



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB1445  
RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH.**

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

Hearing Date: February 5, 2025

Room Number: 225

1 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health (DOH) Child & Adolescent Mental Health  
2 Division (CAMHD) strongly supports this bill to establish a youth mental health digital platform  
3 pilot project to help youth learn about, identify and manage mental health challenges. Providing  
4 easy access to trusted information and resources empowers youth, reduces stigma, and may  
5 prevent mental health challenges from worsening in the future.

6 This pilot also has the potential to support the youth mental health service system by addressing  
7 lower-level challenges so the behavioral health workforce (which is scarce) can focus on youth  
8 who require more intensive support. In addition, it can provide critical data about community  
9 youth mental health needs.

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

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

15 **Fiscal Implications:** \$500,000 for fiscal year 2025-2026, and \$250,000 for fiscal year 2026-  
16 2027.

17 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

# Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai‘i

February 5, 2025

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Hearing Time: 1:00PM  
Location: State Capitol Conference Room 225  
Re: SB1445, Relating to Youth Mental Health

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

On behalf of the Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai‘i hui, we are writing in **strong support of SB1445, relating to youth mental health**. This bill establishes a two-year digital youth mental health platform pilot project under which the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Health develops and makes publicly available a digital platform providing tools and resources designed to help young people address and manage mental health challenges.

As Hawai‘i faces a growing youth mental health crisis, it is imperative that we provide accessible, innovative, and evidence-based resources to support youth. Studies show that nearly one in five adolescents experience a mental health disorder, yet many do not receive the help they need to due to stigma, lack of resources, or barriers to accessing care. A digital platform can bridge this gap by offering immediate, 24/7 access to mental health tools, educational materials, and crisis intervention resources. This pilot project aligns with the evolving ways youth seek support—through digital platforms that provide privacy, accessibility, and tailored resources. By equipping them with self-help tools, coping strategies, and direct connections to professional help, this initiative can play a crucial role in early intervention and prevention practices, thereby reducing long-term mental health challenges for youth.

Furthermore, by tracking engagement and effectiveness over the two-year pilot period, this initiative will allow policymakers to assess its impact and refine the approach for long-term implementation. This is a forward-thinking solution that prioritizes youth well-being and leverages technology to meet them where they are.

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai‘i is a collaboration of organizations and individuals committed to reducing the harmful effects of a punitive incarceration system for youth; promoting equity in the justice system; and improving and increasing resources to address adolescent and young adult mental health needs. We seek to improve the continuity of programs and services for youth and young adults transitioning from minor to adult status; eliminate youth homelessness and housing market discrimination against young adults; and promote and fund more holistic and culturally informed approaches among public/private agencies serving youth.

**Please support SB1445.**

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## HAWAI'I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Phone: (808) 489-9549

Web site: <http://www.hysn.org> E-mail: [info@hysn.org](mailto:info@hysn.org)

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 2, 2025

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

### **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1445 RELATING TO YOUTH** **MENTAL HEALTH**

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports SB 1445 Relating to Youth Mental Health.

35% of middle and high school youth in Hawai'i experience persistent depression; 7% of high school and 11% of middle school students in Hawai'i reported having attempted suicide.

23% of middle school students report that their mental health was most of the time or always "not good" in the prior 30 days. Youth mental health issues are a risk factor for high-risk substance use.

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

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

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

The proposed digital mental health platform will reduce stigma by making it easier for youth to explore resources without fear of judgment. It will expand the reach of mental health education and prevention by making it more convenient and inclusive, especially for children and adolescents in remote or underserved areas. And it is cost-effective.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judith F. Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Judith F. Clark, MPH  
Executive Director



## CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1445: RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

TO: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawaii

Hearing: Wednesday 02/05/2025 at 1:00 PM; CR 225 & via videoconference

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

Catholic Charities Hawaii **supports SB 1445**, which establishes a two-year digital youth mental health platform pilot project under the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division (CAMHD) of the Department of Health.

Catholic Charities Hawaii (CCH) is a tax-exempt, community-based organization that has been providing social services in Hawaii for over 77 years. CCH has programs serving children, families, elders, individuals experiencing homelessness, veterans, and immigrants. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy for the most vulnerable in Hawaii. As an organization committed to serving vulnerable populations and strengthening families, we have seen firsthand the urgent need for expanded mental health support for young people. The challenges of the pandemic, social pressures, and economic uncertainties have heightened stress, anxiety, and depression among youth, making it critical to provide innovative and easily accessible solutions.

By developing a publicly available digital platform, this pilot project will offer young people the resources they need to navigate mental health challenges in a way that is both private and readily accessible. Digital tools can bridge the gap between youth who may hesitate to seek in-person services and the professional guidance they need. Furthermore, this initiative aligns with our mission to promote the well-being of Hawaii's youth and families by fostering resilience and access to essential support systems.

