



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT TO HOUSE BILL 1300 HD 1  
RELATING TO CANCER**

House Committee on Finance  
Hawai'i State Capitol

February 21, 2025

2:00PM

Room 308

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Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) submits this testimony in **SUPPORT** of HB 1300 HD 1 which appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center to conduct a multiethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos, including an analysis of the health effects and risks of individuals living in close proximity to landfills in Nanakuli, O'ahu. This bill further requires the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center to seek federal funding to complete the study.

OHA has long advocated for meaningful policies to help reduce the health disparities of Native Hawaiians and to better protect and uplift the health and vitality of the lāhui. OHA's strategy relating to improved health outcomes includes increased availability and access to quality, culturally based, and culturally adapted prevention and treatment interventions in 'ohana, schools, and communities (E Ola Mau a Mau). In furtherance of this priority, OHA supports an approach to health policy that incorporates "social determinants of health" – i.e., a holistic and systemic view in assessing and addressing health in Hawai'i's communities.

A holistic and systemic view of health must include the built and natural environment. Notably, research shows that Native Hawaiians continue to experience disparate outcomes compared to the rest of the US, with Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders having the highest prevalence of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and obesity.<sup>1</sup> These health disparities are correlated with disparities in areas recognized as social determinants of health, such as housing, education, social services,

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<sup>1</sup> Long CR, Narcisse MR, Bailey MM, Rowland B, English E, McElfish PA, "Food insecurity and chronic diseases among Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the US: results of a population-based survey," J Hunger Environ Nutr. (2022), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9012098/>

leisure, individual rights, culture, and public safety. For example, in addition to poorer health outcomes, of the five largest race groups in Hawai'i, Native Hawaiians have the lowest household incomes and the highest poverty rates, despite 74.5% of this population working 35 or more hours per week.<sup>2</sup>

**To address these disparities, including and particularly with respect to the social determinants that may be causing or contributing to disparate health outcomes, a multiethnic study focusing on Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos is critical.** Data on social determinants of health for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) in the United States are hidden because data are often not collected or are reported in aggregate with other racial/ethnic groups, despite decades of calls to disaggregate NHPI data. As a form of structural racism, data omissions contribute to systemic problems such as inability to advocate, lack of resources, and limitations to political power.<sup>3</sup>

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs urges this committee to **PASS HB 1300 HD 1**. Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify.

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<sup>2</sup> “Demographic, Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics for Selected Race Groups in Hawaii,” Research and Economic Analysis Division – Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism – State of Hawaii (March 2018) at p. ii; 11; and 13, [https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/economic/reports/SelectedRacesCharacteristics\\_HawaiiReport.pdf](https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/economic/reports/SelectedRacesCharacteristics_HawaiiReport.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Morey BN, Chang RC, Thomas KB, Tulua, Penaia C, Tran VD, Pierson N, Greer JC, Bydalek M, Ponce N, “No Equity Without Data Equity: Data Reporting Gaps for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders as Structural Racism,” J Health Polit Policy Law (April 1, 2022) at Abstract, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10959240/>



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

#### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Finance  
Friday, February 21, 2025 at 2:00 p.m.

By

S. Lani Park, PhD,  
Brenda Hernandez, PhD,  
and Alike Maunakea, PhD, Principal Investigators

And

Naoto T. Ueno MD, PhD, Director  
University of Hawai'i Cancer Center

And

T. Samuel Shomaker, MD, JD, MSM, Dean  
Lee Buenconsejo-Lum, MD, Principal Investigator, Pacific Regional Central Cancer Registry,  
U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands  
John A. Burns School of Medicine

And

Michael Bruno, PhD, Provost  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

#### HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center (UHCC) and John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) strongly supports HB 1300 HD1, which would appropriate revenues for UHCC to conduct a multi-ethnic cohort study focusing on social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos in the state of Hawai'i.

This funding would provide vital resources to help initiate this long-term study, which would provide critical data to improve the cancer disparities and promote health equity in populations that experience high rates for many common cancers and continue to be understudied and underserved.

