

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

November 2, 2009

Dr. David Blumenthal, MD, MPP
National Coordinator for Health Information Technology
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Subject: Hawaii-Pacific Health Information Technology (HIT) Regional Extension
Center Program

Dear Dr. Blumenthal,

I am writing this letter in very strong support of the Hawaii-Pacific Health Information Technology Regional Extension Center (HITREC) program proposal submitted by the University of Hawaii on behalf of the Pacific region and the State of Hawaii. I am writing this letter following a meeting with a delegation from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) that attended the recent meeting of the State Alliance for e-Health, sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) on September 24-25, 2009.

The proposal for a Hawaii-Pacific HITREC is vital to helping the territories and the State of Hawaii to become meaningful users of HIT; to implement Electronic Health Record (EHR) systems; and, to prepare for the implementation Health Information Exchanges (HIE) in the region. The proposal, which has received the endorsement of the Governors of the Pacific Island Territories the Hawaii Department of Health, and the regional Medicaid and Medicare Administrators, will help to ensure that the providers in the CNMI and Hawaii receive technical assistance to implement EMRs and EHRs, as defined by the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) for HIT. Since the HIT REC program anticipates potentially 70 such centers to be established, I am strongly urging the support of the Hawaii-Pacific HIT Regional Extension Center since it will serve providers in Hawaii and especially the Pacific Island territories.

The establishment of a Hawaii-Pacific HIT Regional Extension Center will help to ensure that we address the medical records and medical specialist shortages that were identified in the report issued by the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) in September 2008. The Insular Area Health Care: At the Crossroads of a Total Breakdown report identified the need for improving the

management of medical records and the need for specialists, both of which would be helped by Health Information Technology.

In the region, the importance of EHRs and the sharing health information is vitally important given the nature of our health systems. Our health care system often requires our patients to receive care in Guam, Hawaii, and other locations such as the Philippines. We also serve the populations of the U.S. Compact Nations in Micronesia. These populations often overlap with those of Guam, Hawaii, and other locations in the United States. This necessarily results in a strong and well-defined need to exchange health and medical information to improve care provided to all our populations.

The delegation from the CNMI strongly believes that the care of our patients will vastly improve with our ability to share information for clinical care and public health reporting. Our delegation from the Commonwealth also believes that it is critically important that technical assistance be provided to ensure that our hospital, clinics, and independent providers become "meaningful users" of HIT and EHRs, and are able to participate in a Health Information Exchange.

The delegation also values and strongly supports the partnership with the University of Hawaii, State of Hawai'i, Guam, and American Samoa in Health Information Technology (HIT) because of the similarity of our situations and needs and because our health care agencies have worked with University of Hawaii for decades in information technology and medical care for decades.

Through the partnership, the CNMI is a partner to the Pacific Broadband Telehealth Demonstration Project of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that is being coordinated by the University of Hawai'i and with many healthcare programs with the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine. Our schools of nursing work closely together, as does our Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program.

It is also very important to note that the Commonwealth Health Center (CHC) hospital has been using the Resource and Patient Management System of the U.S. Indian Health Service for over a decade. I was informed by the Acting Secretary of Health and the private providers that were part of the CNMI delegation that the CNMI Department of Public Health (DPH) has made the commitment to enable the use of the RPMS for the private health care providers in the CNMI.

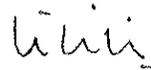
The commitment by the DPH is important for two reasons. First, if such a capability could be implemented, it would enable the shared use of the system and resources by the CHC and private providers that would provide a single data base of

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health information. The sharing between these providers and the hospital would benefit clinical care immensely. It would also enable the use of the population reporting tools that the Indian Health Service is famous for. Second, the University of Hawaii is already supporting the use of the RPMS system in several Critical Access Hospitals and clinics in Hawaii. The expertise of the University of Hawaii would be of immense value to the CHC, the Department of Public Health, and the private providers.

For these reasons, I was very pleased to hear that a regional pre-application was submitted and very strongly support the establishment of the Hawaii-Pacific HITREC. I also urge the early establishment of the regional center due to the importance of HIT to the region and the need to begin early our regional activities.

Sincerely,



GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
The Honorable Eni Faleomavaega
The Honorable Neil Abercrombie
The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
The Honorable Mazie Hirono
The Honorable Benigno R. Fitial, Governor of the Northern Mariana Islands
The Honorable Felix Camacho, Governor of Guam
The Honorable Togiola Tulafono, Governor of American Samoa
Susan Jackson, Deputy Director, Department of Health, State of Hawaii
Pedro Untalan, Acting Secretary of Health, CNMI
Norman H. Okamura, Ph.D., University of Hawaii