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## A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICERS OF THE STATE OF HAWAII.

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

1       SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the State department  
2 of health has long recognized that the district health officer  
3 in each of the three neighbor island counties should be a  
4 physician; ideally, a physician with experience in community  
5 medicine who is also well-versed in public health. For many  
6 years, the department's district health officers met these  
7 requirements. However, at some point, the Hawaii county  
8 district health officer position was filled by a non-physician  
9 who serves as an acting district health officer.

10       The legislature further finds that when the department's  
11 response to health problems in Hawaii county is compared to its  
12 response to health problems in Maui county, it is evident that  
13 the health issues, including disease outbreaks, were addressed  
14 much more proficiently and with greater community satisfaction  
15 in Maui county, where Dr. Lorrin Pang has long been a champion  
16 of the needs of the community. This disparity was clearly  
17 demonstrated in the department's response to two major public



1 health issues: the 2002 dengue fever outbreak in Maui county  
2 versus the 2004 outbreak in Hawaii county; and the rat lungworm  
3 disease outbreak in Hana, Maui, versus the current crisis  
4 centered around the Puna district of Hawaii county. In both of  
5 these instances, the legislature believes that the department's  
6 attention to and engagement with community members was much more  
7 effective in Maui county than in Hawaii county.

8 With respect to the value of the services performed by a  
9 physician in the district health officer role, the legislature  
10 finds that the Maui county district health officer's visit to  
11 Hawaii county during its dengue fever outbreak was much  
12 appreciated by Hawaii residents because Maui county's physician  
13 officer made site visits and communicated valuable information  
14 to the community. The legislature cannot ignore the fact that  
15 Hawaii county, particularly residents of Puna, felt devalued and  
16 even disrespected by the lack of a department community-based  
17 physician, as well as the department's lack of organization and  
18 leadership, as reflected in the recent and highly critical audit  
19 of the department's response to disease outbreaks.

20 The members of the Hawaii county council, recognizing the  
21 importance of having a physician in its district health officer



1 position, have petitioned the legislature to make it a  
2 requirement that district health officers be physicians. It is  
3 evident to the legislature that a community benefits from the  
4 "boots on the ground" approach of a district health officer who  
5 is also a physician. A physician's knowledge and experience  
6 facilitate the day-to-day responsibilities of the position and  
7 allow the physician to serve as a dedicated community resource.

8 Based on the foregoing, the legislature concludes that  
9 requiring an on-site, community-based physician to serve in the  
10 district health officer role is extremely critical to the  
11 department of health's ability to provide adequate community  
12 support, educate the community, and recognize the community's  
13 needs and concerns in the face of pressing public health issues.

14 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to reinstitute the  
15 long-standing practice of having a physician in the role of  
16 district health officer by requiring that all district health  
17 officers of the department of health be licensed physicians.

18 SECTION 2. Chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
19 amended by adding a new section to part I to be appropriately  
20 designated and to read as follows:



1        "§321-        District health officer; physician.    Each  
2    district health officer of the department of health shall be a  
3    physician licensed to practice medicine under part I of chapter  
4    453. To the extent practicable, the physician should have  
5    experience in public health, primary care, emergency room  
6    services, epidemiology, or tropical medicine."

7           SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.

8           SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2018;  
9    provided that an incumbent district health officer who is under  
10   the employment of the department of health on the effective date  
11   of this Act and who does not meet the requirements of this Act  
12   shall remain in that position until replaced by the department  
13   of health, or December 31, 2018, whichever occurs sooner.

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# H.B. NO. 2663

**Report Title:**

Department of Health; District Health Officers; Physicians

**Description:**

Requires each district health officer of the Department of Health to be a physician licensed to practice medicine under Part I of Chapter 453 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