National data typically aggregate health information for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) and, thereby, ignore the rich cultural and lifestyle diversity of these populations and mask their marked differences in cancer incidence and outcomes. UHCC has extensive experience studying cancer disparities in AANHPI. Disaggregated data have revealed stark cancer disparities across Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Asian American subgroups. For instance, Native Hawaiians, among other racial/ethnic groups in the United States (US), have one of the highest rates of lung, breast, colorectal, pancreatic, gastric, liver, endometrial and cervical cancers. Most of these excess risks are only partially explained by known risk factors pointing to the need to explore new hypotheses. Pacific Islanders have high rates for many cancers that should be addressed through culturally tailored health education and prevention efforts, such as in smoking cessation, HPV vaccination, and screening. Filipino Americans have high incidence rates for lung, colorectal and thyroid cancer in Hawai'i, and

rapidly increasing rates of breast and prostate cancers. Due to gaps in the available data, such as on social determinants of health and environmental and occupational exposures, the specific reasons that drive these disparities remain unknown. A new study that captures such information would directly address these research gaps. For instance, there are private waste landfills in Nānākuli, O'ahu, where a high density of Native Hawaiian communities resides. The measure of potential cancer-causing environmental hazards and exposures and their associations with health can be studied through establishing a new prospective cohort study.

The proposed two-year project would establish the feasibility of recruiting participants for a long-term prospective study and greatly strengthen a grant application to NIH to fund the full-scale research. It will also help us continue to build strong partnerships with these communities that we have initiated through our work to field a mobile health clinic with the Native Hawaiian Healthcare Systems and through the work of our Pacific Islander Community Health Workers, so as to define common priority research areas and assist with study recruitment and future dissemination of study findings.

Information from the Hawai'i Tumor Registry (the State central cancer registry, operated by the UHCC), shows disparities in how early certain cancers are diagnosed (i.e., stage at diagnosis), in the number of new cancers detected each year (i.e., incidence), and in the proportion of deaths caused by certain cancers in Native Hawaiians, Filipinos, and Pacific Islanders residing in Hawai'i. Similarly, the Pacific Regional Central Cancer Registry (the US Affiliated Pacific Islands central cancer registry, operated by JABSOM), shows significant cancer health disparities in late stage at diagnosis and extremely poor survival rates in cervical, oropharyngeal, uterine, and liver cancer among the several of the populations indigenous to the USAPI. Many of the US Pacific Islander populations move to Hawai'i for educational and economic opportunities, as well as for health care. There is inadequate information about the contributing factors to the cancer health disparities, especially in the USAPI populations who reside in Hawai'i and are diagnosed with and treated for cancer here. It is well-studied that certain types of cancer are heavily influenced by tobacco, dietary composition, and overweight/obesity. Additionally, there is a high correlation between poverty and food insecurity, tobacco use, obesity, and obesity-related chronic disease, including cancer. Studies conducted in the US, USAPI, and globally also indicate other sociocultural impacts on cancer aside from poverty.

This new multi-ethnic cohort study is highly needed, and the results will inform UHCC, JABSOM, and University of Hawai'i researchers' current and future work with Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Filipino populations to address social, cultural, and economic determinants of cancer prevention, cancer screening, and early detection, treatment, and survivorship.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1300 HD1, provided that its passage does not impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget.



**Testimony to the House Committee on Finance  
Friday, February 21, 2025; 2:00 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 308  
Via Videoconference**

**RE: SENATE BILL NO. 1300, HOUSE DRAFT 1, RELATING TO CANCER.**

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, 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** House Bill No. 1300, House Draft 1, RELATING TO CANCER.

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 an unspecified amount of general funds for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same amount for fiscal year 2026-2027, for the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multiethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos, including an analysis of the health effects and risks of individuals living in close proximity to landfills in Nanakuli, Oahu.

This measure would take effect on July 1, 3000.

The goal of medical research is to develop safe and effective methods to prevent, detect, diagnose, treat and ultimately cure the collection of diseases known as cancer. The better we understand these diseases, the more progress we will make toward diminishing the tremendous human and economic toll disease inflicts upon our citizenry.

**Testimony on House Bill No. 1300, House Draft 1**  
**Friday, February 21, 2025; 2:00 p.m.**  
**Page 2**

Ten years ago, the HPCA testified in support of House Bill No. 1616, Regular Session of 2014, a measure that would add to the Hawaii State Planning Act's objectives and policies for health, the identification of social determinants of health and prioritization of programs, services, interventions, and activities that address identified social determinants of health to improve Native Hawaiian health in accordance with federal law and reduce health disparities of disproportionately affected demographics.

