



# 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 Higher Education  
Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 p.m.

By

Loïc Le Marchand, MD, PhD

Associate Director for Community Outreach & Engagement, and Population Sciences  
Lani Park, PhD and Alikea Maunakea, PhD, Principal Investigators

And

Naoto T. Ueno MD, PhD, Director  
University of Hawai'i Cancer Center

And

Lee Buenconsejo-Lum, Interim Dean and Principal Investigator, Pacific Regional Central Cancer  
Registry (USAPI)

John A. Burns School of Medicine

And

Michael Bruno, PhD, Provost  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

#### SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center (UHCC) and John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) strongly supports SB 2722 which would appropriate revenues for UHCC to conduct a multi-ethnic cohort study focusing on social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos in the state of Hawai'i.

This funding would provide vital resources to help initiate this long-term study, which would provide critical data to improve the cancer disparities and promote health equity in populations that experience high rates for many common cancers and continue to be understudied and underserved.

National data typically aggregate health information for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) and, thereby, ignore the rich cultural and lifestyle diversity of these populations and mask their marked differences in cancer incidence and outcomes. UHCC has extensive experience studying cancer disparities in AANHPI. Disaggregated data have revealed stark cancer disparities across Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian American subgroups. For instance, Native Hawaiians, among other racial/ethnic groups in the United States (US), have ones of the highest rates of lung, breast, colorectal, pancreatic, gastric, liver, endometrial and cervical cancers. Most of these excess risks are only partially explained by known risk factors pointing to the need to explore new hypotheses. Pacific Islanders have high rates for many cancers that should be addressed through culturally tailored health education and prevention efforts, such as in smoking cessation, HPV vaccination, and screening. Filipino Americans have high incidence rates for lung, colorectal and thyroid cancer in Hawai'i, and

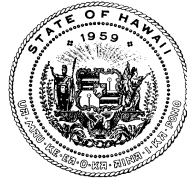
rapidly increasing rates of breast and prostate cancers. Due to gaps in the available data, such as on social determinants of health and environmental and occupational exposures, the specific reasons that drive these disparities remain unknown. A new study that captures such information would directly address these research gaps.

The proposed two-year project would establish the feasibility of recruiting participants for a long-term prospective study and greatly strengthen a grant application to NIH to fund the full-scale research. It will also help us continue to build strong partnerships with these communities that we have initiated through our work to field a mobile health clinic with the Native Hawaiian Healthcare Systems and through the work of our Pacific Islander Community Health Workers, so as to define common priority research areas and assist with study recruitment and future dissemination of study findings.

Information from the Hawai'i Tumor Registry (the State central cancer registry, operated by the UHCC), shows disparities in how early certain cancers are diagnosed (i.e., stage at diagnosis), in the number of new cancers detected each year (i.e., incidence), and in the proportion of deaths caused by certain cancers in Native Hawaiians, Filipinos, and Pacific Islanders residing in Hawai'i. Similarly, the Pacific Regional Central Cancer Registry (the US Affiliated Pacific Islands central cancer registry, operated by JABSOM), shows significant cancer health disparities in late stage at diagnosis and extremely poor survival rates in cervical, oropharyngeal, uterine, and liver cancer among the several of the populations indigenous to the USAPI. Many of the US Pacific Islander populations move to Hawai'i for educational and economic opportunities, as well as for health care. There is inadequate information about the contributing factors to the cancer health disparities, especially in the USAPI populations who reside in Hawai'i and are diagnosed with and treated for cancer here. It is well-studied that certain types of cancer are heavily influenced by tobacco, dietary composition, and overweight/obesity. Additionally, there is a high correlation between poverty and food insecurity, tobacco use, obesity, and obesity-related chronic disease, including cancer. Studies conducted in the US, USAPI, and globally also indicate other sociocultural impacts on cancer aside from poverty.

This new multi-ethnic cohort study is highly needed, and the results will inform UHCC, JABSOM, and University of Hawai'i researchers' current and future work with Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino populations to address social, cultural, and economic determinants of cancer prevention, cancer screening, and early detection, treatment, and survivorship.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 2722, provided that its passage does not impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget.



