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Statement of

Hakim Ouansafi

Hawaii Public Housing Authority
Before the

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

Thursday, February 4, 2021

9:00 AM - Room 423, Hawaii State Capitol

In consideration of

HB 616

RELATING TO BROADBAND ACCESS

Honorable Chair Nakamura and Members of the House Committee on Housing, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning House Bill (HB) 616, relating to broadband access.

The Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) **appreciates the intent** of HB 616, and offers the following comments. This measure requires the HPHA to conduct a study on the state of broadband access in all public housing projects in the State.

While the HPHA has no experience in providing broadband internet access, the Agency has been working with broadband advocates on the state of broadband access in all 85 public housing properties.

Their preliminary estimate is that a study would cost approximately \$500,000 to accurately report costs to provide universal broadband access in all public housing projects in the State as a telecommunications network architecture firm would need to be contracted to perform an assessment of the current broadband infrastructure. At minimum, approximately three engineers would be needed to study the wiring and speed of service, while also taking into account the different types of buildings and the materials they are made of, as well as their locations on the island where those properties reside. To perform this study, we respectfully request a \$500,000 appropriation to provide for this broadband access report, so long as it does not adversely impact the Governor's Biennium Budget.

Please know that all HPHA public housing projects have internet access through either Spectrum or Hawaiian Telcom and most tenants also qualify for low-income rates that may be provided by those internet service providers. The purchase of broadband internet service is strictly between the tenant and internet service provider, as are other services, such as cellular phone service, electricity, and other utilities.

The HPHA appreciates the opportunity to provide the Committee with the HPHA's testimony. We thank you very much for your dedicated support.



**Testimony to the House Committee on Housing
Wednesday, February 4, 2021; 9:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 423
Via Videoconference**

RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 0616, RELATING TO BROADBAND ACCESS.

Chair Nakamura, Vice Chair Hashimoto, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** House Bill No. 0616, RELATING TO BROADBAND ACCESS.

The bill, as received by your Committee, would direct the Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) to study the feasibility of providing broadband access in all public housing projects in the State, including the costs that would be incurred to provide universal broadband access, and a survey of any obstacles to providing universal broadband access in all public housing projects. The bill would also allow HPHA to seek assistance from the Legislative Reference Bureau in conducting certain research or drafting.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

Hawaii has long been at the forefront of integrating newer technologies into daily life. One example of this is Hawaii's Telehealth Law which has served as a model across the United States. Yet, it was only after COVID struck our islands that this law became fully integrated into daily life.

Today, it is common practice to ZOOM or SKYPE with your health practitioner instead of physically going to the provider's office for a visit. When COVID first hit our islands, many health providers had to limit the number of patients that could be serviced in-person because of a scarcity of Personal Protective Equipment, restrictions in the gatherings of groups, and the need for changes to the physical arrangement of examination rooms and other diagnostic facilities.

Testimony on House Bill No. 0616
Thursday, February 4, 2021; 9:00 a.m.
Page 2

For people with adequate broadband access, telehealth was a lifeline for the provision of essential primary health care services. Yet, health care facilities in rural areas experienced the same problems when COVID hit. They too had to limit the number of patients they could see. But because these communities lacked adequate broadband access, they were effectively cut off from primary care. Many were forced to bear their maladies until it became necessary to go to the emergency room.

The Governor's suspension of a statute that prohibits the use of standard telephonic service in telehealth has temporarily eased this inequity. For those without adequate broadband, at least for now, they are able to obtain basic primary care services over landline telephones. But that is neither adequate, tenable, nor fair to the thousands of citizens who lack broadband access.

Because of this, the HPCA views the lack of broadband access in rural areas as an issue of social equity. In this day and age, everyone should have equal access to health care. Telehealth was envisioned as the means of leveling the field between urban and rural areas. The lack of broadband ensures that urban and rural communities remain unequal.

As a member of the Broadband Hui, the HPCA urges your favorable consideration of this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or eabe@hawaiiipca.net.

HB-616

Submitted on: 2/3/2021 7:44:37 AM

Testimony for HSG on 2/4/2021 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Leimomi Khan	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Support. Study may result in increase of broadband access in public housing enabling greater access to health, education, and other programs and services.

LATE

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LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU
State of Hawaii
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Written Comments

HB616 **RELATING TO BROADBAND ACCESS**

Charlotte A. Carter-Yamauchi, Director
Legislative Reference Bureau

Presented to the House Committee on Housing

Thursday, February 4, 2021, 9:00 a.m.
Via Video Conference

Chair Nakamura and Members of the Committee:

I am Charlotte Carter-Yamauchi, Director of the Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB). Thank you for this opportunity to provide written **comments** on H.B. No. 616, Relating to Broadband Access.

The purpose of this measure is to:

- (1) Require the Hawaii Public Housing Authority to conduct a study on the state of broadband access in all public housing projects in the State;
- (2) Require the Public Housing Authority to submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Legislature prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2022; and
- (3) Authorize the Hawaii Public Housing Authority to request assistance from the Legislative Reference Bureau in conducting certain research or drafting the report or recommended legislation, as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of the measure.

The Bureau takes no position on this measure but submits the following comments for your consideration.

With regard to authorizing the Hawaii Public Housing Authority to request assistance from the Legislative Reference Bureau to conduct certain research or to draft the report or recommended legislation, as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of the measure, we note that the Bureau has no specific expertise or particular experience in matters relating to public housing or broadband access. Consequently, any research requested of the Bureau would first require the Hawaii Public Housing Authority to educate Bureau staff on the relevant aspects of public housing and broadband infrastructure in the State. Furthermore, as currently drafted, the measure could be interpreted to authorize the Hawaii Public Housing Authority to delegate all aspects of the required study to the Bureau, and in effect, requiring a legislative service agency to be responsive to an executive branch agency, rather than to the Legislature.

If the Committee decides to recommend passage of this measure and desires to keep the Bureau involved, we respectfully request that the measure be amended to specifically clarify that the Bureau assist with only finalizing the Hawaii Public Housing Authority's report and draft proposed legislation. We also would request that it be specified that the draft report and request to draft proposed legislation be submitted to the Bureau no later than September 1, 2021, so that work on the report and proposed legislation would not adversely impact our ability to provide our core services to the Legislature for the upcoming Regular Session.

If the measure is amended to address the concerns noted above to have the Bureau assist with finalizing the report and proposed legislation, and a specific deadline is inserted for submission of a draft report and request for proposed legislation, the Bureau believes that the services requested under the measure would be manageable and that the Bureau will be able to provide the services in the time allotted; provided that the Bureau's interim workload is not adversely impacted by too many other studies or additional responsibilities, such as conducting studies, writing or finalizing other reports, drafting legislation, or any combination of these for the Legislature or for other state agencies, task forces, or working groups that may be requested or required under other legislative measures.

For these reasons, the Bureau respectfully requests that if this measure is to move on in the legislative process, that amendments be made to section 1(c) of the bill to provide explicit guidance and parameters on the scope of the Bureau's involvement in the required study.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written comments.