

Renee L. Rivera  
P.O. Box 7266  
Hilo, HI 96720  
(808)499-4810

- (1) Why do you want to be a member of the Board?

I want to use my personal experiences with mental illness and substance abuse to help others gain access to appropriate services and give them a chance to better their lives and realize their full potential.

- (2) What do you perceive are the roles and responsibilities of a member of the Board?

Board members should serve as advocates and voices for those who suffer from mental illness and substance use disorders. They should assist those individuals in getting the help that they need by identifying gaps in services and advocating for more and better services where needed.

- (3) In what ways do you feel that you can help protect the consumer?

I can help protect the consumer through education regarding available resources and services, advocacy, and support.

- (4) Given your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a Board 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 I am qualified because I can relate to many of the challenges that our consumers are facing. I have faced many of the same obstacles our consumers have and wish to serve as living proof that it is possible to overcome and learn from these obstacles. I also have a solid understanding and appreciation of the available resources and services available to assist those in need. There is a great deal of shame and embarrassment in respect to addiction and mental health issues and I want to share my story with others to show them there is no shame in seeking help with conquering your battles.

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

I hope to be a voice for those who struggle with mental health disorders and addiction. I want to promote awareness of their struggles and challenges so that we can influence lawmakers to focus on the critical issues that affect the health and well-being of our consumers, their families, and communities.

- (6) Name three qualities that best describe you and how these qualities will benefit the Board.

Commitment: I am committed to attending and participating in board meetings and activities as needed.

Empathy: I can understand and empathize with what our consumers are going through, and I can provide the board with the viewpoint from the consumer's perspective.

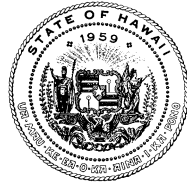
Motivation: I have overcome extreme hardship as a child and a young adult. I have taken responsibility for my past behavior and turned it into something positive that I can use to share, guide, and motivate others.

- (7) Name a previous experience you've had that will be beneficial as a Board member.

I have spoken at numerous community events, using my personal story of how I overcame personal hardships, and I have connected with people from all walks of life. I believe that my personal story of coming from a troubled family history, mental illness, and addiction is a powerful tool that the Board can use for educational and awareness purposes.

- (8) Can you foresee any possible conflicts of interest that could arise during your service on the Board? How would you overcome conflicts of interest?

I do not foresee any possible conflicts of interest but should one arise, I will seek guidance from the Chair and other members of the board. I will also recuse myself from voting on any issues that may be seen as a conflict of interest.



**STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

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**Testimony in SUPPORT of GM0850  
Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the  
Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Hawaii Service Area Board,  
Gubernatorial Nominee, RENEE RIVERA,  
for a term to expire 6-30-24.**

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

Hearing Date and Time: Wednesday, July 1, 2020 at 9:30 a.m. Room: 229

1 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health supports the nomination and confirmation  
2 of Renee Rivera to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Hawaii Service Area Board (HSAB).  
3 Ms. Rivera fills the consumer of mental health services segment of the board, pursuant to Chapter  
4 334-11 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes.

5 Ms. Rivera graduated from the University of Hawaii at Hilo this past May with a bachelor's  
6 degree in sociology. She will be entering the Master of Social Work program this fall at the  
7 University of Hawaii at Manoa through its distant learning program. Ms. Rivera is truly a success  
8 story having experienced severe mental illness and substance use addiction for several years,  
9 yet, she was able to graduate from college, reunite with her three children, and live a productive  
10 and fulfilled life.

11 Ms. Rivera is motivated to utilize her experiences and successes to help the people of  
12 Hawaii Island who are less fortunate than herself. She has been mentoring justice-involved  
13 women for the past year and a half through the Going Home Hawaii program and is very  
14 empathetic and supportive of their healing and recovery.

15 She is currently in recovery and is extremely motivated to help other individuals who are  
16 struggling with mental illness and substance use addiction. She welcomes the opportunity to  
17 serve her community through the HSAB.

1           We respectfully request your favorable consideration in confirming the appointment of Ms.  
2   Rivera to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Hawaii Service Area Board.

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

## Mary Kate Murray

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**From:** Renee Rivera <rrivera6@hawaii.edu>  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 25, 2020 9:33 PM  
**To:** Mary Kate Murray  
**Subject:** letter of support  
**Attachments:** Rivera commission 2020 - Google Docs.html

April 24, 2020

Dear Appointment Committee:

I'm delighted to write this letter of recommendation for Renee Rivera, a student of mine in the Sociology Department here at UH Hilo, where I am a Professor. I have known Renee Rivera since she was a student at HawCC in 2018, where I attended an event involving students and faculty. She struck me as personable and as someone who had a clear vision about where she was going. I know that she shared her biographical details with you. Anyone would agree that her life experiences as a young person were tragic. However, rather than succumbing to despair, she emerged as a well-integrated adult who desires to serve others like herself. Her experiences, coupled with her local heritage, give her an insight into doing social work in local communities that are sure to make a contribution.

