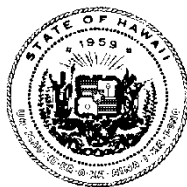


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

February 26, 2024

TO: The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: [HB 2544 HD1](#) - RELATING TO MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION.

Hearing: February 28, 2024, 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 308 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) provides comments on this measure.

PURPOSE: This measure establishes within the Department of Health a 2-year pilot project to charter flights from rural islands to an urban island to provide rural island residents with reliable transportation to medical care on urban islands and to transport medical service providers from an urban island to a rural island. Declares that the general fund appropriation will breach the expenditure ceiling. Appropriates funds. Declares that the appropriation exceeds the state general fund expenditure ceiling for 2024-2025. Sunsets 6/30/2026. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

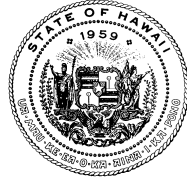
The Committee on Health and Homelessness amended this measure by:

- (1) Deleting language allowing medical providers to reserve and pay for seats on chartered flights;
- (2) Changing the number of roundtrip flights offered per week to an unspecified amount;

- (3) Deleting language establishing the Essential Rural Medical Air Transport Revolving Fund and the associated appropriation into the fund;
- (4) Establishing an end date of June 30, 2026, for the pilot program;
- (5) Changing the appropriation to the Department of Health to an unspecified amount and changing the source of funding to the State's general revenues, rather than the Essential Rural Medical Air Transport Revolving Fund;
- (6) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (7) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

For the committee's information, Medicaid health plans already cover medically necessary transportation for individuals covered by Medicaid. DHS appreciates efforts to increase access to medical care for Medicaid beneficiaries.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



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

**Testimony COMMENTING on HB2544 HD1
RELATING TO MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION.**

REP. KYLE YAMASHITA, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing Date: February 28, 2024

Room Number: 308

1 **Fiscal Implications:** An additional 2.0 – 5.0 FTE plus undetermined general fund appropriation
2 amount required to implement.

3 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health (DOH) provides comments on HB2544
4 HD1 regarding its feasibility, information on other regulatory tools to improve rural access, and
5 refinements to the concept as drafted.

6 Current Status

7 Private sector airlines offer several roundtrip flights on a daily basis. Specifically, they operate
8 three roundtrip flights per day from Lanai to Maui, eleven roundtrip flights from Molokai to
9 Maui, four to five roundtrip flights from Lanai to Molokai, seven roundtrip flights from Lanai to
10 Oahu, and ten roundtrip flights from Molokai to Oahu. These flights are available seven days a
11 week, with more flights on holidays and weekends.

12 Many factors contribute to this bill's premise of inconsistent and undependable air transportation
13 services that include last-minute changes, cancellations, and lengthy delays, such as
14 maintenance, the weather, and market forces. This proposed pilot may only mitigate market
15 forces, e.g., cancellation due to unsold seats, to an extent.

16 Feasibility

1 DOH has no experience or expertise with airline operations, and would require additional staff to
2 implement, even if contracted out, due to the complexity of health insurance, airlines schedules
3 and policies, federal regulations, etc. An additional 2.0 FTE is requested: 1 x program specialist
4 and 1 x accountant if DOH contacts the project out, and a total of 5.0 FTE if implemented by
5 department staff.

6 It is uncertain what entity would respond to competitive procurement, such as a travel agency,
7 case management agency, or an airline given the modest volume. An airline monetizing fallow
8 aircraft is most likely but this amounts to a taxpayer subsidy to a for-profit private enterprise.

9 Network Adequacy

10 Hawaii Revised Statutes require that a “health carrier providing a network plan shall maintain a
11 network that is sufficient in numbers and appropriate types of providers, including those that
12 serve predominantly low-income, medically underserved individuals, to assure that all covered
13 benefits will be accessible without unreasonable travel or delay...”

14 A pilot program funded by general funds for medical transportation is a direct subsidy to health
15 insurance company revenue at taxpayer expense. For Employer-Union Trust Fund beneficiaries,
16 the State is paying twice for health plan network adequacy – the first being the premium and the
17 second the chartered flight. A third cost may be incurred if a patient is a Medicaid beneficiary,
18 since Medicaid health plans already cover medically necessary transportations for individuals
19 covered by Medicaid.

