
HOUSE RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO REQUIRE THAT 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
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6 WHEREAS, requiring that district health officers of the
7 Department of Health be physicians is extremely critical to the
8 Department's ability to provide adequate community support,
9 educate the community, and recognize the community's needs and
10 concerns in the face of pressing public health issues; and
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12 WHEREAS, the Department of Health has long recognized that
13 the district health officer in each of the three neighbor island
14 counties should be a physician and, ideally, a physician with
15 experience in community medicine who is also well-versed in
16 public health; and
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18 WHEREAS, for many years, the Department of Health's
19 district health officers met these requirements, but at some
20 point the County of Hawaii district health officer position was
21 filled by a non-physician without medical experience or a
22 master's degree in public health, who served as an acting
23 district health officer for six years; and
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25 WHEREAS, by that point, rather than attempting to recruit a
26 physician district health officer, the Department of Health
27 created the new position of district health officer II (non-
28 M.D.) to accommodate the existing non-M.D. district health
29 officer; and
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1 WHEREAS, when the Department of Health's response to health
2 problems in the County of Hawaii is compared to its response to
3 health problems in the County of Maui, it is evident that health
4 issues, including disease outbreaks, were addressed much more
5 proficiently and with greater community satisfaction in the
6 County of Maui, where the district health officer was a
7 physician with a master's degree in public health; and
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9 WHEREAS, this disparity was clearly demonstrated in the
10 Department of Health's response to two major public health
11 issues: the 2002 dengue fever outbreak in the County of Maui
12 versus the 2004 outbreak in the County of Hawaii; and the rat
13 lungworm disease outbreak in Hana, Maui, versus the current
14 crisis centered around the Puna district of the County of
15 Hawaii, and in both instances, the Department's attention to and
16 engagement with community members was much more effective in the
17 County of Maui than in the County of Hawaii; and
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19 WHEREAS, the Office of the Auditor conducted an audit of
20 the Disease Outbreak Control Division of the Department of
21 Health and the Division's responses to three disease outbreaks
22 within the State, including the dengue fever outbreak in the
23 County of Hawaii, and in Report No. 17-14, dated December 2017,
24 concluded that the Disease Outbreak Control Division and the
25 Department exhibited "an absence or a lack of adherence to
26 plans, policies, and protocols, all of which provide disease
27 response agencies with clarity and direction during the
28 emergency conditions of an outbreak"; and
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30 WHEREAS, the Auditor also noted that the Disease Outbreak
31 Control Division and the Department of Health were unable to
32 provide "sufficient documentation of the analysis and
33 discussions that occurred during the selected outbreaks. Absent
34 such information, we interviewed staff, as well as other key
35 individuals involved, but found inconsistencies in their
36 recollections of events and the details of their efforts during
37 the selected outbreaks."; and
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39 WHEREAS, the members of the Hawaii County Council,
40 recognizing the importance of having a physician in its district
41 health officer position, have petitioned the Legislature to



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

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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,

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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, that the Legislature requests the Department of Health
12 to reinstitute the long-standing practice of having a physician
13 in the role of district health officer by requiring that each
14 district health officer of the Department be a physician
15 licensed to practice medicine under part I of Chapter 453,
16 Hawaii Revised Statutes; and

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

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23 OFFERED BY:

John M. ... *John ...* *Richard ...*
John ... *Cindy ...*
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