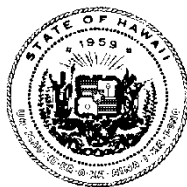


JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



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

February 6, 2024

TO: The Honorable Representative Della Ay Belatti, Chair  
House Committee on Health and Homelessness

The Honorable Lisa Marten, Chair  
House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

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

Hearing: February 9, 2024, 8:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 329 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the bill and defers to the Department of Health on implementation and resource needs.

**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.

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.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
STATE COUNCIL  
ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
TELEPHONE: (808) 586-8100 FAX: (808) 586-7543  
February 9, 2024

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
House Committee on Health & Homelessness  
The Thirty-Second Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Belatti and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB2744 RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH

The Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities is in **SUPPORT OF HB2744**, 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. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates moneys. Declares that the appropriations exceed the state general fund expenditure ceiling for 2024-2025.

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.

House Bill 2744, 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**.

Sincerely,

Daintry Bartoldus  
Executive Administrator

# OFFICE OF INFORMATION PRACTICES

STATE OF HAWAII  
NO. 1 CAPITOL DISTRICT BUILDING  
250 SOUTH HOTEL STREET, SUITE 107  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
TELEPHONE: 808-586-1400 FAX: 808-586-1412  
EMAIL: oip@hawaii.gov

To: House Committee on Health & Homelessness

From: Cheryl Kakazu Park, Director

Date: February 9, 2024, 8:30 a.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 329

Re: Testimony on S.B. No. 2744  
Relating to Oral Health

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill, which would create and appropriate funds for an Oral Health Task Force to make recommendations to improve Hawaii's oral health infrastructure. The Office of Information Practices (OIP) takes no position on the substance of this bill, but has **concerns about the proposed Sunshine Law exemption** for the Oral Health Task Force and has suggested an **amendment**.

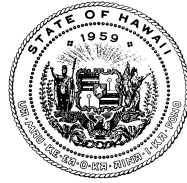
The stated purpose of the Oral Health Task Force is to make policy recommendations on an issue that affects Hawaii's residents generally, and particularly the 288,000 adults with Medicaid dental benefits, with a proposed appropriation of \$200,000 for the 2024-25 fiscal year and additional funding for a newly created position to support the Task Force. The proposed full exemption from the Sunshine Law, part I of chapter 92, means that the Task Force will have no obligation to accept any public input on Hawaii's oral health care infrastructure or the Task Force's proposed recommendations for improving it, no obligation to keep the public informed as it does its work, and no obligation to keep a record of its work in the form of minutes. This is obviously contrary to the Sunshine Law's

statutory policy “that the formation and conduct of public policy – the discussions, deliberations, decisions, and action of governmental agencies – shall be conducted as openly as possible.” HRS §92-1.

The purpose section of this bill does not explain the reason for the proposed Sunshine Law exemption. **In the absence of an explanation for why the Task Force cannot operate under the Sunshine Law, OIP recommends deleting the Sunshine Law exemption** on page 8 at lines 18-19. OIP notes, however, that many of the members are to be State or county employees. **If this Committee is concerned that the government employee members will need to talk together about the same issues the Task Force will be dealing with in the course of their regular work, OIP suggests a more limited exemption** allowing less than a quorum of the Task Force’s members to discuss task force business outside a meeting and report the discussion at the next meeting. **The following language would accomplish that:**

**“Less than a quorum of task force members may discuss task force business together provided that they report the matters discussed at the next duly noticed meeting of the task force outside a meeting, and such discussions shall be a permitted interaction under section 92-2.5.”**

Thank you for considering OIP’s testimony.



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  
RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH**

REP. DELLA AU BELATTI, CHAIR  
REP. JENNA TAKENOUCI, VICE CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & HOMELESSNESS

Hearing Date: 02/09/2024

Room Number: CR 329

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

1 health mandates of Hawaii Revised Statutes Title 19, Chapter 321, Part V §321-61 to §321-63.

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

5 Based on the specialized topic and comprehensive membership of this task force, it may  
6 be difficult to recruit members that currently work together on oral health issues as part of their  
7 employment or associations if they will be prohibited from continuing these professional  
8 interactions during their tenure on the task force based on Part I, Chapter 92, Hawaii Revised  
9 Statutes.