20 The proposal to “allow insurance companies to reserve and pay for seats” (page 2, line 11) is not
21 necessary since health insurance companies may do this of their own accord. This
22 inappropriately and inefficiently shifts the burden to assure access to healthcare to the State when
23 there are existing legal standards for health insurance company network adequacy.

24 Although the project shall seek reimbursement from insurers, pilot project costs will not be
25 recovered due to the lack of negotiated contracts and the nature of health insurance billing and
26 will not create any new value that could otherwise be created under current circumstances.

1 It should be noted that Medicaid health plans already cover medically necessary transportation
2 for individuals covered by Medicaid.

3 Potential Remedies

4 Should the Legislature move forward with this concept, DOH recommends three concepts for
5 consideration which may be implemented individually or in unison.

6 Concept #1 – Health plan requirement: Enact statute that requires contractors with the State for
7 health insurance coverage, as a requirement of that contract or as specified in law, to establish
8 and meet standards for timely off-island healthcare access for members in rural counties. The
9 private sector may respond by enhancing rates for travelling providers or contracting with
10 airlines for reserved seatings or flights, with medical appointment and flight arrangement
11 coordinated by internal case management.

12 This is the least burdensome and resource-intensive option for the State of Hawaii and leverages
13 existing contractual relationships.

14 Concept #2 – State standby reservations: A variation of the pilot proposed in HB2544 is to enact
15 statute to implement elements of Concept #1 but overseen by the State, which is to appropriate
16 funds for a health plan, provider, or authorized third-party entity to book medical appointment-
17 related flights through a specified corporate account with participating airlines for a minimum
18 number of seats for a certain number of days per week. This requires competitive procurement.

19 These seats are reserved for program participants and the airlines will be paid whether or not the
20 seat is filled for that flight at a negotiated rate. Reservations may be made by the patient
21 themselves, with a provider referral or health plan prior authorization, or coordinated by health
22 plan case management staff.

23 This is the most burdensome regarding State funds already expended on health plan benefits, as
24 well as civil servant FTE counts.

- 1 Concept #3 – Task force: Establish a task force via concurrent resolution to consist of health
- 2 plans, airline representatives, and patient advocates to identify market-based and regulatory
- 3 recommendations to address the shortcoming of commercial airline service to certain islands.
- 4 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



'Ahahui o nā Kauka

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February 26, 2024

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Group Testimony in support of HB2544 HD1 RELATING TO MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION

'Ahahui o nā Kauka is an organization of Native Hawaiian physicians dedicated to the health of the people of Hawai'i and Native Hawaiians in particular. Many of our members have borne witness to adverse health events, often tragic, due to delays in care caused by the transportation barriers unique to rural Hawai'i. Several of our past and present members have dedicated much of their careers to caring for the people of Moloka'i as well. We support HB2544's efforts to improve access to care through this pilot project.

To: The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager

Hearing: Wednesday, February 28, 2024, 10:00 AM, Conference Room 308

RE: **HB2544, HD1 Relating to Medical Transportation**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of the intent of HB2544, HD1**. This measure establishes within the Department of Health the Essential Rural Medical Air Transport pilot project to provide residents from rural islands with increased access to medical care.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 84,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 40 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

AlohaCare is committed to improving access to care and strengthening the Medicaid program. As you may know, Medicaid enrollment in our State has grown by over 46% from 327,000 enrollees in March 2020 to 476,000 in January 2024. This tremendous growth has put a further strain on our State's already challenged provider capacity, especially in rural areas. The Hawai'i Physician Workforce Assessment Project Report¹ indicates that Hawai'i is in need of at least 750 doctors, with the greatest statewide shortage being in primary care specialties. The proportional need is greatest on the neighbor islands, with both Maui and Hawai'i County experiencing a physician shortage of 40%.

Hawai'i residents in rural and remote communities have long been accustomed to travelling to urban areas to access specialized care and routine treatment. Residents of Moloka'i and Lāna'i rely on air travel to access emergency and, oftentimes, routine medical care. Pregnant persons on Lāna'i must travel to give birth while those on Moloka'i can only deliver for low-risk pregnancies without an epidural.

