

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

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

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KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N.S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the Senate Committee on
WAYS AND MEANS

Wednesday, April 2, 2025
10:01 AM

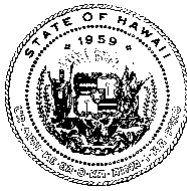
State Capitol Conference Room 211 and Videoconference

In Consideration of
HOUSE BILL 212 HOUSE DRAFT 2
RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS

House Bill 212 House Draft 2 creates a return to home program with the Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Supplemental Budget request.**

The Department supports the program being permanent and receiving regular funding. Changes made in the House Draft 1, including establishing a public-private partnership through contract to administer the program, as well as further defining who is eligible for this program and safeguards to be taken to ensure the person is returning to family or friends that will welcome this person home. Changes made to House Draft 2 ensure adequate staffing for the program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



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

STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
Testimony to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Commenting on HD 212 HD2
RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS
April 2, 2025 10:01 a.m., Room 311 and Video

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Behavioral Health Administration

WEBSITE:
scmh.hawaii.gov

EMAIL ADDRESS:
[doh.scmhchairperson@
doh.hawaii.gov](mailto:doh.scmhchairperson@doh.hawaii.gov)

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

Hawai'i law, HRS §334-10, established the State Council on Mental Health 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/MedQUEST, social services, vocational rehabilitation, and education. Members include representatives from the Hawai'i 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 HD2 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.

- Hawai'i'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. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please contact us at doh.scmhchairperson@doh.hawaii.gov

HB-212-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:46:47 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

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 — 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.



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

TO: Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz,
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Honorable Senator Sharon Moriwaki
Vice Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

RE: HB212 HD2 - RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS

DATE: March 31, 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: 3/27/2025 3:10:19 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

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 Hawai'i would save money in the long run.

HB-212-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/27/2025 3:15:36 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

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 Hawai'i. Hawai'i'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: 3/31/2025 2:07:57 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mavis Oliveira-Medeiros	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Senate Committee on Ways & Means,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT** of **HB 212 (HD2)**, which would require the Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions to establish a permanent Return-to-Home program to return homeless individuals to families and relatives in their home states.

I support this measure for the following reasons:

1. Maui County's homeless problem was exacerbated by the devastating fires of 2023, and many fear that with the emergency eviction moratorium expiring, things will only get worse. A January 2024 point-in-time count found that there were 654 homeless people on Maui. It is estimated that the average cost to care for a homeless person in Hawaii is \$82,000 per year. Making this program permanent would help to reduce the strain on local resources.
2. Returning individuals to their home-states will give them the opportunity to access the services and family support they need to overcome the challenges of homelessness.
3. Hoping that you're aware that Maui County has very limited to zero help for many of the Mentally ill homeless victims who are sent to our County, possibly the whole State. Driving around Kahului area & others like one we just saw in Paia. They're walking around, some screaming obscenities, others just screaming at anyone who'll listen. It's really sad because it went from 1-6 of them a couple years ago, to a couple dozen at least. In the areas we travel. There's probably more on other parts of the island.

I would respectfully ask that an allocation of funds go directly to the counties. This would allow the counties to determine how to best integrate this program with existing, and potentially new, partnerships and resources.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB212 (HD2).

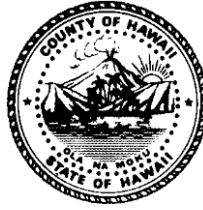
Mavis Oliveira-Medeiros

(808)866-7409

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

1990 Kino'ole Street, Suite 102 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720 • (808) 961-8379 • Fax (808) 961-8685
Existing Housing: (808) 959-4642 • Fax (808) 959-9308
Kona: (808) 323-4300 • Fax (808) 323-4301

April 1, 2025

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 212, HD2
A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Sen. Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair

Rep. Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Wednesday, April 2, 2025, at 10:01 AM

Place of Hearing: Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

Aloha Honorable Chairs Dela Cruz and Moriwaki, and members of the Committee on Ways and Means,

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, HD2**, which aims to establish a permanent Return-to-Home Program to assist homeless individuals in Hawai'i with successful family reunification.

The pilot program established under Act 94 in 2023 has already demonstrated considerable success in reconnecting over 100 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.

Expanding this program into a permanent, statewide initiative with proper funding will ensure that more individuals can return home, where they can access the help and community they need to overcome the challenges of homelessness.

As your Committee considers an appropriation for this valuable program, I want to encourage the allocation of funding directly to the counties to further enhance the effectiveness of this program.

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.



April 1, 2025

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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.

Mahalo,

Kehaulani M. Costa
Housing Administrator



HAWAI'I LODGING & TOURISM
ASSOCIATION

*Testimony of Mufi Hannemann
President & CEO
Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association*

*Senate Committee on Ways and Means
HB 212 HD2: Relating to Homelessness
April 02, 2025*

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association (HLTA)—which represent over 50,000 hotel rooms and nearly 40,000 lodging employees statewide—I am writing in strong support of HB 212, HD2, which would establish the Return-to-Home Program as a permanent, statewide initiative.

Since 2014, HLTA has played a key role in developing and coordinating repatriation efforts to assist homeless individuals who wish to return to their home states and reunite with family or support systems. Working with community-based organizations such as the Institute for Human Services on O'ahu, Kaua'i Economic Opportunity, Inc., and the Maui Family Life Center, we have helped implement and fund, through our foundation, return-to-home programs. Participants or their families paid half of the fare, with the remaining balance subsidized through the program.

This cost-sharing model was not only practical but essential. By requiring participants to invest in their own journey home—either through their own resources or support from loved ones—we saw a greater sense of ownership and accountability. It wasn't a free ticket; it was a commitment to change.

Another defining element of our success was the requirement that participants be received by a family member or someone they trust at their destination. This ensured that individuals were not being sent to another jurisdiction to continue the cycle of homelessness, but instead entered into a supportive environment where they had access to social services, stability, and care.

We are encouraged that HB212, HD2 incorporates these key provisions and builds on the momentum of the successful pilot program initiated by Act 94 (2023). Making this program permanent and providing funding for its administration will help formalize and expand a solution that has already demonstrated real results—a rare and welcome development in the complex challenge of homelessness.

Mahalo for your time and for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of HB212, HD2.

We commend your leadership and your continued efforts to support effective, compassionate responses to homelessness in our state.