



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

July 27, 1988

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE TO THE PRESS

FROM: STATE REPRESENTATIVE JIM SHON
CHAIR, COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

RE: HEALTH STATUS OF RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN HAWAII

"SOME OF THOSE WHO SERVED OVERSEAS IN THE CAUSE OF PEACE ARE HURTING, AND WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT," SAID HAWAII'S HEALTH COMMITTEE CHAIR JIM SHON. "WE HAVE SURVEYED 378 RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS LIVING IN HAWAII, AND I'VE PERSONALLY BEEN MOVED BY THE MANY LETTERS AND STORIES DESCRIBING THEIR MEDICAL HARDSHIPS."

SHON WAS REFERRING TO A STATEWIDE HEALTH SURVEY CONDUCTED BY HIS LEGISLATIVE OFFICE. OF THE 378 RPCVs SENT THE SURVEY, ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY TWO (38%) WERE RETURNED. FORTY SEVEN INDICATED SERVICE-RELATED MEDICAL PROBLEMS, WITH A MAJORITY HAVING INTESTINAL PARASITES OR MALARIA.

"THESE LINGERING PROBLEMS CAN PERSIST IN THE HUMAN BODY FOR YEARS AND YEARS, BUT THE PEACE CORPS HAS PERSISTED IN THE BELIEF THAT NEARLY ALL MEDICAL PROBLEMS ARE DIAGNOSED SOON AFTER SEPARATION FROM SERVICE," NOTED SHON, A FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER IN KOREA (1970-1973).

"WE FEEL THAT A LACK OF FOLLOW-UP HAS BEEN A SERIOUS DEFICIENCY IN PEACE CORPS ADMINISTRATIONS. IF OUR RESULTS ARE SIMILAR TO OTHER STATES,

THEN THOUSANDS ARE SUFFERING HEALTH PROBLEMS DUE TO THEIR SERVICE AROUND THE GLOBE."

"IN HAWAII, WE COULD PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN THE DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF TROPICAL DISEASES, SUCH AS THOSE UNCOVERED BY OUR STUDY. AS A MATTER OF FACT, IT IS LIKELY THAT RECENT IMMIGRANTS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY ARE ALSO HARBORING INSIDIOUS PARASITIC INFECTIONS THAT THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY IS SIMPLY NOT AWARE OF. WE HAVE FOUND THAT GENERAL PRACTITIONERS SELDOM RECOGNIZE TROPICAL PARASITES, AND ONCE DIAGNOSED, VICTIMS OFTEN CANNOT FIND EXPERTS TO TREAT THEM, " SAID SHON, WHO BELIEVES THAT HAWAII DOES HAVE EXPERTISE.

"PERHAPS OUR UNIVERSITY, IN CONJUNCTION WITH LOCAL HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS, CAN EXAMINE THE AREA OF TROPICAL MEDICINE. IN THE MEANTIME, WE HAVE SENT OUR STUDY TO THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR, LORET MILLER RUPPE, TO HEALTH CARE WORKERS INTERESTED IN TROPICAL MEDICINE THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES, AND TO INTERESTED MEMBERS OF CONGRESS. "

"WE INTEND TO MAKE AN ISSUE OUT OF THIS. WE THINK THOSE WHO MAKE THE SACRIFICE TO RISK THEIR HEALTH DESERVE SOLID SUPPORT FROM OUR GOVERNMENT, " SAID SHON. "ONLY 19% OF THOSE WITH PROBLEMS FILED A CLAIM FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE, WHILE A MAJORITY HAD THEIR MEDICAL BILLS PAID OUT OF POCKET OR BY PRIVATE INSURANCE CARRIERS."

"OUR STUDY IS THE FIRST IN THE NATION. WE THINK PEACE CORPS SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN CONDUCTING A NATION-WIDE FOLLOW-UP SURVEY TO IDENTIFY THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM," SAID SHON.