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STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
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March 13, 2023

TO: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: [HB 1366 HD1](#) – RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS.

Hearing: March 15, 2023, 1:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 225 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this measure, offers comments, and requests clarifications. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation in this measure not replace or adversely impact priorities identified in the executive budget.

**PURPOSE:** The bill's purpose is to require the Department of Human Services to establish a three-year return-to-home pilot program to return homeless individuals in the state to families and relatives in their home states. Appropriates funds for the implementation of the return-to-home pilot program. Effective 6/30/3000. (HD1).

The HD1 amended the measure by:

- (1) Requiring the Department of Human Services to contract with eligible nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, or foundations as part of a public-private partnership to administer the Pilot Program;
- (2) Authorizing the Department of Human Services to enter into contracts as part of the public-private partnership without regard to the Hawaii Public Procurement Code and law governing purchases of health and human services;

- (3) Requiring program participants, or their families, to pay half the cost of any transportation used to return the participant to their home state, unless the participant is indigent and lacks the financial resources;
- (4) Requiring all funds provided to eligible nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, or foundations be matched by these entities on a dollar-for-dollar basis;
- (5) Changing the effective date to June 30, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (6) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

DHS appreciates the Legislature's commitment to addressing homelessness in Hawaii and the importance of linking an individual with their family as a strategy to end the person's homelessness.

DHS requests clarification regarding whether the program will include interisland air travel for Hawaii residents or air travel to other Pacific island archipelagos. As drafted, the pilot program will only serve those individuals with families in the continental United States. Additionally, as drafted, the pilot is limited to flying individuals. DHS requests clarification as to whether the program would serve couples or families.

DHS appreciates the revision made in Section 2 (d) that includes that the participant of the program, family, or relatives be responsible for one-half of the cost of any transportation used to return the participant to the participant's home.

Regarding Section 2(c), the Department does not have the staff, rules, or system infrastructure to provide such services and maintain documentation to track whether an individual previously accessed the return-to-home funds. In addition, implementing a new pilot state program would require a general fund appropriation and may duplicate existing private capabilities not subject to State procurement law.

The broader concern is the unintended consequence that a state-funded and state-implemented program will attract individuals to Hawaii, knowing they may have access to a one-way return ticket by claiming to be homeless and lacking resources to return. This concern stems from experience and reports from contracted homeless service providers fielding inquiries from the U.S. mainland who *plan* to become homeless in Hawaii and access homeless services upon arrival or after they deplete their funds. While certain DHS services and benefits

do include citizenship requirements, we do not have timed residency requirements for US citizens. Consequently, DHS must provide services to eligible individuals in most circumstances unless the person receives the same federally funded benefit in another state.

Alternatively, DHS suggests the Legislature consider providing funds to private organizations with existing programs through the grant-in-aid process per Chapter 42F, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

If the bill passes, in addition to an appropriation to fund the air travel, DHS will need one full-time planner to draft rules, procure services, and oversee the pilot program. DHS requests an extended effective date to hire, draft and pass rules, and procure services to administer the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



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

**TO:** Sen. Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Health and Human Services Committee

**FROM:** Jill Wright, Director Community Relations  
IHS, The Institute for Human Services, Inc.

**RE:** HB1366: RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS - Return-to-Home Pilot Program

**HEARING:** Wednesday, March 15, 2023 at 1pm

**POSITION:** IHS **supports** the passing of HB 1366

IHS, The Institute for Human Services has been operating a homeless relocation program since 2015, when we were granted seed funds from the Hawaii Lodging and Tourism Association to address the many transient homeless encountered in Waikiki. Since then, we have worked with a number of private funders to continue delivering this program. The program has by all accounts been a success, and at its peak pre-COVID, was successful in relocating over 100 people each year. In the past eight years, we have helped relocate over 600 people from Oahu primarily to the mainland US and neighbor islands.

Maui also conducted a similar program with a grant from HLTA. I don't have data that speaks to the success of that program.

Over the past two years, we have seen a consistent number of out-of-state visitors, and at any given time we see that around 10-20% of both our outreach and shelter programs are not local. They often get stuck here in Hawaii after a series of misfortunes. There are many people looking to return to their families and more affordable cities. If there were dedicated staff and consistent funding to this program, we could work more quickly to identify serious candidates for the program, connect to their support networks, and help return people home expeditiously. I believe this would save our state much more in benefit and healthcare dollars.

The cost to our community to support a homeless individual is estimated on the low end at around \$35,000. For high utilizer, chronically homeless individuals, that can reach over \$1M. The cost to return a person home - including airfare, staffing, ground transport, etc. averages just over \$1000 per person.

