



**Papa Ola Lokahi**  
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**House Committee on Health**

Representative Gregg Takayama, Chair

Representative Sue Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair

March 21, 2025, 9:30 a.m.

**Re: HCR185** – REQUESTING THE AUDITOR TO CONDUCT A SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED MANDATORY HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR NATIVE HAWAIIAN HEALING AND CULTURAL PRACTICES OFFERED THROUGH FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS

**Position:** Comment

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and members of the committee,  
Papa Ola Lōkahi (POL) appreciates the opportunity to testify on **HCR185**, which requests the auditor to conduct a social and financial assessment of proposed mandatory health insurance coverage for Native Hawaiian healing and cultural practices offered through federally qualified health centers. We **respectfully provide comments** for your consideration.

Papa Ola Lōkahi was established in 1988 through the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act (Public Law 100-579). Our organization was charged in this federal and other state-level legislation to carry out [myriad kuleana](#). Among our responsibilities, POL supports and advocates for traditional Native Hawaiian healers and their practices as protected by both federal and state laws and as recognized by kupuna councils.

We appreciate that this resolution recognizes the role Native Hawaiian traditional healing has played in the health and well-being of kānaka maoli. However, we are concerned with the difficulty of implementing this kind of reimbursement of coverage. Reimbursement would very likely require both diagnosis and treatment codes, documentation and monetary payment, all of which may run contrary to many traditional healing practices.

Conversations about insurance coverage and reimbursement of traditional Native Hawaiian healing practices have been intertwined with certification and regulation discussions for more than 30 years. Because of this, it's critical to recognize that we, as a community, cannot discuss or

*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.*

execute one without the other. Any assessment must include deep understanding of Hawaiian culture and history as well as the inclusion of meaningful community input. Additionally, many healers in our community believe these discussions must begin with them and not the State. We agree.

For these reasons, **we respectfully suggest that this committee pause and defer this resolution** until Native Hawaiian traditional healing communities can discuss at greater length the proposal set forth in HB641 and provide feedback to the State Legislature. We believe that these conversations must happen before it is ripe to pass a resolution or bill.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on HCR185. If you have any further questions, please contact our Director of Policy & Strategy, Ke'ōpū Reelitz at [kreelitz@papaolalokahi.org](mailto:kreelitz@papaolalokahi.org).



**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH**

DATE: Friday, March 21, 2025  
TIME: 9:35 AM  
PLACE: Conference Room 329  
State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HCR 185**

REQUESTING THE AUDITOR TO CONDUCT A SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED MANDATORY HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR NATIVE HAWAIIAN HEALING AND CULTURAL PRACTICES OFFERED THROUGH FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS.

Honorable Chair Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and members of the committee:

Waimānalo Health Center (WHC) is a federally qualified health center, serving the Ko'olaupoko community since 1992, with comprehensive health services. Native Hawaiian Healing services were initiated in 2015 at the request of the community and WHC Board of Directors. Soon after initiating services and currently, WHC received(s) reimbursement from three Medicaid health plans covering lomilomi, lā'au lapa'au, 'ai pono, and hula. Our Mala Ho'ola (healing garden) supports our lā'au lapa'au program by growing and harvesting our own native plants and our Anoni'akahi program trains interested individuals to be licensed as lomilomi practitioners. There is high interest in these services and WHC is committed to delivering these services with a focus on improving the health and wellbeing of those served.

Waimānalo Health Center (WHC) supports HCR 185 requesting the Auditor to conduct an impact assessment report in accordance with sections 23-51 and 23-52, Hawaii Revised Statutes, of mandating health insurance coverage for Native Hawaiian healing and cultural practices offered through federally qualified health centers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Mary Frances Oneha, Chief Executive Officer

**HCR-185**

Submitted on: 3/20/2025 9:50:01 AM

Testimony for HLT on 3/21/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Vasconcellos	Hana Health	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Located in Maui County, the moku (district) of Hana (Census tract 301) is one of the most isolated, rural areas in the state of Hawaii. Hāna Health is a Federally Qualified Health Center serving as the “safety net” provider for the medically underserved population of this remote district. Approximately 2,000 people live in the Hana District, with Native Hawaiians and part Hawaiians making up almost 75% of the population. Overall, Hana District residents, have a high-risk health profile resulting in the onset of preventable chronic health conditions and premature death.

