

**LATE**

EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS  
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

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

JUN YANG  
GOVERNOR'S HOMELESS COORDINATOR  
STATEWIDE OFFICE ON  
HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING SOLUTIONS

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

1:10 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 225, and Videoconference

**In Support**

**House Bill No. 212 HD2, RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS**

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

The Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions (SOHHS) supports H.B.212 HD2, Relating to Homelessness. We respectfully ask for your favorable consideration of this bill.

With only \$50,000 in funding per year, the Return to Home Pilot Program has sent 137 out-of-state homeless people back to their families on the mainland. This program saves Hawaii taxpayers \$11.2 million (Governor Green's State of the State addresses the cost of caring for a homeless person not in stable housing at an average of \$82,000 per person per year). The program sunsets on January 1, 2026.

Thank you, Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Committee Members, for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of **House Bill 212 HD2**. I am grateful for your consideration in passing this important measure and look forward to its potential positive impact on our community while reuniting the homeless with their families on the mainland and saving Hawaii taxpayers millions of dollars.

While the issue of homelessness remains, Hawaii has made significant strides. In 2024, SOHHS set new priorities, including the ambitious goal of halving unsheltered homelessness during Governor Green's Administration's first term (by November 2026). This would mean transitioning approximately 2,200 (chronically homeless) people from the streets or remote areas to a home. Several of SOHHS's priorities focus on expanding the deeply affordable housing inventory for houseless individuals as well as affordable rental units for individuals, couples, and families who are not homeless, but are facing housing instability (potentially becoming homeless) due to the high costs of living in Hawaii.

**JON N. IKENAGA**  
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**HB212 HD2 RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS**

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

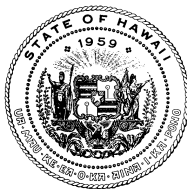
The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) **SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

As the mission of the OPD is to assist indigent defendants before all courts, our office advocates on behalf of individuals experiencing homelessness with regularity. Deputy Public Defenders represent individuals who are charged with all levels of crime, many of which intersect with mental health, addiction, and homelessness.

For individuals who request to participate in this program and have ongoing hearings before the court, it will be necessary to coordinate information between the office of homelessness and the OPD.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH B. GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII  
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA  
MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I



KATHERINE AUMER, PhD  
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON  
LUNA HO'OMALU O KA PAPA

STATE OF HAWAI'I  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH  
P.O. Box 3378, Room 256  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96801-3378

**LATE**

**STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH**  
**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**  
**COMMENTING ON H.B. 212 HD2**  
**RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS**  
**March 12, 2025 1:10 p.m., Room 225 and Video**

**CHAIRPERSON**

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**1<sup>st</sup> VICE CHAIRPERSON**

Kathleen Merriam, LCSW  
CSAC

**2<sup>nd</sup> VICE CHAIRPERSON**

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Kristin Will, MACL, CSAC

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Marian Tsuji, Deputy Director  
Behavioral Health  
Administration

**WEBSITE:**

scmh.hawaii.gov

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doh.hawaii.gov

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

Hawaii law, HRS §334-10, established the State Council on Mental Health (SCMH) as a 21-member body to advise on the allocation of resources, statewide needs, and programs affecting more than one county as well as to advocate for adults with serious mental illness, children with serious emotional disturbances, individuals with mental illness or emotional problems, including those with co-occurring substance abuse disorders. Members are residents from diverse backgrounds representing mental health service providers and recipients, students and youth, parents, and family members. Members include representatives of state agencies on mental health, criminal justice, housing, Medicaid, social services, vocational rehabilitation, and education. Members include representatives from the Hawaii Advisory Commission on Drug Abuse and Controlled Substances and county service area boards on mental health and substance abuse.

The State Council on Mental Health (SCMH) appreciates the intent of HB212 HD1 to reunite individuals with their families, recognizing its potential to bring hope and stability to those in need. However, we must ensure that efforts to address homelessness and mental health challenges do not inadvertently create new hardships for individuals with serious mental illness and/or co-occurring conditions.

- While this initiative could be beneficial, its success depends on ensuring that participation remains entirely voluntary and that individuals receive adequate support at every stage—beginning with a warm handoff to their families and continuing with access to long-term treatment and recovery services in their respective destinations.

Without these safeguards, there is a risk of replacing one difficult situation with another that could further destabilize individuals in crisis.

