



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT TO SENATE BILL 557
RELATING TO EARLY HEALTH

Senate Committee on Higher Education
Hawai'i State Capitol

February 6, 2025

3:05PM

Room 229

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) submits this testimony in **SUPPORT** of SB 557 which requires University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) to direct Huli Au Oli to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Molokai.

Native Hawaiians on Moloka'i, as well as the broader community, face significant health disparities, including limited access to essential healthcare services. The island's healthcare system has struggled for years with shortages of medical professionals, particularly physicians and dentists, which directly impacts the quality and accessibility of care. These shortages are exacerbated by geographic isolation, financial constraints, and limited opportunities for residents to pursue careers in healthcare.

This study is a critical step in identifying the barriers and challenges that prevent physicians and dentists from practicing on Moloka'i and understanding the unique needs of the island's population. By examining factors that influence recruitment and retention, the study will provide valuable data to inform targeted strategies and policies aimed at ensuring that Moloka'i has an adequate number of healthcare providers to meet the needs of its residents, particularly Native Hawaiians, who often experience the worst health outcomes in the state.

OHA believes this study will benefit the Native Hawaiian community on Moloka'i in several key ways:

1. **Identifying Key Barriers:** The study will provide insight into the specific challenges that prevent healthcare providers from establishing practice on Moloka'i. Whether related to infrastructure, cost of living, professional isolation, or other factors, understanding these barriers is the first step toward creating solutions that address the root causes of physician and dentist shortages.

2. **Enhancing Healthcare Access:** By identifying and addressing recruitment and retention challenges, this study can help ensure a more stable and sufficient healthcare workforce on Molokaʻi. Increased access to healthcare providers is critical for improving health outcomes for Native Hawaiians, who face higher rates of chronic diseases and other health disparities.
3. **Supporting Workforce Development:** The findings from the study could inform the development of workforce training programs that are specifically tailored to the needs of Molokaʻi. This could include efforts to train and recruit residents, particularly Native Hawaiians, into healthcare careers, which would contribute to long-term sustainability in the healthcare workforce on the island.
4. **Improving Health Equity:** A stable healthcare workforce on Molokaʻi will reduce the need for island residents to travel long distances for care, thus addressing an important barrier to healthcare access. By focusing on retention as well as recruitment, the study will help ensure that the healthcare system on Molokaʻi is not only adequately staffed but that providers are supported and incentivized to remain on the island, providing continuity of care for the community.

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs supports this study because it represents a proactive, evidence-based approach to addressing the healthcare disparities faced by Native Hawaiians and other underserved communities on Molokaʻi. By ensuring that healthcare providers are adequately recruited, supported, and retained on the island, we can help to build a more equitable healthcare system that meets the needs of the island's residents. For these reasons, OHA urges this committee to **PASS SB 557**. Mahalo nui for the opportunity to provide testimony.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
Thursday, February 6, 2025 at 3:05 p.m.

By

T. Samuel Shomaker, MD, Dean, and
Kelley Withy, MD, Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Community Health,
Hawaii/Pacific Basin Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Director

John A. Burns School of Medicine

And

Michael Bruno, Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 557 – RELATING TO HEALTH

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide COMMENTS on SB 557 which requires the University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) to direct Huli Au Oli to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Moloka'i.

We appreciate the intent of this measure and sympathize with the plight Moloka'i faces in terms of recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists to the island. This is a complex issue as there are multiple factors that must be researched such as demographics, economic sustainability, and the availability of infrastructure to support a medical or dental practice, to name a few. A research study of this nature requires coordination across multiple disciplines, institutions, and agencies, including JABSOM.

Additionally, we question the reason the funds are being directed to JABSOM as Huli Au Oli would be conducting the study. It may be more feasible to fund Huli Au Oli directly and allow that entity to conduct the study of physician and dentist recruitment on Moloka'i.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
S.B. NO. 557, RELATING TO HEALTH.

BEFORE THE:
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

DATE: Thursday, February 6, 2025 **TIME:** 3:05 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 229

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Candace J. Park, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Kim and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

This bill requires the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine to direct Huli Au Ola, a non-profit Area Health Education Center, to conduct a study on the recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists to serve the island of Molokai. The bill appropriates funds to be expended by the University of Hawaii at Manoa John A. Burns School of Medicine for this purpose.

