



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

House Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce

Tuesday, February 6, 2024

2:00 p.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 329 and Videoconference

**In Support
H.B. No. 2411, Relating to Health**

Chair Nakashima, Vice Chair Sayama, and Members on the House Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce:

The Office of the Governor supports H.B. No. 2411, Relating to Health, which would rename the Hawai'i Health Corps Program to the Hawai'i Rural Healthcare Provider Loan Program.

The Hawaii Health Corps Program was established in 2012 with a focus on encouraging certain healthcare providers to serve in counties that are experiencing shortages of physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners, with a priority given to a rural area county. However, since its implementation, it has become clear that, while the need for these providers to serve these areas remains, there is also an increased need for a wider range of healthcare providers by professions, including mental health services to continue to enhance and improve access to medical healthcare services in these areas.

On September 9, 2023, the State launched the Hawai'i Healthcare Education Loan Repayment Program (HELP). HELP was established to provide educational loan debt repayment to qualified healthcare professionals who practice in Hawai'i. In the first round of the HELP program, over 800 applications were received, with 492 medical and healthcare professionals receiving awards averaging roughly \$32,500 and includes nearly 300 primary care and behavioral health providers, 90 professionals serving rural areas or the Neighbor Islands, and 40 residents in training. Additionally, the HELP program is expected to help improve recruitment and retention of healthcare providers serving vulnerable populations, as well as those in medically underserved areas of Hawai'i, and lessen the burden of their educational debt.

Due to HELP having an expanded scope and purpose compared to the current Hawaii Health Corps Program, the Office of the Governor had this bill introduced to clarify and rename this existing statutory program to better reflect its purpose.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce
Tuesday, February 6, 2024 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Lee Buenconsejo-Lum, Interim Dean and
Kelley Withy, MD, Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Community Health,
Hawaii/Pacific Basin Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Director

John A. Burns School of Medicine

And

Clementina Ceria-Ulep, Dean
Nancy Atmospera-Walch School of Nursing

And

Michael Bruno, Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 2411 – RELATING TO HEALTH

Chair Nakashima, Vice Chair Sayama, and Members of the Committee:

This testimony is presented on behalf of the UH Mānoa's John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) and the Nancy Atmospera-Walch School of Nursing (NAWSON).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 2411 which renames the Hawai'i Health Corps Program to the Hawai'i Rural Healthcare Provider Loan Program.

The Hawai'i Health Corps Program was established in 2012 in HRS Section 309H-2 to encourage physicians, nurses and other health care providers to practice in rural areas of the state by providing loan repayment. The Hawai'i Health Corps Program was never funded by the legislature and, therefore, was never operational.

In September 2023, the State launched the Hawai'i healthcare education loan repayment program (HELP). HELP provides educational loan debt repayment to qualified health professionals licensed or otherwise certified to practice and provide care to patients in Hawai'i. In its first year of implementation with the funding appropriated by the legislature in 2023, HELP will be alleviating the educational debt of 492 medical and healthcare professionals.

Given the success of HELP so far, we wish to avoid any actions that may unintentionally undermine the positive outcomes HELP has achieved.

Should this committee decide to advance HB 2411, we suggest a minor amendment in the preamble of the bill which would clarify the distinction between HELP and the proposed Hawai'i Rural Healthcare Provider Loan Program as follows:

Page 1, Line12

“The legislature further finds that on September 9, 2023, the State launched the Hawai'i healthcare education loan repayment program (HELP), [which] a separate program that is alleviating the education debt of 492 medical and healthcare professionals.”

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this matter.