Returning to more traditional practices which are linked to the primary health and support services already provided by Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC's) can help to restore good health to our community members. The cost of providing these services is just one of the barriers FQHC's face when working to address the social and cultural issues impacting our patients.

We are pleased to support HCR185 as an important step in improving access to services that are acceptable and desired by the people we serve. Thank you.

**HCR-185**

Submitted on: 3/20/2025 12:24:11 PM

Testimony for HLT on 3/21/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cassie Savell	Malama I Ke Ola Health Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Cassie Savell and I serve as the Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Chief Executive Officer at Mālama I Ke Ola Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) on Maui dedicated to serving our community, including a large Native Hawaiian population. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HCR185, which seeks to expand access to Native Hawaiian healing practices through insurance coverage and reimbursement for services.

As a healthcare provider in the Maui community, we see firsthand, the disparities that Native Hawaiians face in accessing culturally relevant care and how culturally aligned care leads to better health outcomes. Traditional Hawaiian healing practices such as lomilomi, lā‘au lapa‘au, ho‘oponopono, and other indigenous modalities offer holistic, patient-centered approaches that are deeply rooted in cultural identity and well-being that effectively improve health outcomes for Native Hawaiians.

Despite the benefits of these practices, the lack of insurance coverage often creates a financial barrier for patients, preventing many from accessing the care they need. Expanding insurance coverage for Native Hawaiian healing services is a crucial step toward health equity and healing in our community.

By passing HCR185, the Legislature has the opportunity to support a more inclusive healthcare system, one that recognizes the importance of culturally competent care that strengthens the overall health outcomes of Native Hawaiians.

I respectfully urge the committee to advance HCR185 and ensure that Native Hawaiian healing practices are accessible to all who seek them.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Cassie Savell, DHSc, MHA, MBA

Chief Operating Officer / Deputy CEO

Mālama I Ke Ola Health Center





March 20, 2025

**To:** Chair Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee on Health

**Date:** Friday, March 21, 2025 **Time:** 9:30 a.m.

**Place:** Via Videoconference and Conference Room 329

**Subject:** Testimony in Strong Support of HCR185 - Health Insurance coverage for Native Hawaiian healing and cultural practices

Aloha Chair Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee,

The Health Committee of the Democratic Party of Hawaii strongly supports HCR185, which requests the Auditor to conduct a social and financial assessment of proposed mandatory health insurance coverage for Native Hawaiian healing and cultural practices offered through federally qualified health centers (FQHCs). This measure is crucial in addressing health disparities and promoting culturally responsive care that aligns with the unique needs and values of Native Hawaiian communities.

**Key Points in Support:**

**1. Supporting Cultural Competence in Healthcare:**

- Native Hawaiian healing and cultural practices, such as lomi lomi massage, la‘au lapa‘au (herbal medicine), and ho‘oponopono (traditional conflict resolution), have long been integral to the health and well-being of Native Hawaiian communities.
- Ensuring insurance coverage for these culturally rooted practices promotes equitable access to care that is respectful of Hawaii’s cultural heritage and traditions.

**2. Improving Health Equity for Native Hawaiians:**

- Native Hawaiians experience disproportionate rates of chronic diseases, mental health challenges, and other health disparities.

- Expanding coverage for Native Hawaiian healing practices addresses these disparities by providing culturally aligned care that fosters trust and improves health outcomes.

**3. Leveraging Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs):**

- FQHCs play a vital role in providing accessible healthcare to underserved populations. By integrating Native Hawaiian healing practices into FQHC services, this measure enhances the comprehensiveness and cultural responsiveness of care.
- Mandatory insurance coverage ensures that patients at FQHCs can access these practices without financial barriers.

**4. Assessing Social and Financial Impacts:**

- Conducting a thorough social and financial assessment is critical to understanding the broader benefits and feasibility of expanding coverage for Native Hawaiian healing practices.
- This assessment will provide valuable data to guide policymaking, ensuring that any proposed changes are informed, sustainable, and effective.

