

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 2744 H.D. 2  
RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH**

SENATOR JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR  
SENATOR HENRY J.C. AQUINO, VICE CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date: 03/15/2024

Room Number: CR 225

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The proposed measure appropriates funds out of the State's general  
2 revenues for fiscal year 2024-2025 and 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) position to the Department  
3 of Health (DOH) to administer and oversee a contract to hire a consultant to facilitate the work  
4 of the oral health task force, including completing the task force's interim and final reports and  
5 to lay the foundation for a robust public dental health program in the state. The Department defers  
6 to the Governor's Executive Biennium Budget Request appropriation priorities.

7 **Department Testimony:** The DOH supports this measure to establish an oral health task force  
8 to review information on the status of oral health in the state and make recommendations to  
9 improve oral health infrastructure in Hawaii.

10 An oral health program is a critical part of all state public health departments. However,  
11 the DOH Dental Health Division was eliminated as part of the 2009 budget cuts. Oral health  
12 disease is a particularly critical issue in Hawaii with many children and adults suffering from  
13 preventable dental disease. Access to dental care is a challenge since most of the primary and  
14 specialty oral health providers are in the urban areas of the City and County of Honolulu. The  
15 lack of access to oral health care is particularly serious in rural communities on the neighbor  
16 islands and in low-income urban/rural areas of Oahu.

17 Rebuilding the Department's oral public health program will help to fulfill the basic core  
18 public health functions of assessment, assurance, and policy development and meet the dental  
19 health mandates of Hawaii Revised Statutes Title 19, Chapter 321, Part V §321-61 to §321-63.

1           The oral health taskforce will be instrumental in identifying those key elements and  
2 additional staff resources necessary to rebuild a public health dental program in the Department,  
3 improve overall oral health in the state, and reduce inequalities in oral health.

4           Based on the specialized topic and comprehensive membership of this task force, it may  
5 be difficult to recruit members that currently work together on oral health issues as part of their  
6 employment or associations if they will be prohibited from continuing these professional  
7 interactions during their tenure on the task force based on Part I, Chapter 92, Hawaii Revised  
8 Statutes. We recommend adoption of Office of Information Practices language to amend H.B.  
9 2744 H.D. 2 for a limited exemption to Part I, Chapter 92, Hawaii Revised Statutes that allows  
10 interactions/discussions among Oral Health Task Force members that need to talk together about  
11 the same issues the task force will be dealing with in the course of their regular work.

12           The DOH appreciates the funds and establishment of a 1.0 permanent FTE position that  
13 will increase the Department's capacity to conduct the necessary program activities to improve  
14 the oral health of children, families, and other vulnerable populations statewide.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

16 **Offered Amendments:**

17 ADD: SECTION 2. (g) Less than a quorum of task force members may discuss task force  
18 business together outside a meeting provided that they report the matters discussed at the next  
19 duly noticed meeting of the task force, and that no commitment to vote is made or sought. Such  
20 discussions shall be a permitted interaction under Hawaii Revised Statutes §92-2.5.



**LATE**

**STATE OF HAWAII**  
STATE COUNCIL  
ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
TELEPHONE: (808) 586-8100 FAX: (808) 586-7543

March 15, 2024

The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
The Thirty-Second Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Senator San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT: HB2744 HD2 RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH**

The Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities is in **SUPPORT OF HB2744 HD2**, which establishes an oral health task force to review the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve the State's oral health infrastructure.

Within our population of individuals with developmental disabilities, oral health is a critical issue that requires urgent attention. Many of our members rely on Medicaid as their primary source of healthcare coverage, and the recent reinstatement of Medicaid dental coverage has been a significant step forward. However, a persistent challenge faced by our community is the difficulty in finding dental providers willing to accept Medicaid and provide care to individuals with developmental disabilities.

Despite the reinstatement of dental coverage, our state's current dental infrastructure is insufficient to meet the needs of our community, particularly now that Medicaid covers dental services. We continue to struggle with a shortage of dentists willing to treat patients with Medicaid coverage in Hawaii.