We noted in our testimony that House Bill No. 1616, seeks to:

*" . . . identify those specific social determinants that adversely affect Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos. As these populations make a sizeable percentage of patients seen by community health centers, the HPCA strongly supports this measure."*

This bill was enacted as Act 155, Session Laws of Hawaii 2014.

Eleven years later, we continue to recognize the importance of social determinants of health on the health care outcomes and quality of life of Hawaii's most vulnerable, marginalized, and isolated constituencies. The more we learn the better we are able to act.

**For these reasons, 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@hawaiiipca.net.



## THE QUEEN'S HEALTH SYSTEMS

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To: The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Members, House Committee on Finance

From: Kanilehua Kim, Native Hawaiian Health and Community Engagement, Queen's Health Systems

Jace Mikulanec, Director, Government Relations, The Queen's Health Systems

Date: February 21, 2025

Re: Support for HB1300 HD1 - Relating to Cancer

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The Queen's Health Systems (Queen's) is a nonprofit corporation that provides expanded health care capabilities to the people of Hawai'i and the Pacific Basin. Since the founding of the first Queen's hospital in 1859 by Queen Emma and King Kamehameha IV, it has been our mission to provide quality health care services in perpetuity for Native Hawaiians and all of the people of Hawai'i. Over the years, the organization has grown to four hospitals, and more than 10,000 affiliated physicians, caregivers, and dedicated medical staff statewide. As the preeminent health care system in Hawai'i, Queen's strives to provide superior patient care that is constantly advancing through education and research.

Queen's appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB1300 HD1, which appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center to conduct a multiethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos, including an analysis of the health effects and risks of individuals living in close proximity to landfills in Nanakuli, Oahu.

The Queen's Medical Center is a long-standing member of the University of Hawaii Cancer Consortium, of which members have a common goal to eliminate cancer through research. The UH Cancer Center is one of only 71 institutions in the United States that hold the prestigious National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation and is the only NCI-designated center in the Pacific – making it particularly appropriate to undertake this study.

This proposed effort is in alignment with QHS's mission and vision while also underscoring the work that our Native Hawaiian Health program is undertaking to address systemic inequalities related to pollutant exposure and other environmental stewardship issues. Furthermore, the proposed study's holistic approach (including social determinants of health, resilience factors, and environmental exposures) ensures that community connections to land, culture, etc. are taken into account.

*The mission of The Queen's Health System is to fulfill the intent of Queen Emma and King Kamehameha IV to provide in perpetuity quality health care services to improve the well-being of Native Hawaiians and all of the people of Hawai'i.*

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



Committee on Finance  
Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair  
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Friday, February 21, 2025

**ACS CAN SUPPORTS HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER.**

Cynthia Au, Government Relations Director – Hawai‘i Guam  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Thank you for the opportunity in **STRONG SUPPORT** HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER which appropriates funds to the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multi-ethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, Filipinos and environmental factors.

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), the nonprofit, non-partisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society advocates for public policies that reduce death and suffering from cancer. ACS CAN works with federal, state, and local government bodies to support evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii with over 2,000 deaths each year. This year over 9,000 residents of Hawaii will be diagnosed with the disease. Cancer incidence and mortality rates have decreased in Hawaii over the last decade, but despite this overall reduction, the disparities between ethnic populations continue to be of concern. Cancer is the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have one of the highest incidence rates of breast, lung, colorectal, cervical, pancreatic, gastric and liver cancers among all U.S. racial/ethnic populations.

#### Hawaii Statistics:

- Cancer is the leading cause of death in females and the second leading cause of death after heart disease for males over the age of one.<sup>i</sup>
- Cancer is the leading cause of death in Filipino women and the second leading cause of death after heart disease for Filipino men.<sup>ii</sup>
- Cancer is the leading cause of death in Native Hawaiian women and the second leading cause of death after heart disease for Native Hawaiian men.<sup>iii</sup>
- Cancer is the leading cause of death in Pacific Islander women and the second leading cause of death after heart disease for Pacific Islander men.<sup>iv</sup>

To aid in research, collecting data on Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos will help to provide information on the contributing factors to cancer disparities that currently exist. Data collection will aid in future research to improve health outcomes for these minority populations.

The cancer death rate is 20% higher for individuals from the US counties with the lowest average of incomes compared to counties with a higher average of incomes. According to the US Census, there are currently over 200,000 Filipinos in the state. Research is critical to understanding and reducing cancer disparities, as well as examining gaps in cancer prevention and care delivery that contribute to these disparities.

