



Blood Bank of Hawaii

Senator Jarrett Keohokalole
Chair, Senate Committee on Health (HTH)
Hearing Date: Wednesday, March 23, 1:30 pm

RE: Testimony for SCR33, Requesting the Blood Bank of Hawaii to Immediately Adopt the Food and Drug Administration's Updated Guidance Which Shortens or Eliminates the Deferral Period for Certain Blood Donors.

Aloha Chair Keohokalole and Members of the Senate Health Committee

Blood Bank of Hawaii (BBH), a nonprofit organization, is the sole provider of safe and reliable blood for the State of Hawaii. BBH serves all 18 hospitals across the state. Without blood, hospital programs including trauma, neonatal/pediatric ICU services, organ transplants and other life-saving treatments could not exist.

In 2020, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) shortened the deferral period for certain individuals, including men who have sex with men (MSM). FDA also relaxed administrative regulations that limited the availability of blood. These temporary guidances, applicable for the duration of the declared COVID-19 public health emergency, are expected to sunset later this month. We support this resolution for Blood Bank of Hawaii to adopt FDA's temporary guidances to allow for blood donations that are more inclusive, including the three-month deferral for MSM donors.

We are already working on multiple changes to our internal blood management system that must be made in order to safely incorporate FDA's temporary guidances.

For the past two years, BBH has focused on patchworking some of our outdated technology so that we can more quickly pivot when new FDA guidances are issued. Our new headquarters will be equipped with state-of-the-art technology that we desperately need in order to better respond to our community.

During the tumultuous times of the pandemic with ever changing restrictions that impacted our operations, as well as those in all organizations, our priority has been to ensure the safety of our blood supply as well as supporting hospitals with convalescent plasma to increase the survival of severely ill COVID-19 patients.

Because the temporary guidances are scheduled to sunset at the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency, we have focused our efforts on ensuring these changes are made permanent. We have met with the head of FDA, in Washington, D.C., to advocate action finalizing the temporary changes to donor eligibility criteria, avoiding any lapse which again defers donors.

Blood Bank of Hawaii is also supportive of additional efforts that will address the chronic, critical blood shortages facing our state and our nation. We, and other blood centers, asked FDA to end the outdated blanket three-month deferral period for MSM, and transition to an individual risk assessment to determine donor eligibility. As new blood testing and processing technologies are more widely available, implementation of these and future advances will enable the evolution towards policies more inclusive of all groups, including the LGBTQI+ community, while still ensuring blood safety.



Blood Bank of Hawaii

We have met with each member of our Congressional delegation to ask them to urge FDA to make the temporary guidances permanent, beyond the COVID-19 public health emergency, and, secondly, to transition from a time-based donation deferral to an individual risk assessment. We are fortunate that our Congressional delegates are looking into how they can help to support our efforts and those of other blood centers across the nation to safely evolve FDA regulations.

We are encouraged that FDA has commissioned a study evaluating individual risk assessment as an effective tool in ensuring the continued safety of the blood supply. We are hopeful that FDA will incorporate the valuable insights of the study and transition to a more inclusive donor eligibility process. We look forward to a future where a more diverse donor base can contribute to a safe and adequate blood supply. As pandemic restrictions ease and our operations shift from crisis mode, please note that incorporating FDA's temporary guidance is a high priority and that internal changes to make this happen are targeted to implement by early this summer.

We are submitting this written testimony in favor of SCR33 and look forward to continuing this conversation to ensure a reliable and adequate blood supply needed for critical medical treatments and to enable healthcare innovation for the future.

Sincerely,
Kim-Anh Nguyen, MD, PhD
President & CEO
Blood Bank of Hawaii
knguyen@bbh.org
(808) 848-4705

LATE

SCR-33

Submitted on: 3/22/2022 7:50:29 PM

Testimony for HTH on 3/23/2022 1:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jan Genovia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is my testimony.

I believe that the existing restrictions that the Blood Bank of Hawai'i has in place are discriminatory and are not based on scientific evidence. By restricting people unnecessarily, from donating blood there could be people who die needlessly who might have been saved, had there been a healthy supply of blood from the general public. With many potential donors being denied the ability to save lives, this bill is so critical in having a sufficient supply. Also, discriminating against certain groups of people with stereotypical assumptions is not in alignment with the values of the people of Hawai'i and it's culture or ethical medical standards. I hope that you find the strength to stand for what is right and necessary to potentially save one of your loved ones.