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Tuesday, April 03, 2007

Task force for Maui health care is proposed

HONOLULU – A 15-member task force is being proposed by the Senate Ways and Means Committee to study and plan for Maui's health care needs.

The proposed Maui Health Initiative Task Force's goals would be to determine the island's health care needs, develop a strategic health care plan and determine an appropriate role for the county's facilities in the statewide health care system.

"We need an accurate picture of Maui's health care landscape and a realistic, effective plan to address our current and future needs," said West and South Maui Sen. Roz Baker, who chairs the Senate money panel. "We felt that it's time for the community to stop arguing about quick fixes and take ownership in looking for real answers."

Baker, who was critical of the current administration's planning for health care on Maui, said the panel would conduct a "thorough review that includes significant community input."

"We don't want just another study," she said.

The senator said a majority of the task force members would be from Maui, with seven people appointed by Mayor Charmaine Tavares and eight appointed by state lawmakers.

The task force will report its findings to the mayor, lawmakers and the State Health Planning and Development Agency 20 days before the start of the 2008 legislative session. The health planning agency then

must incorporate the task force's findings into the Hawaii Health Performance Plan within 60 days.

"This is a thorough review that includes significant community input, one that we can wrap up in less than one year," Baker said. "It's a good investment of our time because it will result in a meaningful plan to put Maui back on the right track."

The task force comes as the result of an amendment to House Bill 212, which aims to address Hawaii's severe shortage of health care workers, particularly on Neighbor Islands. The measure calls for the state Health Department to develop a system to assess and address health care staffing needs statewide. The amendment and the task force received approval from Senate Health Committee Chairman David Ige.

"The last review of Maui's health care system that we have is from 2000," Ige said. "We need a more accurate assessment of what the needs are today and into the future."

"In terms of concerns like disaster preparedness and integrated emergency services, this process could become a model for health care planning statewide," he said.

The amended bill advances to the full Senate and the House of Representatives.