The University of Hawaii Cancer Center is one of 72 research organizations in the U.S. designated by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the only one in the Hawaii Pacific region.<sup>v</sup> Its mission is to reduce the burden of cancer through research, education, patient care and community outreach with an emphasis on the unique ethnic, cultural and environmental characteristics of Hawaii and the Pacific. Cancer research focusing on Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos is unique to Hawaii and the University of Hawaii Cancer Center and cannot be easily conducted anywhere else in the world. Findings will further help with receiving future research grants from National Cancer Institute specific to these minority populations.

ACS CAN supports the legislature to fund \$1 million over two years for the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multi-ethnic cohort study for the population of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos unique to the state. All individuals should have equitable access to quality cancer care and an equal opportunity to live a healthy life. However, cancer does not affect everyone equally. Our ability to continue to make progress against cancer relies heavily on eliminating the inequities that exist in cancer care, including in research.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT on this important matter. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Government Relations Director Cynthia Au at 808.460.6109, or [Cynthia.Au@Cancer.org](mailto:Cynthia.Au@Cancer.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Leading Causes of Death by Sex and Race/Ethnicity State of Hawaii, 2018-2022, Dec. 1, 2023  
<https://hhdw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leading-Cause-Death-RaceEth-Sex-2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Leading Causes of Death by Sex and Race/Ethnicity State of Hawaii, 2018-2022, Dec. 1, 2023 <https://hhdw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leading-Cause-Death-RaceEth-Sex-2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Leading Causes of Death by Sex and Race/Ethnicity State of Hawaii, 2018-2022, Dec. 1, 2023  
<https://hhdw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leading-Cause-Death-RaceEth-Sex-2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Leading Causes of Death by Sex and Race/Ethnicity State of Hawaii, 2018-2022, Dec. 1, 2023  
<https://hhdw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Leading-Cause-Death-RaceEth-Sex-2018-2022.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> University of Hawaii Cancer Center <https://www.uhcancercenter.org/50years>

# Multiethnic study to reduce cancer disparities, promote equity

By Drs. Alika Maunakea, Loïc Le Marchand and S. Lani Park

Cancer is a complex disease that affects different ethnic groups in various ways, and studying these disparities can help develop effective prevention, early detection and treatment strategies to promote healthy lifestyles and health equity.

In Hawaii, cancer incidence and mortality rates have declined over the past decade, but cancer disparities remain a concerning issue. Native Hawaiians continue to have the highest cancer incidence and mortality rates among men and women and have higher incidences of breast and ovarian cancers. Similarly, Filipino Americans have high incidence rates for lung, colorectal and thyroid cancer and rapidly increasing rates of breast and prostate cancers.

National data typically aggregate health information for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, ignoring the cultural and lifestyle diversity of these groups and masking their

marked differences in cancer incidence and outcomes. Studies primarily conducted in Hawaii, using disaggregated data, have shown that known risk factors, such as tobacco use and obesity, do not fully account for cancer disparities alone.

Additional factors, such as social determinants of health — including income and social stress — and environmental and occupational exposures, may contribute to differences in cancer occurrence and survival rates. However, due to gaps in the available data, additional risk and protective factors that may drive cancer disparities remain unknown. Likewise, little is known regarding the biological mechanisms that explain these disparities.

To address these critical gaps, a new multiethnic study in Hawaii that includes representation from affected communities is urgently

## ISLAND VOICES



*Dr. Alika Maunakea, left, is a professor of epigenetics and health disparities at John A. Burns School of Medicine, and director of the Consortium of Research Advancement Facilities and Training; Dr. Loïc Le Marchand, center, is a researcher focusing on the role of biological and environmental factors of cancer; Dr. Lani Park's research focuses on genetic, health behavioral and environmental factors that contribute to the racial/ethnic differences in cancer risk.*

needed. The University of Hawaii Cancer Center is one of 71 National Cancer Institute-designated cancer centers in the country and is uniquely positioned to conduct research on cancer disparities among Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Filipinos that cannot be easily conducted anywhere else in the world.

The Hawaii Legislature can support and help fund such a study, via House Bill 1301, which would help fill gaps in the available data

and provide a more comprehensive understanding of cancer risk and outcomes among different ethnic groups in the Islands. The multiethnic cohort study would focus on social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental and occupational exposures, as well as resilience factors among Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders and Filipinos.

