Hawai‘i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus Commission

Advocating for the Hawai‘i LGBTQIA+ Community

Mailing Address: LGBTQ+ Commission, c/o The Department of Human Services, P.O. Box 339, Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96809-0339

Email: hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com
Web: https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/lgbtq-commission/

February 4, 2026

House’s Committees on Health, and Human Services & Homelessness
Hawai‘i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Friday, February 6, 2026, at 9:00 AM

RE: **Strong Support for House Bill 1562**

Aloha Chairs Takayama and Marten, Vice Chairs Keohokapu-Lee Loy and Olds and fellow committee members,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 1562 on behalf of the Hawai‘i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus (LGBTQ+) Commission, which was established by the 2022 Hawai‘i State Legislature to

> “improve the State's interface with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus community; identify the short- and long-range needs of its members; and ensure that there is an effective means of researching, planning, and advocating for the equity of this population in all aspects of state government.”

The Hawai‘i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus Commission submits this testimony in **strong support of House Bill 1562**, with a **request for an amendment**, relating to the establishment of a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project within the Department of Health’s Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division.

The Commission strongly supports the intent of HB 1562 to expand access to mental health resources for young people through innovative, digital tools. Hawai‘i’s keiki are facing unprecedented mental health challenges, and barriers to care, including provider shortages, stigma, cost, and geographic isolation, continue to prevent many from receiving timely and culturally responsive support. A publicly available digital platform has the potential to be a powerful, low-barrier entry point to care and information.

However, the Commission respectfully requests that HB 1562 be **amended to explicitly require that the digital platform include the specific needs of māhū, LGBTQIA+, and gender-diverse keiki** as a core component of the pilot project.

HI State LGBTQ+ Commission Testimony in Support of HB 1562

Māhū, LGBTQIA+ and gender-diverse keiki youth experience disproportionately high rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, bullying, family rejection, and homelessness. These disparities are not incidental—they are the result of systemic exclusion and a lack of affirming, culturally competent mental health resources. For many of these young people, digital platforms may be the *first* or *only* place they feel safe seeking help. If inclusivity is not intentionally designed from the outset, these keiki will once again be left behind.

While the Commission understands that HB 1562 establishes a pilot project, we emphasize that **equity cannot be an afterthought**. Inclusion must be woven into the DNA of the project from its very beginning—in platform design, content development, user interface, data collection, and evaluation metrics. Building inclusivity at the start will strengthen the pilot, improve outcomes, and ensure that the Legislature receives a report that accurately reflects the needs of all youth in Hawai‘i.

An explicit requirement to address māhū, LGBTQIA+ and gender-diverse youth will also align this project with the State’s broader commitments to health equity, suicide prevention, and the well-being of historically marginalized communities.

For these reasons, the Hawai‘i State LGBTQ+ Commission urges the Committee to pass HB 1562 **with amendments** to ensure that māhū, LGBTQIA+, and gender-diverse keiki are meaningfully and intentionally included in the Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your commitment to the mental health and well-being of Hawai‘i’s keiki.

If you or any member of your staff has any questions regarding my testimony you can reach me at hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)
Vice Chair
Hawai‘i State LGBTQ+ Commission

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I

KENNETH S. FINK, M.D., M.G.A, M.P.H
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAIʻI
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA ʻOIHANA OLAKINO
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1562
RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH.

REPRESENTATIVE GREGG TAKAYAMA, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

REPRESENTATIVE LISA MARTEN, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS

Hearing Date: February 6, 2026 Time: 09:00 AM Room Number: 329

Fiscal Implications: The Department of Health ("Department") requests funding for this measure, so long as it does not supplant the priorities and requests outlined in the Governors executive budget request.

Department Position: The Department strongly supports this measure.

Department Testimony: The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division (CAMHD) provides the following testimony on behalf of the Department.

The Department supports this measure, which appropriates funds to the Department to establish and operate a digital youth mental health platform designed to help young people get support for mental health challenges.