¹ <https://www.ahec.hawaii.edu/workforce-page/>



Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the two airlines that used to serve Lānaʻi and Molokaʻi ceased operations, leaving residents with only one airline today. This remaining airline is a vital means for medical travel. However, it has experienced significant challenges and disruptions causing many residents to miss medical appointments.

AlohaCare provides medically necessary travel for our members. These challenges and disruptions have affected our members and providers. We have been actively engaged with the airline, our transportation coordination vendor, and legislators to proactively support a better solution and experience for our members and providers.

HB 2544, HD1 is an innovative proposal to test and evaluate a solution. While we support and appreciate the intent of the bill, we have operational and administrative questions on how this would work and how it would be funded for residents enrolled in the State's Medicaid program.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support of the intent of HB2544, HD1.**



Hawaii Medical Association

1360 South Beretania Street, Suite 200 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
Phone: 808.536.7702 • Fax: 808.528.2376 • hawaiimedicalassociation.org

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Rep. Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Date: February 28, 2024
From: Hawaii Medical Association
Beth England MD, Chair- HMA Public Policy Committee

RE: HB 2544 HD1, Relating to Medical Transportation Position: Support

This measure would establish within the Department of Health a 2-year pilot project to charter flights from rural islands to an urban island to provide rural island residents with reliable transportation to medical care on urban islands.

Living in an island state presents unique geographic and logistical challenges for our patients to receive timely medical care. Patients are experiencing excessively long waiting times for transfer to a higher level of care, particularly in rural areas. These delays have had profound consequences across Hawaii, including negative outcomes and patient deaths. Limited transportation capacity both for ground and flight transfer is a major obstacle contributing to these delays. While this measure does not address all of the current medical transportation challenges, it is a vital step towards reducing barriers to flight transportation. Facilitating travel between these areas and urban centers will allow patients to receive prompt quality medical care that they urgently need and reduce the stressful and costly burdens of air travel placed upon them.

We urge our lawmakers to support this measure that will improve healthcare access for rural and underserved communities of Hawaii.

Thank you for allowing the Hawaii Medical Association to testify on this issue.

Continued

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2024 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

Beth England, MD, Chair
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

REFERENCES:

Hawaii Air Ambulance and Medical Escort Costs. <https://airambulance.com/locations-served/hawaii-air-ambulance/> Accessed Feb 7, 2024.

Consillio, K. Charges for Medevac Flights Soar in Hawaii. <https://www.hmpgloballearningnetwork.com/site/emsworld/news/12111684/charges-for-medevac-flights-soar-in-hawaii> Accessed Feb 7, 2024.

Hawaii residents complain of high prices for medevac flights. <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/29981390/hawaii-residents-complain-of-high-prices-for-medevac-flights/> Accessed Feb 7, 2024.

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2024 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

Beth England, MD, Chair
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Wednesday, February 28, 2024; 10:00 am
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

House Committee on Finance

To: Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

From: Michael Robinson
Vice President, Government Relations & Community Affairs

**Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2544, HD1
Relating To Medical Transportation**

My name is Michael Robinson and I am the Vice President of Government Relations & Community Affairs at Hawai'i Pacific Health (HPH). Hawai'i Pacific Health is a not-for-profit health care system comprised of its four medical centers – Kapi'olani, Pali Momi, Straub and Wilcox and over 70 locations statewide with a mission of creating a healthier Hawai'i.

I write in support of HB 2544, HD1 which establishes a 2-year pilot project within the Department of Health (DOH) to charter flights from rural islands to an urban island to provide rural inland residents with reliable air transportation to medical care on urban islands. The bill also proposes to transport medical service providers from an urban island to a rural island through chartered flights.

Receiving appropriate and timely medical treatment are key determinants of positive outcomes for patients. For residents living on the neighbor islands, access to care is hindered by the increasing shortage of doctors and other health care providers in those communities. The segmented nature of Hawai'i is another factor that impacts access to care. The reality remains that frequently neighbor island residents must fly to Oahu for treatment which is not available on their island.