If the intent of this bill is to award a grant pursuant to chapter 42F, Hawaii Revised Statutes, to Huli Au Ola to conduct a study on the recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists to serve the island of Molokai, we recommend the bill be amended as follows.

1. Amend section 2, page 1, line 16, through page 2, line 2, to read: "(a) [~~The university of Hawaii John A. Burns school of medicine shall direct~~] Huli Au Ola [~~to~~] shall conduct a study on the recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists to serve the island of Molokai."
2. Amend section 4, page 2, to read: "There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$175,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026, as a grant pursuant to chapter 42F, Hawaii Revised Statutes, for Huli Au Ola to study the recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists to serve the island of Molokai."

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Higher Education
Thursday, February 6, 2025; 3:05 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 229
Via Videoconference**

RE: SENATE BILL NO. 0718, RELATING TO HEALTH.

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill No. 0557, RELATING TO HEALTH.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines to over 150,000 patients each year who live in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

This measure, as received by your Committee, would appropriate \$175,000 in general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026, to require Huli Au Ola, the John A. Burns School of Medicine's Maui County Area Health Education Center, to conduct a study on the recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists to be located on and serve the Island of Molokai, and report to 2026 Hawaii State Legislature.

The State of Hawaii is experiencing a severe shortage of health care professionals in the workforce, especially in rural areas. Recent studies note that the current shortage of physicians is at 20% of the total full-time equivalent positions throughout the State. The shortage is especially severe in the fields of primary care, infectious diseases, colorectal surgery, pathology, general surgery, pulmonology, neurology, neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery, family medicine, cardiothoracic surgery, rheumatology, cardiology, hematology/oncology, and pediatric subspecialties of endocrinology, cardiology, neurology, hematology/oncology, and gastroenterology.

This is especially acute for the neighbor islands, where it is even more difficult to attract health care professionals to locate to rural, isolated communities.

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 0557

Thursday, February 6, 2025; 3:05 p.m.

Page 2

The HPCA believes that provision of additional resources for the John A. Burns School of Medicine to study the difficulties experienced in attracting and retaining physicians and dentists to the Island of Molokai will be critically instructive to find ways of bringing desperately needed health care professionals to the neighbor islands.

Accordingly, the HPCA urges your favorable consideration of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or eabe@hawaiipca.net.

February 5, 2025

Testimony in Support of SB 557, Relating to Health

Senate Committee on Higher Education

Thursday, February 6, 2025

3:05 pm

Conference Room 229

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Committee Members:

Hawaii Dental Service (HDS) strongly supports SB557, Relating to Health, because it will identify specific challenges and opportunities for organizations like ours to provide critical support in increasing access to quality dental care for Molokai residents.

Molokai faces distinct challenges in ensuring consistent healthcare access for its approximately 7,000 residents, 60% of whom are enrolled in Medicaid. While HDS has long been committed to bridging gaps in dental care across Hawaii, the core issue remains the absence of sustainable solutions for recruiting and retaining dentists on the island. Barriers such as limited infrastructure, unreliable air transportation, and an aging, shifting dental workforce continue to hinder access to care. HDS supports this study to examine the multiple factors influencing professional healthcare recruitment. Beyond assessing facilities, available physician and dentist positions, urgent care coverage, and supporting roles such as dental hygienists, dental assistants, and office staff, the study should also explore critical issues like transportation, housing, federal funding for health centers, and the financial challenges of operating a small dental practice.

Molokai faces provider shortages, particularly in specialties like endodontics and oral surgery. With only one specialist visiting periodically, residents must travel to Maui or other islands for specialized care. Effectively addressing these systemic challenges requires a deeper understanding and data-driven insights to inform more strategic and impactful collaborations with the State, community organizations, and healthcare partners.

This study will be instrumental in connecting Molokai residents with the quality dental care they deserve. Mahalo for considering SB557.



Dr. Diane S.L. Paloma
President and CEO
Hawaii Dental Service



MOLOKA'I DRUGS, INC.
EST. 1935

February 5, 2025

Testimony in SUPPORT for SB557: RELATING TO HEALTH

Dear Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education:

I am Kimberly Svetin, a Moloka'i native who attended Moloka'i public schools and returned home almost 20 years ago to manage our family-owned pharmacy. As a rural healthcare provider, access to high-quality healthcare services is our mission at Moloka'i Drugs. I am testifying in favor of SB557, which requires the University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) to direct Huli Au Oli to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Moloka'i.