- Hawaii's mental health system is already operating beyond capacity. The Big Island experiences an influx of individuals seeking services during the winter months, stretching providers' ability to meet demand. Some of these individuals are experiencing their first diagnosis or initial mental health episode, and for them, assistance in returning home could be a critical intervention. However, we must recognize that family reunification alone does not guarantee sustained recovery. Many families face challenges in providing long-term care, and there is a need to assess how many reunions result in lasting stability versus repeated crises.
- Furthermore, while addressing the needs of those already in Hawaii is important, we must also take proactive steps to prevent further strain on the state's mental health system. A comprehensive approach should include prevention strategies to reduce the number of individuals who arrive in Hawaii without adequate resources.
- Finally, we urge that any implementation of this initiative include mechanisms for tracking outcomes. Collecting data on the effectiveness of reunification efforts will be critical in assessing their impact and making necessary improvements. Evidence-based approaches will ensure that we are not only providing immediate assistance but also working toward long-term solutions that support individuals with mental health conditions and the communities they return to.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony. We appreciate your commitment to addressing these complex issues and welcome ongoing dialogue on improving mental health care and support in Hawaii. Should you have any questions, please contact us at [DOH.SCMHChairperson@doh.hawaii.gov](mailto:DOH.SCMHChairperson@doh.hawaii.gov)

VISION: A Hawaii where people of all ages with mental health challenges can enjoy recovery in the community of their choice.

MISSION: To advocate for a Hawaii where all persons affected by mental illness can access necessary treatment and support to live full lives in the community of their choice.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.  
*Mayor*

William V. Brilhante Jr.  
*Managing Director*

Merrick Nishimoto  
*Deputy Managing Director*



Kehaulani M. Costa  
*Housing Administrator*

Keiko M. Mercado  
*Assistant Housing Administrator*

**County of Hawai'i**  
**Office of Housing and Community Development**

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March 10, 2025

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 212, HD2**  
**A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS**  
**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Sen. Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

Sen. Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Wednesday, March 12, 2025, at 1:10 PM

Place of Hearing: Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

Aloha Honorable Chairs San Buenaventura and Aquino, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

On behalf of the County of Hawai'i Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), I am pleased to provide testimony in **strong support** of **House Bill 212, HD3**, which aims to establish a permanent Return-to-Home Program to assist homeless individuals in Hawai'i with successful family and/or support group reunification.

The pilot program established under Act 94 in 2023 has already demonstrated considerable success in reconnecting over one hundred individuals with their families and communities. This success proves that the Return-to-Home Program offers a viable, dignified, and cost-effective solution to the issue of homelessness by providing those who wish to return home with the support they need to do so. By helping individuals reconnect with their support networks, the program not only alleviates the strain on local resources but also offers individuals the opportunity to rebuild their lives in familiar and supportive environments.

Expanding this program into a permanent, statewide initiative with proper funding will ensure that more individuals have the opportunity to return home, where they can access the help and community they need to overcome the challenges of homelessness. We have seen, through this pilot, that individuals are more likely to succeed in their transition when they have the support of family and a clear path forward.

Additionally, I want to encourage the allocation of funding directly to the counties to further enhance the effectiveness of this program.



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A local allocation of funds will allow counties to make decisions about how to best integrate the Return-to-Home Program with their existing resources and partnerships, ensuring that every dollar is used where it will have the greatest impact. This approach will maximize the program's success by fostering collaboration between state agencies, nonprofits, and local governments, all working together toward a common goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of HB 212, HD2. Passage of this measure is a critical part of Hawaii's ongoing efforts to address homelessness through compassionate, community-based solutions.

Mahalo,



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Kehaulani M. Costa  
Housing Administrator



The Institute for Human Services, Inc.  
Ending the Cycle of Homelessness

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

**FROM:** Angie Knight, Community Relations Manager  
IHS, Institute for Human Services, Inc.

**RE:** HB212 HD2 - RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS

**DATE:** March 11, 2025

**POSITION:** IHS supports the passing of HB212 HD2.

IHS, The Institute for Human Services, has operated a homeless relocation program since 2015. The pilot program originated with seed funds from the Hawaii Tourism and Lodging Association and other private funders to address the many transient homeless encountered in Waikiki; then was awarded the contract for OHHS's Return to Home Statewide Program.

We support the passing of HB212 HD2, which not only makes the program a permanent and expected cost of OHHS but **also includes the provision for 1 FTE position**, which is critical in the continued success and growth of this program. From the start of the Statewide contract, February 1, 2024 to the end of Jan. 2025 with a staff member splitting time between Return to Home and general outreach duties, 137 individuals were reunited with loved ones and programs to further them in their pursuit of stable, permanent housing outside of Hawai'i.

