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HB212 RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS

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

The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) **SUPPORTS THIS BILL**

As the mission of the OPD is to assist indigent defendants before all courts, our office advocates on behalf of individuals experiencing homelessness with regularity. Deputy Public Defenders represent individuals who are charged with all levels of crime, many of which intersect with mental health, addiction, and homelessness.

For individuals who request to participate in this program and have ongoing hearings before the court, it will be necessary to coordinate information between the office of homelessness and the OPD.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

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

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



**STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA**

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LAND
STATE PARKS

**Testimony of
DAWN N.S. CHANG
Chairperson**

**Before the House Committee on
FINANCE**

**Monday, February 24, 2025
12:00 PM**

State Capitol Conference Room 308 and Videoconference

**In Consideration of
HOUSE BILL 212 HOUSE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS**

House Bill 212 House Draft 1 creates a return to home program with the Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure and offers the following comments.**

The Department supports the program being permanent and receiving regular funding. Changes made in the House Draft 1, including establishing a public-private partnership through contract to administer the program, as well as further defining who is eligible for this program and safeguards to be taken to ensure the person is returning to family or friends that will welcome this person home.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

JOHN MIZUNO
DIRECTOR
STATEWIDE OFFICE ON HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Testimony of **John M. Mizuno**
Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness
Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Monday, February 24, 2025
12:00 noon
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

In consideration of
House Bill No. 212 HD1
RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of **HB 212, HD1, which would** establish a permanent Return-to-Home program in the Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions.

In addition, **HB 212, HD1** will also establish one full-time (1.0 FTE) position to assist and supervise the program statewide.

Foundation of the kauhale Initiative

Homelessness in Hawaii is not just a statistic; it's a pressing issue that demands our immediate attention. For over a decade, our state has consistently ranked among the top five in rates of per capita homelessness. The most recent Point in Time Count (PIT Count) in January 2024 revealed that 6,389 people in our state were experiencing homelessness, with the majority (4,494) on Oahu. These numbers are not just figures. They represent individuals and families in desperate need of our help.

While the issue of homelessness remains, Hawaii has made significant strides. In 2024, the Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions (SOHHS) set new priorities, including the ambitious goal of halving homelessness during Governor Green's Administration's first term (by November 2026). This would mean transitioning approximately 3,200 (homeless) people from the streets or remote areas to a home. Several of SOHHS' priorities focus on expanding the deeply affordable housing inventory for houseless individuals and affordable rental units for individuals, couples, and families who are not homeless but are facing housing instability (potentially becoming homeless) due to the high costs of living in Hawaii.

In 2024, SOHHS established seventeen Kauhale projects, and we recently added the Kulia kauhale in Waianae in 2025, bringing the total to 18. We just completed our 19th kauhale, Fernhurst YWCA, a kauhale for women coming out of the corrections system, which will provide the residents housing, meals, education, and job training. The YWCA kauhale is set to open officially on March 25, 2025. Our goal is to build at least thirty (30) kauhales by November 2026, with at least three kauhales on each neighbor island. This ambitious plan is not just a government initiative but a collaborative effort that involves the Governor, the Legislature, counties, Mayors, county councils, private businesses, faith-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, service providers, and the community.

Support for HB 212 HD1

With only \$50,000 in funding per year, the Return to Home Pilot Program has sent 137 out-of-state homeless people back to their families on the mainland. This program saves Hawaii taxpayers \$11.2 million (Governor Green's State of the State addresses the cost of caring for a homeless person not in stable housing at an average of \$82,000 per person per year). The program sunsets on January 1, 2026.

We strongly support this bill to establish a permanent Return-to-Home program within the Statewide Office of Homelessness and Housing Solutions (SOHHS) and to establish within SOHHS one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) Return to Home Homelessness Assistant to help with the administration of the program statewide (expanding our coverage from Honolulu to all neighbor Islands). The full-time position will be the leading resource to provide timely information on all contracts and services relating to this program to the Legislature, media, and the public and to timely assist with homeless outreach services to match people experiencing homelessness with a shelter or kauhale. Our office has received several UIPA requests. Having a dedicated person with all relevant information ready to provide such documentation will significantly save our office time and work.

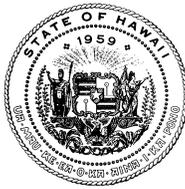
Thank you, Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members, for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of **House Bill 212, HD1**. I am grateful for your consideration of this critical measure. I look forward to the potential positive impact on our community while reuniting people experiencing homelessness with their families on the mainland and saving Hawaii taxpayers millions of dollars.

The Return to Home Program is a proven and successful solution to homelessness, and I urge your support of **HB212 HD1** and its funding through this bill.

Mahalo,

John Mizuno
Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness and Housing Solutions

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



Katherine Aumer, PhD
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON
LUNA HO'OMALU O KA PAPA

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
P.O. Box 3378, Room 256
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96801-3378

Written Testimony Only

STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
Testimony to the House Committee on Finance
COMMENTING ON H.B. 212 HD1
RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS
February 24, 2025 12:00 noon, Room 308 and Video

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Behavioral Health
Administration

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

Hawaii law, HRS §334-10, established the State Council on Mental Health (SCMH) as a 21-member body to advise on the allocation of resources, statewide needs, and programs affecting more than one county as well as to advocate for adults with serious mental illness, children with serious emotional disturbances, individuals with mental illness or emotional problems, including those with co-occurring substance abuse disorders. Members are residents from diverse backgrounds representing mental health service providers and recipients, students and youth, parents, and family members. Members include representatives of state agencies on mental health, criminal justice, housing, Medicaid, social services, vocational rehabilitation, and education. Members include representatives from the Hawaii Advisory Commission on Drug Abuse and Controlled Substances and county service area boards on mental health and substance abuse.

