



Hawai'i Primary Care Association
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To: _____ **Committee on** _____
The Hon. _____, Chair
The Hon. _____, Vice Chair

Testimony in Support of House/Senate Bill _____
Relating to Health
Submitted by Beth Giesting, CEO
Date, Time, Room

The Hawai'i Primary Care Association strongly endorses this measure. Hawai'i is fortunate to have a network of 14 independent nonprofit Community Health Centers that serve 100,000 individuals per year at 46 sites on six islands. Community Health Centers (also known as "Federally Qualified Health Centers") are a significant part of the health care safety net, meeting the needs of people who have the most complex mixes of social, economic, and health problems. These include people who are homeless, impoverished, uninsured, enrolled in Medicaid and Medicare, who have special language, cultural, or mental health needs, and residents of rural areas.

Community Health Centers provide primary medical, behavioral health, and dental services, and use a model of care that maximizes resources while addressing the multiple needs of patients and their families. CHCs intensively manage the care of patients chronically ill with diabetes, asthma, and hypertension and bring their conditions under control. They work with families to link them to needed public insurance and other programs. They make sure patients get prescription drugs through free and discounted pharmaceutical programs like the 340B program. By offering accessible alternatives, Community Health Centers serve to ease emergency room overcrowding and are ideal settings for training students of the health professions because they offer valuable and diverse experiences.

Uninsured Funding. The number of uninsured people in Hawai'i is variously estimated to be between 110,000 and 130,000 people. Uninsured people are most likely to be non-elderly low-income working adults who do not qualify for employer-sponsored coverage or public benefits and either cannot get or cannot pay for private health insurance.

Hawai'i's Community Health Centers served nearly 30,000 uninsured individuals in 2006, a notable achievement but one that still leaves at least 80,000 people without appropriate care. In Hawai'i we should be able to ensure access to important basic health care for all residents - it just makes sense to keep people healthy and productive and to reduce uncompensated costs for avoidable emergency room use and hospitalizations. Due to facility, staffing, and funding challenges CHCs cannot currently promise to be the safety-net for all uninsured people in the state; however, restoring the \$2 million appropriation for the uninsured granted in past years' sessions would provide medical, dental, behavioral health, and prescription drugs for up to 5,000

more uninsured people. Please note that the \$2 million requested should be added to the \$3.5 million for the uninsured already in the Department of Health budget because \$3.5 million falls short of covering all the health centers' uninsured services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of this measure which is one of the most important actions the Legislature can take to support Hawai'i's safety net health care system.