We commend the Department of Health for taking this proactive approach and urge the Legislature to support this important pilot project. We urge your support for this bill and ask for your support in passing during this legislative session. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Please contact our Vice President of Mission, Shellie Niles at (808) 527-4813 if you have any questions.





## Advocating for the Hawai'i LGBTQIA+ Community

February 4, 2025

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Hawai'i State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street, Room 329  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Wednesday, February 5, 2025, at 1:00 PM

### RE: **Strong Support for Senate Bill 1445 Relating to Youth Mental Health**

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and committee members,

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 1445 on behalf of the Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus. (LGBTQ+) Commission, which was established by the 2022 Hawai'i State Legislature with the following purpose:

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

The Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission strongly supports Senate Bill 1445, which seeks to establish a two-year digital youth mental health platform pilot project. This initiative, developed under the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Health, represents a critical investment in the well-being of Hawai'i's young people, providing accessible tools and resources to help them navigate mental health challenges.

Hawai'i's youth are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis, exacerbated by social isolation, economic uncertainty, and the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These struggles are particularly acute for LGBTQIA+ youth and Native Hawaiian youth, who often experience higher rates of mental health challenges due to discrimination, stigma, and a lack of culturally competent support services. A digital platform offering accessible, inclusive, and evidence-based mental health resources has the potential to be a lifesaving tool for these communities.

While we commend this important step toward supporting youth mental health, we respectfully request that SB 1445 explicitly ensure that the platform includes culturally responsive and LGBTQIA+-affirming content. Specifically, we urge the inclusion of:

- Resources tailored to the unique mental health needs of LGBTQIA+ youth, including identity exploration, coping with discrimination, and crisis intervention services.
- Culturally relevant support and mental health resources for Native Hawaiian youth, grounded in indigenous healing practices and community-based care models.

## HI State LGBTQ+ Commission Testimony in Strong Support of SB 1445

- Partnerships with local LGBTQIA+ organizations, Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners, and mental health professionals to ensure the platform is both effective and reflective of Hawai'i's diverse communities.

The success of this initiative depends on its ability to reach and meaningfully support all young people in our state, especially those who are most vulnerable. By incorporating LGBTQIA+-affirming and culturally responsive resources, the digital mental health platform will be a more inclusive and effective tool for addressing the needs of Hawai'i's youth.

Mahalo for your leadership and commitment to improving youth mental health. We urge you to pass SB 1445 with these considerations in mind to ensure that no young person in Hawai'i is left without the support they need.

Should you or any member of your staff have any questions regarding this testimony you can reach the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission at [hawaiiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com](mailto:hawaiiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com).

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)  
Vice-Chair  
[Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission](#)



Where LGBTQIA+ Rights Meet the Labor Movement  
A constituency group of the Hawai'i State AFL-CIO

**LATE**

February 4, 2025

Senate's Committee on Health and Human Services  
Hawai'i State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 at 1:00 PM

**RE: STRONG SUPPORT for Senate Bill 1445**

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Chair Aquino, and fellow committee members,

Pride at Work – Hawai'i is an official chapter of [Pride at Work](#) which is a national nonprofit organization that represents LGBTQIA+ union members and their allies. We are an officially recognized constituency group of the AFL-CIO that organizes mutual support between the organized Labor Movement and the LGBTQIA+ Community to further social and economic justice.

Pride at Work - Hawai'i strongly supports Senate Bill 1445, which seeks to establish a two-year digital youth mental health platform pilot project under the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division. This initiative will provide young people with the critical tools and resources they need to address and manage mental health challenges in a way that is accessible, culturally competent, and inclusive.

Marginalized communities—including Native Hawaiians, LGBTQIA+ youth, and other historically underserved populations—face unique and disproportionate mental health challenges. Systemic inequities, discrimination, and a lack of culturally affirming care contribute to the mental health crisis among these groups. According to national and local data, LGBTQIA+ youth are significantly more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation due to societal stigma, rejection, and bullying. Native Hawaiian youth, similarly, face intergenerational trauma, economic hardships, and cultural displacement, all of which contribute to poor mental health outcomes.

A digital mental health platform offers a vital lifeline to these communities by providing a safe and private space where youth can seek guidance, resources, and support without fear of discrimination or judgment. The flexibility of a digital platform allows young people to access mental health tools on their own terms, ensuring that those who may not feel comfortable seeking in-person services still have a place to turn. Furthermore, this platform has the potential to incorporate culturally responsive and identity-affirming content that resonates with marginalized youth and validates their lived experiences.

SB 1445 represents a crucial step in bridging the mental health gap for Hawai'i's youth. By investing in digital mental health solutions, we can provide timely, accessible, and equitable care that meets young people where they are. We urge this committee to pass SB 1445 to support the well-being of all of Hawai'i's youth, particularly those who have been historically underserved.

