



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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WRITTEN
TESTIMONY ONLY

**Testimony in SUPPORT of GM658
Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the
Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Oahu Service Area Board,
Gubernatorial Nominee, Jacquelyn Esser,
for a term to expire 06-30-2024.**

SENATOR JARRETT KEOHOKALOLE, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

Hearing Date: 3/31/2021

Hearing Time: 1:00 p.m.

1 **Department Position:** The Department of Health (“Department”) supports the nomination and
2 confirmation of Jacquelyn “Jacquie” Esser to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Oahu
3 Service Area Board (OSAB).

4 **Department Testimony:** The subject matter of this measure intersects with the scope of the
5 Department’s Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) whose statutory mandate is to assure a
6 comprehensive statewide behavioral health care system by leveraging and coordinating public,
7 private and community resources. Through the BHA, the Department is committed to carrying
8 out this mandate by reducing silos, ensuring behavioral health care is readily accessible, and
9 person-centered. The BHA’s Adult Mental Health Division (AMHD) provides the following
10 testimony on behalf of the Department.

11 Ms. Esser is a family member of a mental health service recipient. If confirmed, she will
12 fill the family member role on the OSAB, pursuant to Chapter 34-11, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

13 In her application and letter of interest, Ms. Esser shared several reasons for wanting to
14 join the OSAB. On a personal level, she is a family member whose loved ones experienced the
15 devastating impacts of mental illness and substance abuse. On a professional level, she is a

1 public defender whose clients often live with a mental illness and/or substance use disorder.
2 She is an advocate for her clients and often arranges for transitional services when they are
3 exiting the criminal justice system and preparing for community re-entry. We are confident
4 that Ms. Esser's background and knowledge will be an asset to the OSAB.

5 We respectfully request your favorable consideration in confirming the appointment of
6 Ms. Esser to the OSAB.

7 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Ms. Esser's behalf.



March 29, 2021

To: Hawaii Legislature

From: Heather Lusk, Executive Director of the Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center

Re: Support for Jacqueline Esser for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, O`ahu Service Board

I am writing in strong support of Jacquie Esser to serve on the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Oahu Service Area Board. Jacquie has been a long-time advocate for those struggling with substance use disorder (SUD) and other mental health challenges. She has spent much of her career supporting those impacted by the criminal legal system – esp. those impacted by behavioral health issues such as SUD. She has personally seen, in her current role as a public defender, what challenges that people living with mental health issues and SUD face and the barriers to linking people to much needed treatment and the stigma that often follows some of our most vulnerable. She strongly believes that behavioral health should be integrated into our healthcare system to ensure that those suffering have access to the services they need.

The Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center works to reduce harm, promote health, create wellness and fight stigma in Hawaii and the Pacific. Working at the intersection of homelessness, substance use, mental health and chronic diseases such as HIV and viral hepatitis, HHHRC has worked closely with Greg as a member of the Hawaii Opioid Initiative (HOI) work group #4, prevention opioid misuse and related harms of which I am Chair. Over the past two years, Greg has been a consistently active member of the group and provides thoughtful feedback on HOI projects and processes. His meaningful participation in this group has made a huge impact on our community and he will have the same impact through his membership on HACDACs

HHHRC has been proud to work with Jacquie on a couple of projects and appreciate the opportunity to share our strong support for her nomination. Thank you for again selecting Jacquie to participate on the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Oahu Service Area Board – our community will be stronger for it!

Sincerely,

Heather Lusk
Executive Director

GM-658

Submitted on: 3/28/2021 4:18:28 PM

Testimony for HTH on 3/31/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Carrie Ann Shirota	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Baker and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of Jacquelyn Esser's nomination to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, O'ahu Service Area Board.

I have been inspired by Jacquie's commitment and courage to reimagine public safety and wellness in Hawai'i, and to decrease the stigma associated with mental illness.

