

Thomas M. Driskill, Jr., President and CEO, Hawaii Health Systems Corporation

The Honorable Senator Daniel K. Akaka, Ranking Member
United States Senate, Committee on Veterans Affairs

10:00 a.m., January 9, 2006
Kauai Veterans Center
3215 Kapule Highway
Lihue, Kauai

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HEALTHCARE PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND FACILITIES
FOR VETERANS IN HAWAII

Special focused testimony on the construction and projected opening of the
State of Hawaii's first-ever State Veterans Home in Hilo, Hawaii.

Individual Testimony of
THOMAS M. DRISKILL, JR.
President and Chief Executive Officer
Hawaii Health Systems Corporation

Senator Akaka, and other distinguished members of this Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you in strong support of healthcare programs, services, and facilities that serve the approximately 118,000 Veterans living in Hawaii. Hawaii Health Systems Corporation (HHSC) is grateful for the opportunities to provide high quality healthcare services to Veterans at all 12 of our existing facilities located on five islands of Hawaii. The more than 3,400 employees of Hawaii Health Services Corporation take great pride in caring for our State's Veterans. Soon, our role in caring for Hawaii's Veterans will be expanding to new heights when the 95-bed State Veterans Home is opened for operation and occupancy in 2007.

As Hawaii's Veteran population continues to both grow and age, there is an even more critical need for long-term care services such as will be available in the state-of-the-art State Veterans Home that Hawaii Health Systems Corporation is building in Hilo. This 95-bed facility will significantly increase the number of long-term care (LTC) beds in east Hawaii and because they are earmarked specifically for Veterans and other eligible beneficiaries, we will be measurably improving the LTC access and capacity for our Veterans.

Over the last eight years, HHSC has enjoyed an outstanding, collaborative and very successful working relationship with the Department of Veterans Affairs-Hawaii, Washington, D.C., the VA Medical & Regional Office Center-Hawaii, the Office of Veterans Services, and multiple Veterans organizations across the State. Since 2001, HHSC has intensively worked with our VA partners to attain the first ever State Veterans Home for Hawaii, and now the fruits of that arduous labor will soon pay off with the opening of the State Home.

We have recently selected and contracted with a nationally acclaimed management company to operate the State Home for HHSC. Community support both in East Hawaii and across the State for our new State Home has been strong and steadfast over the past several years, and we anticipate that this support will continue to grow as we get closer to opening the State Home.

The synergy of a combined Federal and State funding of the Home has been the catalyst for making this dream a reality. We deeply appreciate Senator Akaka's tremendous support, as well as the tremendous support we received from Senator Inouye, Representative Abercrombie, Representative Case, Governor Lingle, our Hawaii State legislators, and our Hawaii Veterans organizations in making this State Home possible for Hawaii's Veterans.

We would like to ask for one additional element of support from this Committee and that is to help ensure that the per diem rate for State Veterans Homes is NOT decreased at the federal level. Decrements to the per diem rate of reimbursement to the State Veterans Home will have serious adverse financial consequences to the viability and sustainability of all State Veterans Home's operations.

Thank you, Senator Akaka, for the tremendous support you continue to give to all of Hawaii's Veterans, and thank you for your sage leadership and the warm Aloha that you bring to our great State.

Mahalo Nui Loa.