In solidarity,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)  
President  
[Pride at Work – Hawai'i](#)



**HIPHI Board**

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John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native  
Hawaiian Research Office

**HIPHI Initiatives**

Coalition for a  
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &  
Evaluation

Community Health  
Worker Initiatives

COVID-19 Response

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Farm to School Network

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &  
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: February 5, 2025

To: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J. C. Aquino, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

RE: Support for SB 1445, Relating to Youth Mental Health

Hrg: Wednesday, February 5, 2025, at 1:00 PM, Conference Room 225

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)<sup>1</sup> supports SB 1445, which establishes a two-year digital youth mental health platform pilot project under which the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Health develops and makes publicly available a digital platform providing tools and resources designed to help young people address and manage mental health challenges.

We are in the midst of a youth mental health crisis. According to Hawai'i Health Matters, in 2023, one in three public school students in grades 6-12 in our state felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some of their usual activities. Yet, less than 25% of those teens received the help they needed.<sup>2</sup>

**Youth Mental Health Data**

According to the child and family mental health data tracker hosted by Hawai'i Health Matters, for 2023, 34.9% of students in grades 9-12 felt so sad or hopeless for two or more weeks that they stopped doing usual activities in the past 12 months.<sup>3</sup>

The tracker also found that 26.3% of students in grades 6-8 have seriously considered attempting suicide.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the data tracker reported that only 23.2% of young teens were able to obtain the mental health assistance that they need, a number that falls to 19.9% when only public school students in grades 9-12 are considered.<sup>5</sup> This disparity between the number of students reporting

<sup>1</sup> Hawai'i Public Health Institute's mission is to advance health and wellness for the people and islands of Hawai'i. We do this through expanding our understanding of what creates health of people and place, fostering partnerships, and cultivating programs to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hawaiihealthmatters.org/indicators/index/dashboard?alias=MentalHealth>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hawaiihealthmatters.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=13423&localeId=14>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hawaiihealthmatters.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=13353&localeId=14>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hawaiihealthmatters.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=13419&localeId=14>



mental health problems and accessing mental health services highlights the need to strengthen youth mental wellness programs in Hawai'i.

### **Digital Mental Health Tools**

Digital mental health service delivery systems can improve access to mental health services in the Information Age. According to The Commonwealth Fund, a nongovernmental organization that works to promote a high-performing and equitable healthcare system, digital mental health tools that use evidence-based interventions and are combined with clinician-based care could “help increase access to care for people of all ages.”<sup>6</sup>

Since young people tend to be more frequent users of digital technologies, the development of digital mental health technology—such as mobile applications that help people measure changes in their mental health symptoms or access treatment programs—carries unique opportunities for addressing youth mental healthcare gaps.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is laying the groundwork for a “coverage with evidence development” process to enable reimbursement for digital tools with initial evidentiary support.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, some state Medicaid programs, such as Washington and Louisiana, have started developing coverage determination processes that can accommodate digital mental health tools.<sup>8</sup>

As digital mental health tools become more readily available and affordable for states, we should invest in programs that deploy their use to uplift adolescent mental resilience. Accordingly, we support SB 1445 and urge your committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nate Hix'.

Nate Hix  
Director of Policy and Advocacy

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2023/using-digital-technology-respond-youth-mental-health-crisis>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/accelerating-science-driven-reimbursement-digital-therapeutics-state-medicare-programs>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/blog/transforming-medicare-coverage-new-medicare-coverage-pathway-emerging-technologies-and-revamped>

**LATE**

To: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Re: SB 1445 Relating to Youth Mental Health

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 225 & Via Videoconference  
Wednesday February 5, 2025, 1:00PM

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Committee Members,

**On behalf of HCANSpeaks!, I am writing in strong support of SB 1445, Relating to Youth Mental Health.** This bill establishes a two-year digital youth mental health platform pilot project under which the child and adolescent mental health division of the department of health develops and makes publicly available a digital platform providing tools and resources designed to help young people address and manage mental health challenges.

At the 2024 Hawaii Children and Youth Summit, young people agreed that expanding resources and increasing funding for mental health services was a top priority for legislative action in 2025. 35% of middle and high school youth in Hawai'i experience persistent depression; 7% of high school and 11% of middle school students in Hawai'i reported having attempted suicide. 23% of middle school students report that their mental health was most of the time or always "not good" in the prior 30 days. Youth mental health issues are a risk factor for high-risk substance use. The TeenLink Hawai'i website continues to get 2,000 site visits on average each month. The top topics/pages visited included suicide, stress, mental health, and self-care.

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

Please pass SB 1445 to support the mental health needs of youth in our state.  
Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of SB 1445.**

Kind regards,  
Noreen Kohl, Ph.D.  
Policy Researcher and Advocate