

The Twenty-Fifth Legislature
Regular Session of 2009

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Committee on Health

Rep. Ryan I. Yamane, Chair

Rep. Scott Y. Nishimoto, Vice Chair

Committee on Human Services

Rep. John M. Mizuno, Chair

Rep. Tom Brower, Vice Chair

State Capitol, Conference Room 329

Friday, February 6, 2009; 9:00 a.m.

**STATEMENT OF THE ILWU LOCAL 142 ON H.B. 697 AND H.B. 698
RELATING TO TEMPORARY HEALTH INSURANCE FOR UNEMPLOYED PERSONS**

The ILWU Local 142 supports H.B. 697, which establishes a temporary health insurance program for unemployed individuals, and H.B. 698, which temporarily provides health insurance to individuals who are uninsured due to the loss of a job for reasons other than voluntary separation, discharge for work-related misconduct, or work stoppage caused by a labor dispute.

The unemployment rate in Hawaii is the highest it's been in a decade. Thousands of Hawaii residents are without jobs or have reduced work hours. Most are collecting unemployment benefits, but many have exhausted their eligibility for benefits. With seriously reduced income, most of them find themselves and their families without health insurance, placing an additional burden on hospitals and insurance plans.

H.B. 697 and H.B. 698 will help to close that gap and provide coverage to those who would otherwise be uninsured. While the Legislature may believe the State cannot afford such expenditure in this difficult economic climate, the alternative of having more people uninsured yet requiring health services which cost must be borne by taxpayers or passed on to employers and employees by insurance companies is unacceptable as well.

We have no preference for one bill over the other. However, we believe only one program can be implemented.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views on this matter.

HMSA



Blue Cross
Blue Shield
of Hawaii

An Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

February 6, 2009

The Honorable Ryan Yamane, Chair
The Honorable John Mizuno, Chair
House Committees on Health and Human Services

Re: HB 697 – Relating to Temporary Health Insurance for Unemployed Persons

Dear Chair Yamane, Chair Mizuno and Members of the Committees:

The Hawaii Medical Service Association (HMSA) appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of HB 697 which would create a safety net for individuals who have lost their employer based health care coverage due to the economic downturn.

While Hawaii can boast a lower than average uninsured rate due to the Prepaid Health Care Act (PHCA), it also must be noted that when the economy is not faring well and unemployment is rising the PHCA cannot assist those who have lost their health care coverage along with their jobs.

The initiative outlined in HB 697 could help uninsured individuals in need of health care coverage in this difficult environment. Allowing those who are out-of-work to utilize the existing QUEST plan for health care coverage will likely curb expensive and unaffordable trips to the emergency room. The provision of Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) subsidies would ensure that many more people would opt to receive their coverage in this fashion. With Hawaii's unemployment rate hitting a ten year high, the legislature's proposal to provide assistance in this fashion makes good sense.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 697.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Diesman
Assistant Vice President
Government Relations

nishimoto2-Bryce

From: Joel Fischer [jfischer@hawaii.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, February 04, 2009 12:28 PM
To: HLTtestimony
Subject: HB697; HLT; 2/6/09; 9AM; Rm 329

Importance: High

HB697; Relating to Temporary Health Insurance
HLT: Chair, REP Yamane

PLEASE PASS THIS BILL!

I want to thank Rep Yamane and the signers of this bill for introducing it and holding this hearing. This bill is one of the clearest examples of a compassionate Legislature doing whatever is possible to preserve the safety net. We are going to see a huge outpouring of need over the next 2 years, and we should do everything possible to help our people with their most basic needs, especially health care.

Thank you so much.

Aloha, joel

Dr. Joel Fischer, ACSW
President, 19-3, Democratic Party

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"It is reasonable that everyone who asks justice should DO justice."
Thomas Jefferson

"There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because one's conscience tells one that it is right."
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Never, never, never quit."
Winston Churchill