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 2722  
RELATING TO CANCER**

SENATOR DONNA MERCADO KIM, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Hearing Date: February 13, 2024

Room Number: Conference Room 229  
and Videoconference

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health (DOH) defers to the priorities of the Governor's  
2 Executive Budget request. The bill appropriates out of the general revenues an unspecified  
3 sum for fiscal year 2024-2025.

4 **Department Position:** The DOH supports Senate Bill 2722 (S.B. 2722).

5 **Department Testimony:** S.B. 2722 appropriates funds to the University of Hawaii Cancer  
6 Center (UH CC) to conduct a multiethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of  
7 health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiian, Pacific  
8 Islanders, and Filipinos.

9 In Hawaii, subgroups disproportionately affected by cancer include Native Hawaiian,  
10 Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos, and people with lower income or lower education attainment.<sup>1</sup>  
11 These subgroups are more likely to lack insurance, encounter long distances to health services,  
12 or experience culturally inappropriate health care. The multiethnic cohort study is helping with  
13 the understanding of the health disparities in chronic diseases and survival, and how to improve  
14 the quality and quantity of years of life.

15 Providing access to state-of-the-art cancer prevention, screening, and treatment to all  
16 Hawaii residents, including the most vulnerable and the medically underinsured populations, is  
17 a goal of the [Hawaii Cancer Plan 2030](#) and a priority for the DOH, the Hawaii Breast and Cervical

1 Cancer Control Program and Hawaii Comprehensive Cancer Control Program. Also, through the  
2 DOH [Healthy Hawaii Strategic Plan 2030](#), organizational and community-based partners have  
3 stated common objectives along the social determinants of health across prevention and  
4 chronic diseases including putting into practice the knowledge gathered by the UH CC and  
5 partnering research institutions.

6 Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

7 **Offered Amendments:** None

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<sup>1</sup> Hawaii State Department of Health. [Hawaii Cancer Plan 2030](#). Retrieved February 12, 2024.



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, February 13, 2024; 3:01 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 229  
Via Videoconference**

**RE: SENATE BILL NO. 2722, RELATING TO CANCER.**

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill No. 2722, RELATING TO CANCER.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines to over 150,000 patients each year who live in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

This bill, as received by your Committee, would appropriate an unspecified amount of general funds for fiscal year 2024-2025, for a multi-ethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos. The funds would be expended by the University of Hawaii, and require the University to seek additional funds to complete the multi-cohort study.

The goal of medical research is to develop safe and effective methods to prevent, detect, diagnose, treat and ultimately cure the collection of diseases known as cancer. The better we understand these diseases, the more progress we will make toward diminishing the tremendous human and economic toll disease inflicts upon our citizenry.

Ten years ago, the HPCA testified in support of House Bill No. 1616, Regular Session of 2014, a measure that would add to the Hawaii State Planning Act's objectives and policies for health, the identification of social determinants of health and prioritization of programs, services, interventions, and activities that address identified social determinants of health to improve Native Hawaiian health in accordance with federal law and reduce health disparities of disproportionately affected demographics.

**Testimony on Senate Bill No. 2722**  
**Tuesday, February 13, 2024; 3:01 p.m.**  
**Page 2**

We noted in our testimony that House Bill No. 1616, seeks to:

*" . . . identify those specific social determinants that adversely affect Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos. As these populations make a sizeable percentage of patients seen by community health centers, the HPCA strongly supports this measure."*

This bill was enacted as Act 155, Session Laws of Hawaii 2014.

Ten years later, we continue to recognize the importance of social determinants of health on the health care outcomes and quality of life of Hawaii's most vulnerable, marginalized, and isolated constituencies. The more we learn the better we are able to act.

**The HPCA strongly supports this important measure and commends the introducer for offering this proposal. We urge your favorable consideration.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or eabe@hawaiiipca.net.



