
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO PRIORITIZE HAVING EACH OF ITS DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICERS BE A PHYSICIAN LICENSED TO PRACTICE MEDICINE UNDER PART I OF CHAPTER 453, HAWAII REVISED STATUTES.

1 WHEREAS, a physician's knowledge and experience facilitate
2 the day-to-day responsibilities of the Department of Health's
3 district health officer position and allow the physician to
4 serve as a dedicated community resource; and

5
6 WHEREAS, prioritizing the appointment of district health
7 officers of the Department of Health who are physicians is
8 extremely critical to the Department's ability to provide
9 adequate community support, educate the community, and recognize
10 the community's needs and concerns in the face of pressing
11 public health issues; and

12
13 WHEREAS, the Department of Health has long recognized that
14 the district health officer in each of the three neighbor island
15 counties should be a physician and, ideally, a physician with
16 experience in community medicine who is also well-versed in
17 public health; and

18
19 WHEREAS, for many years, the Department of Health's
20 district health officers met these requirements, but at some
21 point the County of Hawaii district health officer position was
22 filled by a non-physician without medical experience or a
23 master's degree in public health, who served as an acting
24 district health officer for six years; and

25
26 WHEREAS, by that point, rather than attempting to recruit a
27 physician district health officer, the Department of Health
28 created the new position of district health officer II (non-



1 M.D.) to accommodate the existing non-M.D. district health
2 officer; and

3
4 WHEREAS, when the Department of Health's response to health
5 problems in the County of Hawaii is compared to its response to
6 health problems in the County of Maui, it is evident that health
7 issues, including disease outbreaks, were addressed much more
8 proficiently and with greater community satisfaction in the
9 County of Maui, where the district health officer was a
10 physician with a master's degree in public health; and

11
12 WHEREAS, this disparity was clearly demonstrated in the
13 Department of Health's response to two major public health
14 issues: the 2002 dengue fever outbreak in the County of Maui
15 versus the 2004 outbreak in the County of Hawaii; and the rat
16 lungworm disease outbreak in Hana, Maui, versus the current
17 crisis centered around the Puna district of the County of
18 Hawaii, and in both instances, the Department's attention to and
19 engagement with community members was much more effective in the
20 County of Maui than in the County of Hawaii; and

21
22 WHEREAS, the Office of the Auditor conducted an audit of
23 the Disease Outbreak Control Division of the Department of
24 Health and the Division's responses to three disease outbreaks
25 within the State, including the dengue fever outbreak in the
26 County of Hawaii, and in Report No. 17-14, dated December 2017,
27 concluded that the Disease Outbreak Control Division and the
28 Department exhibited "an absence or a lack of adherence to
29 plans, policies, and protocols, all of which provide disease
30 response agencies with clarity and direction during the
31 emergency conditions of an outbreak"; and

32
33 WHEREAS, the Auditor also noted that the Disease Outbreak
34 Control Division and the Department of Health were unable to
35 provide "sufficient documentation of the analysis and
36 discussions that occurred during the selected outbreaks. Absent
37 such information, we interviewed staff, as well as other key
38 individuals involved, but found inconsistencies in their
39 recollections of events and the details of their efforts during
40 the selected outbreaks."; and

41
42 WHEREAS, the members of the Hawaii County Council,
43 recognizing the importance of having a physician in its district
44 health officer position, have petitioned the Legislature to



1 require that district health officers of the Department of
2 Health be physicians; and

3
4 WHEREAS, the lack of a dedicated physician district health
5 officer within the County of Hawaii may have contributed to some
6 of the discrepancies and errors in the Department of Health's
7 response to the 2004 dengue fever outbreak; now, therefore,

8
9 BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the
10 Twenty-ninth Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session
11 of 2018, the Senate concurring, that the Legislature requests
12 the Department of Health to reinstitute the long-standing
13 practice of having a physician in the role of district health
14 officer by requiring that each district health officer of the
15 Department be a physician licensed to practice medicine under
16 part I of Chapter 453, Hawaii Revised Statutes; and

17
18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
19 Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Director of Health
20 and the Chairperson of the Hawaii County Council.

