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Testimony of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs

**Before the
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
Thursday, March 18, 2021
10:00 a.m.
Via Videoconference**

**On the following measure:
S.R. 54, REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER
AFFAIRS TO ESTABLISH A WORKING GROUP TO DEVELOP FUNDING SOURCES
FOR RURAL BROADBAND IMPROVEMENTS.**

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

Chair Baker and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ji Sook “Lisa” Kim, and I am the Cable Administrator of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs’ (Department) Cable Television Division. The Department offers comments on this resolution.

The purpose of this resolution is to request that the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism establish a working group to facilitate the development of funding sources to increase broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of Hawaii.

The global pandemic, triggering stay-at-home and social distancing orders, has underscored the critical need for universal broadband access for distance learning, telework and job training, telehealth and social services, and social and civic engagement. To meet this need, the federal government is making more funding

available for broadband infrastructure, equipment, and internet services, and the Administration is focused on fostering a robust statewide broadband network and digital equity for residents.

The Department recognizes the value of coordination among broadband stakeholders to identify broadband deployment obstacles and capitalize on funding opportunities to improve broadband access and use; however, it defers to the lead agency regarding the specifics of this measure and the best means for coordination.

If this Committee decides to pass this resolution, the Department requests amending page 3, lines 15 and 16, to provide the Department with flexibility to better carry out its functions under this measure: “One representative of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs [~~Cable Television Division~~].” In addition, the title of the resolution should be amended for consistency with the purpose of the measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this resolution.



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
Thursday, March 18, 2021; 10:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 229
Via Videoconference**

**RE: SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 072/SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 054 --
REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS TO
ESTABLISH A WORKING GROUP TO DEVELOP FUNDING SOURCES FOR RURAL
BROADBAND IMPROVEMENTS.**

Chair Baker, Vice Chair Chang, 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** Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 072 and Senate Resolution No. 054.

The resolutions would request the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism to establish a working group to facilitate the development of funding sources to increase broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas by identifying and addressing remaining obstacles to full deployment of broadband infrastructure to all areas of Hawaii.

The resolutions also ask the working group to report its findings and recommendations to the 2023 Legislature.

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.

Testimony on Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 072/Senate Resolution No. 054
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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.

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 statutes 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 these resolutions.

Lastly, we note there are technical issues (i.e., **See**, Title and first BE IT RESOLVED Clause.) with these documents that your Committee may wish to address.

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.