Currently, **we have no Moloka'i-raised physicians practicing on island**; they have decided to practice elsewhere. We have a double board-certified doctor in genitourinary pathology and dermatopathology practicing at Massachusetts General Hospital and teaching at Harvard Medical School. Another top adolescent psychiatrist who is a Moloka'i High alumna practices in Honolulu. We also have three Moloka'i doctors working in Texas—two Kamehameha Schools' graduates and one Moloka'i High alumnus.

The late physician, Noa Emmett Aluli, was my doctor. Since his passing two years ago, I am now on my fourth primary care physician. It is very difficult to retain physicians unless you offer housing or discounted housing; medical school student loan repayment; and respectable salaries.

I am not sure you know that for the bulk of Moloka'i residents, it now costs about \$215.00 for one dental cleaning. In 2024, we had four dentists. As of January 1, 2025, we have two dentists and one locum, or temporary dentist. Two of our three dentists no longer accept any dental insurance. The Moloka'i Community Health Center accepts dental insurance but it is as much as a five-month wait for a cleaning. We pay for 100% of the dental premium for my staff. However, most have stopped going to the dentist or see dentists on Maui and O'ahu.

Since I have double-coverage dental insurance, my family of four goes to dentists off-island. I value dental health so much that I pay for the second dental insurance for my family.

Retaining medical (i.e. dental, nursing, medical, pharmacy, etc.) professionals is challenging in Hawai'i. It is even more challenging on a rural island like Moloka'i with only one airline providing unreliable air travel and having no ferry travel. We support a study to garner data and to analyze this data to see how we can best recruit and retain medical professionals on our island. Thank you for your support of SB557.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Mikami Svetin, President
Moloka'i Drugs, Inc.
P.O. Box 558
Kaunakakai, HI 96748
Work 808-553-5790

In Support and Testimony Letter Regarding SB557

February 5, 2025

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair



Dear Senator Chair Kim:

This letter is to provide **support and testimony** for bill SB557 to have Huli Au Ola, Maui County Area Health Education Center, (AHEC) to conduct a study.

I am the President for the Molokai Homestead Farmers Alliance.

Our membership of 125 residents of Molokai, supports this study to be conducted to identify the reasons why we cannot retain medical and dental professionals on Molokai.

Huli Au Ola is a nonprofit organization and providing services for over 20 years. This organization has assisted many students in their desires to pursue health careers and return back to the island. Many of these students are now working at Molokai General Hospital, Na Pu'uwai, and the Molokai Community Health Center.

During this time, I have seen the lack of medical professionals, not stay longer than two years at most, to practice medical and dental services for our community.

It is time to research this crucial issue due to the lack of medical care and dental care to our island.

Our airline issue continues to cause unreliable transportation and we need to begin the process of solutions to identify the lack of these professionals in health care.

We need your support to please pass this bill SB557 to allow this study and assist our community.

Me ke aloha pumehana,
Faith Tuipulotu



To: The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Committee On Higher Education

LATE

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Public Policy Manager
Sarielyn Curtis, External Affairs Specialist

Hearing: Thursday, February 6, 2025, 3:05 PM, Conference Room 229

RE: **SB557 Relating to Health**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of **SB557**. This measure requires the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) to direct Huli Au Oli to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Molokai and appropriate moneys.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving over 70,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. Approximately 37 percent of our members are keiki. We are Hawai'i's only health plan exclusively dedicated to serving Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dually-eligible beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality, whole-person care for all.

AlohaCare is committed to improving access to care. We serve over 2,200 residents on Molokai, and we continue to be very engaged in bolstering access to care despite provider shortages and travel challenges. We support a multi-faceted approach to improving access to care. This measure to conduct a study toward developing a long-term strategy and plan for services on Molokai would be a good step forward.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support** of **SB557**.

Testimony in Support of SB557: Relating to Health

Dear Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education:

I am in support of SB557, that would recommend the University of Hawaii, John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) to require Huli Au Oli to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Molokai, which is in dire need of these professionals as well as other health-related providers.