Providing easy access to trusted information and resources empowers youth, reduces stigma, and may prevent mental health challenges from worsening in the future.

This pilot also has the potential to support the youth mental health service system by addressing lower-level challenges so the behavioral health workforce (which is scarce) can

focus on youth who require more intensive support. In addition, it can provide critical data about community youth mental health needs.

A project like this can only be successful if youth are aware of the resource and encouraged to use it. Therefore, a comprehensive marketing strategy is an essential part of ensuring that youth have access to these powerful tools and feel comfortable using them.

Concerning trends in youth mental health over the past several years are well documented. This pilot provides an opportunity to support youth in an effort to reverse these trends.

Offered Amendments: None

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JON N. IKENAGA
PUBLIC DEFENDER

DEFENDER COUNCIL
1130 NORTH NIMITZ HIGHWAY
SUITE A-254
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96817

HONOLULU OFFICE
1130 NORTH NIMITZ HIGHWAY
SUITE A-254
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96817

APPELLATE DIVISION
TEL. NO. (808) 586-2080

DISTRICT COURT DIVISION
TEL. NO. (808) 586-2100

FAMILY COURT DIVISION
TEL. NO. (808) 586-2300

FELONY DIVISION
TEL. NO. (808) 586-2200

FACSIMILE
(808) 586-2222

STATE OF HAWAI'I
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

HAYLEY Y. C. CHENG
ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER

HILO OFFICE
275 PONAHAWAI STREET
SUITE 201
HILO, HAWAI'I 96720
TEL. NO. (808) 974-4571
FAX NO. (808) 974-4574

KONA OFFICE
75-1000 HENRY STREET
SUITE #209
KAILUA-KONA HI 96740
TEL. NO. (808) 327-4650
FAX NO. (808) 327-4651

KAUA`I OFFICE
3060 EIWA STREET
SUITE 206
LIHUE, HAWAI'I 96766
TEL. NO. (808) 241-7128
FAX NO. (808) 274-3422

MAUI OFFICE
81 N. MARKET STREET
WAILUKU, HAWAI'I 96793
TEL. NO. (808) 984-5018
FAX NO. (808) 984-5022

February 4, 2026

HB 1562: RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Chair Takayama, Chair Marten, Vice-Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice-Chair Olds, and Members of the Committee on Health, and Members of the Committee on Human Services and Homelessness:

The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) **supports HB 1562** which establishes and appropriates funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project to develop and make available a digital platform to address young people's mental health challenges and requires a report to the Legislature.

The OPD represents thousands of children, adolescents, and families across the State of Hawai'i. In the course of this work, we routinely encounter young people whose untreated or inadequately addressed mental health needs contribute directly to school exclusion, family instability, court involvement, and long-term system entanglement. Early, accessible, and preventative mental health supports are critical to interrupting these trajectories before they deepen.

As the bill correctly recognizes, youth mental health indicators have worsened substantially over the past decade, with compounding impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters. The OPD strongly supports prevention-focused strategies that emphasize early intervention, education, and coping skills, particularly those that can reach youth before they become involved in the justice system.

A publicly available digital platform designed to provide mental health education, self-care strategies, and county-specific resources offers an important entry point for youth who may otherwise face barriers to in-person services, including

geographic isolation, transportation challenges, long waitlists, or stigma associated with seeking help.

From the OPD's perspective, one of the most significant benefits of this bill is its potential to reduce unnecessary criminal and juvenile justice system involvement. Many of the youth we represent do not require intensive or coercive interventions, but rather timely access to information, coping tools, and support. Addressing lower-level mental health needs upstream allows limited behavioral health and judicial resources to be reserved for youth with the highest levels of need, while helping others stabilize earlier.

The OPD also supports the bill's emphasis on evidence-based, peer-reviewed, confidential, and responsive content. Youth are more likely to engage with mental health resources when they feel safe, respected, and able to access information privately and on their own terms. A digital platform that is inclusive, stigma-reducing, and adaptable to diverse user needs can help close equity gaps for youth in underserved communities.

