

The Senate Ka 'Aha Kenekoa

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

February 18th, 2025

Aloha Tianna Celis-Webster:

Congratulations on your nomination to the State Council on Mental Health. To assist the Hawaii State Senate with its confirmation process, we request that you submit the following information to our office no later than February 21st, 2025, to ensure that we proceed in a timely manner:

1. Why do you wish to be a member of the State Council on Mental Health.
 - a. I have navigated Hawaii's mental health system firsthand as throughout my childhood and as I navigate my career path as a 25-year-old I have dedicated most of my work to advocating for youth and young adults with lived experience. My work with organizations such as EPIC Ohana, Mental Health America, and the National Governors Association has reinforced my commitment to improving mental health policies, ensuring youth voice is integrated into decision making, and advocating for equitable services. Serving on the State Council would allow me to bring my lived and professional expertise to policy discussions that directly impact those who rely on Hawaii's mental health services.
2. What do you perceive are the roles and responsibilities of a member of the State Council on Mental Health.
 - a. The Council plays a critical role in shaping mental health policies, advising legislators, and ensuring the accessibility and effectiveness of mental health services. Key responsibilities include offering insight on how policies affect service recipients, particularly underserved groups such as youth in foster care and young adults, as well as collaborating with state agencies, reviewing legislative measures, and addressing systemic gaps in mental health services.
3. Given your understanding of the roles and responsibilities as a member of the State Council on Mental Health, why do you believe that you are qualified for the position?
 - a. I bring a unique combination of lived experience and professional expertise in mental health advocacy. As a Pono Process Grievance Navigator, I support youth in the foster care system and ensure their voices are heard. I have national policy experience as a Mental Health America Youth Policy Accelerator Fellow, co-creating research and policy recommendations. This past year, I also served as a Youth Policy Advisor for the NGA

Mental Health Policy Academy. Additionally, I've helped develop Hawaii's first youth peer support curriculum at EPIC Ohana and have advocated for these services nationwide. My understanding of the youth mental health system, both as a recipient and advocate, equips me to offer valuable insight to the Council.

4. Please include a brief statement of your skills, expertise, and knowledge that would aid you as a member of the board.
 - a. With both lived experience and professional expertise in Hawaii's mental health system, I possess a deep understanding of the challenges faced by youth and families. My work in policy advocacy, legislative review, and systems reform has equipped me with the skills to analyze and recommend changes to mental health policies. My experience in facilitation, stakeholder engagement, and youth-centered program development ensures I can effectively contribute to the Council's mission and drive meaningful improvements.
5. What do you hope to accomplish during your term of service?
 - a. During my term, I aim to advocate for equitable access to mental health services, ensuring youth and underserved communities receive the support they need. I will work to elevate the voices of those with lived experience in policy discussions and strengthen collaboration between state agencies, service providers, and the community to create a more effective and inclusive mental health system.
6. Name three qualities that best describe you and how these qualities will the State Council on Mental Health.
 - a. Empathetic – My lived experience allows me to deeply understand the challenges faced by those navigating the mental health system. This empathy drives my commitment to advocating for policies and services that truly meet the needs of the community.
 - b. Collaborative – I value ensuring all voices are included in decision-making.
 - c. Passionate – My advocacy is fueled by a deep commitment to making the system work better for youth and families, particularly those with lived experience.
7. Name a previous experience you've had that will be beneficial as a member.
 - a. One of my most impactful experiences was working with a team from EPIC Ohana and CAMHD to help develop Hawaii's first Youth Peer Support Curriculum. This experience required me to balance policy, service provider perspectives, and the lived experience of youth and myself to create a training that ensures peer supporters are well equipped to serve their communities. It reinforced my ability to work across systems, advocate for meaningful change, and ensure youth voice is not just heard but integrated into policy.
8. Can you foresee any possible conflicts of interest that could arise during your service on the State Council on Mental Health. How would you overcome conflicts of interest?
 - a. I can imagine there may be instances where my roles intersect with Council decisions. To mitigate conflicts, I would be fully transparent about my affiliations, excuse myself when necessary, and prioritize ethical decision-making to ensure my role on the Council remains objective and in service of the broader mental health community.