HB2744 HD2, with its establishment of an oral health task force, represents a promising opportunity to address the systemic problems facing Hawaii's dental system. By bringing together stakeholders from both the private and public sectors of dentistry, this task force can work collaboratively to develop solutions that improve access to dental care for individuals with developmental disabilities.

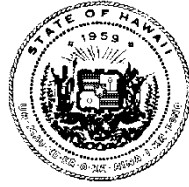
Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support of HB2744 HD2**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daintry Bartoldus".

Daintry Bartoldus  
Executive Administrator

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

TRISTA SPEER  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

March 13, 2024

TO: The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: [HB 2744 HD2](#) - RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH.

Hearing: March 15, 2024, 1:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 229 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent, offers comments, and defers to the Department of Health on implementation and resource needs. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace budget priorities identified in the executive budget.

**PURPOSE:** This measure establishes the Oral Health Task Force to review information and data on the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve the State's oral health infrastructure and appropriates funds to help facilitate the work of the oral health task force. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD2)

The Committee on Health and Homelessness (HD1) amended this measure by:

- (1) Amending the composition of the Oral Health Task Force;
- (2) Deleting language that would make the Oral Health Task Force exempt from the State's Sunshine Laws;
- (3) Changing the appropriations to unspecified amounts;
- (4) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and

- (5) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

The Committee on Finance (HD2) made additional amendments by:

- (1) Changing the number of program specialist V positions to an unspecified number; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

DHS appreciates the Legislature's continued investment in and attention to the oral health needs of Hawaii's residents. A representative from the DHS Med-QUEST Division will participate as a member of the task force.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.

March 15, 2024

**To: Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS)**

From: Hawaii Association of Health Plans Public Policy Committee

Date/Location: March 15, 2024; 1:00 p.m./Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

**Re: Testimony in support of HB2744 HD2– Relating to Oral Health**

The Hawaii Association of Health Plans (HAHP) respectfully supports HB2744 HD2. HAHP is a statewide partnership that unifies Hawaii's health plans to improve the health of Hawaii's communities together. A majority of Hawaii residents receive their health coverage through a plan associated with one of our organizations.

HAHP believes that practicing preventive care and maintaining good oral health is essential to improving health care outcomes and ensuring the well-being of our state. We also believe that Hawaii's current oral health infrastructure makes it impossible for residents to access the appropriate level of oral health care services, especially for those who are most in need.

We appreciate the efforts of this legislature to address these concerns and strongly support the appropriation of funds to establish an oral health task force to review Hawaii's oral health status, develop an oral health strategy, and make recommendations on how we can improve oral health in Hawaii.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB2744 HD2.

Sincerely,

HAHP Public Policy Committee

cc: HAHP Board Members



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Friday, March 15, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.

by

Clementina D. Ceria-Ulep, PhD, RN  
Dean & The Queen's Health Systems Endowed Professor  
Nancy Atmospera-Walch School of Nursing

And

Lee Buenconsejo-Lum, Interim Dean  
John A. Burns School of Medicine

And

Michael Bruno, Provost  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

#### HB 2744 HD2 – RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on **HB 2744 HD2 in support.**

This measure establishes an oral health task force to review the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve the oral health infrastructure in Hawai'i. This initiative is in collaboration with the Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition, of which faculty from NAWSON and JABSOM both are engaged in and collaborate with.

The recommended members of the Task Force include a faculty member of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Nancy Atmospera-Walch School of Nursing (NAWSON) which includes the Department of Dental Hygiene. The faculty is to be appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives. In addition, the Task Force will include a representative of the University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine, to be appointed by the President of the Senate.

This Task Force will fill an important role in our state by creating the dedicated entity which will review information on the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve oral health infrastructure in Hawai'i. Benefits of this Task Force include stronger cross-sector collaboration on oral health issues, up-to-date analysis of community oral health status, increased awareness of the importance of oral health, and clear, actionable recommendations for improvements.

