H.B. NO. 3154

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO EPIDEMIOLOGISTS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. Chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:

"**§321- Epidemiologists.** The department of health may establish permanent or temporary exempt positions known as epidemiologists for the purpose of investigating diseases and injuries which threaten the public health and safety. The positions shall be appointed by the director without regard to chapter 76."

SECTION 2. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

INTRODUCED BY: Calvin K. Say

BY REQUEST

JAN 22 2008

H.B. NO. 3154

Report Title:
Epidemiologists

Description:
Authorizes the Department of Health (DOH) to create permanent or temporary exempt epidemiologist positions.

HB 3154

JUSTIFICATION SHEET

DEPARTMENT: Health

TITLE: A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO EPIDEMIOLOGISTS.

PURPOSE: To authorize the Department of Health (DOH) to create permanent or temporary exempt epidemiologist positions.

MEANS: Add a new section to chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

JUSTIFICATION: The civil service system classifies a series of "epidemiological specialists", who conduct and lead disease outbreak investigations, and operate and maintain surveillance systems. In some cases they administer protective medications and take blood samples under medical supervision.

We strongly believe that the DOH should be granted the authority to establish and fill "epidemiologist" positions, as distinguished from epidemiological specialists, without regard to chapters 76 and 89, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

The granting of the authority to create and fill the exempt positions addresses a major operational need for the DOH by providing the optimal opportunity to attract, adequately compensate and retain qualified epidemiologists, whose recruitment pool is significantly limited due to the high degree of specialization required in this field of public health.

Epidemiologists function at a higher level, designing studies to address recurring problems unique to our environment, collaborating with University colleagues to conduct applied research, designing, evaluating surveillance systems, and

synthesizing results of surveillance, investigations, and new scientific developments for use by decision-makers.

The DOH has been trying, so far unsuccessfully, to create an epidemiologist classification series since 2003. The civil service classification and compensation system places much more weight on the number of staff supervised than on the level of technical skill necessary to perform complex tasks independently.

The current epidemiological specialist position series is not sufficient for recruiting and retaining staff with the technical expertise and multidisciplinary skills necessary to build and maintain the DOH's capacity for public health surveillance and response. Our ability to protect the public health is compromised by requirements of a decades old job classification system that has not been expanded to reflect advances in public health practice, including electronic data capture and transmission, medical informatics, sophisticated statistical manipulation, automated telecommunications, mapping with global positioning systems, rapid diagnostic assays, nucleic acid amplification techniques, pathogen "fingerprinting" (i.e., pulsed field gel electrophoresis and restriction fragment length polymorphism) and complex study design and analyses.

With over six million visitors each year, Hawaii is uniquely vulnerable to importation of new and re-emerging diseases. Our citizens need highly qualified, experienced epidemiologists to protect us from threats of new and re-emerging diseases and to interrupt outbreaks rapidly, to minimize their impact on our people and economic environment.

Impact on the public: Public health and safety will be better protected if the

department is able to employ personnel with the requisite level of specialized expertise and experience in epidemiology. Public health funds and resources can be deployed more efficiently and effectively using evidence-based research provided by epidemiologists.

Impact on the department and other agencies: DOH will be better equipped to respond to health crises more rapidly and efficiently and thereby better protect the public's health and safety.

GENERAL FUND: None.

OTHER FUNDS: None.

PPBS PROGRAM DESIGNATION: HTH-131.

OTHER AFFECTED AGENCIES: None.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon approval.