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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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Testimony COMMENTING on SB1596
RELATING TO NURSING

SENATOR JOY SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date: February 5, 2025; 1:00 PM Room Number: 225

1 **Fiscal Implications:** N/A.

2 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health (DOH) requests deferral of this measure
3 due to the subversion of the authority of the State Board of Nursing.

4 Pursuant to section 457-5, Hawaii Revised Statutes, the State Board of Nursing is already
5 authorized to implement the intent of SB1242, including to:

- 6 • License qualified applicants by examination or endorsement;
- 7 • Provide consultation, conduct conferences, forums, studies, and research on nursing
8 education and practice;
- 9 • Authorize the administration of examinations to eligible applicants for licensure as
10 registered nurses or licensed practical nurses, or other examinations required by the
11 board as designated in its rules; and
- 12 • Employ, contract, and cooperate, to the extent allowable by law, with any board-
13 approved organization in the preparation and grading of an appropriate nationally
14 uniform examination.

15 This measure creates parallel, duplicative, and unnecessary authorities for DOH without the
16 necessary appropriations and resources to “equip each facility...with the technical and facility

1 requirements necessary for a Pearson VUE Authorized Test Center.” This proposed legal
2 mandate is also an inappropriate subsidy to a private sector entity which may be for-profit.

3 Furthermore, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing has publicly acknowledged on its
4 website that it is exploring technology that would allow candidates to take the NCLEX outside of
5 traditional test centers. Once implemented, this will achieve the intent of this measure without
6 additional costs to the State.

7 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

8 **Offered Amendments:** N/A.

9



**Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Wednesday, February 5, 2025 at 1:00 PM
Conference Room 225 and videoconference**

**By
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University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

TESTIMONY WITH COMMENTS on S.B. 1596

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the committee:

Thank you for hearing this measure. This measure requires the Department of Health to identify one facility in each of the counties of Hawai'i, Kaua'i, and Maui that has the capability to establish a Pearson VUE Authorized Test Center as a test site to administer a NCLEX for nurses; equip each facility identified with the technical and facility requirements necessary for a Pearson VUE Authorized Test Center; and submit an application for each facility to Pearson Education, Inc. to be authorized and contracted as a Pearson VUE Authorized Test Center. The Hawai'i State Center for Nursing (HSCN) appreciates the intent of this measure and offers comments.

The Hawai'i State Center for Nursing has long monitored access to the NCLEX exam for practical nursing (PN) and Registered Nursing (RN) candidates. This entry to practice exam is the qualifier for initial licensure as well as one of two options available to nurses who are seeking to reinstate their license after inactive licensure of five or more years.

Historically, Hawai'i has identified challenges to NCLEX access.

Prior to the initial COVID-19 pandemic response, Hawai'i had identified challenges in accessing the NCLEX exam for our state's residents as a barrier to entering practice. The Hawai'i State Center for Nursing and other organizations have identified that access to testing facilities for licensure-qualifying examinations was a barrier in 2019. As communicated on several instances to NCSBN by HSCN, Hawai'i further identified during the initial COVID-19 pandemic shutdown that access to NCLEX examinations was severely impacted. Gratefully, the response from NCSBN including shortening the test length, improved some of the delays our state's recent nursing graduates during that initial pandemic period.

Limited access to NCLEX as compared to US States and Washington D.C.

Hawai'i has the most limited NCLEX access in the nation. There is only one testing location in the state, located on the island of O'ahu. To compare Hawai'i to the United States, there are nine states that have only one testing site. However, Hawai'i is the only state in the nation that has no additional nearby testing sites (other US states or Canada). All states other than Hawai'i have four regionally accessible testing sites that can be accessed by ground and air transportation.

Available Pre-licensure Nursing Programs in Counties without NLCLEX testing location

The only NCLEX testing site is on the island of O'ahu. Pre-license programs for PN and RN education are on O'ahu, Maui, Hawai'i Island, and Kaua'i. Recent nursing graduates who are residents in islands other than O'ahu must fly to O'ahu or to other states or regions to take their exam.

The mission of the Hawai'i State Center is to engage in nursing workforce research, promote best practices and disseminate knowledge, cultivate a diverse and well-prepared workforce, support healthy work environments, champion lifelong learning, and strategically plan for sound nursing workforce policy.

Opportunities for Enhanced Access to NCLEX

NCSBN reports that the NCLEX licensure exam will soon be available for remote online proctoring. This will enable people to take the NCLEX exam in a private, uninterrupted location. Pearson VUE online testing decision tree¹, which details that required criteria for the online test include 1) computer passing the system requirements, 2) reliable internet service, 3) a quiet, private space to take the exam without interruptions, and 4) a willingness to consent to all of the online exam requirements including to accept monitoring in the test taker's personal space during the exam.

Hawai'i Initiatives that Support Access to NCLEX

Hawai'i's Connect Kākou initiative will improve statewide internet infrastructure by bringing high-speed internet to underserved communities. This will improve the likelihood that the internet requirements will be met across the many regions of the state. Additionally, the nursing academic-to-practice community is strong. Several initiatives coordinated by HSCN, including the Hawai'i Clinical Placement Collaborative and the Hawai'i Transition to Practice Program (which includes the Hawai'i Nurse Residency Program), reinforce a strong and collaborative relationship between nursing education and nursing practice. Through these initiatives, there has been informal discussions about this future online NCLEX test option in which both healthcare administrators and local educational institutions have stated a willingness to offer secure test-taking locations with strong internet connectivity should a test-taker not meet the testing requirements at their home.

HSCN supports the concept of regional access to this important test to the extent that the Advisory Board prioritized the topic in 2023. However, after years of analysis, exploration of opportunities, and communication with national and local stakeholders, HSCN has determined that the NCLEX online exam option has the greatest potential positive impact. While it is a different option than the one proposed, it has the likelihood of achieving the goal of this initiative. Further, pre-existing state initiatives like Connect Kākou and the strong nursing academic-practice partnerships will bolster potential success.

The Hawai'i State Center for Nursing commends the Legislature for addressing this topic and entertaining solutions that will improve the livelihood of our residents, by making nursing a more accessible career. Further, HSCN recognizes that emerging initiatives may achieve the same goal of this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify with comments on this measure.

¹ <https://home.pearsonvue.com/Test-Takers/Online-Testing-Decision-Tree>

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SB-1596

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 9:31:58 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/5/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anne Scharnhorst	Testifying for UH Maui College	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

As a Professor of Nursing at UHMC, I have watched for 18 years the emotional and fiscal strain having to travel to Oahu to take their nursing licensure exam has caused the graduating nursing students. This measure, or possibly an online option offered by the national Council of State Boards of Nursing, would address this longstanding issue.

I thank the legislature for addressing this topic and looking for solutions that will improve the livelihood of our residents, by making nursing this high-stakes testing experience fairer for neighbor island nursing students. I see the online option for NCLEX testing may achieve the same goal of this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.