If funded, this preliminary study would bolster chances of securing a National Institutes of Health grant and foster new valuable partnerships with communities to identify shared research priorities and support recruitment efforts. Findings from this multiethnic cohort study could lead to the development of culturally appropriate prevention and treatment strategies to reduce the risk of cancer-related health behaviors

and the occurrence of cancers. These strategies may be more effective as they are tailored to meet the specific needs of these communities, ultimately promoting health equity in Hawaii.

As researchers and advocates with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), we know that investing in the study of cancer disparities could ultimately reduce the burden of cancer in populations that have been underserved and underrepresented by bringing new insights into the social, environmental and biological factors that lead to these disparities. Thus, this study will ultimately provide Hawaii public health practitioners and the community with the necessary data to advance health equity for Filipinos, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

We urge Hawaii legislators to support and fund the feasibility study by the UH Cancer Center, a critical step in building a future where all communities in Hawaii have an equal opportunity to prevent, detect and survive cancer.



Aloha State Legislator,

My name is McKayla McCullah and I'm a young Native Hawaiian woman, member of the Wai'anae community, and volunteer with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN). The negative impact of health disparities is something I'm used to seeing. Cancer, heart disease, and diabetes are some of the leading causes of death among Native Hawaiians. I am a granddaughter and niece to those who have fought these diseases and a family member to others who have lost their lives or are still fighting.

This is why I support HB 1300 HD1, which would fund a multiethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center. The study would focus on understanding the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups, including Filipinos in Hawaii relating to cancer outcomes. The collected data will aid in future research to improve health outcomes for underrepresented populations.



The statistics are staggering. In 2018, the UH Cancer Research Center found Hawai'i men and women experienced higher incidence of cancers of the liver and intrahepatic bile duct and stomach compared to other populations in the United States. Furthermore, breast cancer incidence and mortality were highest among Native Hawaiian women compared to any other racial or ethnic group in Hawaii. Also, lung cancer incidence is higher among Native Hawaiians, as well as Filipinos. Thyroid cancer incidence is highest in Filipino women.

We have experts who want to focus more on the people of their land. Why wouldn't we want to invest in that kind of research? With your help, we can make a difference and identify necessary data needed to make changes.

By finding and researching these facts of our Native Hawaiian communities, we can get to the root of these problems and hopefully identify solutions to benefit future generations. As a Kamehameha Alumni and beneficiary child of Bernice Pauahi Bishop, a Hawaiian princess who served her people before passing from breast cancer, I ask you to help us fight – fight for her and for our communities.

Sincerely,  
McKayla McCullah  
Makaha, HI

[Community Voice](#)

# More Data Needed To Help Reduce Cancer Disparities

House Bill 1301 would fund a study that focuses on Native Hawaiians, other Pacific Islanders and Asian communities in Hawaii.

By [Patricia Kalolaine Cornett](#)

March 17, 2023 · 3 min read



UH Cancer Center

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Cancer disparities are a significant public health issue in Hawaii, and our state legislators have the chance, and kuleana, to take a vital step toward helping everyone have a fair and just opportunity to prevent, detect, treat and survive cancer.

Cancer affects everyone but it does not affect everyone equally. Breast cancer incidence and mortality are highest among Native Hawaiian women compared to any other racial or ethnic group in



Hawaii. American Samoan men are **eight times more likely** to develop liver cancer.

The most recent Hawaii Cancer at a Glance report (2014-2018) indicates that lung and bronchus cancer incidence among males is highest among Native Hawaiian and Filipinos. And Filipinos have the highest proportions of late-stage prostate cancers.

I am a breast cancer survivor, so I know screenings can help detect cancer at an earlier stage and save lives. As part of my journey and my work as a health-care worker, I’m committed to helping women get their mammograms and will drive them to their appointment and then back home.

In 2021, I was sitting on my chemo chair when I noticed that among the people who were receiving treatment, I was the only Tongan.