At the same time, OPD acknowledges that not all youth have consistent access to devices, internet service, or digital literacy. While this bill alone cannot resolve those disparities, it represents a meaningful and necessary first step toward expanding the State's mental health infrastructure in a way that is scalable, cost-effective, and responsive to modern realities.

The $300,000 appropriation for this one-year pilot project is a modest investment when weighed against the substantial long-term costs associated with untreated youth mental health needs, including court involvement, incarceration, school failure, and family disruption. The required legislative report will also provide critical data to inform future policy decisions and ensure accountability.

The OPD supports HB 1562.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

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

BONNIE KAHAKUI
ADMINISTRATOR

DAYNA OMIYA
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

STATE OF HAWAIʻI | KA MOKUʻĀINA O HAWAIʻI
STATE PROCUREMENT OFFICE
P.O. Box 119
Honolulu, Hawaii 96810-0119
Tel: (808) 586-0554
email: state.procurement.office@hawaii.gov
http://spo.hawaii.gov

TESTIMONY
OF
BONNIE KAHAKUI, ADMINISTRATOR
STATE PROCUREMENT OFFICE

TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEES
ON
HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS
February 6, 2026, 9:00 a.m.

House Bill 1562
RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Chair Takayama, Chair Marten, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair Olds, and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 1562. The State Procurement Office (SPO) appreciates the bill's intent to promote early prevention of youth and adolescent mental health disorders through digital platforms and respectfully provides comments and recommendations.

Comments

This bill establishes a one-year pilot project for the implementation and administration of the Digital Youth Mental Health Platform commencing July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027. The bill also requires that the Department of Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division submit a report to the Legislature, including any proposed legislation, regarding the pilot project no later than twenty days prior to the Regular Session of the 2027 Legislature.

SECTION 2, Subsection (c), Page 4, lines 15-18, exempts the procurement of the pilot project from Chapters 103D and 103F, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS). The bill does not provide justification for exempting the one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project from HRS Chapter 103D - Hawaii Public Procurement Code and Chapter 103F - Purchase of Health and Human Services.

The SPO understands that this is a pilot program with a very short implementation and reporting period, which makes conducting a fully competitive procurement challenging. However, there should be parameters around the exemption.

The SPO recommends that the bill include that the exemption from HRS Chapters 103D and 103F is valid only for the pilot project ending on June 30, 2027. If the department elects to continue the digital youth mental health platform, a competitive solicitation should be conducted pursuant to the procurement code.

RECOMMENDATION

The SPO recommends the following revisions to SECTION 2, Page 4, lines 15-18:

"(c) Procurement for development, management, and hosting services and communication and marketing services for the purposes of this Act shall be exempt from chapters 103D and 103F, Hawaii Revised Statutes, only for the period of the pilot program, not to exceed June 30, 2027.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

HAWAII SUBSTANCE ABUSE COALITION

HB1562 Digital Platform for CAMHD

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Rep. Gregg Takayama, Chair
Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee, Vice Chair
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS
Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair
Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
Friday, Feb 6, 2026: 9:00: Room 329 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Comments to Support HB1562:

ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Alan Johnson. I am the ad hoc leader of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition (HSAC), a statewide organization for substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorder prevention and treatment agencies and recovery-oriented services.

COMMENTS for SUPPORT:

Digital Platforms, according to all evidence, **do not replace therapy or clinical care.**

Our **caution is that digital platforms** are not a substitute for personalized, licensed clinical treatment for children who need it.

1. **Human connection matters**. Licensed mental health professionals provide clinical assessment, diagnosis, tailored treatment planning, and crisis support — things current digital platforms cannot fully replicate. Empathy, nuanced judgment, and safety monitoring (especially for younger users) are best delivered by trained clinicians.
2. Evidence varies. While some tools show positive results for mild to moderate issues in studies, the **quality and long-term effectiveness are still being researched**, and outcomes vary by tool, age group, and condition.
3. **Not all tools are regulated.** Some wellness or chatbot apps aren't clinically validated and should not be treated as therapy. Professional guidance helps families choose appropriate, evidence-based resources.

