



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB1431  
RELATING TO VIRAL HEPATITIS.**

SENATOR JOY SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date: February 3, 2025 @ 1:00 PM

Room Number: 225

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health ("Department") requests that this measure be  
2 considered as a vehicle to provide this needed funding so long as it does not supplant the  
3 priorities and requests outlined in the Governors executive budget request.

4 **Department Position:** The Department SUPPORTS this measure and offers comments.

5 **Department Testimony:** The Communicable Disease and Public Health Nursing Division  
6 (CDPHND) provides the following testimony on behalf of the Department. CDPHND supports  
7 SB1431, which would establish a hepatitis prevention program and positions to address the  
8 burden of viral hepatitis on Hawai'i.

9 **Preventable Infections and Deaths in Hawai'i**

10 Viral hepatitis infections can lead to preventable liver cancer and premature death. From 2000-  
11 2020, hepatitis B mortality rates were consistently higher in Hawai'i compared to the US,  
12 reaching three times as many deaths in 2019. Most of these deaths were among Asian and  
13 Pacific Islander residents. For the same period, most hepatitis C-related deaths in Hawai'i  
14 occurred earlier than that rest of the state: 88% did not reach age 75, and 40% died before  
15 retirement age at 65.

16 **Opportunities to Intervene Exist**

Hepatitis B and C can be eliminated in Hawai'i through existing interventions: universal hepatitis screening and immunization; culturally-based care coordination; and safe, effective treatments, including a cure for hepatitis C. Most residents can get these covered by insurance, so this measure will support efforts to leverage insurance-paid services. With only 2 federally-funded positions and no dedicated program funds, CDPHND has focused on coalition-building (via Hep Free Hawai'i) to coordinate a statewide hepatitis elimination strategy ("Hep Free 2030") since 2011. Successes include hepatitis C treatment in local jails and prisons as well as electronic medical record integration in Neighbor Island health centers. This progress points to the impact that an adequately funded and staffed hepatitis prevention program could have.

#### **Sufficient Infrastructure Needed**

CDPHND is seeking positions to scale up the State's response to preventable, treatable, but life-threatening, hepatitis. The requested positions include:

- Section Supervisor (1 F.T.E. Program Specialist V): Provide overall coordination of section activities as well as strategic planning and partnership development;
- Intervention Specialist/Case Investigator (1 F.T.E. Epidemiological Specialist IV): Conduct disease surveillance and investigation activities to effectively allocate resources;
- Office Assistant (1 F.T.E. Office Assistant III): Provide administrative support.

CDPHND estimates that \$545,000 in annual program funds would be sufficient to support targeted community-based hepatitis testing, immunizations, care coordination, and treatment.

If unfunded, the State will not be able to effectively curtail high rates of hepatitis mortality and related costs to the workforce, despite the availability of known interventions.

**Offered Amendments:** None.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



February 1, 2025

To: COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Re: SUPPORT OF SB1431 RELATING TO VIRAL HEPATITIS

Hrg: Monday, February 3, 2025 at 1:00 pm

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and Members of the Committee,

The Hawai'i Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 450 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawai'i through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy.

The Hawaii Public Health Association **supports SB1431**. This bill aligns with [Hep Free 2030](#), the statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis, as developed by the Hep Free Hawai'i (HFH) coalition and the Hawai'i Department of Health (HDOH). *Hep Free 2030* aims to eliminate viral hepatitis in Hawai'i by 2030 through key partnerships and culturally appropriate services and policies. We know we can eliminate hepatitis in Hawai'i because viral hepatitis is both preventable and treatable; models and interventions already exist and are being deployed locally.

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

- Two of the leading causes of liver cancer in Hawai'i are hepatitis B and C, which can also lead to premature deaths.
- Per HDOH, annual liver cancer death rates in Hawai'i were higher than the national average from 2000 to 2020
- Per HDOH, most state residents with hepatitis C (88%) died earlier than the rest of state.