The NAWSON wishes to recognize the incredible talent and dedicated experts in oral health that are faculty of NAWSON. These faculty commit to enhancing access to oral

healthcare through the education and training of the future dental hygienist workforce. In addition, Dr. Mattheus, PhD, APRN-Rx, CPNP, FAAN, Nancy Atmospera-Walch Endowed Professor in School Health & Professor, is the Senior Practice Director and Dental Sealant Program Director for the Hawai'i Keiki: Healthy and Ready to Learn Program. Dr. Mattheus was a recipient of the Achievement Rewards for College Scientists (ARCS) Scholarship, Honolulu Chapter for her doctoral research study on the prevention of early childhood caries in primary care practice and currently serves at the Hawai'i State Oral Health Champion designated by Harvard University's Center for Integration of Primary Care and Oral Health (CIPCOH). We would like to recommend her as a candidate Taskforce member.

The UH JABSOM recommends Dr. Jill Omori, Director of the Office of Medical Education, and Dr. Matthew Oishi, part-time faculty in charge of the oral health curriculum for the medical students, as qualified experts who would offer high value contributions to this Task Force.

The NAWSON and JABSOM look forward to serving on this important task force.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide supporting testimony related to this measure.





## HAWAII ORAL HEALTH COALITION

Date: March 13, 2024

To: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
The Honorable Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services

Re: Support for HB 2744 HD 2, Relating to Oral Health

Hrg: March 15, at 1:00PM - Conference Room 225 & via Videoconference

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The Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition, a program of the Hawai'i Public Health Institute<sup>i</sup>, is in **strong support of HB 2744 HD 2**, which establishes an oral health task force to review information on the status of oral health in the state and makes recommendations to improve or health infrastructure in Hawai'i, and appropriates funds to the Department of Health for two positions to facilitate the work of the oral health taskforce.

**We respectfully request amendments to HB 2744 HD2** to include language reflected in prior testimony from the Department of Health relating to limited exemption to the Sunshine Law allowing less than a quorum of task force members to discuss potential task force business together during the course of their normal work, provided that they report the matters discussed outside of a noticed meeting at the immediately following noticed meeting of the task force, and that during their communication outside of a noticed meeting there is no commitment to vote is made or sought. This amendment is necessary as oral health resources and personnel are limited and it is likely that some discussions may overlap given the nature of task force participants' work. We aim to ensure individuals are able to communicate freely to provide the best support to communities as possible without fear of violating the sunshine laws.

The mission of the Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition (HOHC) is to improve the overall health and well-being of all Hawai'i residents by improving access and equity in oral health care through collaborative partnerships, advocacy, and education. HOHC is a community-driven organization comprised of members representing organizations and individuals from diverse sectors across Hawai'i.

Oral health is essential to the overall physical, psychological, social, and economic well-being of Hawai'i's residents. Yet, our residents suffer from poor oral health:

- Hawai'i has among the highest prevalence of dental decay in children and adults compared to other states.
- Low-income families, intellectually and developmentally disabled residents, kūpuna, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations, and neighbor island residents are disproportionately impacted by poor oral health.
- Lack of an in-state dental school, geographic isolation, lack of community water fluoridation, and societal inequities are significant contributors to our poor oral health status.

Forty-two states maintain dedicated public dental health staff responsible for assessing and monitoring the population's oral health status, community needs, and infrastructure; informing and educating the public about the importance of oral health; and working to reduce barriers to dental care. With over 288,000 adults with Medicaid dental benefits, there is a lack of dental providers to adequately meet the need for services among the population.

Our state's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) cared for approximately 40,000 dental patients in 2021<sup>ii</sup>, and often have long wait lists due to the limited facility and staffing capacity. Additionally, only 240 FQHC and general practice dentists are active in Medicaid in Hawai'i. However, it is unclear how many currently accept new patients. While the legislature recently allocated funding to reinstate basic services to adults enrolled in Medicaid, the shortage of Medicaid providers and limited infrastructure hinders the provision of services across the state, primarily in rural and neighbor island communities.

