

Written Testimony Presented before the
House Committee on Health
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By
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RE HB 909 In Support

Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify as an individual involved in maternal and child health practice and research for more than two decades. I am a PhD researcher pleased to support H.B. 909 to establish a comprehensive infant mortality reduction program in Hawai'i.

Infant mortality is a sentinel indicator of a community's health, and reflects the culmination of health care, social, and biological processes influencing women, families, and their infants, often across multiple generations. The State of Hawai'i's infant mortality rate is a bit misleading since, as a whole, it falls within expected ranges. The state's infant mortality rate, however, masks very important disparities that exist in some communities throughout the islands. We know from vital statistics data that the infant mortality rate and low birth weight rate (a strong correlate of infant mortality) decreases more slowly in some communities compared with others, and in fact some indications show the rates may be worsening in some communities. Wide variation exists in infant mortality in Hawai'i, and understanding reasons for these variations can be difficult without sufficient data and community-based attention, of the kind proposed by this Bill.

As a maternal and child health epidemiologist and Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Women's Health at the University of Hawai'i, I can attest strong interest in addressing these issues further among colleagues and students. Having a coordinated response to infant mortality in Hawaii, including better data that help provide improvement in our understanding of the determinants and nuances of infant death throughout Hawai'i, would be of great interest to researchers and public health practitioners.

In fact, a major program of the John A. Burns School of Medicine (the NIH-funded RMATRIX program) has at its core a content focus on perinatal growth and development. Having clinical and translational researchers as part of the infant mortality reduction efforts that result from this bill, together with public health professionals, communities, social scientists, and many others, would dramatically help improve understanding of infant death in Hawai'i, and importantly, help guide what to do about it.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to testify and for your advocacy on behalf of the health of Hawai'i's people.