**RE: SUPPORT – SB 2722, Relating to Cancer and University of Hawai‘i; Cancer Center; Multiethnic Cohort Study**

Chair and members of the committee.

I am Adam Zarrin, the Director of State Government Affairs for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society® (LLS) is a global leader in the fight against cancer. The LLS mission: Cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma, and improve the quality of life of patients and their families. LLS funds lifesaving blood cancer research around the world, provides free information and support services, and is the voice for all blood cancer patients seeking access to quality, affordable, coordinated care.

**We support SB 2722, relating to cancer, and a multi-ethnic cohort study.**

The study would identify reasons for the disproportionately high risk of chronic diseases among Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. The study will also suggest new ways to address these long-standing disparities.

These first steps will help develop new therapies for patients with cancer and other serious illnesses. These conditions require extensive research and innovation and depend on foundational research like this.

History has shown us that not all patients have had the same opportunity or consideration in clinical research. For example, those from historically marginalized groups are often under-represented in clinical trials.

Such a lack of diversity among people participating is problematic on multiple levels. It impacts our understanding of how effective new drugs might be across populations and how to reduce disparities in access to treatment.

We are excited that Hawaii can be a leader in addressing health equity in underrepresented communities, and we hope you will support SB 2722.

Thank you.



February 12, 2024

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

Re: STRONG SUPPORT of SB2722 - Relating to Cancer

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:00 pm, Conference Room 229

The Hawai'i Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 450 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawai'i through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy. Additionally, HPHA aims to call attention to issues around social justice and equity in areas that extend beyond the traditional context of health (e.g., education, digital equity, cultural sensitivity), which can have profound impacts on health equity and well-being. Therefore, as stewards of public health, HPHA is also advocating for equity in all policies.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals. Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

HPHA humbly asks for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Thank you for allowing HPHA the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Holly Kessler  
Executive Director





Senate Committee on Higher Education  
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Tuesday, February 13, 2024

**ACS CAN SUPPORTS SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.**

Cynthia Au, Government Relations Director – Hawaii Guam  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Thank you for the opportunity in STRONG **SUPPORT** SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER which appropriates funds to the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multi-ethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos.

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), the nonprofit, non-partisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society advocates for public policies that reduce death and suffering from cancer. ACS CAN works with federal, state, and local government bodies to support evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii with 2,500 deaths each year. This year approximately 8,460 residents of Hawaii will be diagnosed with the disease. Cancer incidence and mortality rates have decreased in Hawaii over the last decade, but despite this overall reduction, the disparities between ethnic populations continue to be of concern. Cancer is the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have one of the highest incidence rates of breast, lung, colorectal, cervical, pancreatic, gastric and liver cancers among all U.S. racial/ethnic populations.

Hawaii Statistics:

- Cancer is the leading cause of death in females and the second leading cause of death after heart disease for males over the age of one.<sup>i</sup>
- Cancer is the leading cause of death in Filipino women and the second leading cause of death after heart disease for Filipino men.<sup>ii</sup>

- Cancer is the leading cause of death in Native Hawaiian women and the second leading cause of death after heart disease for Native Hawaiian men.<sup>iii</sup>
- Cancer is the leading cause of death in Pacific Islander women and the second leading cause of death after heart disease for Pacific Islander men.<sup>iv</sup>

To aid in research, collecting data on Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos will help to provide information on the contributing factors to cancer disparities that currently exist. Data collection will aid in future research to improve health outcomes for these minority populations.

The cancer death rate is 20% higher for individuals from the US counties with the lowest average of incomes compared to counties with a higher average of incomes. According to the US Census, there are currently over 200,000 Filipinos in the state. Research is critical to understanding and reducing cancer disparities, as well as examining gaps in cancer prevention and care delivery that contribute to these disparities.

