



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

Practice Directorate

May 14, 2007

The Honorable Linda Lingle
Office of the Governor
Hawaii State Capitol
Executive Chambers
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Governor Lingle:

I am writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association to urge you to make necessary mental health care accessible to the citizens of Hawaii by signing Senate Bill 1004 (SB 1004) into law. If this bill becomes law, specially trained psychologists will be authorized to prescribe certain psychotropic medications to patients of the thirteen federally qualified health centers on Oahu and neighboring islands, thereby helping to assure that care is provided to those in need.

As stated in Section 1 of SB 1004, the Hawaii Legislature has determined that the state's citizens are currently suffering from limited access to mental health treatment, particularly in rural areas. The purpose of SB 1004 is to "address the urgent need for timely, appropriate, and cost-effective therapeutic and psychopharmacological health services in rural areas." This need is reported to be particularly acute within Hawaii's underserved populations -- the uninsured, the poor, native Hawaiians, ethnic minorities and the homeless. We are well aware that as Governor, you have demonstrated a clear vision and commitment to improving access to health care in your state, particularly mental health care. SB 1004, if enacted into law, will improve access to and coordination of care for these underserved populations, consistent with your ongoing vision and commitment.

There is no doubt that the Legislature has worked hard this year to put forward multiple measures to improve access to health care for the citizens of Hawaii. Legislation creating universal health care for children, increased Medicaid funding, health insurance rate regulation and prescriptive authority for appropriately trained psychologists are all critical measures intended to help address the state's health care need. It is also important to note that the psychologists in Hawaii have worked diligently with the co-sponsors of SB 1004 to determine the most effective and efficient means to utilize appropriately trained psychologists to improve access to needed psychopharmacologic care. Working in collaboration with primary care physicians, those psychologists would contribute to a holistic, integrated and interdisciplinary approach to care that is all too often lacking where medication for behavioral health problems has been concerned.

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Opponents to SB 1004, more concerned about protecting professional turf than improving access to care, have made unsubstantiated statements about increased risk to patient safety if psychologists are allowed to prescribe. In point of fact, four separate independent evaluations of psychologists trained and prescribing through the Department of Defense concluded that the psychologists were trained to prescribe safely and effectively. The most comprehensive of those evaluations, conducted by the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology, found that psychologists not only prescribed safely and effectively, but "filled critical needs and performed with excellence wherever they served." Appropriately trained psychologists certified to prescribe in Louisiana and New Mexico, where prescriptive authority for psychologists has been law for some time, have written over 40,000 prescriptions without incident and are effectively filling the gap for needed mental health services in those states.

If SB 1004 becomes law, the citizens of Hawaii will be able to receive necessary services virtually immediately. Fourteen highly experienced, licensed doctoral-level psychologists with an applied clinical specialty have completed the 2-year postdoctoral master's degree program specializing in clinical psychopharmacology that is articulated in the legislation. These psychologists, already highly regarded and valued members of their respective health care communities, would be able to be certified to provide additional needed services as soon as regulations implementing the law are promulgated.

The American Psychological Association believes that SB 1004, if enacted, will meet an urgent need for improved access to safe and effective psychopharmacological care for Hawaiians, particularly the state's underserved populations. We urge you to sign into law this important step towards improving access to mental health care in your state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russ Newman", followed by a long horizontal line.

Russ Newman, Ph.D., J.D.
Executive Director for Professional Practice

cc: Hawaii Psychological Association