Given this impact on Hawaii, we support this bill to establish and fund a formal hepatitis program in HDOH. This would ensure that necessary and effective services—including surveillance, vaccination, screening, treatment—can be provided to affected communities with sufficient HDOH staffing and infrastructure.

Undiagnosed and untreated viral hepatitis increases the costs to private and public systems of care each year. This bill provides a modest investment to make significant impact on a preventable, treatable health issue. Please pass this bill to help save local lives!

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Holly Kessler'.

Holly Kessler  
Executive Director

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1431

**TO:** Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, & HHS Committee Members

**FROM:** Nikos Leverenz  
Policy & Advancement Manager

**DATE:** February 3, 2025 (1:00 PM)

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Hawai'i Health & Harm Reduction Center (HHHRC) **strongly supports** SB 1431, which establishes and appropriates funds for a hepatitis prevention program within the state Department of Health to “address preventable morbidity and mortality from viral hepatitis” among this state’s residents. These positions will strengthen current efforts to collect needed data and to pursue strategies that broaden access to screening, prevention, and care services.

Over the past decade, HHHRC has worked with Hep Free Hawai'i and over 200 community partners in recent years on a strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis A, B, and C on a statewide basis. “[Hep Free 2030](#)” identifies five priorities to eliminate hepatitis in Hawai'i: awareness and education, access to services, advocacy at all levels, equity in everything, and data for decision making. It also articulates four core values: harm reduction, social justice, intersectionality, and aloha.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) broadly recommends vaccination for hepatitis B and that all adults over 18 get tested for hepatitis B and C at least once. In 2020 the CDC declared viral hepatitis a “[winnable battle](#),” making it a national public health priority where significant progress can be made in a relatively short timeframe.

HHHRC’s mission is to reduce harm, promote health, create wellness, and fight stigma in Hawai'i and the Pacific. We work with many individuals impacted by poverty, housing instability, and other social determinants of health. Many have behavioral health problems, including those related to substance use and mental health conditions, and have also been deeply impacted by trauma related to histories of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 4:26:33 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shavon Fenton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the committee,

I **support SB1431**. This bill aligns with [Hep Free 2030](#), the statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis, as developed by the Hep Free Hawai‘i (HFH) coalition and the Hawai‘i Department of Health (HDOH). *Hep Free 2030* aims to eliminate viral hepatitis in Hawai‘i by 2030 through key partnerships and culturally appropriate services and policies. I know we can eliminate hepatitis in Hawai‘i because viral hepatitis is both preventable and treatable; models and interventions already exist and are being deployed locally.

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

- Two of the leading causes of liver cancer in Hawai‘i are hepatitis B and C, which can also lead to premature deaths.
- Per HDOH, annual liver cancer death rates in Hawai‘i were higher than the national average from 2000 to 2020
- Per HDOH, most state residents with hepatitis C (88%) died earlier than the rest of state.

Given this impact on Hawaii, I support this bill to establish and fund a formal hepatitis program in HDOH. This would ensure that necessary and effective services—including surveillance, vaccination, screening, treatment—can be provided to affected communities with sufficient HDOH staffing and infrastructure.

Undiagnosed and untreated viral hepatitis increases the costs to private and public systems of care each year. This bill provides a modest investment to make significant impact on a preventable, treatable health issue. Please pass this bill to help save local lives!

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 4:26:07 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dr. Christina MB Wang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair San Buenaventura , Vice Chair Aquino and members of the committee

**I support SB1431.** This bill aligns with [Hep Free 2030](#), the statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis, as developed by the Hep Free Hawai‘i (HFH) coalition and the Hawai‘i Department of Health (HDOH). *Hep Free 2030* aims to eliminate viral hepatitis in Hawai‘i by 2030 through key partnerships and culturally appropriate services and policies. We know we can eliminate hepatitis in Hawai‘i because viral hepatitis is both preventable and treatable; models and interventions already exist and are being deployed locally.

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

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Given this impact on Hawaii, we support this bill to establish and fund a formal hepatitis program in HDOH. This would ensure that necessary and effective services—including surveillance, vaccination, screening, treatment—can be provided to affected communities with sufficient HDOH staffing and infrastructure.

