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To Whom It May Concern:

We write in strong support of the proposed Rural Health Research Center at the University of Hawai'i (UH). As organizations that are invested in improving health care access for the rural areas of Hawai'i and addressing health disparities in rural areas, we support the creation of a Rural Health Research Center at UH that would be focused on rural health workforce policy and health equity. Such a center would create actionable data and policy briefs, as well as policy recommendations, to improve rural health care in Hawai'i.

Despite the strength and resilience of Hawai'i's rural communities, these areas have long faced challenges with adequate health care access and health workforce. Shortages of physicians (in both primary care and specialty care), nurse practitioners, sonographers, medical assistants, registered nurses, and more have often been acute across the rural areas of the islands of Hawai'i, and many of these shortages have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, travel time by airplane to Honolulu for advanced care makes many individuals and families delay getting appropriate treatment and/or drives up the costs of health care as well as morbidity and mortality on the neighbor islands.

Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, many of whom live in Hawai'i's rural areas, also often face significant health disparities, from chronic diseases to access to care to mental health. These populations are also not nearly proportionately represented in Hawai'i's health workforce, despite the state's strong desire to increase diversity in Hawai'i's health professions.

Our legislators and communities need policy recommendations and data-driven research to inform practical solutions to improve rural health. Despite various efforts to address rural health workforce policy and health equity, much more could be done by investing in a hub at UH to serve the state in these areas.

We strongly support UH's Rural Health Research Center proposal and look forward to working together to improve health and health care in the rural areas of Hawai'i and the Pacific.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Rantz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" being more prominent than the last name "Rantz".

Lisa Rantz

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Established in 1994, the Hawaii State Rural Health Association (HSRHA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit Organization dedicated to addressing rural health needs across our island state.

**~Working Together to Promote Healthy Rural Communities~**