



the
**Drug Policy
Forum**
of hawai'i

February 10, 2009

To: Representative Ryan Yamane, Chair
Representative Scott Nishimoto, Vice Chair
And Members of the Committee on Health

From: Jeanne Ohta, Executive Director

RE: HB 532 RELATING TO MEDICAL AMNESTY
Hearing: February 10, 2009, 8:30 a.m., Room 329

Position: Support

I am Jeanne Ohta, Executive Director of the Drug Policy Forum of Hawai'i. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 432 which establishes limited immunity for seeking medical assistance for victims of drug overdoses.

This measure is modeled after New Mexico's 911 Good Samaritan law and recognizes that many drug-related overdoses occur in the presence of close friends, family or acquaintances. Providing legal immunity encourages those present at the time of a suspected overdose to call for help immediately.

People using drugs are afraid to be arrested for possession of illegal substances, even in cases when their friends or family need professional medical assistance. They may try other methods to revive the overdose victim instead of calling 911.

I suggest however, that Section 2 (b) (3)--note that the bill incorrectly denotes that item as (c)--be deleted. The intent of this measure is to encourage anyone who witnesses an overdose to call for emergency help. This provision does not provide that encouragement nor does it support the intent of the rest of the bill.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors (2008) adopted a resolution which supports the establishment of Good Samaritan policies to reduce the number of preventable overdose deaths.

The measure puts the focus on saving lives and preventing deaths from overdose rather than on arresting victims and their friends for possessing small amounts of drugs.

Please pass HB 532; it is sensible policy which can help save lives.

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