Furthermore, between 2016 and 2020, there were a total of 29,536 emergency department (ED) visits with a dental related diagnosis by adults aged 21 years and older in Hawai'i, two-thirds of which were admitted for primary dental diagnoses. A significant proportion of these ED visits were Medicaid recipients (9,680), and/or Native Hawaiian/Part Native Hawaiian (5,018). **Medicaid claims constituted 45% of the cumulative total charges for the ED visits with a primary dental diagnosis (\$12.3 million).** Additionally, higher rates of ED visits were found for Hawai'i County, Kaua'i County, and adults ages 21 to 44<sup>iii</sup>.

It is imperative that we invest time and resources into further examining the oral health landscape in Hawai'i to better understand the full scope of oral health needs, resources, infrastructure, and to identify evidence-based best practices, which can best address the barriers and gaps in our existing oral health care systems. A dedicated oral health task force comprised of key stakeholders is necessary to identify and develop the strategies that address the critical needs of our communities.

Additionally, dedicated staffing under the Department of Health to facilitate and advance the work of an oral health task force will lay the foundation for ongoing assessment of oral health trends and systems, and the development of effective approaches to improving oral health outcomes for all Hawai'i residents.

The State has begun to reinvest in the oral health of its most vulnerable residents. HB 2744 HD2 is a necessary approach to supporting the success and sustainability of this investment. Most importantly, this measure will promote a strong foundation for improved and inclusive oral health outcomes.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask you to pass HB 2744 HD2, with amended language expressed above. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PD' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Patrick Donnelly  
Statewide Oral Health Coalition Manager  
Hawai'i Public Health Institute

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<sup>i</sup> Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI) is a hub for building healthy communities, providing issue-based advocacy, education, and technical assistance through partnerships with government, academia, foundations, business, and community-based organizations.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/data-reporting/program-data?grantNum=H80CS06640>

<sup>iii</sup> Matsunaga, M.; Chen, J.J.; Donnelly, P.; Fok, C.C.T.; Partika, N.S. Emergency Room Visits with a Non-Traumatic Dental-Related Diagnosis in Hawaii, 2016–2020. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2022**, *19*, 3073. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19053073>

To: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
RE: HB2744 HD2 in strong support  
Hawaii State Capitol, Conference Room 225  
March 15, 2024; 1:00 pm

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the committee,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT of House Bill 2744 HD2** relating to Oral Health.

HB2744 HD2 would fill a need in our oral health community by establishing an oral health taskforce to review information on the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve our health infrastructure in Hawai'i, and appropriates funds to the Department of Health for program specialist positions to facilitate the work of the oral health taskforce.

Oral health is essential to the overall physical, psychological, social, and economic well-being of Hawai'i's residents. Yet, our residents suffer from poor oral health as reported in the Department of Health's [Hawaii Smiles 2015](#):

- Hawai'i has among the highest prevalence of dental decay in children and adults compared to other states.
- Low-income families, intellectually and developmentally disabled residents, kūpuna, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations, and neighbor island residents are disproportionately impacted by poor oral health.
- Lack of an in-state dental school, geographic isolation, lack of community water fluoridation, and societal inequities are significant contributors to our poor oral health status.

We must invest time and resources into further examining the oral health landscape in Hawai'i to better understand the full scope of oral health needs, resources, and infrastructure, and to identify evidence-based best practices, which can best address the barriers and gaps in our existing oral health care systems. A dedicated oral health task force comprised of key stakeholders is necessary to identify and develop strategies that address the critical needs of our communities.

The State has begun to reinvest in the oral health of its most vulnerable residents. HB2744 HD2 is an effective approach to supporting the success and sustainability of this investment. Mahalo for supporting this bill.

Me ka ha'aha'a,  
Mai Hall, M.Ed.  
Children's Health Coordinator

**HB-2744-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/12/2024 2:34:50 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/15/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In support.