I also speak on behalf of the Molokai Rural Health Community Association (MRHCA) that advocates for the improvement of the health status of the residents of the island of Molokai. MRHCA also umbrellas a Maui County-funded kupuna ("senior") care program that provides resources and services to **over 1,000 Molokai registered kupuna over the age of 65 on Molokai**. This program focuses primarily on the "feel good" services but also supports the referral of kupuna to medical, dental, eye, ear and foot care. The MRHCA staff hears from kupuna about the need for health-related services in the above-mentioned areas and the frustration that is often voiced at not being able to receive these services and specialty services in a timely manner or not at all, requiring them to travel off island to attend to their medical and clinical needs. This is a multi-faceted problem and one that many rural and remote areas experience, especially on Molokai.

As has been voiced by many other testifiers, Molokai has a dearth of physicians and dentists practicing on Molokai. The death of two primary care physicians (Dr. Emmett Noa Aluli and Dr. William Thomas, Jr.) in the last two years and the retirement of several dentists has added to the severe shortages of these basic health providers.

It takes a special person to reside and practice on Molokai. There are other challenges that one has to consider when deciding to move to Molokai, including the public school system, the cost of living (although there are Molokai houses less expensive than the high-income areas across the state), the lack of amenities that many are accustomed to having in urban areas, the almost-dangerous air transportation situation currently occurring with only one air carrier servicing the island, and other "lacks" or "limitations."

The recruitment and retention of qualified and committed health care providers in communities across Hawaii and the nation is a common problem; Molokai is not the only community impacted by these lacks, challenges, and limitations. However, unlike many communities, Molokai is surrounded by water and one cannot just drive across the state to receive services.

I was born and raised on the island of Molokai and will always call it my home, despite these many challenges. However, I am realistic to know that times have changed from the "good, ol' days," when things were simpler and done "old school," but it seemed to have worked back then.

What has happened? Perhaps, the recommended study will confirm Molokai's unique challenge, including limited medical (including dental, nursing, pharmacy, psychological, and others) professionals, the problem of just a single airline serving the island, and residents having difficulty accessing healthcare, will begin the process to develop realistic and targeted solutions to improve medical service availability which is also accessible and culturally appropriate.

It is hoped that health-related relevant community partners would also be included in the study process to ensure that all segments of this island community be represented and heard through this proposed study.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Judith S. Mikami

Judith S. Mikami, MPH, RN
Co-Founder
Molokai Rural Health Community Association
P.O. Box 558
Kaunakakai, HI 96748
Mobile 1-808-658-0710

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 2:57:44 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rosie F Davis	Testifying for Huli Au Ola Maui County AHEC	Support	In Person

Comments:

Please support this bill

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Higher Education
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair**

**Thursday, February 6, 2025, at 3:05PM
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference**

LATE

RE: SB557 Relating to Health

Aloha e Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports Senate Bill 557 (SB557), which requires University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) to direct Huli Au Oli to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Molokai. Appropriates moneys.

SB557 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Business Services. This bill promotes policies that drive economic growth, enhance workforce opportunities, and improve the quality of life for Hawaii's residents.

Ensuring the well-being of all residents is a fundamental responsibility of the state, requiring equitable access to essential services, regardless of geographic location. Health equity is especially critical for communities like Molokai, where geographic isolation creates barriers to medical care. Molokai faces a severe shortage of non-primary care physicians and dentists, leaving its 7,000 residents with limited healthcare access. Many cannot afford to travel for medical services, and telehealth cannot replace in-person care for serious conditions.

To address this, proposed legislation directs Huli Au Ola, under the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine, to study the recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists on Molokai. The study will evaluate key challenges, including housing, transportation, and partnerships, with findings submitted to the legislature before 2026. The Chamber supports this initiative to promote health equity and ensure all Hawaii residents have fair and equal access to medical care.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.

We respectfully ask to pass Senate Bill 557. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 2:05:58 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gene Ross K. Davis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of SB557 and humbly ask for your consideration and support in conducting a study to identify the factors that contribute to the lack of long term professional healthcare service providers on Molokai.

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 2:08:54 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kimberly Thayer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

While I am from Maui, I know first hand from community engagement work we have done on Molokai that there is a dearth of healthcare professionals on Molokai. Lack of adequate medical care is not a mere inconvenience but rather a serious health and safety issue for residents. They should not be expected to travel to another island to see a doctor or dentist, nor should they be expected to move to another island altogether to ensure access to medical care.

I support this bill for its potential to ensure that the Molokai community gets a permanent and reliable healthcare ecosystem. This will benefit generations of Molokai residents, which we should all support.

