020 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Connie Mitchell	IHS, The Institute for Human Services	Support	No

Comments:

IHS strongly supports HB 2707 to strengthen workforce in the human services sector. We are thankful for this bill's intent to provide scholarships for social work students to meet the growing demand for services and the need for more professionals trained in this area.



HAWAII SUBSTANCE ABUSE COALITION

## **HB2707 HD2 Social Worker Scholarship**

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE:

- Rep. Sylvia Luke, Chair; Rep. Ty Cullen, Vice Chair
- Thursday, Feb. 20th, 2020: 1:00 pm
- Conference Room 308

## **Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports HB2707 HD2:**

GOOD MORNING CHAIR, VICE CHAIR AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS.

My name is Alan Johnson. I am the current chair of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition (HSAC), a statewide organization of over 30 non-profit alcohol and drug treatment and prevention agencies.

**The demand for social work services are on the rise but staffing resources are getting smaller.**

- *The social care system in Hawai'i is under strain because of the shortage of experienced and qualified social workers, which has led to critical situations.*
- *The role of social workers in society is now more important than ever before because of the combined impact of the aging population, severe shortages in social care, and gaps in services. And the worst part – it seems that the most vulnerable in society are the ones who are the most affected by the situation.*
- *Agencies in Hawai'i are recording unusually high vacancy rates with some agencies, such as substance use disorder agencies, reporting 20-25% vacancy rates. The shortage of social workers has led to social workers juggling far more cases than they should have, which can then in turn lead to even larger vacancies. Moreover, social workers' compensation lags far behind other healthcare positions. Most agencies find that recruitment for social workers to be most difficult.*

**Scholarships are a creative way to really make a difference.**

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and are available for questions.



## CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAI'I

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2707 HD2: RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH

TO: Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair, Representative Ty J. K. Cullen, Vice Chair, and Members, Committee on Finance

FROM: Rob Van Tassel, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai'i

Hearing: Thursday, 2/20/20; 1:00 PM; CR 308

Chair Luke, Vice Chair Cullen, and Members, Committee on Finance:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony **in support** of HB 2707, HD1, which would establish the behavioral health social worker scholarship program at the UH. **We strongly support this HD2, which includes that students receiving this scholarship can fulfill their 5 year work commitment by working for service providers contracted by the state departments** in the areas of psychiatric and mental health or other behavioral health social work. I am Rob Van Tassel, with Catholic Charities Hawai'i. We are also a member of Partners in Care.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH) is a tax exempt, non-profit agency that has been providing social services in Hawai'i for over 70 years. CCH has programs serving elders, children, families, homeless and immigrants. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy for the most vulnerable in Hawai'i. Catholic Charities Hawai'i has a long history of working in the areas of affordable housing and homelessness.

There is a great need in Hawaii for trained behavioral health workers. However, it is not only State "difficult-to-fill" positions that need an expansion of trained social workers. Non-profit organizations that contract with the Department of Humans Services (DHS) for behavioral health services also are challenged to find adequate trained staff for critical programs. Non-profits also have the challenge of competing with health care organizations for this specialized workforce.

With Housing First and other community behavioral health services providing critical interventions, we need more well-trained staff. This bill is an important step to increase trained staff needed to end homelessness as well as to meet the growing needs in the overall community for mental health and behavioral health services.

Trained mental health professionals are a state-wide concern for public safety, ending homelessness, and the overall health of the public at large. We urge you to pass HB 2707, HD 2 as an important step forward to increase trained workers that are urgently needed.

If you have any questions, please contact our Legislative Liaison, Betty Lou Larson, at (808) 373-0356, or [bettylou.larson@catholiccharitieshawaii.org](mailto:bettylou.larson@catholiccharitieshawaii.org).





**HB-2707-HD-2**

Submitted on: 2/18/2020 3:42:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2020 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Colleen Fox	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I am in support of HB2707 HD2 Social Worker Scholarship. Social Workers play an important role in our health and human services agencies. The shortage of experienced and qualified social workers in the social services field has led to critical situations that impact our most vulnerable. Social Workers committ to the field knowing there is not a large financial payoff, which can make it challenging to pay off college loans and remain in the field. By supporting HB2707, you are supporting the most vulnerable of our population who receive services from social work graduates. Please support those who support our neediest.