Undiagnosed and untreated viral hepatitis increases the costs to private and public systems of care each year. This bill provides a modest investment to make significant impact on a preventable, treatable health issue. Please pass this bill to help save local lives!



**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 4:05:56 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anika Martin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair San Buenaventura , Vice Chair Aquino and members of the committee

I **support SB1431**. This bill aligns with [Hep Free 2030](#), the statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis, as developed by the Hep Free Hawai‘i (HFH) coalition and the Hawai‘i Department of Health (HDOH). *Hep Free 2030* aims to eliminate viral hepatitis in Hawai‘i by 2030 through key partnerships and culturally appropriate services and policies. We know we can eliminate hepatitis in Hawai‘i because viral hepatitis is both preventable and treatable; models and interventions already exist and are being deployed locally.

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

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Given this impact on Hawaii, we support this bill to establish and fund a formal hepatitis program in HDOH. This would ensure that necessary and effective services—including surveillance, vaccination, screening, treatment—can be provided to affected communities with sufficient HDOH staffing and infrastructure.

Undiagnosed and untreated viral hepatitis increases the costs to private and public systems of care each year. This bill provides a modest investment to make significant impact on a preventable, treatable health issue. As part of the local coalition, I humbly ask that you pass this bill to make an impact and save local lives!

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 4:00:00 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aaron Ruddick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair San Buenaventura , Vice Chair Aquino and members of the committee

I **support SB1431**. This bill aligns with [Hep Free 2030](#), the statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis, as developed by the Hep Free Hawai‘i (HFH) coalition and the Hawai‘i Department of Health (HDOH). *Hep Free 2030* aims to eliminate viral hepatitis in Hawai‘i by 2030 through key partnerships and culturally appropriate services and policies. We know we can eliminate hepatitis in Hawai‘i because viral hepatitis is both preventable and treatable; models and interventions already exist and are being deployed locally.

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

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Given this impact on Hawaii, we support this bill to establish and fund a formal hepatitis program in HDOH. This would ensure that necessary and effective services—including surveillance, vaccination, screening, treatment—can be provided to affected communities with sufficient HDOH staffing and infrastructure.

Undiagnosed and untreated viral hepatitis increases the costs to private and public systems of care each year. This bill provides a modest investment to make significant impact on a preventable, treatable health issue. Please pass this bill to help save local lives!

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 6:15:32 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arnold Abe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please fund this vital program for affected communities.

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 7:53:27 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thaddeus Pham	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the HHS committee,

As a public health profession in Hawai'i and as someone someone who lost a family member to hepatitis, **I write in unequivocal support of SB1431.** This bill provides a small investment in local health infrastructure, which will make significant impact on a preventable, treatable, and deadly disease. SB1431 can save lives!

Personally, I have experienced how lack of sufficient public health education and resources contributed to the death of my uncle from hepatitis B. By the time it was diagnosed, his liver was already failing. He passed quickly and in pain, leaving behind a wife and three daughters. This was completely avoidable.

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

- Two of the leading causes of liver cancer in Hawai'i are hepatitis B and C, which can also lead to premature deaths.
- Annual liver cancer death rates in Hawai'i were higher than the national average from 2000 to 2020.
- Most Hawai'i residents with hepatitis C (88%) died earlier than the rest of state.

However, we know we can eliminate hepatitis in Hawai'i because viral hepatitis is both preventable and treatable. Models and interventions already exist and are being deployed locally by Hep Free Hawai'i coalition and its government and community partners. A more sustainable investment would ensure that this effective work continues.

Please pass this bill to help save local lives!

Mahalo,

Thaddeus Pham

Makiki, HI



**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 2/1/2025 1:37:41 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gretchen Alther	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair San Buenaventura , Vice Chair Aquino and members of the committee

**I support SB1431.** This bill aligns with [Hep Free 2030](#), the statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis, as developed by the Hep Free Hawai‘i (HFH) coalition and the Hawai‘i Department of Health (HDOH). *Hep Free 2030* aims to eliminate viral hepatitis in Hawai‘i by 2030 through key partnerships and culturally appropriate services and policies. We know we can eliminate hepatitis in Hawai‘i because viral hepatitis is both preventable and treatable; models and interventions already exist and are being deployed locally.