The University of Hawaii Cancer Center is one of 71 research organizations in the U.S. designated by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the only one in the Hawaii Pacific region.<sup>v</sup> Its mission is to reduce the burden of cancer through research, education, patient care and community outreach with an emphasis on the unique ethnic, cultural and environmental characteristics of Hawaii and the Pacific. Cancer research focusing on Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos is unique to Hawaii and the University of Hawaii Cancer Center and cannot be easily conducted anywhere else in the world. Findings will further help with receiving future research grants from National Cancer Institute specific to these minority populations.

ACS CAN supports the legislature to fund \$1 million over two years for the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multi-ethnic cohort study for minority populations unique to the state. All individuals should have equitable access to quality cancer care and an equal opportunity to live a healthy life. However, cancer does not affect everyone equally. Our ability to continue to make progress against cancer relies heavily on eliminating the inequities that exist in cancer care, including in research.

Attached for your reference are articles published last year on the multi-ethnic cohort study referring to the same bill, House Bill 1301 (2023) for more information about what the study would do.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT on this important matter. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Government Relations Director Cynthia Au at 808.460.6109, or [Cynthia.Au@Cancer.org](mailto:Cynthia.Au@Cancer.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Leading Causes of Death by Sex and Race/Ethnicity State of Hawaii, 2018-2022, Dec. 1, 2023  
<https://hhdw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leading-Cause-Death-RaceEth-Sex-2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Leading Causes of Death by Sex and Race/Ethnicity State of Hawaii, 2018-2022, Dec. 1, 2023  
<https://hhdw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leading-Cause-Death-RaceEth-Sex-2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Leading Causes of Death by Sex and Race/Ethnicity State of Hawaii, 2018-2022, Dec. 1, 2023  
<https://hhdw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leading-Cause-Death-RaceEth-Sex-2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Leading Causes of Death by Sex and Race/Ethnicity State of Hawaii, 2018-2022, Dec. 1, 2023  
<https://hhdw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leading-Cause-Death-RaceEth-Sex-2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>v v</sup> University of Hawaii Cancer Center <https://www.uhcancercenter.org/50years>

# Multiethnic study to reduce cancer disparities, promote equity

By Drs. Alika Maunakea, Loïc Le Marchand and S. Lani Park

Cancer is a complex disease that affects different ethnic groups in various ways, and studying these disparities can help develop effective prevention, early detection and treatment strategies to promote healthy lifestyles and health equity.

In Hawaii, cancer incidence and mortality rates have declined over the past decade, but cancer disparities remain a concerning issue. Native Hawaiians continue to have the highest cancer incidence and mortality rates among men and women and have higher incidences of breast and ovarian cancers. Similarly, Filipino Americans have high incidence rates for lung, colorectal and thyroid cancer and rapidly increasing rates of breast and prostate cancers.

National data typically aggregate health information for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, ignoring the cultural and lifestyle diversity of these groups and masking their

marked differences in cancer incidence and outcomes. Studies primarily conducted in Hawaii, using disaggregated data, have shown that known risk factors, such as tobacco use and obesity, do not fully account for cancer disparities alone.

Additional factors, such as social determinants of health — including income and social stress — and environmental and occupational exposures, may contribute to differences in cancer occurrence and survival rates. However, due to gaps in the available data, additional risk and protective factors that may drive cancer disparities remain unknown. Likewise, little is known regarding the biological mechanisms that explain these disparities.

To address these critical gaps, a new multiethnic study in Hawaii that includes representation from affected communities is urgently

## ISLAND VOICES



*Dr. Alika Maunakea, left, is a professor of epigenetics and health disparities at John A. Burns School of Medicine, and director of the Consortium of Research Advancement Facilities and Training; Dr. Loïc Le Marchand, center, is a researcher focusing on the role of biological and environmental factors of cancer; Dr. Lani Park's research focuses on genetic, health behavioral and environmental factors that contribute to the racial/ethnic differences in cancer risk.*

needed. The University of Hawaii Cancer Center is one of 71 National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers in the country and is uniquely positioned to conduct research on cancer disparities among Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Filipinos that cannot be easily conducted anywhere else in the world.