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

13 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

14 **Offered Amendments:** None



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

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

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Health & Homelessness  
Friday February 09, 2024 at 8:30 a.m.

by

Clementina D. Ceria-Ulep, Dean  
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 – RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on **HB 2744 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 dental hygiene program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Nancy Atmospera-Walch School of Nursing (UHM NAWSON) is the only baccalaureate level program in the state and is accredited by CODA. It offers the educational preparation required of dental hygienists to provide oral health care and education to the people of Hawaii, the continental U.S., and the Pacific-Asia region. The program also offers clinical services for community members at the UHM Dental Hygiene Clinic. Students majoring in dental hygiene can become licensed professionals who offer preventive, education, and therapeutic services for the control of oral diseases and the promotion of optimum oral health. Students receive education in basic dental hygiene, dental and oral pathology (disease), clinical dental hygiene, dental materials and more. Students gain competency in screenings to assess eligibility for preventive services, and applying dental materials such as dental sealants during the course of their education.

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 a 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 has served as 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 task force member.

The UH JABSOM medical student curriculum, including the Hawaii Houseless Outreach through Medical Education (HOME) project, and primary care residency and geriatrics fellowship curricula include oral health and training to apply dental sealants to better meet the needs of the many underserved patients we see. JABSOM has an Oral Health Director, Dr. Matthew Oishi, embedded within our Office of Medical Education. We would like to recommend him as a candidate task force member.

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





## DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • TTY (808) 586-8162 • Fax (808) 586-8129

February 9, 2024

### TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

#### House Bill 2744 – Relating to Oral Health

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) offers comments on House Bill 2744 – 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.

DCAB respectfully suggests that the funding would be better put into areas previously identified that will improve oral health. For example, the bill mentions that the Department of Health does not retain any dedicated oral health staff.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kirby L. Shaw".

KIRBY L. SHAW  
Executive Director

**HB-2744**

Submitted on: 2/5/2024 9:00:13 PM

Testimony for HLT on 2/9/2024 8:30:00 AM

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

Comments:

The Legislature took a significant step when it restored adult dental Medicaid benefits. Yet, much more needs to be done and this Task Force would be an effective way to begin to coordinate the effort.

February 7, 2024

Testimony in Support of HB2744, Relating to Oral Health

Hawaii Dental Hygienists' Association

Chair Au Belatti, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Esteemed Members of the House Committee on Health and Homelessness

Chair Marten, Vice Chair Amato, and Esteemed Members of the House Committee on Human Services

The Hawaii Dental Hygienists' Association (HDHA) strongly SUPPORTS HB 2744. This measure hopes to establish a Hawaii Oral Health Task Force to review the status of oral health in the State and make recommendations to improve the oral health infrastructure in Hawaii. It will also appropriate funds for dedicated oral health staff positions within the Department of Health.

As the largest association representing Hawaii's licensed dental hygienists, HDHA looks forward to being a key stakeholder in the discussion and lending our SUPPORT to HB 2744. We humbly ask your committee to show your support for the creation of an Oral Health Task Force.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



**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)

**House Committee on Health and Homelessness**  
Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

**Friday, February 9, 2024, 8:30 AM, Conference Room 329 & Videoconference**

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

Dear Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

Papa Ola Lokahi testifies in **SUPPORT** of HB 2744, 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.*



Date: February 9, 2024

To: The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
The Honorable Representative, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Health & Homelessness

The Honorable Representative Lisa Marten, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Human Services

Re: Support for HB 2744, Relating to Oral Health

Hrg: February 9, at 8:30am - Conference Room 329 & 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**, which establishes an oral health taskforce to review information on the status of oral health in the State and make 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.

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.

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 is an effective 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. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,



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>

February 7, 2024

## Testimony in Support of HB 2744, Relating to Oral Health

House Committee on Health & Homelessness  
House Committee on Human Services

Friday, February 9, 2024  
8:30 am  
Conference Room 329

Aloha Chairs Belatti and Marten, Vice Chairs Takenouchi and Amato, and Committee Members:

Hawaii Dental Service (HDS) strongly supports HB 2744, 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.