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 3:20:26 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Iolani Kuoha	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

December 5, 2025

Aloha Senator Chair Kim,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB557 and to advocate for the approval of a study conducted by Huli Au Ola Maui County AHEC. This organization has played a crucial role in supporting health career pathways for our community, serving over 1,075 students on Moloka‘i over the past 20 years. Through recruitment, training, and hands-on rotations, Huli Au Ola has provided invaluable opportunities for students interested in pursuing careers in health care within Moloka‘i and Maui County.

The ongoing shortage of medical professionals and dentists on Moloka‘i remains a critical issue. Recruitment is challenging, and even when professionals are secured, many leave after only one or two years. In recent years, Moloka‘i has lost two long-time physicians who were full-time residents, along with the retirement of one dentist three years ago and another just this past November. As a result, our community is now left with only two full-time physicians, one part-time physician, and a locum tenens provider.

Additionally, the instability of airline transportation further exacerbates access to medical care, putting our community at even greater risk.

We respectfully urge your support in passing SB557, which will allow for a vital study to assess and address these healthcare challenges. This study is essential to identifying long-term solutions and ensuring that Moloka‘i residents have access to the medical services they need.

Mahalo for your time and consideration. Your support in passing this bill will make a meaningful difference in strengthening healthcare access for our island community.

Me ke aloha pumehana,

‘Iolani Kū‘oha

LATE

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 3:54:08 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sheron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom It may Concern:

I am in support of bill SB557 due to the lack of medical professionals and dentists that reside on Molokai. It is an important necessity here to make sure we have stable medical and dental care for our community and for future generations. We lack many resources, one of them being transportation to other islands due to the unreliability of our one and only airline company here. This makes it difficult for community members to get to their medical appointments off-island and it gets discouraging and frustrating for most, especially our kupuna (elder). We are in need of support to pass this bill to be of kokua (help) to the community here on Molokai!

Mahalo nui,

LATE

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 4:01:42 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherry Sasada	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Senator Chair Kim:

This letter serves to certify that **our support and testimony** is in support of SB557:

I am in support of Huli Au Ola Maui County AHEC, conducting a study. This organization has served approximately over 1075 students in the last 20 years on Molokai. The organization provides recruitment, training and rotations to any and all students interested in health careers on Molokai, and Maui County.

The lack of medical professionals and dentists is hard to recruit and once they arrive most leave after one or two years. In the recent years we lost two long time physicians as full time residents on Molokai, along with one of long time dentist retired three years ago, and other one this last November.

We are left with two full time, one-part time and a locum.

The issues with the airlines is a risk for our community when it comes to transportation and contributes to the lack of health care. With the lack of dentist on island, we have inconsistent care from providers that fly in and out to provide care. Also, some dentist are charging for services prior to receiving care and forcing us to be reimbursed from the insurance companies afterwards, which is unaffordable to most people here. So, the providers that do take insurance payments have long waiting lists for patient care. We are short options here on healthcare as well as airlines.

We need your support to please pass this bill SB557 to allow us to conduct a study and assist our community. Please pass this bill to help our community of Molokai

Me ke aloha pumehana,

Ronald and Sherry Sasada

In Support of SB557



February 5, 2025

Dear Senator Chair Kim,

This letter serves to certify support and testimony of SB557:

As a lifelong resident of the island of Moloka'i, I have witnessed the ever-changing rotation of health professionals within our community. While any and all medical care is deeply appreciated by this island, it is vital to have professionals who are able to remain on Moloka'i long-term to benefit our community.

I am currently a second-year medical student with the intention of pursuing general practice so that I can return to Molokai and serve my community. I am not alone in this goal, but our numbers are few and we are far-away from properly addressing the lack of healthcare on Moloka'i.

This bill represents a necessary step that must be undertaken to analyze and provide solutions on retaining/recruiting physicians and dentists for our island. At present, the majority of Molokai residents must travel off-island to receive care; placing a strain on these families.. We must find a way to attract healthcare professionals for our community.

Mahalo nui,
Kamalei Davis

HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 6, 2025, 3:05pm
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
Hawaii State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

SB557 - SUPPORT

LATE

February 6, 2025

Aloha Chair Mercado, Vice Chair Kidani, and Respected Committee Members,

SB557: Requires University of Hawai'i John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) to direct Huli Au Oli to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Molokai. Appropriates moneys.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some personal testimony.

I wholeheartedly SUPPORT a study to help provide insights for a long-term solution to address the retention of medical professionals on Molokai. I also want to respectfully point out that the bill lists the final report to be due in 2026.

