

Testimony in SUPPORT of HR 83/ HCR 89

URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO EMPLOY THE TEAM 6B CONTACT TRACING TEAM AS PERMANENT STAFF AND HIRE OTHER MEMBERS FROM THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITIES IN AN EFFORT TO ADDRESS THE HEALTH INEQUITIES THAT EXIST AND CREATE BETTER ACCESS TO CULTURALLY RELEVANT PROGRAMS FOR NATIVE HAWAIIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS.

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES, & HOMELESSNESS

Rep. Ryan I. Yamane, Chair

Rep. Adrian K. Tam, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Rep. Mark M. Nakashima, Chair

Rep. Scot Z. Matayoshi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: 03/25/2022

Dear Committee Members,

I write to SUPPORT **HR 83/ HCR 89**, which urges the Department of Health to permanently employ Team 6B, a critical contact tracing team providing important outreach to Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities, and to hire other members from NHPI communities to address health inequities.

COVID-19 exposed systemic inequalities in our healthcare services, as NHPI communities were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and did not receive the care or public health information needed in the beginning. It has shown us that there needs to be more investment in programs by State agencies to bridge the cultural and language gaps that exist. I am a Samoan woman living in Hawaii and I witnessed firsthand how my community members struggled to understand the pandemic and what they needed to do if they got sick. While others were able to access information directly on websites such as the CDC, many Samoans had to wait to get information second hand from their relatives and friends who had previously suffered from COVID-19 in order to understand what they needed to do because of a language barrier and educational barrier.

Team 6B was an innovative and successful effort to provide outreach and contact tracing to NHPI communities in-language, with culturally appropriate communication. Team 6B is a vital link to the community the Department of Health can't afford to lose. It has shown empirical proof that culturally relevant public health interventions are an effective method of curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This resolution would not only allow Team 6B to continue the critical outreach and services they have provided for the past 2 years, but also encourage the hiring of more members from

underserved and marginalized communities, which is absolutely necessary in addressing the inequities that exist for these communities. Thus, I ask you to pass **HR 83/ HCR 89** from the Health, Human Services, and Homelessness Committee.

Thank you for your support and consideration,

- Aovai Cole

**Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander
HAWAI'I COVID-19 TEAM**
Response. Recovery. Resilience.



**SUPPORT for SCR 127, HCR 89, and HR 83
“URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO
EMPLOY THE TEAM 6B CONTRACT TRACING
TEAM AS PERMANENT STAFF AND HIRE OTHER
MEMBERS FROM THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND
PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITIES.”**

House Committee on Health, Human Services, &
Homelessness
Chair Yamane and Vice-Chair Tam
Tuesday, March 29, 2022
CR329 & Via Video Conference

Aloha Chair Yamane, Vice-Chair Tam, and Members of the House Committee on Health, Human Services, & Homelessness,

As a coalition of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations, the Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander COVID-19 Hawai'i Response, Recovery, and Resilience (NHPI 3R) Team testifies in **SUPPORT of SCR 127, HCR 89, and HR 83**, which urges the Department of Health to employ the Team 6B contact tracing team as permanent staff and hire other members from the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities to address health inequities. Timely implementation of these and other actions is crucial to expand and deepen public health equity and resilience in the State of Hawai'i.

In spring 2020, the disparity in COVID-19 cases for Pacific Islanders was reported to community leaders, who began to call for action. At that time, the public health response in Hawai'i was focused on supporting the general public through the statewide shutdown. Later, CivilBeat reported that [while just 4% of the state population, Pacific Islanders comprised 30% of cases](#). Due to the lack of data disaggregation and infrastructure, state agencies had a limited understanding of COVID-19 impacts on race/ethnicity groups, as aggregated data could not identify specific COVID-19 disease trends among different racial groups such as NHPI. Community advocacy and partnerships with State agencies led to the disaggregation of COVID-19 data and the formation of the Pacific Islander contract tracing team, Team 6B, within the Department of Health. Team 6B provided critical culturally appropriate outreach and we believe their efforts in reaching out to the severely impacted Pacific Islander community contributed to the decrease in COVID-19 disparities in Pacific Islander communities.

Throughout the pandemic, Team 6B has demonstrated that they are well-positioned in Hawai'i communities and capable of performing to State standards. We call for the Legislature to support the resolutions that urge their permanent employment because the use of a culturally and linguistically tailored approach has been needed in State engagements with the PI community and public health outreach since before the pandemic. It would be a missed opportunity in equity if the members of Team 6B, who are from the same communities they work to serve, were not provided the option to become permanent State employees. Further, failing to provide this opportunity to the members of Team 6B is a message to communities that the State – despite the clear data on COVID-19 disparities – does not seek to draw upon the successes of Team 6B to improve community resilience into the future.

The NHPI 3R Team continues to stand in support of the measures that build health equity for NHPI through direct vehicles such as the proposed Office of Health Equity (SB 2031)

or the system-wide changes needed to empower equity work, like the improvement of data governance through the establishment of a State Chief Data Officer (HB 1885). The lessons learned over the past two years will be repeated in future public health issues if leaders do not act to improve the overwhelmed, underinformed, and under capacity systems. Community-driven advocacy, including that of the NHPI 3R Team, catalyzed the discourse that eventually led to the policy change around the disaggregation of NHPI data, identification of specific communities facing disparity in COVID-19, and actions to respond to COVID-19 in those communities. Continued collaboration to ensure that these gains are not lost is necessary so that the partnerships and work built can extend to the chronic inequities facing NHPI.

