



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

June 17, 2009

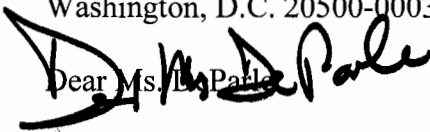
The Honorable Nancy-Ann Min DeParle

Director

White House Office for Health Reform

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20500-0003

Dear Ms. DeParle

I recently held a forum on federal health reform with the health providers on May 28th in my district. At the meeting and through comments later received by my office, health providers emphasized to me the need for federal health reform to protect Hawaii's unique health care environment and recommended the following be taken into consideration as the Congress drafts health care reform legislation:

- Address Compact Migrants: Hawaii provides health care to compact migrants through Medicaid without any federal matching funds. Though the federal government signed the Compacts of Free Association with these countries, namely the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau, the state has had to carry the full burden of this federal agreement. Specifically, the 1996 Welfare Reform Law (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act) inadvertently declared compact migrants ineligible for Medicaid and TANF and we ask that this decision be reconsidered to provide access to federal benefits.
- Protect the Prepaid Health Care Act: Hawaii currently has an ERISA exemption for its Prepaid Health Care Act, which requires employers to provide health insurance to their employees who work 20 hours or more a week for four consecutive weeks. We ask that this coverage mandate be honored unless the new federal plan improves upon Hawaii's waiver provisions.
- Ensure that the Needs of Native Hawaiians are Met by Federal Health Care Reform: Groups in Hawaii and the continental U.S. are working to raise the health status of Native Hawaiians and to secure the resources necessary to address the current health disparities. Papa Ola Lokahi, designated by Congress as the Native Hawaiian Health Board, has put together a Native Hawaiian health care system in Hawaii and has supported a number of health initiatives for Native Hawaiians living on the continental US but has struggled to secure sufficient resources to carry out all of the goals of the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act (NHHCIA).

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- As you may know, the U.S. spends about \$8,000 per capita for health care, but in comparison, spending on Native Hawaiian health is approximately \$32 per capita. Native Hawaiians also continue to be under-represented in the health professional workforce. In order to address these issues, we ask that you support the inclusion of a 100% FMAP for Native Hawaiians, the reauthorization of the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act, enhanced funding for Native Hawaiian health and allied-health professional education and training, and a provision asking the President to initiate an executive order reaffirming consultation protocols between federal agencies and Native Hawaiians in health care reform legislation. Native Hawaiians need to be included in any on-going national discussions on health care reform.
- Address Health Workforce: Hawaii's workforce is aging and there is a physician shortage not only in the predominately rural Neighbor Island areas, but even on the lesser populated areas outside Honolulu on Oahu.
- Address Problems in Long Term Care: Acute care is being burdened by the problems lack of access to long term care. Currently, patients who are judged ready for nursing homes are kept in hospitals as they are waitlisted for long term care. Caring for waitlisted patients has continued to create a loss for the hospitals with costs in excess of payments of \$73.5 million in 2007.
- Address Malpractice Costs: Many of the providers I heard from were concerned about the high premiums and one doctor mentioned his increased use of MRIs to avoid lawsuits. We must address defensive medicine through health care reform legislation if we truly want to decrease the growing health care costs in our country.
- Support Prevention and Wellness: We must move from our current paradigm of treating illness to promoting wellness.

Overall, the health providers in my district were supportive of the current efforts being made on health care reform and are looking forward to legislation that will be coming forth from the House committees. Please free to contact my staff member, Rose Hacking, for more information on any of these issues. I look forward to working with you to enact health reform legislation that both ameliorates Hawaii's unique needs and builds upon existing innovative programs.

We need to address these issues esp. compact migrant challenges.

NA

Sincerely,


Neil Abercrombie
 Member of Congress

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