



**STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

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**Testimony in SUPPORT of GM0632  
Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the  
State Council on Mental Health,  
Gubernatorial Nominee, EILEEN LAU-JAMES,  
for a term to expire 6-30-23.**

SENATOR ROSALYN H. BAKER, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, CONSUMER PROTECTION, AND HEALTH

Hearing Date and Time: Tuesday, May 12, 2020 at 9:30 a.m. Room: 229

1 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health supports the nomination and confirmation  
2 of Dr. Eileen Lau-James, DVM, to the State Council on Mental Health (SCMH). Dr. Lau-James  
3 fills the mandated SCMH membership position of family member, pursuant to Chapter 334-10 of  
4 the Hawai'i Revised Statutes and Federal Law, Public Law 102-321, Section 1914(c).

5 Dr. Lau-James is a veterinarian, small business owner, mother of two young boys, and  
6 the devoted wife to a husband abruptly and unexpectedly afflicted by schizoaffective disorder a  
7 few years ago. She quickly learned that while schizophrenia is treatable with early intervention,  
8 stigma and inadequate laws prevent many loved ones from receiving the mental health care they  
9 so desperately need. While medication has led to her husband's stabilization and recovery, she  
10 is reminded of the confusion, fear, hardships, and barriers she faced when she tried to obtain life-  
11 saving mental health services for him, especially involuntary psychiatric care. She has become  
12 an advocate, sharing her personal experience and offering support to families experiencing similar  
13 crises.

14 Dr. Lau-James served as an interim member on the Council since June 5, 2019, and she  
15 was voted to serve as the SCMH Secretary for fiscal year 2020. Her interest in serving on the  
16 Council and her desire to contribute to the community will continue to enhance the Council's  
17 effectiveness.

1           We respectfully request your favorable consideration in confirming the appointment of  
2 Dr. Lau-James to the State Council on Mental Health.

3           Thank you for the opportunity to testify on her behalf.

*Christopher Knightsbridge*  
*3010 Vista Pl*  
*Honolulu, HI, 96822*  
*808-208-0248*  
*10-May-2020*

**Dear Members of the Committee of Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health,**

I am writing today in strong support of **Dr. Eileen Lau-James** appointment to the State Council on Mental Health.

Dr. Eileen Lau-James is likely the most qualified human being to ever apply to serve on a state council for mental health I can possibly imagine.

That statement, along with this endorsement is the strongest I have ever written for another individual during my nearly two decades of experience in any capacity, and it is done so with complete sincerity and without exaggeration.

My name is Christopher Knightsbridge. I am currently serving as 2<sup>nd</sup> vice chair on our State Council on Mental health, hold a Master of Art's degree in International Relations and Clinical Psychology and am three years into a doctorate in Clinical Psychology. I am also one of a myriad number of individuals in Hawaii who grew up here living with family members suffering from mental illness, as well as live with the struggle of it myself.

I have personally known Dr. Lau-James for approximately 2 years now ever since she shared her personal story with our state council. Her story elicits frustration yet hope and is truly inspirational.

While she possesses too many positive characteristics to list, what most impresses me most is her incredibly high frustration tolerance and ability to remain objectively optimistic in the face of so many barriers and problems she has faced dealing with the current system and negative stigma surrounding those living with mental health care in our state.

While many would remain angry and bitter, she has chosen a different path. She has decided to not only care for her family but go public and advocate for change for other families as well. How she has the energy or time to do so is completely mind-blowing.

If one needed any evidence of her positive character outside of the advocacy she has already engaged in, as a profession she is a veterinarian and so literally spends most of her days saving the lives of our state's kittens.

It is beyond an understatement to say Eileen is one of the most consistently courageous and caring advocates for mental healthcare I have ever met, and we need Eileen and more like her to step up and serve.

I have absolutely no doubt she will continue to be an amazing advocate and change maker for our state, and am hopeful your committee vote favorably in letting her continue to serve on our state council.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Christopher Knightsbridge

Clayton James  
2575 Kuhio Ave #701  
Honolulu, HI 96815  
808-292-6454  
May 11, 2020

Dear Members of the Committee of Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health,

My name is Clayton James. I am the faithful husband of Dr. Eileen Lau-James, an improving father to Atlas and Triton James, and a very blessed man. I am writing today in support of her appointment to the State Council on Metal Health.

Both before and after my diagnosis and the birth of our children, from day one, Eileen has supported me both financially and with strong insight and perseverance.

Dr.Lau excels in leadership, creating new ideas/solutions, and encouraging others. She sees opportunity as a way of helping others. Dr. Lau is proficient with organizing tasks to completion.

She is a supportive wife, wonderful mother and my angel.

She will be a formidable champion to those on this island struggling silently to get help for family members in need for mental health care. Now in this time of crisis, mental health care will be needed more than ever.