The State Council on Mental Health (SCMH) appreciates the intent of HB212 HD1 to reunite individuals with their families, recognizing its potential to bring hope and stability to those in need. However, we must ensure that efforts to address homelessness and mental health challenges do not inadvertently create new hardships for individuals with serious mental illness and/or co-occurring conditions.

- While this initiative could be beneficial, its success depends on ensuring that participation remains entirely voluntary and that individuals receive adequate support at every stage—beginning with a warm handoff to their families and continuing with access to long-term treatment and recovery services in their respective destinations.

Without these safeguards, there is a risk of replacing one difficult situation with another that could further destabilize individuals in crisis.

- Hawaii's mental health system is already operating beyond capacity. The Big Island experiences an influx of individuals seeking services during the winter months, stretching providers' ability to meet demand. Some of these individuals are experiencing their first diagnosis or initial mental health episode, and for them, assistance in returning home could be a critical intervention. However, we must recognize that family reunification alone does not guarantee sustained recovery. Many families face challenges in providing long-term care, and there is a need to assess how many reunions result in lasting stability versus repeated crises.
- Furthermore, while addressing the needs of those already in Hawaii is important, we must also take proactive steps to prevent further strain on the state's mental health system. A comprehensive approach should include prevention strategies to reduce the number of individuals who arrive in Hawaii without adequate resources.
- Finally, we urge that any implementation of this initiative include mechanisms for tracking outcomes. Collecting data on the effectiveness of reunification efforts will be critical in assessing their impact and making necessary improvements. Evidence-based approaches will ensure that we are not only providing immediate assistance but also working toward long-term solutions that support individuals with mental health conditions and the communities they return to.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony. We appreciate your commitment to addressing these complex issues and welcome ongoing dialogue on improving mental health care and support in Hawaii. Should you have any questions, please contact us at DOH.SCMHChairperson@doh.hawaii.gov

VISION: A Hawaii where people of all ages with mental health challenges can enjoy recovery in the community of their choice.

MISSION: To advocate for a Hawaii where all persons affected by mental illness can access necessary treatment and support to live full lives in the community of their choice.



The Institute for Human Services, Inc.
Ending the Cycle of Homelessness

TO: Honorable Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita
Chair, House Committee on Finance

Honorable Rep. Jenna Takenouchi
Vice Chair, House Committee on Finance

FROM: Angie Knight, Community Relations Manager
IHS, Institute for Human Services, Inc.

RE: HB212 HD1 - RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS

DATE: February 21, 2025

POSITION: IHS supports the passing of HB212 HD1.

IHS, The Institute for Human Services, has been operating a homeless relocation program since 2015. The pilot program originated with seed funds from the Hawaii Tourism and Lodging Association and other private funders to address the many transient homeless encountered in Waikiki; then was awarded the contract for OHHS's Return to Home Statewide Program.

We support the passing of HB212 HD1, which not only makes the program a permanent and expected cost of OHHS but also includes the provision for 1 FTE position, which is critical in the continued success and growth of this program. From the start of the Statewide contract, February 1, 2024 to the end of Jan. 2025 with a staff member splitting time between Return to Home and general outreach duties, 137 individuals were reunited with loved ones and programs to further them in their pursuit of stable, permanent housing outside of Hawai'i.

Over the years, we have seen an uptick in the number of out-of-state visitors in our outreach and shelter programs and this would save our State much more in benefit and healthcare dollars. Currently, over 60% of new intakes at our men's shelter are recent arrivals from out-of-state. Moreover, over the past year, we've seen an increase in demand for relocation services for individuals receiving care at behavioral health crisis centers and our own triage and treatment center, individuals voluntarily wishing to participate in in-patient programs in the mainland. A partnership with Waikiki community partners has also helped identify more candidates for this program more efficiently.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-212-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 7:43:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jillian Anderson	Waikiki Neighborhood Board	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

WAIKIKI NEIGHBORHOOD BOARD

Legislative Permitted Interaction Group

The Waikiki Neighborhood Board stands in **support** of HB212 HD1.

As homelessness continues to be a concern not just in Waikiki but statewide, it is critical we invest in programs that have shown success in helping individuals find housing solutions. In its pilot, the return-to-home program sent 137 out-of-state individuals back to their families on the mainland. The effects of this have been felt in Waikiki, which is a common destination for our out-of-state homeless population.

Providing permanency in staffing and funding will allow the return-to-home program to continue its effective efforts. We must grow upon the immense qualitative and quantitative successes this program has been able to achieve and most importantly — to be able to reunite more individuals with their families in the state they initially called home.

The Waikiki Neighborhood Board asks for your continued support of this measure which would greatly benefit our community.

HB-212-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/22/2025 12:37:42 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ellen Godbey Carson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill HB212 for Return-to-Home funds for some of our homeless individuals. Some have come here thinking they could afford to live here, only to find out they can not. While they are homeless here, they may have family on the Continent who are willing to take them in and help support them to become self-sufficient again. Without funds to get them to a place where they can stabilize and become productive citizens again, they are caught in our expensive paradise where they deteriorate on our streets and face mental and physical health risks that cause rapid deterioration. This bill makes sense.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony

Ellen Godbey Carson