There are many oral health disparities that have created a dental divide in our state. There are those who can easily access dental care; while those in rural neighbor island communities have a difficult time finding a dentist or specialist. Through the efforts of the Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition and the support of our legislators, more adults now have comprehensive dental benefits through Medicaid, but it may still be challenging for them to find dentists who are willing to accept Medicaid patients. There is much more work we must do to raise the standards of oral health in our state.

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 oral 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's Family Health Services Division 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



## Hawaii Dental Association

Committees: House Health & Homelessness Committee and Human Services Committee

Time/Date: 8:30 a.m., February 9, 2024

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 329 and via Videoconference

Re: HB 2744, Relating to Oral Health

Aloha Chair Belatti, Chair Marten, Vice Chair Takenouchi, Vice Chair Amato, and members of the committees,

The Hawaii Dental Association (HDA) is a professional association comprised of approximately 950-member dentists. **We are writing to comment on HB 2744**, 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. Designating only one dentist who must be a Medicaid-serving dentist on a 21-person task force, even with the addition of a HDA representative, does not adequately ensure the voice and the vision of the spectrum of providers across the state. We respectfully request that at least one dentist from each county be considered for inclusion in the task force.

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.





To: The Honorable Della Au Belatti, Chair  
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Health & Homelessness

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

Hearing: Friday, February 9, 2024, 8:30 AM, Conference Room 329

RE: **HB2744 Relating to Oral Health**

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AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of HB2744**. 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.

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**.

February 7, 2024

Testimony in Support of HB2744, Relating to Dental Hygienists

To whom it may concern:

I strongly support HB2744. This measure hopes to establish a Hawaii Oral Health Task Force to review the status of oral health in the state and make recommendations to improve the oral health infrastructure in Hawaii. It will also appropriate funds for dedicated oral health staff positions within the Department of Health. As a dental hygienist who sees this great need in our community, I humbly ask your committee to show your support for the creation of an Oral Health Task Force.

Mahalo for your time,

Erin Cortez, MSAH, BSDH, RDH

Date: February 9, 2024 NOTE this is the Second draft. 2.0 ( after feedback from 7 other dentists today)

Committee: HLT: House Committee on Health and Human Services

HUS: House Committee on Human Services

Bill HB.2744 relating to an Oral Health Task Force

Testifier: Dr. Don Sand, DDS

**Aloha Chair Lisa Martin, Vice Chair Terez Amato, and committee members.**

**Aloha Chair Della Au Belatti, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and committee members**

My name is Dr. Don Sand, I support the intent of this HB2477 with a request to amend language.

280,000 Hawaii residents that are now eligible for dental care are unable to access providers! **Frontline- mission minded dentists** support the intent behind HB2744 to improve access to dental care for Hawaii residents.

The bill aims to connect over 21 administrators, some of which are stakeholders, to facilitate creating plans to access to care for adult Medicaid recipients. An area of concern is that the majority of the administrators included in the bill are currently part of the broken system which raises concern as to their ability to be effective implementing the proposed changes.

### **Problem 1**

Over 50 percent of the silo agencies listed have not been a part of the oral health conversation in 5 years. Surprisingly, only 1 of the 21 recommended administrators for the oral health task force is a dentist! The absence of key stakeholders and dentists in the program is an area of weakness in developing a successful plan. What I am describing would compare to having a failing chain of restaurants that needs to be revamped, but deciding not to include the chefs and cooks in the actual problem-solving. Or imagine a school trying to rework a failing math program, but not involving *all the math teachers*. It is against common sense principles to believe this would generate excellent results.

**Recommendation for improving problem 1:**

Specify that **multiple frontline dentists with real world clinical and business experience** must be included in the team of administrators. Set a minimum number of dentists that must be present in order for business to be conducted by the task force.