Sincerely and Respectfully,

Clayton James

Donna M. Lynch  
2575 Kuhio Avenue 703  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96815  
808-383-8867  
March 11, 2020

Dear Members of the Committee of Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health,

My name is Donna M. Lynch. I am a personal friend of Dr. Eileen Lau-James, past Director of Marketing for Kapiolani Community College, and currently a small business owner of a popular cleaning company here in Honolulu. I am writing today in support of her appointment to the State Council on Mental Health.

I have personally known Dr. Lau-James for the past 3 years. In the time that I have known her I have witnessed her:

- Be a successful veterinarian
- A wonderful, loving, caring friend
- Simultaneously be the breadwinner of a young family with two lively and genius young boys and the caretaker/champion of a husband that suffers from serious mental illness
- At each turn, in trying to advocate for treatment for her husband, Dr. Lau-James came upon challenges (from CPS to barriers and legal restrictions in securing treatment for her husband Clayton) I witnessed this on several occasions as I live next door to the Lau-James
- I witnessed her take on each challenge head on and achieve all she set out to do.
- In the midst of advocating for her family, she also successfully purchased a feline veterinary hospital and is now that proud owner of Purradise Cat Care Inc.
- Her next goal is to be an advocate for family members that are struggling to get help for their mentally ill loved ones. She wants to help shape and reform Hawaii's mental health care system.

Dr. Lau-James is also my good friend and neighbor; I was home several times and personally witnessed situations where Clayton was confused but adamant about clouds speaking to him personally telling him what to do, was often handcuffed by the police, and made to sit on the floor in our immediate hallway while the two young boys watched from my hallway in my unit. I have witnessed her remain calm while assessing the situation at hand trying to tell the police or CPS workers Clayton need to be treated at Queens or Castle hospitals because he was hallucinating and was a threat to himself and others. Eileen has called me numerous times to

check on Clayton in their apartment because he failed to pick up the boys from school or had left the car running, doors opened in the parking garage while he sat on the steps outside of our apartments speaking to the hand railing on what his next steps were to be.

The struck me most about Eileen was her:

- persistence in the face of adversity
- proactive and relentless advocacy for her family
- resiliency
- problem solving ability
- optimism
- ability to see the big picture and find practical solutions
- new found passion for mental health reform
- ability to communicate complex issues in a clear way

I have no doubt that she will be a formidable champion to those on this island struggling silently to get help for family members in need for mental health care. Now in this time of crisis, mental health care will be needed more than ever. Chose Dr Eileen Lau-James she will add years of experience and a new found passion for the mental health community of Hawaii.

Sincerely and Respectfully,

**Donna M. Lynch**

**From:** [Kelly Carrington](#)  
**To:** [CPH Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** Dr. Eileen Lau-James Letter of Support CPH Hearing May 12 9:30am Conference Room 229  
**Date:** Monday, May 11, 2020 1:15:27 PM

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**Kelly Carrington, RVT**  
**Purradise Cat Care Inc.**  
**1131 Kapahulu Avenue**  
**Honolulu, HI 96816**  
**(808)732-8884**

May 11, 2020

Dear Members of the Committee of Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health,

I am a professional colleague of Dr. Eileen Lau-James. I am writing today in support of her appointment to the Hawaii State Council on Mental Health.

I have personally known Dr. Lau-James for nearly a decade. In the time that I have known her I have witnessed her become a fiercely loyal wife, caring mother, distinguished veterinarian, and successful business owner. None of her achievements have come easily. I have watched her graciously juggle being the sole breadwinner for her family of four while championing for her husband, Clayton, who suffers from serious mental illness while simultaneously purchasing a veterinary hospital.

Dr. Lau-James is resilient. She is a leader. She is well-informed. She is able to communicate complex concepts in simple terms. She is persistent. Whatever goal she sets, whether it be to “get the guy” or to start a business, she achieves it. Her current goals are to be an advocate for family members that are struggling, like she did, to get help for their mentally ill loved ones; and to help bring positive change to Hawaii’s mental health care system. She will achieve these goals and do so with the grace and kindness that our community desperately needs during these times.

I have no doubt that Dr. Eileen Lau-James will be a formidable champion to those in Hawaii struggling silently to get help for family members in need of mental health care. Now in this time of crisis, mental health care will be needed more than ever.

Sincerely and Respectfully,  
Kelly Carrington, RVT



GM632

Eileen Lau-James

State Council on Mental Health

**(1) Why do you wish to be a member of the State Council on Mental Health?**

Aloha, my name is Dr. Eileen Lau-James and I would like to apply to be a member of the Hawaii State Council of Mental Health – specifically for the Family Member position. I am a veterinarian, the owner of the island's newest exclusive feline veterinary practice – Purradise Cat Care Inc., the mother of two spirited young boys and the dedicated wife of a husband that was recently diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder.

What initially brought me to the State Council of Mental Health was the terrifying experience of dealing with an astoundingly ineffective mental healthcare system. Were it not for the social privilege conferred to be by my veterinary profession, my background as a doctor and scientist, and my close friendships with others diagnosed with this disorder – my husband and my family would not have stood a chance.

Only after undergoing such immense emotional and financial hardship the past few years, did I truly understand the insurmountable challenges faced by family members of seriously mentally ill individuals.