March 13, 2024

**Testimony in Support of HB 2744 HD2, Relating to Oral Health**

Committee on Health and Human Services  
Friday, March 15, 2024  
1:00 pm  
Conference Room 225

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Committee Members:

Hawaii Dental Service (HDS) **strongly supports HB 2744, HD2, Relating to Oral Health**, because we recognize that improving the oral health of our community is everyone's kuleana, a shared responsibility. A task force would be valuable to identify Hawai'i's current oral health challenges and collaboratively explore solutions together to address the gaps.

HDS and the HDS Foundation strive to address these gaps by providing resources for nonprofit programs that improve access to oral health care, support oral health education, and help to prevent oral health disease. We also provide scholarships for both dentists and dental hygienists to ensure Hawai'i residents can provide culturally sensitive dental care in their respective communities. However, we recognize improving oral health must be a kākou effort — everyone must bring their perspectives and best thinking forward to improve the overall health and well-being of Hawai'i residents, from keiki to kūpuna.

Representatives from both HDS and the HDS Foundation are honored to be included on the list of proposed members to participate in the state's oral health task force. We look forward to sharing our mana'o with the Department of Health and others on the task force and learning from others on how to best move our state forward.

An oral health task force, composed of representation from those who represent different areas of our oral health system, will support diversity and enable Hawai'i to create a comprehensive state dental plan to address our oral health disparities. It is also an opportunity to identify and replicate oral health programs that are having a positive impact.

Thank you for your support of this important bill.

Sincerely,



**Dr. Diane S. L. Paloma**  
President and CEO  
Hawaii Dental Service



**Papa Ola Lokahi**  
Nana I Ka Pono Na Ma

894 Queen Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
Phone: 808.597.6550  
[www.papaolalokahi.org](http://www.papaolalokahi.org)

**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**  
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J. C. Aquino, Vice Chair

**Friday, March 15, 2024, 1:00 PM, Conference Room 225 & Videoconference**

**RE: HB 2744 HD 2 – RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH**  
**Position: SUPPORT**

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee,

Papa Ola Lokahi testifies in **SUPPORT** of HB 2744 HD 2, which establishes an oral health task force to review the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve oral health infrastructure in Hawaii. Papa Ola Lokahi supports efforts to assess, evaluate, and update our health infrastructure to deliver essential health care services. The proposed structural collaboration between community voices, administrative agencies, and health professionals provides the opportunity for recommendations to be developed with a wide range of stakeholder perspectives.

To the best of our knowledge, the proposed role of task force members does not conflict with any Papa Ola Lokahi federal mandates, our mission, or other administrative agreements. We stand able to serve on this task force as delineated in the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to **SUPPORT** HB 2744.

*Papa Ola Lōkahi, the Native Hawaiian Health Board, authorized by the federal Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act, is charged with raising the health status of Native Hawaiians to the highest possible level, which we achieve through strategic partnerships, programs, and public policy.*

# THE KŪPUNA CAUCUS



March 14, 2024

To: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair,  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Re: HB 2744, HD 2, relating to Oral Health

Date: Friday, March 15, 2024

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Place: Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

Position: **Strong Support**

Aloha, Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee:

The Kūpuna Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i has an enrollment of some 2,700 members. We focus on issues relating to the health and welfare of seniors in our State (and beyond).

We strongly support HB 2744, because, as prior testimony has unanimously confirmed, the condition of oral health in the Aloha State is woefully inadequate, and we seriously need an infusion of attention, effort, and funding to improve it.

We are alarmed at the very small number of practicing dentists that we have, and further the apparent fact that so few of them have agreed to participate in Adult Medicaid Preventive Dental Services. We have been monitoring the launch of such services pursuant to the Executive Budget of the 2022 Legislature, which appropriated about \$30 million per year for such services.

It is very clear that the underlying issue is **money**, or rather the lack thereof. Oral health is a serious problem that must be seriously addressed. We are hopeful that the establishment of the oral health working group, which HB 2744 would create, will be a significant positive step toward effectuating major improvements.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on this truly important bill.