Based on the challenges involved with air travel, chartering flights could be an idea worth considering.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



MOLOKA'I DRUGS, INC.
EST. 1935

February 27, 2024

Testimony in SUPPORT for HB2554 – Relating to Medical Transportation

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and members of the Finance Committee:

As a **rural** healthcare provider, access to comprehensive, high-quality health care services is our mission at Moloka'i Drugs, Inc. On behalf of our employees and patients, I am testifying in favor of HB2554, which “establishes within the Department of Health a two-year pilot project to charter flights from rural islands to an urban island to provide rural island residents with reliable transportation to medical care on urban islands and to transport medical service providers from an urban island to a rural island.”

Every week, our pharmacy staff and I know and talk to Moloka'i residents who have missed cancer treatments, dental cleanings, occupational and/or physical therapy, surgeries, colonoscopies and other specialists' appointments due to the single air carrier cancelling or delaying flights. To plan for the stress of air transportation, hundreds of Moloka'i residents have made thousands of flights **the day before** a medical appointment to guarantee arrival before their sessions. This comes with the added financial burden for many Moloka'i families of car rentals, overnight stays in hotels, and additional meals and incidentals.

For many of our older and/or physically challenged residents, it is not one roundtrip flight, but, two roundtrip flights—one airplane ticket for the patient and one airplane ticket for his/her caregiver.

The inconsistent air transportation has personally affected me for as a caregiver for my 87-year-old “hanai” mother who has dementia. I have made two of her medical appointments for later this year; these appointments were made 4-6 months in advance. Like others on Moloka'i, I need to fly to Honolulu the night before her appointments. I have also cancelled five of her appointments in 2023 due to cancelled or delayed flights.

Moloka'i is a medically underserved area. When our medical providers need to refer their patients, this access to healthcare is often provided by doctors on Maui, O'ahu, and Hawai'i Island. It is critical that we as taxpayers fund a two-year pilot to charter flights from the smaller islands to the larger islands with more medical resources. Therefore, we ask that you please vote in support of HB2554, which will help in increasing access to comprehensive, high-quality healthcare services for our rural residents with more reliable air transport. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Mikami Svetin /s/

Kimberly Mikami Svetin
President
Moloka'i Drugs, Inc.
P.O. Box 558
Kaunakakai, HI 96748
Work 808-553-5790



February 28, 2024

The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

Re: HB 2544 HD1 – Relating to Medical Transportation

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

Hawaii Medical Service Association (HMSA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2544 HD1, which establishes within the Department of Health a 2-year pilot project to charter flights from rural islands to an urban island to provide rural island residents with reliable transportation to medical care on urban islands and to transport medical service providers from an urban island to a rural island.

Ensuring that our members on Molokai, Lanai, and neighbor islands have adequate access to healthcare is one of our top priorities. We appreciate the legislature's efforts to address this growing need across the state and look forward to participating in this project.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2544 HD1.

Sincerely,

Dawn Kurisu
Assistant Vice President
Community and Government Relations



THE QUEEN'S HEALTH SYSTEM

To: The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
Members, House Committee on Finance

From: Jace Mikulanec, Director, Government Relations, The Queen's Health System

Date: February 28, 2024

Re: Support for HB2544 HD1: Relating to Medical Transportation

The Queen's Health System (Queen's) is a nonprofit corporation that provides expanded health care capabilities to the people of Hawai'i and the Pacific Basin. Since the founding of the first Queen's hospital in 1859 by Queen Emma and King Kamehameha IV, it has been our mission to provide quality health care services in perpetuity for Native Hawaiians and all of the people of Hawai'i. Over the years, the organization has grown to four hospitals, and more than 10,000 affiliated physicians, caregivers, and dedicated medical staff statewide. As the preeminent health care system in Hawai'i, Queen's strives to provide superior patient care that is constantly advancing through education and research.

Queen's appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB1831 HD1, which establishes within the Department of Health a 2-year pilot project to charter flights from rural islands to an urban island to provide rural island residents with reliable transportation to medical care on urban islands.

Our most vulnerable and high risk patients deserve reliable transportation to medical care in the event of an emergency or scheduled appointment. We have observed patients from neighbor island facilities, including Molokai General Hospital and North Hawai'i Community Hospital, with serious medical conditions in desperate need of medical attention experience delays, cancellations, and flight changes. A more reliable and stable solution is needed.