However, **they are useful to support clinical care or formalized evidenced-based treatment, especially for early support, education, monitoring and accessibility.** What digital platforms can do is help kids practice skills, track moods, learn coping strategies, or deliver evidence-based exercises (e.g., CBT-based tools).

Digital platform **can improve outcomes when combined with traditional therapy** and help reinforce what's learned in sessions. Some platforms are even designed to work *alongside* a clinician's plan.

Digital platforms for youth mental health (including ones connected to support services) are **valuable complements** — they broaden access, support skill development, and can *enhance* traditional care — but **they do not replace professional treatment** when a child has significant or complex mental health needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and are available for questions.

Aloha,

My name is Patricia "Patty" Chin, and I serve as the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative Manager at EPIC ʻOhana. We partner with youth ages 14 to 26 who have experienced foster care, many of whom face significant mental health challenges rooted in trauma, instability, and the stress of navigating adulthood without consistent support. I am submitting testimony in strong support of HB1562, which establishes a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project.-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project.

Youth mental health needs are rising sharply. According to a 10-year CDC study (2013–2023), nearly all indicators of child and adolescent mental health worsened nationwide. In Hawaiʻi, these challenges have been intensified by the COVID19 pandemic and the Maui wildfires, which increased rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma exposure among young people.-year CDC study (2013–2023), nearly all indicators of child and adolescent mental health worsened nationwide. In Hawai-19 pandemic and the Maui wildfires, which increased rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma exposure among young people.

For youth with foster care experience, the need is even greater. Nationally, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network reports that 90% of youth in foster care have experienced at least one traumatic event, and many have experienced multiple. Trauma, instability, and disrupted relationships all contribute to long-term mental health struggles.-term mental health struggles.

We see this clearly in Hawaiʻi's foster youth population. According to the HI H.O.P.E.S. Match Statewide Report (2017–2024), mental health ratings among participants show a persistent need for support:

- Only 28-35% of youth rate their mental health as "excellent" or "very good."-third of youth rate their mental health as "excellent" or "very good."
- 50-60% rated their mental health as "good/fair."
- 8-12% rated their mental health as "poor."

These trends have remained steady over multiple years, underscoring the need for accessible, youth-friendly mental health tools. A digital platform is especially important for foster youth and young adults because it:

1130 N. Nimitz Hwy., Ste. C-210 Honolulu, HI 96817
Phone: (808)838 – 7752 | Email: epic@epicohana.org

- Reduces stigma by allowing youth to explore mental health resources privately
- Expands access for youth in rural or underserved areas
- Provides immediate, developmentally appropriate coping tools
- Helps youth manage stress before it escalates into crisis
- Supports a population that often struggles to access traditional services due to transportation, scheduling, or trust barriers

To ensure this platform truly meets the needs of Hawai'i's youth, the pilot project should include young people with lived experience — including those with foster care experience — in its design, development, and testing. Their insight is essential for creating a tool that is relevant, culturally grounded, and accessible. For these reasons, the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative strongly supports HB1562 and respectfully urges the Committee to pass this bill. Mahalo, for your time and for your commitment to Hawai'i's youth.

Patricia "Patty" Chin

1130 N. Nimitz Hwy., Ste. C-210 Honolulu, HI 96817
Phone: (808)838 – 7752 | Email: epic@epicohana.org

EPIC 'OHANA

CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAIʻI

SUPPORT HB 1562: RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

TO: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai‘i
Hearing: Friday, 02/06/26; 9:00am; CR 329 & Videoconference

Chair Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy and Committee on Health and
Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds and Committee on Human Services and Homelessness:

Catholic Charities Hawai‘i **supports HB 1562**, which establishes a Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project within the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division.