In the interim, may I ask that you please consider Molokai's need of your attention and commitment – to address the confluence of critical issues we're currently facing now. We are so thankful for Senator DeCoite, but Senator DeCoite can't do it alone. Both she, and we, earnestly need your support.

Our economy as you know, is fragile. Take a thoughtful look around Molokai and you'll quickly recognize that you're looking at more needs than wants – at its best, it is basic. I'm hopeful I can share some of the unseen problems that compound our community's *ability* to access medical care as it currently exists.

- **VULNERABLE DEMOGRAPHICS.** The majority of our island's demographics are the elderly and the young – they are both vulnerable and less inclined, or unable to speak up and advocate for themselves. They in particular need access to in-person visits with professionals who can recognize and identify what they may not be able to convey.
- **FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS.** There are approximately 2500 jobs on island, and most pay minimum wage. One-third of our residents live through government assistance or social security. Most residents have limited resources which limits access to any off-island services, or are responsible for the care of those with limited resources who may require travel companions. Many also can't afford the underinsured travel expenses of airfare, car rental and many times hotel lodging because of unreliable air service.
- **HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT.** Traditionally we've had the highest unemployment in the state, normally two to three times the state average – which means some of our residents only have sporadic medical coverage, or coverage that expires before their medical professional can come to Molokai.
- **PREPAY DENTAL SERVICES.** The majority of our on-island Dentists now are requiring payment upfront for their dental services. Residents now have to choose how they're going to manage their monthly cash flow. Many must simply forego dental treatment until its unbearable and inevitably more costly.
- **UNRELIABLE AIR TRAVEL.** Compounding this for the last 3+ years, those who do travel face unreliable air service and limited capacities by our only airline. Because of delayed or cancelled flights, many of us find we can't rebook a missed appointment, or procedure with a specialist, until months later which often leads to compounded medical problems, compounded expenses, and compounded stress.

It is reasonable to say that every island will require a certain amount of fixed infrastructure and program needs to ensure a basic standard of living is met for its residents – and I don't think anyone disputes health care is one of them.

It's also reasonable to say, that same level of access to basic health care that's available to the rest of State, is *not* available on Molokai.

The reality is so many of our residents find they have no other recourse but to compromise and go without – forego appointments, forego treatments, and forego a diagnosis. The health and welfare of our residents is *literally* at stake.

How can we allow this to be acceptable?

To say Molokai needs better access to medical care is an understatement. It is a bigger problem than is being acknowledged. We desperately need the health care, airline, and insurance industries, along with our federal and state legislators, and our community, to commit to finding solutions to address our urgent health care needs. I hope this study not only looks at all partners and all avenues; it also earnestly looks at facilitating real solutions. And I also hope our community leaders realize what's at stake for our future generations.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share my mana'o.

With Warmest Aloha,

Dawn Bicoy-Stephenson
Molokai Resident
Maunaloa, Hawaii

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:01:17 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rob Stephenson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments: Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee, My name is Rob Stephenson, and I am a resident of Molokai, where four generations of our family call home. I am submitting this testimony in support of S.B. 557, which seeks to address the ongoing challenge of recruiting and retaining medical professionals on our island. Access to healthcare on Molokai has always been limited, particularly when it comes to specialists and dental care. While telehealth has provided some benefits, it cannot fully replace the need for in-person visits, especially for more serious conditions. Traveling off-island for medical care is costly and difficult, given the limited transportation options available. Many residents struggle with the time and financial burden of seeking treatment elsewhere, making consistent healthcare access a real challenge. The study proposed in this bill is a necessary step toward finding solutions that will help ensure the people of Molokai receive the care they need. Understanding the barriers to recruitment and retention will help guide future efforts to improve healthcare access in our community. I respectfully urge you to support this measure and help move us toward sustainable, long-term healthcare solutions for Molokai. Mahalo for your time and consideration. Respectfully, Rob Stephenson Molokai Resident 808-658-0608 mobile mkkrob@me.com

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 9:27:17 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lu Ann Mahiki Lankford-Faborito	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a resident of Hoolehua, Molokai this is a major necessity for our island residents. Strong support

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 9:28:17 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kenneth Faborito	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support for our islands needs.