**5. Honoring Hawaii's Cultural Heritage:**

- HCR185 reinforces Hawaii's commitment to honoring its Indigenous heritage and promoting healthcare solutions that reflect the state's unique cultural identity.
- Supporting Native Hawaiian healing practices sets an example for other states in prioritizing culturally responsive and community-centered care.

HCR185 represents a pivotal step in advancing health equity, cultural competence, and holistic care for Hawaii's residents. We commend the Legislature for its vision and leadership on this important issue and urge the passage of this measure to ensure that Native Hawaiian healing practices are accessible to all who can benefit from them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this measure.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Burdick, Chair

Melodie Aduja, Vice Chair

Health Committee of the Democratic Party of Hawaii



**HCR-185**

Submitted on: 3/21/2025 10:09:34 AM

Testimony for HLT on 3/21/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louella Vidinha	Leeward Massage therapy center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm in strong support of this bill.

I'm a native Hawaiian Health practiser.

In practice continually since 1993.

I've seen and helped countless patients as an independent practitioner and would love to expand my practice to help others.

It's a proven technique over these past 30 years now.

Thank you,

Louella Vidinha

Leeward Massage Therapy Center

Aiea, Hawaii

**HCR-185**

Submitted on: 3/18/2025 6:58:47 PM

Testimony for HLT on 3/21/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Wailua Brandman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support.

**HCR-185**

Submitted on: 3/18/2025 11:53:48 PM

Testimony for HLT on 3/21/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leimomi Khan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Fully support. The Waianae and Waimanalo Health Care Centers are good sources for information on the positive effects of treatment of medical conditions by Native Hawaiian healing practices, such as lomilomi massage, ‘ai pono, la‘au lapa‘au, and ho‘oponopono; and even hula and canoe paddling.

**HCR-185**

Submitted on: 3/19/2025 8:37:16 PM

Testimony for HLT on 3/21/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
B.A. McClintock	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this important bill. Mahalo.

Aloha members of the Health Committee,

My name is Keo Ohelo. I am here today to express my support for **HCR 185**, a resolution that is vital in safeguarding the cultural and environmental heritage of the Native Hawaiian community. Many community members have shared with me firsthand how traditional care has been effective throughout their lives—from using natural remedies like Olena cream to prevent childhood skin rashes to relying on traditional remedies for the common cold as well as lomilomi services for physical and muscle relief. I would like to utilize this testimony to express the support by Kanaka Maoli that tie these practices to our ancestral medicinal practices but also those who support the combination of spiritual alignment with the practices. We have seen Native Hawaiian health pathways underrepresented as the Native Hawaiian community make up high rates of diabetes, heart disease and cancer in high rates.

The Waimānalo Health Center is in touch, with the vast majority of our community affirming the effectiveness of native Hawaiian healing practices. These time-honored methods are not only culturally significant but also provide practical, accessible care that complements modern healthcare. They illustrate how deeply integrated indigenous healing is in our daily lives. Focused on wholistic well being Lā‘au Lapa‘au services and ‘ai pono have played effective roles in many native Hawaiians health.

I have recently worked in electoral politics assisting with voter mobilization outreach and coalition building with Indigenous and College voting groups. One of the clear mandates by native people in the 2024 election was solutions for indigenous advancement. According to Indian Health Services we have seen a groundbreaking expansion of health care pathways by the previous Biden administration. Particularly focused on Child Health Insurance Program as well as Medicare coverage for tribal facilities and services.

Moreover, HCR 185 aligns with national indigenous trends that emphasize the value of traditional practices and the inclusion of indigenous voices in policymaking. We have seen strong implementation of native healing practices with indigenous tribal nations in Alaska and New Mexico. These services have been proven to have satisfactory well being rates in regards to it's patients. By reinforcing native Hawaiian healing methods, we are part of a broader movement that promotes sustainable, culturally sensitive healthcare solutions. In light of **HCR 185** requesting an auditor to conduct an impact assessment it is vital to acknowledge the growing mistrust in the nations pharmaceutical industry and a growing interest for more natural pathways to health services. It is with boundless confidence and commitment to indigenous advancement that I support **HCR 185** requesting an auditor into the social and financial assessment of proposed mandatory health insurance coverage. In accordance with Hawai'i revised statutes.

I respectfully urge the committee to support **HCR 185**, ensuring that our community's time-tested practices continue to thrive and inspire future generations.