Catholic Charities Hawai`i (CCH) is a tax-exempt, community-based organization that has been providing social services in Hawai`i for 78 years. Catholic Charities Hawai‘i serves individuals and families across the state who are experiencing poverty, housing instability, trauma, and crisis. Increasingly, we are seeing the impact of untreated mental health challenges among children and adolescents, particularly those living in communities affected by disasters, economic hardship, and limited access to care. HB 1562 directly responds to this growing and urgent need by investing in prevention, early intervention, and accessible mental health support for youth.

The pilot recognizes that today's youth face unprecedented stressors and that traditional in-person services alone cannot meet the demand due to workforce shortages, geographic barriers, and stigma associated with seeking help. Digital platforms—when evidence-based and properly governed—offer a powerful and effective tool to expand reach, especially for rural, underserved, and disaster-impacted communities. Importantly, this pilot also supports the broader behavioral health system by helping address lower-level needs through prevention and education, allowing scarce licensed professionals to focus on youth with the most acute needs. This thoughtful approach reflects an understanding of Hawai'i's workforce constraints while still advancing access and quality of care.

Catholic Charities Hawai‘i strongly supports the bill's emphasis on prevention and early intervention to address youth mental health needs before they escalate into more intensive and costly services, reducing stigma by enabling young people to confidentially access trusted information and coping tools, and promoting equity and access for youth who may not otherwise engage with or have access to traditional behavioral health systems. This measure represents a prudent, forward-looking investment in the well-being of Hawai'i's youth and aligns with our shared commitment to building resilient, healthy communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your continued leadership on behalf of Hawai'i's keiki and families. If you have any questions, please contact our Vice President of Mission, Shellie Niles, at (808) 527-4813.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

LATE

Hawaii Medical Association
1360 South Beretania Street, Suite 200 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
Phone: 808.536.7702 • Fax: 808.528.2376 • hawaiimedicalassociation.org

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Representative Gregg Takayama, Chair
Representative Sue Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND HOMELESSNESS
Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

Date: February 6, 2026
From: Hawaii Medical Association (HMA)
Elizabeth Ann Ignacio MD - Chair, HMA Public Policy Committee
Christina Marzo MD and Robert Carlisle MD, Vice Chairs, HMA Public Policy Committee

RE HB 1562 RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH: Keiki Caucus; DOH; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division; Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project; Report; Appropriation
Position: Support

This measure would establish and appropriate funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project that will enable the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Health to develop and make publicly available a digital platform designed to help young people address and manage mental health challenges; this would require a report to the Legislature.

HMA applauds the Legislature's direction to strengthen early prevention and education on mental health. By increasing access to tailored education and coping resources across our islands, especially in rural and underserved areas, the measure will support equitable behavioral health access for diverse communities. The pilot provides a platform to tailor resources sensitive to cultural and geographic needs across Hawaii, which can strengthen statewide resilience and reduce disparities in mental health and substance use outcomes.

HMA strongly supports this measure, and respectfully provides this additional comment:

HMA recommends health care literacy as a core platform component. Introducing young people to the roles and value of their health care teams — including physicians, nurse practitioners, psychologists, family therapists, and even emerging tools such as AI health and well-being trackers — will:

- Improve young peoples' understanding of *when* and *how* to seek professional support.
- Normalize seeking care and strengthen their long-term patient-provider relationships.
- Foster engagement with evidence-based care pathways early in life.

2026 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team
Elizabeth A Ignacio, MD, Chair • Robert Carlisle, MD, Vice Chair • Christina Marzo, MD, Vice Chair
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

2026 Hawaii Medical Association Officers
Nadine Tenn-Salle, MD, President • Jerald Garcia, MD, President Elect • Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD, • Immediate Past President
Laeton Pang, MD, Treasurer • Thomas Kosasa, MD, Secretary • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

Healthcare literacy is foundational to effective prevention and navigation of behavioral health challenges. Introducing youth to the *scope of provider roles*, culturally responsive care options, and supportive technologies can reduce barriers to care and improve outcomes across mental health and substance use disorders.

