

LLOYD K. SODETANI, Maui Representative, Hawaii Office of Veterans Services

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February 18, 2009

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka The United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

My Dear Senator Akaka:

RE: Proposed Collocation of Veterans' Facilities on Maui

On September 6, 2007, I sent you a letter which, in part, included an idea of consolidating veteran services on Maui at one location. I am elated to inform you that we have initiated communications and necessary documentation to implement this effort. Enclosed are letters and memoranda from the State Department of Defense and Department of Education that create an understanding, site plans and maps that identify the location of the proposed project, and a list of organizational leaders from various veterans' groups who are supportive of our efforts. Additionally, the cooperation and support that the Veterans Affairs leadership in Honolulu is providing toward our efforts is most encouraging.

In mid-December, 2008, a VA clinic staff member in Kahului informed me that the Maui clinic was classified as "sub-standard" and needed to be re-located within the next eighteen months. Per VA, it will require at least 10,000 square feet of office space and forty to fifty parking stalls. Shortly thereafter, I was informed by a staff member at the VA Counseling Center in Wailuku that its lease would expire in twenty-four months, and the current parking was grossly inadequate. This was also confirmed by the County Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency that will be moving into the same building in early March 2009. HUD will need an additional thirty parking stalls for employees upon its move to the Wailuku office building, which will cause further inconveniences for the VA Counseling Center. The State Office of Veterans Services (OVS) is located on Dairy Road in Kahului, approximately a mile away from the VA clinic. Parking is also a problem at that location. The fact that we have three veteran offices at three different locations makes it costly and time-consuming for the veterans and VA staff members. All too often, veterans go to the wrong office for the services they need only to be directed to another location. This has caused much frustration and discouragement for these veterans, with parking being a real challenge for any of the office sites mentioned above.

Mr. Randy Yamanuha, Principal at Maui High School, has offered up to four acres of land to have our facilities consolidated and re-located along the West Papa Avenue side of the campus. Although the land area has been used for the high school's agricultural program, it is apparent that attracting students to pursue an interest in agriculture becomes a greater challenge each year. Mr. Yamanuha has expressed thoughts of creating an internship program in health and social services for his students that will be of greater value and enhancing the students' efforts in their pursuit of higher educational opportunities. With the VA's support and the endorsement of the State Department of Defense as well as all veterans' groups, success is certain. We also envision having branch offices from the Department of Human Services agencies such as Aid to the Aged and Aid to the Disabled; and other state and county agencies as the need arises.

Phasing of the improvements will also minimize our need for funding all at once. It will also

provide us with a realistic timetable and ability to obtain funding from the various sources we are contemplating. It is essential for us to obtain your approval, support and initiative to fund this project. After the VA and OVS facilities are built, we would pursue the construction of a facility that would replicate the Oahu Veterans Center at Foster Village on Oahu. The County community centers available to our veterans groups require annual coordination, registration and payment. My observation of this method has not been favorable for the veterans. For example, the Maui Korean War Veterans Association meets every third Wednesday of each month at the Kahului Community Center. Competition for parking with the youth center (adjacent to the community center) attendees is always a problem, and invariably our veterans must park at the bottom of the hill farthest away from the community center when they arrive at 6:00 in the evening. With some government assistance, we hope to fund this portion of the project by grants, private donations from community leaders, businesses and foundations. The final phase of the project will be planned for completion in five to ten years thereafter. By that time, Maui should be able to justify a forty to fifty bed care home, similar to the Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home in Hilo. With the VA clinic on campus, Hale Makua located only three blocks away, the hospital and other private clinics close by; health services will be readily available to serve the clients' needs. Collocating these facilities will provide efficient and effective results. The servicing of veterans and the use of the facilities will be optimized.

Relative to the collocation of the facilities, I would like to suggest that services for veterans, especially those who reside on the neighbor islands, can greatly improve by VA establishing a partnership with other health facilities (government funded and/or operated). For example, the Community Health Clinic of Maui in Wailuku is scheduled to be ready for occupancy in September, 2009. Many veterans can be referred to the CoraMunity Health Clinic for further evaluation or service rather than being referred to Tripler. Veterans in remote areas like Hana, being referred to Hana Community Health Clinic rather than being referred to Tripler will better serve Maui. This would minimize travel time, cost for VA, uncertainty about transportation (air and ground) requirements and layovers on Oahu.

I make this recommendation because my daughter, Lisa, who is in her final months of residency at UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, CA is a National Health Service Corps Scholar and is required to perform four years of service to "under-served" America. Community Health Clinic of Maui does not qualify as "underserved" because its "health professional shortage area" score is not high enough but meets all other criteria. I am certain if veterans were referred to the Clinic, the scores would certainly escalate. The anticipated increase in unemployment will also result in a higher score for the Clinic, since projections of the unemployed and their dependents will not have medical insurance coverage soon. Military and VA benefits that pay for medical cost will help to keep the Clinic solvent if we can be referred to the Clinic rather than to Triplet, or at least given a choice.

We will need "seed" funds to begin our conceptual designs and remit fees. The State Department of Defense Acting Engineer projects that we would need an initial \$250,000 for the design process. I have taken the initiative by asking many of my friends for assistance. I have commitments from Ken Kurokawa (Viet Nam veteran) from Austin, Tsutsumi and Associates, Consulting Engineers, and Stanley Gima, Architect, to provide the topographic survey and conceptual design without charge, respectively. I would also estimate that the land value of the four acres range from \$2,500,000 to \$4,000,000 in today's market, given all of the infrastructure

that is readily available to serve the property. Hopefully, this would be considered as part of the State's shared cost. We are in the process to determine the cost-estimates for the 10,000 square foot clinic, the 6,000 square foot VA Counseling Center and the improvements to be constructed subsequently. A rough estimate of the construction cost for the clinic is about \$400 per square foot. The counseling center and other similar type structures are 'estimated at \$250 per square foot. All of the improvements that are desired currently are "foot-printed" on the site plan to include the two hundred parking stalls that are needed.

Your favorable consideration and support of our proposal will be greatly appreciated. Only with your assistance will we be able to pursue our objective and provide the services to our veterans which they justly deserve.

Aloha pume hang,