Mahalo,

Colleen Fox, PhD

Maikiki

**HB-2707-HD-2**

Submitted on: 2/19/2020 9:02:59 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2020 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Ann Yabusaki	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I write in support of this bill. I am a psychologist and family therapist and would welcome more social workers working for government agencies to help expedite and improve care for some of my clients involved with government systems. This program would also help to address the great need on the neighbor islands.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ann S. Yabusaki, Ph.D., MFT

Christina Marsh  
54-126 Imua place  
Hauula, HI 96717

February 19, 2020

Committee on Finance  
Rep. Sylvia Luke,  
Rep. Ty J.K. Cullen, Vice Chair  
and committee members

In Support of HB2707 HD1

My name is Christina Marsh, I have a Bachelors in Social Work and I am currently working as a substance abuse counselor with adolescents in school base outpatient treatment program and currently working toward my Masters in Social Work in mental health.

When looking at my options to continue my education I had to make the decision on whether or not to take out school loans, however, in this profession there is a need for mental health specialization, and the need can be seen in my own practice, the prevalence of mental health issues in adolescents in treatment. I felt I needed more training and exposure to increase my knowledge and practice. Having the expertise and continued training in this field is important to continue to provide services that is effective to address substance abuse and mental health issues. Having an option that can afford the opportunity and affordable, will bring in more professionals in this field, with the increase need of mental health social worker professionals, and will help make that decision easier for those contemplating this field and continuing their education. It is a selfless decision when choosing social work and giving of yourself. This would show incentive and appreciation in choosing to be in a profession where you give so much of who you are in effort to change so many lives.

Even though I will not benefit from this bill personally, I am delighted to see this bill make its way to being approved and for future recipients that will benefit from this opportunity and lives changed by future recipients of this scholarship. Thank you for the opportunity to give my testimony.

**HB 2707 HD2**  
**RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH**  
**Committee on Finance**  
**Hearing – February 20, 2020**  
**1:00 PM, State Capital, Conference Room 308**

Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair  
Representative Ty J.K. Cullen, Vice Chair

By: Dannah G. Yamamoto

I am writing to express my **support of HB 2707 HD2** to establish a scholarship program for behavioral health social workers at the University of Hawaii, where the recipients will commit 5 years of service to the DHS, DOH, DOE, DPS, judiciary, or contracted providers for services in the behavioral mental health field.

As a social worker with the DOH, I have quickly become aware of the high “turnaround” rates of behavioral health workers within the state and in our contracted providers. This can be due to the high demands of the positions, the secondary trauma that is often experienced, and the low wages these positions offer. Though I believe there are many other ways we can support our behavioral health workers, HB 2707 HD2 offers several benefits to social workers and our field:

- 1) It provides incentive for those, who could not otherwise, continue their education and gain valuable skills necessary to be effective behavioral health social workers in the community. With more accessible education, the more competent social workers we will have entering the field and providing services to those in our community.
- 2) It will help the state’s and contracted agency’s social worker “retention problem”. I have worked with families who have changed therapists over 3 times within one year due to the turnaround rates in our agencies. This is a problem for continuity of care as rapport needs to be rebuilt and the family needs to adjust the the style of a new therapist. HB 2707 HD2 would provide incentive for social workers to commit to a position, ensuring more consistent mental health care for our community.

HB 2707 is a step in the right direction to increase educational opportunities for behavioral health workers and provide consistency of care for those benefiting from services. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Dannah G. Yamamoto

**LATE**

HB 2707 HD2 – RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2707 HD2

Aloha Honorable Chair Sylvia Luke, Vice Chair Ty J.K. Cullen and members, House Committee on Finance,

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB2707 HD2, which would establish a behavioral health social work scholarship program at the Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work at University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

My name is Alex Nakamoto and I am currently completing my master's degree in social work at Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work at University of Hawai'i at Manoa. My specialization is in the field of behavioral mental health and I am an intern at a substance abuse treatment organization. Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify on this very important bill.

I strongly support the intent of the bill, which is to create a scholarship program where Master of Social Work Students would be able to work in the field of Mental Health post-graduation. As a student, having a program like this would have a number of benefits. For one, it would open the door to more students who want to pursue a degree in social work and want to pursue a career in the field of mental health. In our program, a majority of our cohort is specializing in behavioral mental health and a program like this would only make the program more attractive to students. This would also provide a key "foot in the door" for students who want to work in Hawai'i for their careers or want to gain valuable experience.

The topic of mental health, and specifically, Hawai'i's mental health system of care has been a focal point in the news. One way to address this, is by increasing our workforce with trained professionals. Using social work values, education and training, mental health social workers would gain valuable experience needed to do work here in Hawai'i. As stated in the bill, social workers could work in many different areas of the state department where they could provide a client-centered, strengths-based approach that would empower individuals seeking mental health services. In general, an increased workforce could help to alleviate issues in Hawai'i that require multi-faceted solutions. I believe that this type of program will encourage and entice students to work for our state mental health system with the hope that they stay beyond their required years.

Mahalo again for the opportunity to testify.