The Hawaii Legislature can support and help fund such a study, via House Bill 1301, which would help fill gaps in the available data

and provide a more comprehensive understanding of cancer risk and outcomes among different ethnic groups in the Islands. The multiethnic cohort study would focus on social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental and occupational exposures, as well as resilience factors among Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders and Filipinos.

If funded, this preliminary study would bolster chances of securing a National Institutes of Health grant and foster new valuable partnerships with communities to identify shared research priorities and support recruitment efforts. Findings from this multiethnic cohort study could lead to the development of culturally appropriate prevention and treatment strategies to reduce the risk of cancer-related health behaviors

and the occurrence of cancers. These strategies may be more effective as they are tailored to meet the specific needs of these communities, ultimately promoting health equity in Hawaii.

As researchers and advocates with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), we know that investing in the study of cancer disparities could ultimately reduce the burden of cancer in populations that have been underserved and underrepresented by bringing new insights into the social, environmental and biological factors that lead to these disparities. Thus, this study will ultimately provide Hawaii public health practitioners and the community with the necessary data to advance health equity for Filipinos, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

We urge Hawaii legislators to support and fund the feasibility study by the UH Cancer Center, a critical step in building a future where all communities in Hawaii have an equal opportunity to prevent, detect and survive cancer.

[CommunityVoice](#)

# More Data Needed To Help Reduce Cancer Disparities

House Bill 1301 would fund a study that focuses on Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders and Asian communities in Hawaii.

By [Patricia Kalolaine Cornett](#)

March 17, 2023 · 3 min read



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Cancer disparities are a significant public health issue in Hawaii, and our state legislators have the chance, and kuleana, to take a vital step toward helping everyone have a fair and just opportunity to prevent, detect, treat and survive cancer.

Cancer affects everyone but it does not affect everyone equally. Breast cancer incidence and mortality are highest among Native Hawaiian women compared to any other racial or ethnic group in Hawaii. American Samoan men are **eight times more likely** to develop liver cancer.



The most recent Hawaii Cancer at a Glance report (2014-2018) indicates that lung and bronchus cancer incidence among males is highest among Native Hawaiian and Filipinos. And Filipinos have the highest proportions of late-stage prostate cancers.

I am a breast cancer survivor, so I know screenings can help detect cancer at an earlier stage and save lives. As part of my journey and my work as a health-care worker, I'm committed to helping women get their mammograms and will drive them to their appointment and then back home.

In 2021, I was sitting on my chemo chair when I noticed that among the people who were receiving treatment, I was the only Tongan.

**Top Cancer Sites for Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders (1998-2002)**

Cancer Incidence Rates per 100,000 - Men (1998-2002) *							
Cancer	Native Hawaiian	Samoan	Tongan	Non-Hispanic White (NHW)	Native Hawaiian/NHW Ratio	Samoan/NHW Ratio	Tongan/NHW Ratio
All Sites	531.6	566.7	428.8	587.0	0.9	1.0	0.7
Colorectal	65.7	43.1	--	65.6	1.0	0.7	--
Liver & IBD	16.3	54.5	--	6.7	2.4	8.1	--
Lung	109.8	111.9	107.0	89.2	1.2	1.3	1.2
Prostate	119.7	144.1	85.0	170.0	0.7	0.8	0.1
Stomach	18.8	53.0	--	9.9	1.9	5.4	--

Cancer Incidence Rates per 100,000 - Women (1998-2002) *							
Cancer	Native Hawaiian	Samoan	Tongan	Non-Hispanic White (NHW)	Native Hawaiian/NHW Ratio	Samoan/NHW Ratio	Tongan/NHW Ratio
All Sites	488.5	472.0	504.7	448.5	1.1	1.1	1.1
Breast	175.8	102.5	118.0	145.2	1.2	0.7	0.8
Cervical	12.3	18.1	--	8.1	1.5	2.2	--
Colorectal	44.0	38.6	--	47.6	0.9	0.8	--
Lung	69.7	56.9	--	59.0	1.2	1.0	--
Stomach	14.5	--	--	4.3	3.4	--	--

\*IBD = Intrahepatic Bile Duct

Source: NCI 2008. Cancer Incidence and Mortality Patterns among Specific Asian and Pacific Islander Populations in the U.S.  
<http://seer.cancer.gov/publications/apicancer/index.html>

A screenshot from a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report.