By strengthening mental health education and outreach, this platform pilot can help surround our keiki and young adults with a connected circle of care that includes families, schools, community supports, and trusted health care teams. HMA lauds this shared approach, reinforcing that no young person navigates mental health or substance use challenges alone, and that Hawaii is committed to meeting them with understanding, guidance, and accessible resources at every step of their journey.

Thank you for allowing Hawaii Medical Association to submit comments on this measure.

REFERENCES AND QUICK LINKS

Madrid-Cagigal A, Kealy C, Potts C, Mulvenna MD, Byrne M, Barry MM, Donohoe G. Digital Mental Health Interventions for University Students With Mental Health Difficulties: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. Early Interv Psychiatry. 2025 Mar;19(3):e70017. doi: 10.1111/eip.70017. PMID: 40033658; PMCID: PMC11876723.

Potts C, Kealy C, McNulty JM, Madrid-Cagigal A, Wilson T, Mulvenna MD, O'Neill S, Donohoe G, Barry MM. Digital Mental Health Interventions for Young People Aged 16-25 Years: Scoping Review. J Med Internet Res. 2025 May 9;27:e72892. doi: 10.2196/72892. PMID: 40344661; PMCID: PMC12102633.

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Hay, Jeremy. "Need A Doctor? Hawai‘i’s Physician Shortage Keeps Getting Worse." *Honolulu Civil Beat*, 8 Jan. 2026, www.civilbeat.org/2026/01/hawaii-physician-shortage-getting-worse/. Accessed Jan 25 2026.

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2024 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

Beth England, MD, Chair
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

LATE

To: House Committee on Health and Committee on Human Services and Homelessness
Re: **HB 1562 – Relating to Youth Mental Health**
Hawai'i State Capitol room 309 & Via Videoconference Friday, February 6, 2026, 9:00 AM

Dear Chair Takayama, Chair Marten, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair Olds and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB 1562.** This bill would establish and appropriate funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform.

HCAN is dedicated to advocating for the well-being of Hawai'i's children and ensuring that all keiki have access to the resources and support they need to thrive. HB1562 is of great importance to our mission, as it seeks to address the growing mental health needs of children and adolescents by establishing a digital platform through the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division. The proposed pilot project aligns with our commitment to advancing child welfare and improving access to vital health services for Hawai'i's youth.

Digital mental health tools have become increasingly recognized as effective means to reach young people who may face barriers to traditional in-person services, such as stigma, geographic isolation, or limited provider availability. By leveraging technology, the pilot project has the potential to expand access to early intervention and support, particularly for underserved and rural communities. This approach is consistent with best practices in youth mental health, which emphasize meeting children where they are and providing developmentally appropriate, accessible resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please **SUPPORT HB 1562**.

Judith F. Clark
48-218 Kamehameha Highway
808-499-9966
Judithforceclark@gmail.com
Kaneohe, Hawaii 96744

February 4, 2026

To: Representative Gregg Takayama, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Health

Representative Lisa Marten, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

Testimony in Support of HB 1562 Relating to Youth Mental Health

As a community advocate and the former Executive Director of Hawaii Youth Services Network, I support HB 1562 which establishes a digital mental health platform for youth.

This program will increase access to information and services for youth with mental health needs particularly in underserved neighbor island and rural areas. It will use a medium that young people find natural and comfortable. The need to improve mental health services for Hawaii's youth is huge.

35% of middle and high school youth in Hawai'i experience persistent depression; 7% of high school and 11% of middle school students in Hawai'i reported having attempted suicide. 23% of middle school students report that their mental health was most of the time or always "not good" in the prior 30 days.

The TeenLink Hawai'i website continues to get 2,000 site visits on average each month. The top topics/pages visited included Suicide; Health and Wellness Toolkit; Sleep; Stress; Mental Health; and Self- Care.

