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HONOLULU, HI – Today, Governor Ige announced his intent to veto SB2407, which would add “opioid use, substance use, and withdrawal symptoms resulting from the treatment of those conditions” to the list of ailments legally treatable with medical cannabis. DPFHI urges the Governor to reconsider this decision in light of developments in other states, previous additions of conditions via legislation signed by the Governor himself and how this bill aligns with the intent behind his State of Hawai‘i Opioid Initiative Action Plan.

The following is a statement by DFPHI Executive Director Carl Bergquist:

“This announcement is misguided since Hawai‘i has the chance to join the vanguard of other states like Pennsylvania and New Jersey in approving medical cannabis against opioid and other substance use. As the Pennsylvania Secretary of Health, Dr. Rachel Levine, said when she recently approved the use of medical cannabis against substance use disorders, this is not meant to be a “substitute” for other proven treatments but rather to act as “another tool” against this devastating disease. As a state that pioneered the legalization of medical cannabis, and now has dispensaries serving the patient population, it makes sense that we embrace this kind of progressive outlook rather than bury it in process that will lead to prolonged suffering. The Governor’s Opioid Initiative, in which DPFHI participated, calls for “alternatives” to opioids. We submit that SB2407 can and should be part of those alternatives when it comes to dealing with the scourge known as the opioid epidemic.”

Bergquist added, “In announcing his intent to veto this important piece of legislation, Governor Ige referred to a ‘professional process’ that helps evaluate conditions for medical cannabis. While such a process exists, it is passive and actually sees the Department of Health, rather than an independent panel of experts like e.g. in New Mexico, evaluate submitted petitions instead of itself proposing new conditions to be added. It is meant to be a complement rather than the exclusive way to add new conditions. This is why conditions have been added via legislation in Hawai‘i, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 2015 and just last year in 2017, four other conditions (lupus, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis) were added this way. The addition of PTSD in particular has helped well over a thousand suffering patients. Moreover, the idea behind this particular bill comes from the Legislature’s own Oversight Working Group on Medical Cannabis, which is comprised of experts and patients, and sat for over a year before submitting its final report to the Legislature.”