Alan B. Burdick, Chair  
Kūpuna Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i



**Testimony on HB 2744**  
**Relating to Oral Health Task Force**  
Submitted by Dr. Steven Pine, DDS, Chief Dental Officer  
Hawaii Island Community Health Center  
February 6, 2024

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2744, which aims to establish a statewide oral health task force to address the pressing oral health needs of our community.

Hawaii faces significant challenges in oral health, particularly among our most vulnerable populations, including low-income individuals, disabled residents, kūpuna, Native Hawaiians, and those residing on neighbor islands. Despite efforts to improve access to care, disparities persist, with many individuals unable to receive essential dental services.

Key statistics highlight the urgency of this issue:

- Over 288,000 adults in Hawaii are enrolled in Medicaid dental benefits, yet access to dental care remains limited.
- Federally Qualified Health Centers served approximately 40,000 dental patients in 2021, underscoring the importance of these safety net providers.
- Despite the presence of 240 Medicaid-enrolled dentists in Hawaii, many areas, especially rural and underserved communities, still face shortages of dental providers.
- The lack of dedicated oral health staff within Hawaii's Department of Health hinders efforts to assess and monitor oral health status, educate the public, and develop effective policies and plans to improve oral health outcomes.

Establishing a statewide oral health task force is a crucial step towards addressing these challenges. This task force will play a pivotal role in:

1. Conducting a comprehensive review of oral health status in Hawaii, identifying key issues, and recommending strategies for improvement.
2. Analyzing systemic barriers to oral health services and advocating for systemic changes to promote equity.
3. Developing a strategic blueprint with clear goals, objectives, and actions to guide oral health efforts in the state.
4. Facilitating collaboration among stakeholders to address complex issues and implement effective solutions.
5. Providing recommendations to policymakers to improve oral health infrastructure and access to care.

Moreover, the appropriation of funds to support the work of the task force, including contracting with a consultant and establishing a permanent full-time position within the Department of Health, demonstrates a commitment to addressing oral health disparities in our state.

In conclusion, I urge you to support HB 2744 and prioritize the establishment of a statewide oral health task force. By working together across sectors and communities, we can create a healthier future for all residents of Hawaii.

Mahalo for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

*Steven Pine*

Steven C. Pine  
Chief Dental Officer  
Hawaii Island Community Health Center

March 15, 2024

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

To: The Honorable Chair Joy San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Senator Henry Aquino and Committee members

From: Dr. Don Sand DDS 2.0 draft

HB 2744 HD2 - RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH. Hearing: March 15, 2014

Conference Room 308 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

Aloha Legislative Committee,

I am writing today to strongly support HB 2744 purposing the establishment of an Oral Health Task Force for Hawaii. As a concerned member of our community and a dedicated advocate for public health, I believe that such a task force is crucial for addressing the urgent oral health issues affecting our communities.

Certain segments of Hawaii's population, including seniors, the homeless, and low-income individuals, bear a disproportionate burden of common oral diseases that can significantly impact their overall health and well-being. These include cavities, tooth decay, gum disease, gingivitis, and periodontal disease.

Establishing an oral health task force presents an opportunity to mitigate these adverse health outcomes through systematic change. By bringing together experts from diverse backgrounds, including dentists, public health professionals, community leaders, and policymakers, the task force can develop innovative strategies to promote oral health and expand access to care.

Through this initiative, we can gather crucial information about the current state of oral health in Hawaii, identifying areas of need and disparities in access to care. Additionally, the task force can advocate for policies that support equitable access to oral health care services, such as Medicaid expansion and reimbursement reform. By collaborating with existing community organizations and healthcare providers, we can leverage resources and maximize our impact.

