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KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII



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**Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 2068  
RELATING TO PSYCHOLOGISTS**

REPRESENTATIVE SCOT Z. MATAYOSHI, CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Friday, February 2, 2024, 9:30 a.m., Room 309/VIDEO

1 **Fiscal Implications:** Undetermined. The Department of Health (Department) is working on  
2 determining the amount of funding that would be required to enable implementation of this bill.

3 **Department Position:** The Department supports this measure.

4 **Department Testimony:** The Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) provides the following  
5 testimony on behalf of the Department.

6 The Department supports this measure, which proposes to authorize the Director of  
7 Health to appoint psychologists to fill staff positions for the state mental health program. There  
8 is a 41% vacancy rate for psychologist positions within BHA. The current system of recruitment  
9 utilizing the civil service process for critical psychologist positions has not met the essential  
10 psychologist staffing needs of the Department.

11 Shortages in psychologists have become increasingly problematic with recent  
12 challenges, such as the homelessness crisis, COVID-19 recovery efforts, and the Maui wildfires.  
13 Hiring and maintaining psychologists who specialize in youth and families is of paramount  
14 importance, particularly given our dearth of mental health resources.

15 HB 2068 proposes to authorize the director to implement a proven and previously used  
16 recruitment and retention tool for psychologist positions to carry out the state mental health  
17 program. The previous reclassification of psychologists to exempt status over a three year

1 period through ACT 79, SLH 2016, provided the much needed assistance in accelerating the  
2 standard recruitment process and also improved recruitment and retention efforts by allowing  
3 the Department to be expeditious and efficient in our efforts to remain salary competitive with  
4 other state, federal, and local agencies. While successful in the short-term, the effects of ACT  
5 79, SLH 2016, also show that the change should be made permanent as the same problems that  
6 it was intended to address reemerged a few years after it sunsetted. HB 2068 would assist the  
7 Department in permanently addressing psychologist position vacancies and improve the  
8 performance of the state mental health program.

9 **Proposed Amendments:** The Department respectfully requests that an appropriation be added  
10 to this bill. While the total dollar amount is still being determined, the Department is confident  
11 that it can provide the fiscal information in subsequent hearings on this measure.

12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.



**HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION**

AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

**RANDY PERREIRA**, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

The Thirty-Second Legislature, State of Hawaii  
The House of Representatives  
Committee on Labor and Government Operations

**LATE**

Testimony by  
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 2, 2024

H.B. 2068 — RELATING TO PSYCHOLOGISTS


The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO strongly opposes the purpose and intent of H.B. 2068 which authorizes the director of health to appoint psychologists to fill staff positions for the state mental health program.

Granting the Director of Health blanket authority to hire exempt psychologist goes against civil service law and the merit principles, where exempt employees are performing duties that have been traditionally performed by civil servants. Exempt employees are considered at-will and are not afforded the same protections and benefits compared to a civil service employee. We raise questions and concerns about the need for the Director to appoint exempt-psychologist for the state mental health program. Exempting future-psychologist may present pay equity issues between existing civil service psychologist which is inherently unfair. And future-exempt psychologists are not afforded the same civil service protections compared to their counterparts. There is inequity on both sides – even though they may be doing the same job.

This measure goes to the larger issue which is that the state needs to invest in its current and future civil service workforce – increasing the position pay and offering modern and attractive recruitment and retention incentives, along with increasing the hiring time is paramount. Hiring of exempt employees through this pilot program is a band-aid fix to address the underlying issues within the state government workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition of H.B. 2068.

Respectfully submitted,



Randy Perreira  
Executive Director