Here are 4 key voices required to develop system improvements:

1. **Public health dentists** focused on large scale oral health efforts in the community in our FQHC's and rural health hospitals
2. **Private practice dentists** who are tasked with seeing over half the Medicaid patients while trying to stay financially solvent.
3. **Dental specialists**, who are often the most difficult for patients to access, especially on neighbor islands and rural communities. For example, oral surgeons and endodontists provide critical treatment needed to resolve the root problems causing dental pain and infection in our community.
4. **Patient advocate groups** should be part of the task force to illuminate their perspective, experiences, and reported needs.

## **Problem 2**

Much of our current oral health crisis is down 9-10 years downstream of the absence of having a Dental Director's leadership for the state of Hawaii.

This measure seeks a facilitator to lead the discussions, without a thorough description of the educational training and experiential background required to fill this position. We recommend that such an important role be well defined and similar to the qualifications needed to lead a state DOH division such as a Dental Director. This person would need a minimal standard of qualifications including having some key degrees such as an MPH, DDS, MBA and is experienced in this highly specialized discipline.

In the attempt to fill our serious absence of oral health leadership in the Hawaii Department of Health, HB 2744 wisely attempts to create a leadership position and a process to improve Hawaii's systems of dental care delivery for the underserved, however, it has room for improvement.

## **Recommendation for to solution to problem 2**

The right person can make or break this 3-year plan and this cannot be understated! For success, HB 2744 must clearly define the criteria needed to participate in the proposed task force. The facilitator should have a minimal qualifying criterion such as: 7 years+ leading dental initiatives, preferably at the state level and have several years' experience specifically in dental public health. We strongly

recommend considering requiring the leadership to include individuals with both an DDS/DMD and a public health degree such as an MPH.

### **Problem 3**

The oral health taskforce presented in the current draft does not make provisions for data collection required to study and evaluate program needs, weaknesses, and successes. The funding of research and publication of the data needs to be included in the language of HB2744 to facilitate constant evaluation and improvement of the system.

### **Recommendation for a solution to problem 3**

Create language and an appropriation for funding to support data collection, to design a study, to hire local University of Hawaii/Manoa researchers, and to retain national research consultants. This team would give concrete data continually to the task force as well as being empowered to design solutions. These resources would support our local pipeline of dental work force while also allowing for constant evaluation and improving of Hawaii's dental access. Production of literature and data can be used to compare Hawaii to the national best practices and to be used in program planning, policy development and strategic goal planning for our state.

The following is an example of 8 recommendations that a well-funded and highly talented team created in DOH. ( 9 years ago, Sept 25, 2015)

**This Hawaii Oral Health: Report: Key Findings.** This report makes 8 recommendations. 7 of the recommendations are about prevention. Half of #4 has been acted upon by our 2022 Legislative Session by reinstating adult dental Medicaid benefits. There has been no significant investments by the state on any of this guidance.

1. Develop and implement an oral health surveillance plan to improve data collection, analysis and use of data for **program planning, evaluation, and policies.**
  2. Develop effective, evidence-based community and school-based **dental disease prevention** programs for all age groups, particularly those who are experiencing oral health disparities. These should include age-appropriate fluoride and **dental sealant programs.**
  3. Continue to support and expand affordable and **accessible preventive dental care** services to Hawaii's low-income population.
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4. Expand Medicaid dental services for adults beyond the current coverage for emergencies only to include **preventive and treatment services**.
5. Consider increasing reimbursements to dental providers for **key preventive** or restorative **procedures** to increase participation in Medicaid.
6. Develop strategies to reduce barriers to finding and **receiving preventive dental care services** for children enrolled in the Medicaid program.
7. Use or adapt existing educational programs for pregnant women, and for health and dental professionals regarding the safety and importance of **dental care and preventive counseling** during pregnancy and in the neonatal period.
8. Explore **innovative**, evidence-based strategies to expand access to underserved, high-risk populations including tele-dentistry.

Mahalo for all you are doing to improve the health for our precious island people,

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2.8.2024

Committee on Health and Homelessness

To Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair, Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair, and committee members

Committee on Human Services

To Representative Lisa Marten, Chair, Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair, and committee members:

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

I am writing in **support of HB2744** which provides funds for the establishment of 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 was 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**

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