Over the years, we have seen an uptick in the number of out-of-state visitors in our outreach and shelter programs and this would save our State much more in benefit and healthcare dollars. Currently, over 60% of new intakes at our men's shelter are recent arrivals from out-of-state. Moreover, over the past year, we've seen an increase in demand for relocation services for individuals receiving care at behavioral health crisis centers and our own triage and treatment center, individuals voluntarily wishing to participate in in-patient programs in the mainland. A partnership with Waikiki community partners has also helped identify more candidates for this program more efficiently.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

**HB-212-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 9:55:29 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/12/2025 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jillian Anderson	Testifying for Waikiki Neighborhood Board	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

The Waikiki Neighborhood Board stands in **support** of HB212 HD2.

As homelessness continues to be a concern not just in Waikiki but statewide, it is critical we invest in programs that have shown success in helping individuals find housing solutions. In its pilot, the return-to-home program sent 137 out-of-state individuals back to their families on the mainland. The effects of this have been felt in Waikiki, which is a common destination for our out-of-state homeless population.

Providing permanency in staffing and funding will allow the return-to-home program to continue its effective efforts. We must grow upon the immense qualitative and quantitative successes this program has been able to achieve and most importantly — to be able to reunite more individuals with their families in the state they initially called home.

The Waikiki Neighborhood Board asks for your continued support of this measure which would greatly benefit our community.



**Committee on Health and Human Services  
Hawai'i State Legislature**

Subject: Testimony in Strong Support of HB212 – Return to Home Program

Dear Chair San Buenaventura and Vice Chair Aquino,

My name is Nora Hull and I am a Masters of Social Work student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and student intern at The Queen's Medical Center. The views I will express are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of the University or QMC. I am writing to express my **strong support for HB212**, which seeks to provide eligible unhoused individuals with assistance in being reunited with family and relatives in the individual's home state.

As a social work student in the emergency room, I witness the complex challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness everyday; many of whom moved to Hawai'i on a whim and lack the resources to reconnect with existing supports in a familiar environment. The Return-to-Home Program has already proven successful in reuniting individuals with their loved ones, offering them a path to stability outside of homelessness in Hawaii. Making this program permanent will ensure continued support for those who seek to return home, while freeing up resources for kama'āina who experience housing insecurity. Additional funding for the program will also allow individuals to find long-term solutions, lowering the state's expenditures on emergency care.

With the committee's support of HB212, the Return to Home Program will continue to serve as an example of a thoughtful and humane approach to reducing homelessness in Hawai'i.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nora Hull

**HB-212-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 3:29:40 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/12/2025 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Denise Boisvert	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY SUPPORT this bill. Please pass it. The amount of time, money, and services provided to a single transient each year is exorbitant. Re-homing many who end up in Hawaii would save money in the long run.

**HB-212-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 3:10:29 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/12/2025 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kim Jorgensen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

As a long-term resident of Waikiki, I am in FULL SUPPORT of this bill. I see many people who live on the streets, in the parks, and along the Ala Wai Canal; and often some look like they have relatively recently arrived to Hawaii. Hawaii's financial resources are limited so their families and other states's resources should be responsible to help them.

**HB-212-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 8:45:38 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/12/2025 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jan K Baldado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support HB 212 HD2.

Mahalo nui.

**HB-212-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 12:13:22 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/12/2025 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ellen Godbey Carson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

I support this Return-to-Home program as one of the reasonable steps to help re-house people who come to live in our islands but find they cannot afford to live here. Their lives are torn apart when they become homeless, and they have no reasonable path here to be able to support themselves. This program offers a humane solution of finding family on the Continent who agree to support them and house them, so they can stabilize their lives and become self-sufficient citizens once more.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Ellen Godbey Carson

**HB-212-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 6:19:47 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/12/2025 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

STRONG STRONG SUPPORT!!! MAHALO!



March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Hearing Time: March 12<sup>th</sup> at 1:10 PM  
Location: State Capitol  
Re: HB212 HD2 Relating to Homeless

**LATE**

Aloha e Chair Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the Committee:

We are writing **to offer comments on** HB212 HD2 Relating to Homelessness.

This bill will establish the return-to-home program on a permanent basis, and appropriate funds for the program's continued operations.

The appropriation of funds will have a FTE position established to assist and supervise the program. Given the limited manpower to ensure the success of this permanent program, HDC wishes to highlight the importance of resourcing and leveraging modern data systems to streamline program operations and allow for tracking of outcomes and impacts on the population over time.

Hawai'i Data Collaborative (HDC) firmly believes that data informs our understanding of what's happening, why it's happening, and what we can do about it. Data helps identify opportunities, guide decisions, and create systems of accountability so we, as a community, can achieve better outcomes for all. Because HDC's focus is to improve the household need space, we partner with government, philanthropy, and community based organizations (CBO) to improve the data ecosystem in Hawai'i.

**Thank you for your time and consideration.**

Nicholas Redding  
Executive Director  
Hawai'i Data Collaborative