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 10:38:11 PM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kilia Purdy-Avelino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Senator Chair Kim:

This letter serves to certify that our support and testimony is in support of SB557:

I am in support of Huli Au Ola Maui County AHEC, conducting a study for our island. This organization has served over 1,075 students in the last 20 years on Molokai. The organization provides recruitment, training, and rotations to any, and all students interested in health careers on Molokai, and Maui County.

The lack of medical professionals and dentists are hard to recruit and once they arrive most leave after one or two years. In recent years, we lost two long-time physicians as full-time residents on Molokai, along with one of the long-time dentists who retired three years ago, and another one this last November. We are left with two full-time, one part-time, and a locum.

The issue with the airlines is a risk for our community when it comes to transportation and contributes to the lack of health care.

We need your support to please pass this bill SB557 to allow us to conduct a study and assist our community.

Please pass this bill to help our community of Molokai

Me ke aloha pumehana,

Kilia Purdy-Avelino

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 8:10:21 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deldrine Kapuni Manera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 6, 2025

Aloha Senator Chair Kim,

This testimony is in support of SB557.

I am a lifelong resident of Moloka'i. I have seen how Moloka'i thrived economically thru the 50's thru the 70's as the pineapple and sugar industry dominated the agricultural landscape in Hawaii. So people had jobs to sustain themselves. Business was good. There was no shortage of doctors however, I remember having one dentist - Dr. Arthur Chu - to service the entire island. I even remember having minor surgery done at the hospital!

Never in our history have I seen Moloka'i in dire need of medical professionals so that our fragile healthcare network can stay above water. Currently, my doctor recently retired so I - a 69 year old Kupuna - have to scramble for a doctor in a pool that is already spread thin. I had surgery three weeks ago in Honolulu and the next day planned to return home only to find out the only airline providing air travel to our island community shut down. We had to share a costly flight home with other strandeers.

the stories are plentiful and I know you have heard them so enough of my stories. Poor healthcare, unavailability of doctors and the lack of dependable air travel to get to special treatment, procedures and surgery not available in island makes for the perfect storm.

I support Huli Au Ola MauiCounty Area Health Education Center to recieve funding thru SB557 to conduct the necessary survey needed to collect data and work towards resolving the basic human needs of our people.

We need to find ways to keep our doctors on island.

mahalo

Deldrine Kau'i Kapuni Manera

In Support and Testimony Letter Regarding SB557

February 6, 2025

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

LATE

Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Dear Senator Chair Kim:

This letter serves to certify support, and testimony is in support of SB557:

I am a registered nurse that live and work on Moloka'i. I was born and raised on the Moloka'i fortunate to work and serve the community that helped to raise me. We are in dire need of retaining medical doctors and dentists. Mahalo to our current providers that live and practice currently on island. Mahalo to AHEC and University of Hawai'i Maui College-Moloka'i Education Center in helping to grow our own health care professionals.

I am in support of a study to assist in finding solutions to help retain medical providers and dentist on our island. I am in support of a study in helping to find ways to increase the reimbursement rates for private practice providers can sustain and maintain a practice on Moloka'i. Serving and practicing on a rural island can financially draining if a provider is in private practice.

I am in support of a study to find solutions to introduce providers to learn about the community they will serve. The study will help to identify the best way to enculturate providers before coming. Learn about the people, the island, and Moloka'i's unique culture. Learn about the high incidences of chronic illnesses, learning how to collaborate with existing providers and resources to help their patients in improving their health and wellbeing.

I am requesting to support and passing SB557 for a study to be completed to help our community live, thrive and achieve health equity.

Me ka 'oia'i'o,

Courtney-Paige K. DiMaggio, RN

SB-557

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 11:00:32 AM

Testimony for HRE on 2/6/2025 3:05:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Mikami	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education:

My name is David Mikami and I worked as a licensed pharmacist for 50 years on Molokai. I am in support of SB557, that would recommend the University of Hawaii, John A. Burns School of Medicine to require Huli Au Oli to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve Molokai.

Although the Senate bill talks about physician and dentist recruitment and retention, this can apply to all medical professionals, including pharmacists, we are trying to bring to Molokai. We have had a hard time recruiting and retaining medical professionals on Molokai. In 90 years of our family managing Molokai Drugs, only one, full-time pharmacist is a Molokai native. The rest of our full-time pharmacists were from Oahu or the mainland.

We need this study and thank you for passing SB557.

Thank you,

David T. Mikami, PO Box 558, Kaunakakai, HI 96748 (Home 808-553-5603)