Renee Rivera is a natural leader, one who influences people through her own behavior (example) as well as her good communication skills. Her message is always concise, coherent, and powerful. She gathers allies to her with amazing deftness and makes contributions to these networks which, in return, support her and her causes, one hallmark of social capital. She just has a way of bringing people together. Moreover, ever since I've known Renee, she's been involved with activities in school and in the community that make a difference. She's spoken about her experiences at a number of events around the community and in classrooms. In the classroom, she's been honest and brave about sharing her past when it sheds light on discussion topics. She's very well-liked and respected in the Sociology Department at UH Hilo by faculty and students alike. She's now serving as a mentor in the Going Home Program which serves individuals returning from prison. As well, she serves as a liaison between the Sociology Department and the students and faculty at HawCC, helping to provide a "bridge" between the many transfer students our Department accepts each year.

Renee Rivera is an asset to the Department and to the community-based organizations of which she is part. But I don't want to gloss over her academic abilities, ones that will make her a very good graduate student. Her grades in the Sociology major have been solid. She's a conscientious and hard-working student with excellent writing and oral communication skills. She received A's and B's in our core courses, including statistics and theory, with A's in both senior seminars. These seminars allow us to ascertain the academic skills of our majors (similar to capstones), so these grades are a good indication of her high level of academic skills.

Thus, I support her candidacy for this appointment and want to help her in any possible way. If you need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (808) 756-0500.

Best regards and Aloha,

Marilyn Brown, Ph.D.

Professor, Sociology Department

University of Hawai'i at Hilo



## Mary Kate Murray

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**From:** Colby and Adrienne Howard <howardsreadyabout@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, June 26, 2020 1:39 PM  
**To:** CPH Testimony  
**Subject:** Renee Manfredi - Letter of Support

Good morning,

It is my honor and pleasure to write this letter of support for Renee Manfredi.

I have known Renee since 2005 and have watched her grow and mature into a beautiful young woman with a passion to serve. Renee has worked tirelessly for years to give a voice to individuals with disabilities. She is thoughtful, well spoken, and courageous. She steps outside her comfort zone on an almost daily basis to advocate for those without a voice in our world. You would be fortunate indeed to have her on your team.

Kind regards,  
Adrienne Howard

howardsreadyabout@yahoo.com  
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February 12, 2020

Mental Health and Drug Addiction Board

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing this letter in support of the application for appointment to your board of Ms. Renee Rivera. I have known Ms. Rivera for close to two years now as a student in our program and from her being in a number of my classes including Social Theory, Research Practicum, and Internship. She has also participated in Sociology Club events, which I have been the advisor, and we have interacted repeatedly in formal and informal situations. We have discussed her past experiences and life and career goals and I have seen her in action in both the classroom and in community events and projects.

As a student in class Ms. Rivera is very engaged and dedicated to learning and becoming more capable of seeing her community through multiple lenses and gaining perspective on how social processes happen and can be molded to enable people to become stronger as individuals and has communities. She has a very strong awareness of the challenges and difficulties that can arise in people's lives and what it takes to overcome them. Her learning is very driven by applications and the practical aspects of theories and ideologies in shaping how we deal with people and communities. Her engagement helps to keep other students focused in class and to see how problems are multi-faceted and both simple and complex at the same time. She is especially interested in what motivates and drives people and how this can be affected by events and other people. She has solid academic skills and works very hard at her learning.

In our Research Practicum we took on a project to interview secondary school students and adults working with children to identify sources of stress affecting families in Hawaii and what kinds of strategies communities can take to help strengthen families and make them more resilient. She engaged in the whole process, from design and conceptualization, to field preparation and access, to data collection and analysis. She volunteered to take point on contacting and visiting schools and initializing contact with school officials and students. Her manner quickly gained her access and acceptance and she was invited to become more connected and involved not only by staff, but especially by the students. She brought an understanding of both care givers and children to the design of our instruments and included her son in our design process as he became enthusiastic about the potential for change our project embodied. His desire to create change and positively impact the community is a clear reflection of her own attitudes and child rearing practices.

In Internship she is helping to ease the academic pathways for others. She was already volunteering and working with her former instructors at Hawaii Community College as a guest speaker to help inspire them and provide guidance in moving on to the University. We are formalizing that this semester and she is not only guest speaking, but arranging for University faculty to guest speak in HawCC classes and doing pre-advising and counseling for students interested in moving on to the University. In creating positive changes from the troubles in her own past, she now seeks to enable such changes in the lives of others and provide them realistic and practical guidance in how to strive and achieve at higher levels than they may now think possible.

Having a history of a troubled family life and having made some bad personal choices in her own past behavior with learning to take responsibility for these choices and moving past them, as well as



experience in the field of Social Services from the client's perspective, she has empathy for those in need tempered by the knowledge of the need for discipline and structure. She is very approachable and listens carefully to people seeking to understand where they are coming from before speaking. She is reflective and considered in her decision making and very committed to making a difference in the community. With her attitudes and personality she is very good at dealing with people in crisis as well as helping others to gain perspective on their lives to focus on what matters and what they can change for themselves. She is very grounded in the practical aspects of life while striving to achieve a higher level of achievement for the community as individuals and as a whole.

With her personality, drive, and values as well as her dedication and ability, I believe Ms. Rivera will make an excellent addition to your board, bringing a valuable and personal perspective to the issues and strongly urge you to include her in your organization. She will benefit from this and it will further her on the path to becoming an even more effective agent of change in our community. If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me at (808)932-7117 or [alton@hawaii.edu](mailto:alton@hawaii.edu).

Sincerely,

Alton M. Okinaka  
Associate Professor of Sociology