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

- Two of the leading causes of liver cancer in Hawai‘i are hepatitis B and C, which can also lead to premature deaths.
- Per HDOH, annual liver cancer death rates in Hawai‘i were higher than the national average from 2000 to 2020
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Given this impact on Hawaii, we support this bill to establish and fund a formal hepatitis program in HDOH. This would ensure that necessary and effective services—including surveillance, vaccination, screening, treatment—can be provided to affected communities with sufficient HDOH staffing and infrastructure.

Undiagnosed and untreated viral hepatitis increases the costs to private and public systems of care each year. This bill provides a modest investment to make significant impact on a preventable, treatable health issue. Please pass this bill to help save local lives!

Thank you,

Gretchen Alther

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 9:37:13 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dawn Poiani	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony: Opposing State Funding for Hepatitis B Screening**

Honorable committee members,

I oppose the state should be responsible for funding widespread Hepatitis B screening. While I fully recognize the importance of addressing public health concerns, I believe that the state should not bear the cost of universal Hepatitis B screenings. There are several reasons for this position, which I will outline below.

**1. Fiscal Responsibility and Allocation of Resources**

The state's budget is finite, and taxpayer money should be spent where it will have the most significant impact on public welfare. Hepatitis B is a disease that, while important, affects a relatively small portion of the population. The vast majority of individuals do not require screening because they are not at high risk for infection. Prioritizing universal screening would divert precious resources away from other urgent public health issues that affect a broader portion of the population, such as mental health services, access to primary care, or preventive measures for more common and widespread diseases.

While screening can be important for high-risk groups, the cost of universal screening would be significant and may not lead to a meaningful improvement in public health outcomes for the general population. It is critical that we allocate resources efficiently to where they can have the greatest impact on improving overall health outcomes.

**1. Targeted Screening is More Effective**

Rather than offering universal screening to all individuals, a more effective approach would be to focus resources on high-risk populations. Hepatitis B primarily affects individuals who are in certain high-risk groups, such as people with a history of injection drug use, individuals from regions with a high prevalence of Hepatitis B, and individuals who have certain occupational exposures (e.g., healthcare workers).

By targeting screening efforts to these groups, we can better ensure that resources are being spent effectively and that individuals who truly need screening receive it. A blanket approach is not

only inefficient but also unnecessary, as the vast majority of people will not benefit from routine screening.

2. This bill has a strong focus on Prenatal, and post natal screening. This is already universally done with mothers and newborns in the hospital. It makes no sense for the state to take over the costs of maternal and infant screening since this is already a universal protocol.

Thank you,

Dawn P.

Honolulu, HI 96813

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:58:53 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniel Saltman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair San Buenaventura , Vice Chair Aquino and members of the committee

**I support SB1431.**

Hepatitis C is a curable infection. Pill only treatments with minimal side effects for 8 -12 weeks have a 95 - 98% cure rate. **THIS IS UNIQUE AMONG CHRONIC VIRAL INFECTIONS!**

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

- Two of the leading causes of liver cancer in Hawai‘i are hepatitis B and C, which can also lead to premature deaths.
- Per HDOH, annual liver cancer death rates in Hawai‘i were higher than the national average from 2000 to 2020
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Given this impact on Hawaii, we support this bill to establish and fund a formal hepatitis program in HDOH. This would ensure that necessary and effective services—including surveillance, vaccination, screening, treatment—can be provided to affected communities with sufficient HDOH staffing and infrastructure.

Undiagnosed and untreated viral hepatitis increases the costs to private and public systems of care each year. This bill provides a modest investment to make significant impact on a preventable, treatable health issue. Please pass this bill to help save local lives!

