



UNIVERSITY
of HAWAII®
MĀNOA

April 1, 2021

Aimee Malia Grace
Director, Office of Strategic Health Priorities
University of Hawai'i (UH) System
2425 Campus Road, Sinclair 10
Honolulu, HI 96822

Dear Dr. Grace:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our strong support for the Rural Health Research Center proposal by the University of Hawai'i (UH) Office of Strategic Health Initiatives. The Hawai'i/Pacific Basin Area Health Education Center (AHEC) at the UH John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) has numerous programs to recruit, train, and retain health providers—particularly physicians—in Hawai'i and the Pacific. AHEC tracks physician shortage issues in the state of Hawai'i; provides rural rotations for medical students, including with support needs such as short-term housing in community homes; administers the Hawai'i State Loan Repayment Program for health professionals in underserved and rural areas; manages multiple grants to increase diversity in the health professions and expand outreach to pre-health professions students; and provides telehealth services as part of a grant with the Hawai'i State Department of Health.

AHEC strongly supports further policy development to improve health workforce shortage issues in Hawai'i. Our recent report to the legislature found that the state of Hawai'i now has a shortage of 1,008 physicians (up from 820 last year).¹ There have been multiple grassroots efforts to mobilize and develop policy solutions with a supportive legislature, but a hub for sustained engagement with these issues would be critical.

We strongly support UH's proposal for a Rural health Research Center in the quest for improved health workforce access and health equity in rural areas of Hawai'i and the Pacific. Thank you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kelley Withy MD PhD'.

Kelley Withy, MD, PhD
Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Community Health
Director, Hawaii/Pacific Basin AHEC

¹ <https://www.ahec.hawaii.edu/workforce-page/>