**Top Cancer Sites for Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders (1998-2002)**

Cancer Incidence Rates per 100,000 - Men (1998-2002) *							
Cancer	Native Hawaiian	Samoan	Tongan	Non-Hispanic White (NHW)	Native Hawaiian/NHW Ratio	Samoan/NHW Ratio	Tongan/NHW Ratio
All Sites	531.6	566.7	428.8	587.0	0.9	1.0	0.7
Colorectal	65.7	43.1	--	65.6	1.0	0.7	--
Liver & IBD	16.3	54.5	--	6.7	2.4	8.1	--
Lung	109.8	111.9	107.0	89.2	1.2	1.3	1.2
Prostate	119.7	144.1	85.0	170.0	0.7	0.8	0.1
Stomach	18.8	53.0	--	9.9	1.9	5.4	--

Cancer Incidence Rates per 100,000 - Women (1998-2002) *							
Cancer	Native Hawaiian	Samoan	Tongan	Non-Hispanic White (NHW)	Native Hawaiian/NHW Ratio	Samoan/NHW Ratio	Tongan/NHW Ratio
All Sites	488.5	472.0	504.7	448.5	1.1	1.1	1.1
Breast	175.8	102.5	118.0	145.2	1.2	0.7	0.8
Cervical	12.3	18.1	--	8.1	1.5	2.2	--
Colorectal	44.0	38.6	--	47.6	0.9	0.8	--
Lung	69.7	56.9	--	59.0	1.2	1.0	--
Stomach	14.5	--	--	4.3	3.4	--	--

\*IBD = Intrahepatic Bile Duct

Source: NCI 2008. Cancer Incidence and Mortality Patterns among Specific Asian and Pacific Islander Populations in the U.S. <http://seer.cancer.gov/publications/apicancer/index.html>

A screenshot from a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report.

“Where are my people and why am I the only one getting treatment?” I asked my husband.

So, I decided to look for them and was hired to reach out to my Tongan Community on the Koolau side, Waiahole, Kahaluu, Punaluu, Hauula, Kahuku, Laie and beyond, to share my story

and the importance of mammograms with them.

I currently have an information booth that provides information to mostly Pacific Islander women about the University of Hawaii Cancer Center and how to get a mammogram. For many of them, this is the first time they have signed up to get screened for the first time in several years.

Cancer research also saves lives. It is thanks to a clinical trial that I am now in remission after being diagnosed with cancer for a second time. In addition to helping women get their mammograms, I talk to my community about how crucial cancer research and clinical trials are to help improve cancer outcomes.

### **Cancer research also saves lives.**

As an American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network volunteer, I understand that besides doctors and researchers, our elected officials also play a pivotal role in improving the lives of people with cancer and their families.

**House Bill 1301** aims to provide funds that will allow the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multiethnic cohort study that will focus on the different factors that contribute to higher incidence and higher mortality rates in certain cancers among Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, and Asian communities including Filipinos in Hawaii.

These are communities that face cultural, language and structural barriers to cancer care — including lack of transportation — and are largely understudied.

The collected data will help better understand cancer disparities and identify gaps in cancer prevention and care delivery that contribute to these disparities as well as how to address them.

In Hawaii, we believe in living pono. I urge our state lawmakers to honor this concept and approve the funding for the multiethnic study that can help end cancer as we know it, for everyone.

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Community Voices aims to encourage broad discussion on many topics of community interest. It's kind of a cross between Letters to the Editor and op-eds. This is your space to talk about important issues or interesting people who are making a difference in our world. Column lengths should be no more than



**WAIANAЕ COAST  
COMPREHENSIVE  
HEALTH CENTER**

**Friday, February 21, 2025 at 2:00 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 308 & Videoconference**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

**To: Chair Kyle Yamashita  
Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi**

**From: Ian Ross  
Public Affairs Director  
[ianross@wcchc.com](mailto:ianross@wcchc.com) | (808)652-3380**

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1300 HD1 - RELATING TO CANCER**

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Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

The Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center is in **support of House Bill 1300 HD1**, which appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center to conduct a multiethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, environmental exposures, and cancer risks affecting Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos.

Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center (WCCHC) is a Federally Qualified Health Center dedicated to improving the health and well-being of the West O'ahu community through accessible and affordable medical and traditional healing services, including outreach to people experiencing homelessness, crucial for our community's wellbeing. With 52 years of service, WCCHC is committed to providing comprehensive healthcare by addressing social determinants of health.

Cancer disparities in Hawai'i remain a critical concern, particularly among Native Hawaiians and Filipinos, who face significantly higher incidence and mortality rates for a range of cancers. Additionally, many residents of Nānākuli live near waste landfills may experience heightened health risks due to environmental exposure yet there has been insufficient research to fully understand these impacts.