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

The mission of The Queen's Health System is to fulfill the intent of Queen Emma and King Kamehameha IV to provide in perpetuity quality health care services to improve the well-being of Native Hawaiians and all of the people of Hawai'i.

HB-2544-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 7:10:03 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Shizuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee,

I stand in support of HB2544.

Having generations of family members living on Molokai, I've known of the need to fly between the islands for medical treatments and procedures, often flying to Oahu to visit with medical specialists.

I've also known of the lack of consistency of flying on Mokulele Airlines, which is famous for having long delays and sometimes canceled flights. I, and many others, have been victims of this. It is unacceptable for anyone who has an appointment, especially when their health is dependent on these appointments for medical treatments and procedures.

A chartered flight specific to those seeking medical care can possibly provide some consistency and availability for those in need of it, if it means that Molokai and Lanai residents have one less thing to worry about when it comes to their health, then it's the right thing to do.

I hope this bill passes and the pilot program is successful and provides the residents a little relief when it comes to their health.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Keoni Shizuma

HB-2544-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 7:27:53 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT.

MAHALO.

Aloha my name is Austin Johnsen I am born and raised in Kapolei , Oahu. I am a constituent of Representative Garcia. Thank you for hearing my testimony as I am in favor of House Bill 2544. I have seen first-hand the long delays to Molokai and Lanai from Honolulu and Kahului. This bill would be a great for the people of Lanai and Molokai to get to their medical appointments.

I have friends from Lanai and Molokai that travel to Oahu the day before their doctor's appointment and rent a hotel room to ensure they make their appointment. After their appointment they would attempt to fly back to Lanai and Molokai and would need to stay another night because the flights are delayed to the next day. This is now costing 3 days of work to meet a basic health need.

In Lanai there has been over a dozen deaths potentially due to lack of access to health care. The medical needs must be the first priority. In 2022 after the only medevac provider in Hawaii self-grounded after a horrific accident the governor sent the air national guard to medevac patients. Medevac flights are an enormous cost, my grandparents were often medevac'd from Hilo airport to Honolulu before they passed. Medevac flights can be prevented by routine doctors' appointments, this could potentially save patients thousands.

Since my testimony before the Health and Homelessness committee I have been in contact with Angel Flight West. Angel Flight is a group of volunteers that help transport patients to healthcare. Angel Flight flew over 189 flights last year and is at capacity of the number of patients they are able to transport. Volunteer pilots are paying for airplanes out of their own pocket to care for the people of Hawaii. Angel Flight has proven that there is a need to charter aircrafts to transport patients. The community of Hawaii has tried to fulfill this need and needs support.

HB-2544-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 10:09:44 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael L Gomes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I would like to submit testimony in SUPPORT of bill HB2544 relating to Medical Transportation. It is without any doubt that this measure should be passed based on our constant need of very LIMITED flights and lack of medical care available to our urban communities.

I am a caregiver to my 80 year old mom who is an Amputee on dialysis and she needs constant medical care and checkups on Oahu. Our current lone Airlines cannot accommodate passengers needing medical care by adequately providing reliable service to and from Molokai or Lanai. We need another option Immediately.

Therefore again I rise in SUPPORT of the current bill before you today HB2544 and hope you will SUPPORT it as well.

Mahalo

Michael L Gomes

HB-2544-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/27/2024 11:40:09 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/28/2024 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaira Kaina	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Finance Committee,

My name is Kaira Kaina and I am a Molokai High school graduate from 2021. I was a sophomore at the University of Montana, however in March 2023 I was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 20 and returned home to Molokai in April 2023. Because of my cancer diagnosis I've had to fly to Honolulu at least 50 times this year for treatments and appointments. I estimate that 20 of my flights were either delayed or canceled which resulted in my medical providers rescheduling those appointments. This is a very stressful time for me and my mother, who came to every one of my appointments in Honolulu. Fortunately, I am considered cancer free but still need to travel to Oahu every 3 weeks for infusions. Please vote in favor of HB2554 which will help patients like myself in accessing timely medical treatments off island.

Mahalo for your vote.