In conclusion, I urge you to support the establishment of an Oral Health Task Force for Hawaii. This is a vital step towards creating a healthier and more equitable future for our state. Thank you for considering my testimony and for your dedication to improving the health and well-being of all Hawaii residents.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,  
Rebecka Adolpho, MPH





To: The Honorable Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
The Honorable Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President  
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager

Hearing: Friday, March 15, 2024, 1:00 PM, Conference Room 225

RE: **HB2744, HD2 Relating to Oral Health**

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AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of HB2744, HD2**. This measure establishes an Oral Health Task Force to review information and data on the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve the State's oral health infrastructure and appropriates funds to facilitate the work of the task force.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 84,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 40 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

Oral health is an essential aspect of a person's overall health and quality of life. Good oral health is important for healthy pregnancies and avoiding heart disease and diabetes complications and other conditions. Poor oral health is the cause for a wide range of health conditions that affect one's ability to eat, speak, smile and have positive self-esteem.

In 2022, the legislature approved \$29.9 million to reinstate an adult Medicaid dental benefit, with services becoming available January 1, 2023. We are grateful to the legislature and the Med-QUEST Division for this tremendous win for better oral health care for our community. However, even with the new benefit, the historical challenge of an insufficient network of dentists to provide oral health care to Medicaid beneficiaries persists. In order for Medicaid beneficiaries to have access to services, we need more dental providers. The dental provider shortage for Medicaid and other infrastructure shortcomings impact our rural and neighbor island communities most, putting Hawai'i's most vulnerable populations at risk.

Establishing an oral health task force of key stakeholders to assess our State's oral health system will give us an opportunity to systematically review and understand our State's needs, current resources and infrastructure, and identify next steps for improving oral health outcomes for our residents. We must continue to invest in a healthier Hawai'i, and this measure is step in the right direction.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support of HB2744, HD2**.



## Hawaii Dental Association

Committees: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Time/Date: 1:00 p.m., March 15, 2024

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 225 and via Videoconference

Re: HB 2744, HD2 Relating to Oral Health

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the committee,

The Hawaii Dental Association (HDA) is a professional association comprised of approximately 950-member dentists. **We are writing to comment on HB 2744, HD2** relating to oral health. This bill establishes an oral health task force to review the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve the State's oral health infrastructure. It requires reports to the Legislature.

We support the intent of this bill and appreciate that HDA has been designated to name a representative to the task force that would be established by this measure. Oral health is essential for overall health and wellness. One cannot be healthy without a healthy mouth. It can show signs of nutritional deficiencies or general infection. Systemic diseases, those that affect the entire body, may first become apparent because of mouth lesions or other oral problems.

We are strongly interested in assisting the legislature in exploring the supports necessary to effectively implement the state's Medicaid program and improve overall health. We have consistently advocated for the voice and the vision of the spectrum of dental service providers across the state to be included.

HDA is a statewide membership organization representing dentists practicing in Hawaii and licensed by the State of Hawaii's Board of Dentistry. HDA members are committed to protecting the oral health and well-being of the people of Hawaii, from keiki to kupuna and everyone in between.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on HB 2744, HD2.



**Hawaii Dental Hui**  
Healthy Smiles for all Hawaii

TEL (808) 428-1572

drsandsmiles@gmail.com

54-135 Honomu Pl Hau'ula, HI 96717

March 15, 2024

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

To: The Honorable Chair Joy San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Senator Henry Aquino and Committee members

From: Dr. Don Sand DDS

**HB 2744 HD2 - RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH.** Hearing: March 15, 2014

Conference Room 308 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

Aloha, I'm Dr. Sand. As a frontline public health dentist and systems consultant in Hawaii, I strongly support the intent of HB2744.HD2, which relates to creating a Legislative Oral Health Task Force.

**About one-third of our island residents, an estimated 288,000, have been suffering from the oral health crisis and are unable to access care.** Thanks to you and your colleagues in the 2022 session, you all were part of our first big win for oral health since 2009, when our state Executive branch decided to discontinue the Adult Medicaid benefit and dissolve the State Dental Department in DOH.