“Where are my people and why am I the only one getting treatment?” I asked my husband.

So, I decided to look for them and was hired to reach out to my Tongan Community on the Koolau side, Waiahole, Kahaluu, Punaluu, Hauula, Kahuku, Laie and beyond, to share my story and the importance of mammograms with them.

I currently have an information booth that provides information to mostly Pacific Islander women about the University of Hawaii Cancer Center and how to get a mammogram. For many of them, this is the first time they have signed up to get screened for the first time in several years.

Cancer research also saves lives. It is thanks to a clinical trial that I am now in remission after being diagnosed with cancer for a second time. In addition to helping women get their mammograms, I talk to my community about how crucial cancer research and clinical trials are to help improve cancer outcomes.



## Cancer research also saves lives.

As an American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network volunteer, I understand that besides doctors and researchers, our elected officials also play a pivotal role in improving the lives of people with cancer and their families.

[House Bill 1301](#) aims to provide funds that will allow the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multiethnic cohort study that will focus on the different factors that contribute to higher incidence and higher mortality rates in certain cancers among Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, and Asian communities including Filipinos in Hawaii.

These are communities that face cultural, language and structural barriers to cancer care — including lack of transportation — and are largely understudied.

The collected data will help better understand cancer disparities and identify gaps in cancer prevention and care delivery that contribute to these disparities as well as how to address them.

In Hawaii, we believe in living pono. I urge our state lawmakers to honor this concept and approve the funding for the multiethnic study that can help end cancer as we know it, for everyone.

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Community Voices aims to encourage broad discussion on many topics of community interest. It's kind of a cross between Letters to the Editor and op-eds. This is your space to talk about important issues or interesting people who are making a difference in our world. Column lengths should be no more than

800 words and we need a photo of the author and a bio. We welcome video commentary and other multimedia formats. Send to [news@civilbeat.org](mailto:news@civilbeat.org). The opinions and information expressed in Community Voices are solely those of the authors and not Civil Beat.

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## Read this next:



### **Jonathan Okamura: Micronesians Are The Most Denigrated Group In Hawaii. We Need To Be More Concerned**

By Jonathan Y. Okamura · March 19, 2023 · 7 min read

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### About the Author



#### **Patricia Kalolaine Cornett**

Patricia Kalolaine Cornett is an outreach coordinator for the University of Hawaii Cancer Center. She is also a cancer survivor and a volunteer for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, the American Cancer Society's nonprofit and nonpartisan advocacy affiliate. Cornett serves on several community boards, including the Lauhi Foundation and the Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander R3 outreach collaborative group.



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**Kellen King**  
**Wailuku, 96793**

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

RE: **Strong Support of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.**

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

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Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kellen King and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I am in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

I care about the fight against cancer because we have many friends and family who have fought cancer. This fight is long and painful but we can chip away with this study to specifically help kama'aina.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Kellen King  
Wailuku, 96793

**Ms. Valerie Weiss**  
**6616 Alahele St Kapaa, HI 96746-9426**  
[valerieweiss31@gmail.com](mailto:valerieweiss31@gmail.com)

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

RE: **Strong Support of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.**

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

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Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

I am in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

As a cancer survivor (so far) I am fully aware that many cancer patients did not survive. We must have more research and study including a multi-ethnic cohort study at the UH Cancer Center.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Ms. Valerie Weiss  
6616 Alahele St Kapaa, HI 96746-9426  
[valerieweiss31@gmail.com](mailto:valerieweiss31@gmail.com)

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To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

RE: **Strong Support of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.**

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

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Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Danielle Spitz and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I am in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER. Mahalo!

