

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair

February 13, 2013 at 8:30 a.m.
Conference Room 329

Supporting HB 649: Relating to Health

The Healthcare Association of Hawaii advocates for its member organizations that span the entire spectrum of health care, including all acute care hospitals, as well as long term care facilities, home care agencies, and hospices. In addition to providing quality care to all of Hawaii's residents, our members contribute significantly to Hawaii's economy by employing over 40,000 people. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 649, which expands the range of mental illnesses the Department of Health is required to treat. This range has been reduced through administrative rules.

The census at the Hawaii State Hospital (HSH) exceeded its licensed capacity in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2012. A serious concern was raised because HSH is viewed as a key indicator of the adequacy of Hawaii's mental health system.

In response, the Governor convened a Special Action Team (SAT) to revitalize Hawaii's mental health system and to manage the HSH census more effectively. The SAT issued a report in October 2012 that included both short-term and long-term recommendations that addressed Personnel/Finance/Procurement, Program Capacity/Clinical Operations, and Legal/Judicial issues. The report included the following recommendations:

- (1) Reduce excessive or continuing State staff vacancies in critical roles;
- (2) Divert persons with mental illness from the Criminal Justice System and commitment to HSH;
- (3) Increase community service;
- (4) Decrease gaps in services or financing services to reduce the risk of hospitalization or reduce stays at HSH;
- (5) Expedite the forensic examination process to reduce length of stay at HSH; and
- (6) Propose legislation to amend HRS Sec. 704-411(1)(b) to allow alternatives for placement for persons on conditional release who violate the conditions of their conditional release.

This bill is consistent with the recommendations of the SAT. Like many states, Hawaii's mental health system has been compromised due to budget cuts. This bill takes a step toward restoring it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 649.

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February 12, 2013

TO: House Committee on Health
Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair

HB649, Relating to Health

IN STRONG SUPPORT

Chair and Committee Members:

We are writing to express the strong support of Mental Health America of Hawaii for HB649. This law restores diagnostic categories enabling persons with mental illness to access services from the Adult Mental Health Division of the Department of Health.

The cuts during the past administration, which decimated mental health services in our state, included cutting back eligibility so that only people with psychoses are able to receive state services. People who desperately need help – such as those with suicidal depression or severe PTSD – have been left without help or treatment. This is unconscionable and unfair. The totality of the cuts in mental health services resulted in a dramatic increase in police psychiatric emergency calls as well as the overcrowding of Hawai'i State Hospital. And it has increased human suffering, as those with serious mental illness experience great pain. They need help. It is the responsibility of our community to take care of them. I urge you to consider restoration of services to a wider spectrum of mental illness conditions.

This bill also requires the Adult Mental Health Division to provide certain services, such as Representative Payee, Clubhouse, and supportive housing to those severely mentally ill persons who have private insurance, but whose plans do not cover such services. Additionally, this bill provides much needed funding for mental health and substance abuse services for homeless individuals.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important bill, and we appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Pat Waterhouse".

Mary Pat Waterhouse
President, Board of Directors

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marya Grambs".

Marya Grambs
Executive Director