As a Public Defender, Jacquie has witnessed firsthand that our jails and prisons have become default mental health and health institutions due to the paucity of comprehensive mental health and substance use services in our community. During her campaign for Prosecutor's office and even now, Jacquie continues to raise awareness about cost-effective evidence based policies to divert persons with mental health and chemical dependency conditions from the carceral system, that reinforces trauma and exacerbates recidivism.

Jacquie is a staunch advocate for community based mental health and substance use services to help people live their best lives, rather than criminalizing individuals for mental health and substance use conditions. Please confirm her nomination to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, O'ahu Service Area Board.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support Jacquelyn Esser's nomination.

Carrie Ann Shirota, Esq.

GM-658

Submitted on: 3/29/2021 8:52:00 AM

Testimony for HTH on 3/31/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Melinda Yamaga	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Chair Keohakalole, Vice Chair Baker, and Health Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of Governor Ige's nomination of Jacquelyn Esser to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Oahu Service Area Board. I have known Ms. Esser for over a decade both professionally and personally. I can attest that her work ethic is second to none. Moreover, her knowledge and commitment to the topics covered by this board are self evident through her professional career and her volunteer work. She will bring an important perspective and expertise to this board which will serve as a benefit to all of Oahu's residence.

GM-658

Submitted on: 3/29/2021 9:43:57 PM

Testimony for HTH on 3/31/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Justin Levinson	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

It is my pleasure to write in support of the nomination of Jacquie Esser. Jacquie has been a dedicated advocate relating to the destigmatization substance use and behavioral health disorders. In my job as a professor of law, I have invited Jacquie to guest lecture in my course on issues related to the criminal legal system. She is professional, honorable, and dedicated to helping the people who need it most. She will make a great addition to the Board. Sincerely, Justin Levinson

ROBERT K. MERCE
2467 Aha Aina Place
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96821
(808) 398-9594

TO: Senate Committee On Health
RE: Governor's Message 658
HEARING: Wednesday, March 31, 2021
TIME: 1:00 p.m.
CONF. Via Videoconference
POSITION: **Strongly Support**

Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Baker, and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support the nomination of Jacquelyn "Jacquie" Esser to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Oahu Service Area Board.

Jacquie is a graduate of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and the William S. Richardson School of Law. After graduating from law school, she clerked for Judge, now Justice, Michael D. Wilson, when he presided over the Mental Health and Drug Courts. The courts provide judicial supervision, community-based treatment, and an array of support services to address the mental health and substance use issues that contributed to a person's involvement in the criminal legal system.

After her clerkship, Jacquie became a Deputy Public Defender on O'ahu where, for the past eleven years, she has represented indigent people, many of whom suffer from mental illness and substance use disorders. Jacquie often functions as both a lawyer and social worker for her clients, working tirelessly to get them into treatment programs and helping them access the social and economic services they need to succeed.

In 2020 Jacquie ran for Honolulu Prosecuting Attorney on a platform that stressed the importance of addressing mental illness and substance abuse as public health issues rather than criminal justice issues, and the need for providing a continuum of care that enables people with mental health and substance use disorders to lead healthy and productive lives.

Although Jacquie did not win the prosecutor's race, her bold ideas on diversion, treatment and rehabilitation attracted national attention and earned her endorsements from US Senator Bernie Sanders, as well as some of the most forward-thinking District Attorneys in the country, such as Chesa Boudin of San Francisco and Larry Krasner of Philadelphia.

Jacquie is a strong, hardworking, and resolute advocate for the poor, marginalized, vulnerable and disadvantaged people of our community. In the past year she has been a key member of the Office of the Public Defender's team addressing COVID-19 issues before the Hawaii Supreme Court, she worked with the community-based Emergency Reentry Project to locate housing for men and women coming out of jail, she continued to represent individual clients, and she still found time to be a food bank volunteer.

Jacque has the knowledge, skill and training to make a major contribution to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Oahu Service Area Board. She knows how to work for change in a collaborative manner, and she is smart, compassionate, and dedicated to improving the lives of people struggling with mental health and substance use disorders.

I urge you to recommend the confirmation of Jacquie Esser to the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Oahu Service Area Board.

Thank you for allowing me to testify this afternoon.