



April 6, 2026

The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on
Public Safety, Intergovernmental and Military Affairs
Hawai'i State Senate
State Capitol, Room 016
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

LATE

RE: **SUPPORT — SCR 59**

Aloha, Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Red Cross of Hawai'i respectfully submits testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SCR 59**. The Red Cross has served the people of Hawai'i since 1898, responding to disasters large and small. We know firsthand that the ability to rapidly deploy qualified health care and mental health professionals during a state of emergency is a matter of life and safety for disaster-impacted community members. SCR 59 represents an important step toward ensuring that out-of-state licensed health care professionals can be quickly authorized to practice in Hawai'i during a declared emergency, without the delays caused by standard licensure requirements. We offer the following comments and recommended refinements to strengthen the measure further.

I. The current language references "mental health counselors" as the authorized category of mental health practitioners. We respectfully urge the Committee to broaden this designation. In practice, the Red Cross deploys a range of licensed mental health professionals to disaster sites, including Clinical Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, School Counselors, and Psychologists — disciplines that are not typically captured under the "counselors" label. We understand that the existing language may provide a pathway for these professionals through the phrase "other health care professionals designated by the Department of Health," and we acknowledge that in Hawai'i, mental health services fall under the Department of Health's purview. However, relying solely on a future departmental designation creates ambiguity that could potentially impede the rapid deployment necessary during a fast-moving disaster.

We recommend that the bill either:

- Enumerate the specific mental health disciplines individually (e.g., licensed clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, school counselors, and psychologists); or
- Replace "mental health counselors" with the broader term "mental health professionals" to encompass all licensed mental health disciplines without requiring additional departmental action.

II. We are concerned about the provisions which appear to require individual deployed workers to register on a state registry portal prior to, or upon, deployment. For a large-scale disaster response, individual worker registration would create significant administrative burden and delay the arrival of urgently needed medical and mental health support. The Red Cross already maintains a robust internal credentialing system. Before any health care professional is deployed, we verify their current licensure, confirm the license is unencumbered, and validate their eligibility to respond. This vetting process occurs at the national, organizational level, ensuring that only qualified and licensed individuals are deployed in the field.

We recommend that the resolution be amended to allow recognized emergency response organizations to deploy their pre-vetted health care workers freely upon a declaration of emergency, with the organization serving as the responsible entity for credentialing verification, rather than requiring each individual worker to complete a separate state registration process.



III. SCR 59 is more restrictive than some comparable frameworks, such as the Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act (UEVHPA), which allows any volunteer health practitioner affiliated with a "qualified volunteer organization" to be authorized to practice. The Red Cross is pleased to be explicitly recognized in this bill, and we raise this point not as a primary concern for our own operations, but in the spirit of building the most resilient and flexible emergency health system possible for Hawai'i. During major disasters, the Red Cross frequently collaborates with other nonprofits and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) members that provide free health services and help fill capacity gaps. If those partner organizations are not eligible to deploy entities under this bill, our shared capacity to scale response rapidly may be impacted.

We recommend the Committee consider language that permits any qualified nonprofit emergency response organization — as defined by criteria the Governor or Department of Health may establish — to serve as an eligible deploying entity, consistent with the UEVHPA framework.

IV. SCR 59 provides that emergency practice authority expires after 60 days or the termination of the emergency declaration, whichever occurs first. We appreciate the 60-day window, which is sufficient for most disaster responses. However, for higher-impact events, such as the Lahaina wildfire response, 60 days may be insufficient, and extending practice authority would require additional gubernatorial action during an already impacted operational period.

We recommend simplifying the framework by allowing emergency practice authority to remain in effect for the full duration of the emergency declaration. This approach ensures that the authorization organically tracks the state's own determination of when the emergency window has passed, eliminates the need for extension procedures during active responses, and provides deploying organizations with the flexibility necessary for sustained, long-term mission delivery.

The American Red Cross strongly supports the goals of SCR 59 and commends Senator Fukunaga for advancing this critical piece of emergency preparedness policy. Hawai'i will continue to experience disasters that demand swift, coordinated deployment of skilled healthcare professionals from across the country. SCR 59 establishes an important framework for making that possible.

With the amendments outlined above, this measure would provide even greater operational clarity, equity across mental health disciplines, and flexibility for frontline disaster response organizations. We urge the Committee to pass SCR 59 with the aforementioned amendments, and look forward to continued collaboration with the Legislature on Hawai'i's emergency preparedness framework.

Mahalo,

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