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Ms. Danielle Spitz  
62 -2482 Anekona Pl  
Kamuela, HI 96743-7792  
[dspitzrealtor@gmail.com](mailto:dspitzrealtor@gmail.com)

**Ms. Mary Kelley**  
**4406 Puneer Rd**  
**Koloa, HI 96756-9636**  
[mkelley323@gmail.com](mailto:mkelley323@gmail.com)

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

RE: **Strong Support of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.**

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

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Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is (Name) and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I am in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Ms. Mary Kelley  
4406 Puneer Rd Koloa, HI 96756-9636  
[mkelley323@gmail.com](mailto:mkelley323@gmail.com)

**Miss Chelsea Gonzales**  
**502 Keawe St Honolulu, HI 96813-3102**  
[cjanegonzales47@gmail.com](mailto:cjanegonzales47@gmail.com)

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

RE: **Strong Support of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.**

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

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Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Chelsea Gonzales and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I am in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Miss Chelsea Gonzales  
502 Keawe St Honolulu, HI 96813-3102  
[cjanegonzales47@gmail.com](mailto:cjanegonzales47@gmail.com)

**Dr. Marsha Wellein**  
**95 -086 Waihonu PI**  
**Mililani, HI 96789-3331 [welleinmd@hotmail.com](mailto:welleinmd@hotmail.com)**

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

RE: **Strong Support of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.**

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

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Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Marsha Diane Akau Wellein and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I am in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Marsha Wellein  
95 -086 Waihonu PI Mililani, HI 96789-3331 [welleinmd@hotmail.com](mailto:welleinmd@hotmail.com)



Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

Hearing: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

**93 Petitions SUPPORT SB2722: Relating to Cancer**  
**First Petition Batch 93/163**

Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

Please find attached, the first batch of two submitted, 93 signed petition copies from a total of 163 signed petitions collected from communities across the state of Hawaii in **SUPPORT** of a multiethnic cohort study to collect data on the social determinants Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Asians including Filipinos contributing factors of cancer disparities for minority populations with high cancer rates in Hawaii - SB 2722: Relating to Cancer.

Please feel free to contact Cynthia Au, Government Relations Director - Hawaii Guam,  
[Cynthia.au@cancer.org](mailto:Cynthia.au@cancer.org) or 808.460.6109 with any questions.



Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

Hearing: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

**70 Petitions SUPPORT SB2722: Relating to Cancer**  
**Second Petition Batch 70/163**

Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

Please find attached, the second batch of two submitted, 70 signed petition copies from a total of 163 signed petitions collected from communities across the state of Hawaii in **SUPPORT** of a multiethnic cohort study to collect data on the social determinants Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and Asians including Filipinos contributing factors of cancer disparities for minority populations with high cancer rates in Hawaii - SB 2722: Relating to Cancer.

Please feel free to contact Cynthia Au, Government Relations Director - Hawaii Guam, [Cynthia.au@cancer.org](mailto:Cynthia.au@cancer.org) or 808.460.6109 with any questions.



**SB-2722**

Submitted on: 2/11/2024 8:22:36 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/13/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Bryan Johnson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong support of sb 2722. Cancer is PI community is often made worse by social disparities and lack of effective data.

**SB-2722**

Submitted on: 2/9/2024 8:11:20 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/13/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Vasconcellos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Mark Vasconcellos and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (optional- you can put your organization or affiliation in support of UH Cancer Center here). I am in **STRONG SUPPORT** of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

I'm a 3 time cancer survivor. I'm a 21 stage 3 cancer survivor of male breast cancer and non hodgekins lymphoma. And currently still cancer free from this. And 7 years stage 1 colon cancer. I went through chemotherapy and radiation and with only 1 kidney. I received 2 proclamations from Govenor Ige and Green. I humbly ask you to please kokiua.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the [leading](#) cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,

Mark Vasconcellos

Honolulu 96822



**SB-2722**

Submitted on: 2/12/2024 8:39:09 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/13/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ron Shimabuku	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Member of the Senate Committee on Higher Education,

I am testifying in SUPPORT of SB2722 - Relating to Cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I respectfully ask you to pass SB2722.