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Please be aware that testimony submitted to committees – including your responses to the above questions - is posted on the Legislature's website; you may wish to remind individuals who intend to submit testimony on your behalf of the public nature of the testimony.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

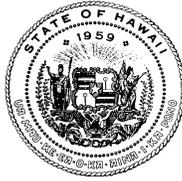
Here is the link to your nomination on the State Capitol website:

https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=GM&billnumber=577&year=2025

Mahalo,

Amelia Dudley
Office Manager
Office of Sen. Joy A. San Buenaventura
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 213
Honolulu, HI 96813





STATE OF HAWAII
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Testimony in SUPPORT of GM577
Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the
State Council on Mental Health
Gubernatorial Nominee, TIANNA CELIS-WEBSTER,
for a term to expire 06-30-2028

SENATOR JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR
SENATOR HENRY J.C. AQUINO, VICE CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date and Time: February 28, 2025, 1:00 p.m. Location: Room 225 and Video

- 1 **Department Position:** The Department of Health ("Department") supports Tianna Celis-Torres'
- 2 nomination and confirmation to the State Council on Mental Health ("Council").
- 3 **Department Testimony:** The Hawaii Revised Statutes §334-10 provides for establishing the
- 4 State Council on Mental Health within the Department for administrative purposes to advise
- 5 the Department on the allocation of resources, statewide needs, and programs affecting two or
- 6 more service areas. It serves as an advocate for adults with serious mental illness, children with
- 7 serious emotional disturbances, other individuals with mental illnesses or emotional problems,
- 8 and individuals with combined mental illness and substance abuse disorders. The Council's
- 9 mandate includes reviewing and commenting on the statewide comprehensive, integrated
- 10 service plan. It also serves as the State Planning Council for federal Mental Health Block Grant
- 11 program purposes. The Council can have up to twenty-one members, of which a majority
- 12 should be non-providers of mental health services. The majority should also be non-state
- 13 employees. The mandate seeks that all service area boards of the State are represented and
- 14 adequate representation of parents and children with serious emotional disturbances. It
- 15 requires the Council to have members from the principal state agencies concerning mental
- 16 health, education, vocational rehabilitation, criminal justice, housing, Medicaid, and social

1 services; Public and private entities concerned with the need, planning, operation, funding, and
2 use of mental health services and related support services; Adults with serious mental illnesses
3 who are receiving, or have received, mental health services; The families of such adults or
4 families of children with serious emotional disturbances; and the Hawaii Advisory Commission
5 on Drug Abuse and Controlled Substances.

6 Tianna Celis-Webster, a recent interim appointee to the Council, will fill the vacant
7 youth seat. She brings a wealth of expertise from her role at EPIC Ohana Inc. as a Pono Process
8 Grievance Navigator and her selection as a National Governors' Association Mental Health
9 Youth Policy Academy Advisor for Hawaii.

10 Ms. Celis-Webster has been attending Council meetings since her interim appointment
11 and is an active member of its current ad hoc committee for 2025 Legislation. Her active
12 participation is a testament to her commitment to improving our foster care and mental health
13 systems and her role as an advocate and peer support for youth. She has immediately and will
14 significantly enhance SCMh's future advocacy for children and youth.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this nomination and for your consideration
16 of Tianna Celis-Webster.



HAWAI`I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

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Vonnell Ramos, President
Cyd Hoffeld, Vice President
Sione Ford Naeata, Treasurer
Greg Tjapkes, Secretary

Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

Access to Independence
Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai`i
Bobby Benson Center
Child and Family Service
Coalition for a Drug-Free Hawai`i
Domestic Violence Action Center
EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.
Friends of the Children's Justice
Center of Maui
Get Ready Hawai`i
Hale Kipa, Inc.
Hale 'Opio Kaua`i, Inc.
Hawai`i Children's Action
Network
Hawai`i Health & Harm
Reduction Center
Hawaii Island Community`
Health Center
Ho`ola Na Pua
Ho`okele Coalition of Kaua`i
Ka Hale Pomaika`i
Kokua Kalihi Valley
Kaua`i Planning and Action
Alliance
Lines for Life Youth Line
Maui Youth and Family Services
Na Pu`uwai Molokai Native
Hawaiian Health Care
Systems
P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.
Parents and Children Together
PHOCUSED
Piha Wellness and Healing
Planned Parenthood of the
Great Northwest, Hawaii
Alaska, Kentucky, Indiana
Residential Youth Services
& Empowerment (RYSE)
Salvation Army Family
Intervention Services
Sex Abuse Treatment Center
Susannah Wesley Community
Center
The Catalyst Group

February 25, 2025

To: Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
And members of the Committee on Health and Human
Services

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF GM 577
Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the State
Council on Mental Health, Gubernatorial Nominee, TIANNA CELIS-
WEBSTER, for a term to expire 06-30-2028.

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports the nomination of Tianna Celis-Webster for the State Council on Mental Health.

I am a member of the Governor's Policy Academy on Youth Mental Health and Well-being and worked closely with Tianna who served as a Youth Advisor. She is knowledgeable and articulate about the mental health needs and issues of young people and a skilled discussion facilitator.

Tianna is currently employed at EPIC 'Ohana as a Pono Process Navigator and works collaboratively to ensure that youth rights are upheld within the Child Welfare Services (CWS) system. Drawing from her own experiences navigating mental health and foster care systems at a young age, Tianna brings a unique perspective to her role, actively participating in crucial conversations aimed at improving system outcomes.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director