1% of the population will be afflicted with schizophrenia at some point in their lives. This disease affects us all in one way or another. It decimates families and it is one of the root causes of our homeless problem. It is a brain disorder very similar to early onset dementia, and it is TREATABLE with early intervention. However, the civil rights laws in place to protect patients with severe mental illness are the very same laws that are preventing them from receiving care. What further complicates the situation is the stigma and fear surrounding this disorder. For most, it is easier to look away rather than address the issue head on. The consequences of not addressing this very sick and vulnerable are dire – and often jeopardizes the safety of the public at large.

I would like to share my story to raise awareness and help better advocate for seriously mentally ill individuals (and family members of mentally ill individuals) struggling to get mental health care in the future.

**(2) What do you perceive are the roles and responsibilities of a member of the State Council on Mental Health?**

I have been an interim council member since July of 2019. As of 3/10/2020 I was elected to be secretary of the council. My roles as a Member of the State Council on Mental Health include:

- Providing representation for stakeholders in legislative issues involving mental health
- Reviewing and evaluating the adequacy of available mental health services and advising the Senate as an advocate for family members of mentally ill individuals
- Providing recommendations based on the needs of the population I represent, and based on the vision of the board
- Being ever present at meetings to ensure that quorum is met to vote on council matters
- Presently, my responsibilities on the council include planning the annual council retreat, and being a member of the legislative permitted interaction group.

GM632  
Eileen Lau-James  
State Council on Mental Health

- (3) Given your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a State Council on Mental Health member, why do you believe that you are qualified for the position? Please include a brief statement of your skills, expertise and knowledge that would aid you as a member of the Board.

I believe that my veterinary medical background, my background as an educator and community leader, my entrepreneurial spirit, my work ethic and my recent experiences with the mental health care system makes me uniquely suited to be a member of the State Council on Mental Health.

- (4) What do you hope to accomplish during your term of service?

1. I hope to first educate myself on the intricacies of current state laws involving mental health
2. I hope to use my scientific, entrepreneurial objectivity to process complex information from multiple points of view and distill from them the most simple efficient practical solutions that would maximize benefit to our community
3. I hope to encourage stake holders from around the community to become involved in mental health advocacy.
4. I hope to create additional state resources to help family members in need of help during a crisis. I hope to help foster a community that validates and celebrates their efforts and acknowledges the huge emotional burden they bear. The most frustrating part about being a caretaker for a mentally ill husband was the lack of resources and support available to me.

- (5) Name three qualities that best describe you and how these qualities will benefit the State Council on Mental Health.

Driven/Goal Oriented: When I set a goal, I see it through to completion.

- o Examples of goals set in the past ten years:
  - Becoming a veterinarian
  - Moving to Hawaii
  - Becoming an owner of a feline exclusive veterinary clinic
  - Successfully advocating for treatment of my mentally ill husband (arguably the most difficult goal accomplished to date)
  - Becoming a member of the State Council of Mental Health
- o Future goals:
  - To advocate for family members of patients suffering from serious mental illness, and to make resource more readily accessible
  - To form strong relationships with local organizations and encouraging more community involvement in advocacy
  - To help streamline the mental health care system to greatly increase treatment to the number of patients with serious mental illness in our community, thereby saving families, increasing the safety of the community, and saving on overall cost of mental health care to the state.

GM632

Eileen Lau-James

State Council on Mental Health

Critical Thinker: My scientific background allows me to be aware of morale and emotional biases in the information presented to us each day. Before forming my opinions, I take great effort to seek out and consider opposing points of view.

Community Leader: As a veterinarian, I have had the great honor of communicating with people from all walks of life – in both celebratory and critical situations. I understand the importance of giving clear concise advice to the people that have placed their trust in experts/professionals.

**(6) Name a previous experience you've had that will be beneficial as a State Council on Mental Health member.**

In trying to get help for my husband's recent diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder:

- I became intimately familiar with the mental health system from a consumer perspective
- My experience as a veterinarian allows me to understand:
  - o The pharmacology of prescription medications
  - o Physician/patient dynamics
  - o How emotional bias blinds when making decisions in critical situations
  - o The limitations of the science from which we base our decisions
  - o How to communicate medical information in easily accessible language
- My experience as a veterinary hospital owner allows me to understand:
  - o The importance of fostering healthy team morale in order to meet goals
  - o Financial limitations that slow progress
  - o The importance of efficiency
  - o The importance of marketing

**(7) Can you foresee any possible conflicts of interest that could arise during your service on the State Council on Mental Health? How would you overcome conflicts of interest?**

Yes, my personal biases include:

- Being an advocate for treating seriously mentally ill patients in crisis situations (against the patient's wishes if necessary)
  - o As a clinician and scientist, objectivity is paramount to me. I am intimately aware of my own personal biases and the awareness allows me to account of my biases prior to forming an opinion. Evaluating large scale data before jumping to conclusions is my goal in every situation (both in my personal life and my professional life)