This study is essential to identifying the root causes of these disparities, guiding targeted interventions, and improving cancer prevention efforts. By leveraging federal funding and existing data from the Department of Health, the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center is uniquely positioned to lead this critical research, ensuring that solutions are tailored to Hawai'i's unique ethnic, cultural, and environmental landscape.

**We urge your support for HB 1300 HD1** to advance cancer research, address health disparities, and protect the well-being of Hawai'i's most vulnerable communities. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Rebecca "Becki" Ward  
Honolulu, 96816

To: Committee on Finance  
Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair  
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

RE: Strong Support of HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER.

Hrg: Friday, February 21, 2025

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My name is Rebecca "Becki" Ward and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and the University of Hawaii Cancer Center. I thank you for the opportunity to **SUPPORT** HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER, as fighting cancer is an issue I strongly support, based on personal experience.

I lost my husband to prostate cancer in 2006, and this experience has motivated me to get involved so that declining numbers of families ever have to deal with this illness and loss. I was in volunteer leadership with the American Cancer Society for 10 years, served on a national ACS Research Grant Peer Review Committee, and now serve on the Community Advisory Board of the UH Cancer Center. I know firsthand that research is critical to understanding and reducing cancer disparities, as well as examining gaps in cancer prevention and care delivery that contribute to these disparities.

I ask that you support funding for the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multi-ethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Asians including Filipinos.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii, with over 2,000 deaths each year. It is the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Everyone should have equitable access to quality cancer care and an equal opportunity to live a healthy life. Our ability to continue to make progress against cancer relies heavily on eliminating the inequities that exist in cancer care, including research. Data collection will aid future research to improve health equity for minority populations unique to the people of Hawaii. Please support and pass HB 1300 HD1.

Sincerely,  
Rebecca "Becki" Ward  
Honolulu, 96816

**Cheryl K. Okuma**  
**Wailuku, 96793**

To: Committee on Finance  
Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair  
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

RE: Strong Support of HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER.

Hrg: Friday, February 21, 2025

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My name is Cheryl K. Okuma and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I am in STRONG **SUPPORT** of HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER. Cancer affects everyone, but it does not affect everyone equally.

Cancer has touched myself, family members across generations, as well as friends in its many different forms. A multi-ethnic research is a positive step towards understanding challenges of cancer impacts in our ethnically diverse population. Research is a step towards progress in achieving equity in our fight against cancer.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Hawaii and the leading cause of death among Asian Americans and the second-leading cause (after heart disease) among Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals.

Research is critical to understanding and reducing cancer disparities, as well as examining gaps in cancer prevention and care delivery that contribute to these disparities for minority populations unique to Hawaii.

I humbly ask for your SUPPORT and pass HB 1300 HD1 for state funding of \$1 million over two years on a multi-ethnic cohort study by the University of Hawaii Cancer Center of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Asian groups including Filipinos.

Sincerely,  
Cheryl K. Okuma  
Wailuku, 96793

Mark Vasconcellos  
Honolulu, 96822

To: Committee on Finance  
Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair  
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

RE: Strong Support of HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER.

Hrg: Friday, February 21, 2025

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My name is Mark Vasconcellos and I am an advocate for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I thank you for the opportunity to SUPPORT HB 1300 HD1 – RELATING TO CANCER.

As a survivor of stage 3 non hodgekins lymphoma cancer and secondary male breast cancer. I'm now 19 plus cancer free. Also a survivor of colon cancer stage 1. Now a survivor for now 10 years. So I ask humbly to support us in this bill submitted to you.

Research is critical to understanding and reducing cancer disparities, as well as examining gaps in cancer prevention and care delivery that contribute to these disparities. I ask that you support funding for the University of Hawaii Cancer Center to conduct a multiethnic cohort study focusing on the social determinants of health, lifestyles, environmental exposures, and resilience factors of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Asians including Filipinos.

Everyone should have equitable access to quality cancer care and an equal opportunity to live a healthy life. Our ability to continue to make progress against cancer relies heavily on eliminating the inequities that exist in cancer care, including research. Data collection will aid future research to improve health equity for minority populations unique to the people of Hawaii.

Please support and pass HB 1300 HD1.

Sincerely,  
Mark Vasconcellos  
Honolulu, 96822

**HB-1300-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/20/2025 3:06:15 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/21/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Richard Collins	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass this important legislation. Mahalo!