



March 31, 2025

**To:** Chair David A. Tarnas, Vice Chair Mahina Poepoe, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

**Date:** Tuesday, April 1, 2025 **Time:** 2:00 pm

**Place:** Via videoconference and Conference Room 325

**From:** Alan Burdick, Chair, Health Committee Melodie Aduja, Vice Chair, Health Committee

**Subject:** Testimony in Support of HCR185 - Health Insurance Coverage for Native Hawaiian Healing and Cultural Practices

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

The Health Committee of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, 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.

Hawai'i's unique cultural heritage is intertwined with Native Hawaiian healing practices, which have been proven to foster physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. These practices deserve recognition and inclusion in health insurance coverage to ensure equitable access and support for the communities that depend on them.

**Supporting Arguments:**

- **Promoting Equity in Healthcare:**
  - Native Hawaiian healing practices are essential for culturally appropriate healthcare, particularly for Native Hawaiian communities that face disparities in health outcomes.
  - Mandatory health insurance coverage for these practices would reduce barriers to accessing care and foster greater equity in healthcare delivery.

- **Integration of Proven Practices:**

- Many Native Hawaiian healing methods, including lomilomi (massage) and lā‘au lapa‘au (herbal medicine), have demonstrated positive effects on physical and emotional health.
- Recognizing these practices within the healthcare system complements modern medical approaches and promotes holistic care.

- **Economic and Social Benefits:**

- Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) are vital providers for underserved populations, and including Native Hawaiian practices would strengthen their capacity to serve the community effectively.
- A thorough financial assessment would provide valuable insights into the cost-efficiency and potential savings of incorporating cultural practices into healthcare plans.

- **Preservation of Native Hawaiian Culture:**

- Supporting Native Hawaiian healing practices through health insurance coverage would help preserve and perpetuate Hawai‘i’s cultural heritage.
- It affirms the state’s commitment to honoring and integrating cultural traditions into contemporary systems.

- **Data-Driven Policy Decisions:**

- A social and financial assessment conducted by the Auditor would ensure that policy decisions are informed by comprehensive data on utilization, costs, and community impact.
- This approach would support sustainable implementation while addressing any concerns about financial feasibility.

We commend the Committee for recognizing the importance of culturally rooted healthcare practices and their integration into health insurance coverage. The passage of **HCR185** would reflect Hawai‘i’s dedication to equity, cultural preservation, and holistic community health.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this critical resolution.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

Alan Burdick Chair, Health Committee

Melodie Aduja Vice Chair, Health Committee



**Papa Ola Lokahi**  
677 Ala Moana Blvd  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Phone: 808.597.6550 ~ [www.papaolalokahi.org](http://www.papaolalokahi.org)

**House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs**

Representative David Tarnas, Chair

Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

April 1, 2025, 2:00 p.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

*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.*

30 years. Because of this, it's critical to recognize that we, as a community, cannot discuss or 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).