A Hawai'i Department of Health report using 2020 data estimates that 11,000 of Hawai'i's youth experienced at least one major depressive episode in the prior year. Of those who experienced a major depressive episode, approximately 6,000 did not receive mental health services in the prior year.

We need to ensure that mental health services are accessible to Hawaii's students.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark

Judith F. Clark, MPH

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Rep. Gregg Takayama, Chair
Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair
Rep. Terez Amato (Maui)

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS
Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair
Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
Rep. Terez Amato (Maui)

HEARING:
Friday, February 6, 2026 at 9:00 AM
Conference Room 329 & Videoconference
Hawai'i State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT : HB 1562 - RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Aloha Chair Takayama, Chair Marten, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair Olds, and Rep. Amato of Maui,

My name is Christine Andrews and I live in Wailuku, Maui. I write to you today in **support of HB 1562, relating to youth mental health**, which establishes and appropriates funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project that will enable the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Health to develop and make publicly available a digital platform designed to help young people address and manage mental health challenges.

I am the parent of two young adult children who each suffered from severe mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, when they were younger. I am fortunate that, as an attorney, a stay-at-home parent and someone with access to health care, I was able to advocate for them. It was a full-time job. I would spend hours each day looking for appointments to get my daughter seen while she was experiencing a mental health crisis. It took weeks of calls and emails to arrange for a 504 plan with my daughters' school. There were hospital visits and intakes with crisis care teams. Constant communication with her teachers to help navigate missed school days and workload. It was a lot.

Even with all the work I did to support my oldest daughter, and to get her the help she needed, she was still the one who managed to self-diagnose with ADHD, right at the end of high school. It took months to get her diagnosis confirmed, because the waitlist for testing was months long. Then, because she turned 18 during that wait, it was another struggle to transition her from a pediatric mental health team to an adult one. It was a struggle to get her the care she needed, work with her high school teachers and administrators, and yet, she was a lucky one. She had me to be there for her and advocate for her. She was able to graduate high school, with honors, and be accepted to a prestigious college. During college she became a mental health advocate, received a prestigious fellowship, and is now in graduate school at a world-renowned institution. She was able to navigate her mental health challenges successfully because she had access to support. Not everyone has that privilege. She had friends with the same challenges that withdrew from college because they could not manage their mental health and their education. They did not have the same resources or support.

I have seen the challenges for youth in trying to access care. The long waitlists for appointments, the scarcity of providers. I have seen the impacts on their opportunities, their education, their futures, and their families caused by lack of access to youth mental health resources. **I strongly support HB 1562** and request your vote for it, because young people, like my daughters, need platforms to address and manage mental health challenges, so that they can become healthy, productive adults.

Mahalo for supporting the success of Hawaii keiki,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.
Wailuku, Maui

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

HB-1562
Submitted on: 2/5/2026 5:02:28 PM
Testimony for HLT on 2/6/2026 9:00:00 AM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karley Beaver	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am testifying as an individual in favor of HB1562. I am in support of this bill because, according to Mahmood et al. (2024), "20% of US children have a reported mental health condition, while an estimated 40% will be diagnosed with one by age 18". And with the continued stigma around mental health, not many children receive treatment for these conditions.

It is especially important for these services to be accessible to residents of Hawai'i because the high cost of living means many cannot afford to take care of their physical or mental health. According to Mahmood et al. (2024), "Food insecurity, housing instability, residing in unsafe neighborhoods, and insufficient or inconsistent income are all stressors that adversely contribute to an increased risk of mental health disorders". This quote highlights that economic challenges are not only a barrier to accessing these mental health services but also create a greater risk of an individual experiencing these conditions.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize the importance of passing this bill to support children's mental health. It should not be a privilege to care for your health, but a fundamental right.

Karley Beaver

Source

Mahmood, Asos et al. "Disparities in Access to Mental Health Services Among Children Diagnosed with Anxiety and Depression in the United States." *Community mental health journal* vol. 60,8 (2024): 1532-1546. doi:10.1007/s10597-024-01305-3