The pandemic effects on health and the social determinants of health have yet to be fully understood. Measures like SCR 127/HCR 89/HR 83 and others work to change the context so that State capacity and effectiveness improve. Offering permanent employment to Team 6B, developing and utilizing a diverse hiring plan, and hiring staff reflective of NHPI communities are actions that can be taken to help increase engagement and decrease disparity. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and the continued commitment to Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders as we navigate together. The NHPI 3R Team can be contacted via email at nhpicovid@papaolalokahi.org.

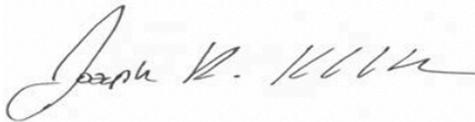
Respectfully,



Sheri Daniels, Native Hawaiian Co-Lead



Josie Howard, Pacific Islander Co-Lead



Joseph Keawe'aimoku Kaholokula, Native Hawaiian Co-Lead



Felea'i Tau, Pacific Islander Co-Lead

HR-83

Submitted on: 3/28/2022 12:00:36 PM

Testimony for HHH on 3/29/2022 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leimaile Barrett	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly SUPPORT HR 83.

Far too many of our Pacific community were affected by COVID-19 and were not receiving clear directives or education concerning what needed to be done and how in way that was linguistically appropriate or culturally appropriate. Along with this resources such as food and shelter were not being asked for or given. This unfortunately, led to more positive cases within multi-generational homes, unnecessary and burdensome ticketing as family members had to leave their home in order to feed their families, public exposure to the virus, and an over-representation of our Pacific community in deaths.

Team 6B has met all these challenges and continues to be one of the most utilized contact investigation team. They have shown that they are not only an emergency response team but are also an effective team whose daily presence has made an impact that can be gauged in the data collected. They are the necessary bridge to our communities and their presence makes a difference in the public health disparities suffered by our Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities.

I strongly urge the Department of Health to employ the Team 6B Contact Tracing Team as permanent staff and SUPPORT the hire of other members from the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities in an effort to address the health inequities that exist and create better access to culturally relevant programs for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

Mahalo,

Leimaile Barrett

HR-83

Submitted on: 3/28/2022 1:06:18 PM

Testimony for HHH on 3/29/2022 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexander Mawyer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The HI DOH's efforts to develop, maintain, and advance the technical and human resources to contribute to the wellbeing and health equity needs of the complexly diversity of Pacific Islander communities in Hawai'i should be applauded and supported with continuing funding. Because of the continuing dynamics and impacts of the ongoing covid-pandemic, the potential for new or emergent strains, alongside the persistence of non-pandemic health inequities and community needs, the work of Team 6B should be supported or, as possible, expanded to increase impacts, consolidate lessons learned, and lay the foundation for the future health of our state's significant Pacific Islander communities. Mahalo nui loa, Alexander Mawyer

Committee on Health, Human Services, & Homelessness

Date: Tuesday, March 29, 2022

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Place: Via Videoconference, Conference Room 329

SUPPORT: HR 83

Aloha Chair Yamane, Vice Chair Tam and members of the committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **strong support of House Resolution 83** urging the Hawai'i State Department of Health to hire the Team 6B contact tracing team as permanent staff, and to hire other Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander professionals. It is imperative that the DOH address the health inequities that exist today, and create better access to culturally-relevant programs that serve our communities.

It is evident that the work of Team 6B has been instrumental in improving the DOH's ability to work effectively in our local community during the critical times of the COVID-19 pandemic. I witnessed the impact of this team first-hand in my capacity as a steering committee member and communications lead for COVID-19 pediatric campaign Keiki Heroes that worked in the field statewide with families impacted by the pandemic. The ability to bring culturally-consistent communications, perspectives, values and practices is essential in being able to work with our community members to reach our shared goals of improved health outcomes across the state.

With tremendous gratitude to Team 6B, I urge the committee to vote in support of HR 83.

Mahalo,



Christine Matsuda

christine.matsuda@gmail.com

808-321-2473

Committee on Health, Human Services, & Homelessness

Date: Tuesday, March 29, 2022

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Place: Via Videoconference, Conference Room 329

SUPPORT: HCR 89

Aloha Chair Yamane, Vice Chair Tam and members of the committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **strong support of House Resolution 83** urging the Hawai'i State Department of Health to hire the Team 6B contact tracing team as permanent staff, and to hire other Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander professionals. It's critical that the DOH address health inequities today and into the future. We need consistent staffing so that we can build better relationships in our NHPI communities.

It's clear to me that the work of Team 6B was instrumental in addressing the needs of the NHPI community during the last two years of response to COVID-19. I worked with this team as the Director of COVID Pau as we went out into the community to engage those who had not yet been vaccinated or needed testing to keep their families safe. COVID Pau played a small role in that effort but it was clear to me that Team 6B had the unique ability to bring culturally-consistent communications, perspectives, values and practices to every event that they worked on. This is essential in being able to work with our community members to reach our shared goals of improved health outcomes across the state.

I have the utmost respect for the tireless work of Team 6B and urge this committee to support HR83.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Na'alehu Anthony', written in a cursive style.

Na'alehu Anthony

808.554.5358

whereslehu@gmail.com

HR-83

Submitted on: 3/28/2022 5:56:53 PM

Testimony for HHH on 3/29/2022 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Luke Kaakau Jr	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I urge your strong passage of HR83. We can now longer hide the fact that inequities still happen not only on the health front, but also many other fronts in this state. Listen to and support the voices of our marginalized communities and ensure they have a voice at the table at ALL times. And this is a start. Join this team in making it pono. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Luke Kaakau Jr.