



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

House Committee on Finance

Thursday, February 22, 2024

10:00 a.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 308 and Videoconference

In Support

House Bill No. 2411, HD1, Relating to Health

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members on the House Committee on Finance:

The Office of the Governor supports H.B. No. 2411, HD1, Relating to Health, which would rename the Hawai'i Health Corps Program to the Hawai'i Rural Health Care Provider Loan Program.

The Hawaii Health Corps Program was established in 2012 with a focus on encouraging certain healthcare providers to serve in counties that are experiencing shortages of physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners, with a priority given to a rural area county. However, since its implementation, it has become clear that, while the need for these providers to serve these areas remains, there is also an increased need for a wider range of healthcare providers by professions, including mental health services to continue to enhance and improve access to medical healthcare services in these areas.

On September 9, 2023, the State launched the Hawai'i Healthcare Education Loan Repayment Program (HELP). HELP was established to provide educational loan debt repayment to qualified healthcare professionals who practice in Hawai'i. In the first round of the HELP program, over 800 applications were received, with 492 medical and healthcare professionals receiving awards averaging roughly \$32,500 and includes nearly 300 primary care and behavioral health providers, 90 professionals serving rural areas or the Neighbor Islands, and 40 residents in training. Additionally, the HELP program is expected to help improve recruitment and retention of healthcare providers serving vulnerable populations, as well as those in medically underserved areas of Hawai'i, and lessen the burden of their educational debt.

Due to HELP having an expanded scope and purpose compared to the current Hawaii Health Corps Program, the Office of the Governor had this bill introduced to clarify and rename this existing statutory program to better reflect its purpose.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.