Mahalo Nui, to each of you who voted to pass the 2022 bill introduced by M.L Nadine Nakamura, with language written by Chair Joy San Buenaventura, to reinstate the Adult dental benefit with a \$26 million-dollars into the Governor's budget.

The collateral damage of healthcare disparity is hard to measure in terms of lost health, lost economic outcomes, damaged mental health, wasted emergency-only care, and human suffering for our underserved and vulnerable. Suffering is not just measured in acute and chronic pain but also for those now with an inability to chew food, the inability to smile, to get a job, or socialize due to the shame of missing teeth.

One metric to show Hawaii state cost is a 5-year Hawaiian study. Data shows that about 40,000,000 million dollars was spent on ER visits for tooth infections that could have been

prevented. \$20 million of the \$40 million were direct costs to the state in wasted Medicaid funds.

**PURPOSE:** This measure establishes an Oral Health Task Force to review information and data on the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve the State's oral health infrastructure. It appropriates funds to help facilitate the work of the oral health task force and to add a 1.0 FTE program specialist V position assigned to oral health for the family health division at DOH.

I believe that there is enough vision and talent in this 2024 Legislative session, there are enough community stakeholders that if we all work to create the **right process** and choose the **right people**, we will save the state hundreds of millions of dollars. We can end the oral health suffering for all in Hawaii.

Thank you for listening to the voice of dentists and the voice of our patients who are asking for more dental care access.

Dr. Sand



3.15.2024

Committee on Health and Human Services

To: Senator Joy A San Buenaventura, Chair; Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair and Committee members:

**Support of Bill HB2744 HD2: Relating to Oral Health/Oral Health Task Force**

I am writing in **support of HB2744 HD2** with funding to establish a Hawaii Oral Health Task Force. I am a registered dental hygienist, a member of the Hawaii Oral Health Coalition (HOHC), the Kauai Chapter of the HOHC and the Hawaii Dental Hygienists' Association. I am grateful and very supportive of the 2022 effort to reinstate Medicaid Adult Dental Health benefits in Hawaii. Positive momentum and collaboration that is occurring statewide support utilization of a Task Force. The Oral Health Task Force could support a coordinated approach to the complex issues surrounding unmet oral health needs.

**Mahalo**

Anne Hvizdak, BSDH, CDHC  
Member Hawaii Oral Health Coalition  
Member Hawaii Dental Hygienists' Association  
669 Aewa St. #375  
Eleele, HI (Kauai) 96705  
[Hvizdak11@gmail.com](mailto:Hvizdak11@gmail.com)

**HB-2744-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/13/2024 9:59:55 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/15/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Caroline Kunitake	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Committee on Health & Human Services,

My name is Caroline Kunitake and I support HB2744 HD2.

This bill establishes an oral health task force to review the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve the State's oral health infrastructure.

Our state lacks a well funded and robust oral health program. My hope is that the oral health task force will annually report top priorities to the legislature. Without state level priorities, the legislature will not know which oral health initiatives to fund.

Please support HB2744 HD2. I appreciate the opportunity to provide supportive testimony.

Mahalo,

Caroline Kunitake

TO: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair, Health & Human Services  
And  
The Honorable Senator Henry J. C. Aquino, Vice-Chair

Subject: HB2744-Relating to Oral Health

Hrg: March 15, 2024, at 1:00 PM-Conference Room 225 & via Videoconference, State Capitol.

Date: March 14, March 2024

RE: Strong Support for HB No 2744, a Dental Task Force

I am Joseph P. Mayer, Jr., DDS, Hawaii Dental License DT1980, and I strongly support the intent of the formation of the Oral Health Task Force, HB2744. Given the critical necessity for the massive State Budget expense to support the devastation in Maui, which is rightly the State's highest priority, the Task Force will have a positive impact on all residents. I have personally witnessed the pain and suffering of the underserved population for the last 7 years. HB2744 will benefit of our island communities and reduce that needless pain and suffering.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph P. Mayer, Jr., DDS