**LATE**

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 5:33:56 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melissa Bumgardner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB 1431. This bill will help the Hep Free Hawai'i Coalition, of which I am a member, achieve our statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis by 2030. 2025 marks my 30th year serving my community as a pharmacist. Hepatitis C is one of the few chronic medical conditions I have had the privilege of partnering with patients to CURE in my career. And it only takes a simple 8 or 12 week treatment. The problem is that, right now, only about one-third of patients currently diagnosed with Hepatitis C in our country currently achieve cure. This is often because patients don't know they have the condition or don't realize that there are new, highly effective treatment options available. Allocating resources to the Hawai'i Department of Health can help fund outreach efforts to raise awareness of this curable condition, fund testing and linkage-to-care services in our community, and provide resources to continue to increase the pool of providers offering treatment. Hepatitis B is a vaccine-preventable disease that could also benefit from additional resources for awareness and outreach. Both conditions accounted for 2 out of 3 liver cancer cases in Hawai'i in 2018, a condition for which Hawai'i has higher incidence and rates of deaths compared to other states.

I strongly encourage the committee to pass this bill to help save local lives.

**LATE**

**SB-1431**

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 3:47:25 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/3/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Griff Jurgens	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, & members of the committee,

First, thank you for the work you do serving the public. A job that can sometimes be under appreciated. I **support SB1431**. This bill aligns with [Hep Free 2030](#), the statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis, as developed by the Hep Free Hawai‘i (HFH) coalition and the Hawai‘i Department of Health (HDOH). *Hep Free 2030* aims to eliminate viral hepatitis in Hawai‘i by 2030 through key partnerships and culturally appropriate services and policies. We know we can eliminate hepatitis in Hawai‘i because viral hepatitis is both preventable and treatable; models and interventions exist locally & are being deployed.

The lack of public health resources dedicated to viral hepatitis has contributed to higher death rates in the state, especially for vulnerable communities such as Asian and Pacific Islander (API) residents.

- 2 of the leading causes of liver cancer in Hawai‘i are hepatitis B and C, which also lead to premature deaths
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Given this impact on Hawaii, I support this bill to establish and fund a formal hepatitis program in HDOH. This would ensure that necessary and effective services—including surveillance, vaccination, screening, treatment—can be provided to affected communities with sufficient HDOH staffing & infrastructure.

Undiagnosed & untreated viral hepatitis increases the costs to private and public systems of care each year. This bill provides a modest investment to make an impact on a preventable, treatable health issue. Please pass this bill to help save local lives.



**LATE**

**TO:** Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, & HHS Committee Members

**FROM:** Heather Lusk  
Co-Founder and Co-Director of Hep Free Hawaii

**DATE:** February 3, 2025 (1:00 PM)

Hep Free Hawaii (HFH) **strongly supports** SB 1431, which establishes and appropriates funds for a hepatitis prevention program within the state Department of Health to “address preventable morbidity and mortality from viral hepatitis” among this state’s residents. These positions will strengthen current efforts to collect needed data and to pursue strategies that broaden access to screening, prevention, and care services.

Over the past decade, HHHRC has worked with Hep Free Hawai‘i and over 200 community partners in recent years on a strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis A, B, and C on a statewide basis. “[Hep Free 2030](#)” identifies five priorities to eliminate hepatitis in Hawai‘i: awareness and education, access to services, advocacy at all levels, equity in everything, and data for decision making. It also articulates four core values: harm reduction, social justice, intersectionality, and aloha.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) broadly recommends vaccination for hepatitis B and that all adults over 18 get tested for hepatitis B and C at least once. In 2020 the CDC declared viral hepatitis a “[winnable battle](#),” making it a national public health priority where significant progress can be made in a relatively short timeframe.

Hep Free Hawai‘i (HFH) is a coalition of local, national and global partners dedicated to increasing viral hepatitis awareness and access to care throughout our state. With over 100 partner agencies, HFH thrives because we all work together, connecting our communities and our islands to make Hawaii truly “hep free”. HFH’s 2030 plan to eliminate viral hepatitis includes increase to awareness and access of hepatitis testing

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.