Mahalo,

Ron Shimabuku

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education

RE: Strong Support of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

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Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Michelle Hashimoto, a Pu'unui resident and long-time cancer fighter in my community. I grew up in Moanalua Valley and attended Moanalua High School and graduated from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I also advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center. As a *caregiver for my father who battled cancer, a concerned parent, and an active community member*, I am submitting testimony in STRONG **SUPPORT** of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

My 86-year old father was diagnosed with esophageal cancer a few months before his passing. Although he didn't pass from cancer, please know that through studies like the Multiethnic Cohort (MEC) study, lifesaving findings help folks like my father get diagnosed earlier as well as have more treatment options and **better health outcomes**. Our families and friends need your support for today and ... for our future which includes my two children who are now 19 and 22.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the [leading](#) cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Michelle Hashimoto  
2533 Stream Drive  
Honolulu, HI 96817  
(808) 741-5854

**SB-2722**

Submitted on: 2/12/2024 2:57:44 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/13/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Anamalia Su'esu'e	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Anamalia Su'esu'e and I am in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

My father came to Hawaii in 1976 from American Samoa in pursuit of higher education. He spent his life serving and working with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders here in Hawaii, many years of which was spent as a teacher in our middle and high schools. My father passed away from cancer in 2020. We need more research on cancer and NHPI, especially in outcomes given how rampant cancer disparities are among NHPI.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Ana Su'esu'e  
Hauula, 96717

**LATE**

**SB-2722**

Submitted on: 2/12/2024 6:57:48 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/13/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Chelsea Gonzales	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Senate Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Chelsea Gonzales and I've been a long time advocate with the American Cancer Society, Cancer Action Network.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals. Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery. I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

**LATE**

**SB-2722**

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 8:50:20 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/13/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laurie Chun	Testifying for Friends of University of Hawaii Cancer Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Laurie Chun and I am an advocate for the Friends of the University of Hawaii Cancer Center. I am in **STRONG SUPPORT** of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

I am a fourth-generation Chinese American. My family has been affected by cancer in multiple generations.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the [leading](#) cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your **SUPPORT** of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,

Laurie Chun

Honolulu, HI 96817



**LATE**

Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rex Chang and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I am the current President of the Friends of the UH Cancer Center. I am in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

As a family supporter of a relative that has gone through the battle with cancer, I know firsthand the devastating effects that cancer can have. A cancer diagnosis is life altering for the individual as well as family and friends.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the [leading](#) cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii will help to reduce cancer disparities in cancer prevention and care delivery.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,

Rex Chang

Honolulu, 96822

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of Senate Committee on Higher Education



RE: VERY STRONG Support of SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

Hrg: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 3:01 pm, Conference Room 229

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Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Monica McLaren and I have served on the Friends of UH Cancer Center board for 8 years. The Friends is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to support and promote the efforts of the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center in its efforts to find cures for cancer, to educate the people of Hawai'i on cancer prevention and to improve the quality of life of those diagnosed with cancer. We are and represent the community that UHCC and the Hawaii legislature serves.

To fulfill our mission and goal, the Friends is actively involved in and deeply understands Center programs and their effect. Having seen the positive local and global effects of the 50+ year old Multiethnic study that UHCC spearheaded, I very **STRONGLY SUPPORT** SB 2722 – RELATING TO CANCER.

The Friends has seen UHCC's mission and vision up close and in practice. Both are based on respect and incorporation of the unique cultural context of Hawai'i and the commitment that scientific and medical goals resonate with the community we serve.

UHCC can only achieve that mission and vision by collecting and understanding data from communities in Hawaii. UHCC, one of only 72 research organizations in the U.S. designated by the National Cancer Institute and the only one in the Pacific is an incredible local resource that we MUST use to the fullest to eradicate cancer, particularly in our local ethnic groups who disproportionately suffer that burden.

I ask for your SUPPORT of SB 2722 for state funding of \$1 million over two years of a multi-ethnic cohort study by the UHCC of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Monica McLaren  
Honolulu, 96822