Hospital emergency departments would be well served by this program as some homeless individuals head for the hospitals as their first portal for triage into homeless services, knowing that they will get referred to shelter, and service providers are not likely to turn them away if they are coming from a hospital ED.



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

Please give consideration to funding this program in order to expand access for both Oahu and Maui.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**HAWAI'I LODGING & TOURISM**  
**A S S O C I A T I O N**

Testimony of  
Mufi Hannemann  
President & CEO  
Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association

Senate Committee on Health & Human Services  
House Bill 1366, HD1  
March 15, 2023

Chair Buenaventura and members of the Committee, mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association, the state's largest and oldest private sector visitor industry organization.

The Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association—nearly 700 members strong, representing more than 50,000 hotel rooms and nearly 40,000 lodging workers—**supports House Bill 1366, HD1 as a segment of our state's concerted efforts to address homelessness in our communities.**

Since 2014, our organization has helped to coordinate repatriation programs around the state for homeless individuals, working with organizations such as the Institute for Human Services, Kauai Economic Opportunity, Inc., and Maui Family Life Center. Utilizing both public and private funds, this program paid half the cost of the travel fare necessary for these individuals to return to their home, with the balance of the fare being paid by the individual, a family member, or similar. Pre-pandemic, it was reported that nearly 800 people participated and just two percent have returned to Hawai'i.

We appreciate the amendments previously made by the requisite committees in the House and request this committee's consideration of another possible adjustment to the pilot program.

We believe a major reason for the high level of success of our repatriation program was that it required that the individual be met at their destination by a family member or a loved one. This ensured that we were not sending people to other jurisdictions just to continue the cycle of homelessness but to receive the care and access to social programs and services that they needed through a caring and compassionate point of contact. As such, we would suggest the insertion of language that would make participation in the program conditional upon the participant being met by someone upon their arrival unless this is not possible or feasible.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

**HB-1366-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/11/2023 6:33:56 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Julia Estigoy-Kahoonei	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I completely support the return to home pilot program which will assist in returning folks from the continent back to their home state. As a current employee of DHS, I see how many people come to Hawaii with nothing, end up doing nothing to contribute to our island community, many end up squatting on vacant properties and just rely on assistance. Year after year they claim no income and are not productive individuals. I am happy to pay a little bit more taxes for a program that will relocate these folks back with their families and support system.

**HB-1366-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2023 5:53:12 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Alan Garcia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of HB1366, HD1, as this bill will actually help return homeless with their families on the mainland while saving millions of taxpayer dollars. I heard the testimony of former Mayor Hannemann and he explained that hundreds of homeless were reunited with their families with less than 2% returning to Hawaii, through a similar successful program in Hawaii. This is a great program and should be supported as we seek to reduce homelessness in our State and save the finite amount of resources for our local homeless.

If the Department of Human Services cannot run the program, it could easily be contracted with the providers who ran the previous "Return-to-Home" program. This will reduce "homeless" in Hawaii & save millions of dollars of taxpayer costs.

For the following reasons, I support HB1366, HD1.



**HB-1366-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2023 7:47:05 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Lisa Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of HB1366, HD1, because this measure will help get homeless back to their families on the mainland. When the homeless person is able to return to their home and family, they will be in a strong support group which will help them become stable and heal from the issues which may have caused them to become homeless.

This is also a win for Hawaii's taxpayers because this program will save the state millions dollars which would have been used for the large segment of homeless.

Finally, this program will protect the finite amount of resources for Hawaii's local homeless.

This program has already reunited hundreds of homeless with their families on the mainland with less than 2% returning to Hawaii.

For the foregoing reasons, I stand in strong support of HB1366, HD1.

**HB-1366-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2023 9:08:37 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tiffany Sims	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In support of HB1366, HD1

During previous hearing on this bill, IHS, The Institute for Human Services provided that they had been operating a homeless relocation program since 2015, when they received seed funds from the Hawaii Lodging and Tourism Association to address the many transient homeless encountered in Waikiki. Since then, according to IHS, they have worked with a number of private funders to continue delivering this program. The program has by all accounts been a success, and at its peak pre-COVID, was successful in relocating over 100 people each year. In the past 8 years, IHS provides that they have helped relocate over 600 people from Oahu primarily to the mainland US and neighbor islands.

According to former Mayor Mufi Hannemann less than 2% of these homeless that we assisted in reuniting with their families on the mainland returned to Hawaii - thereby saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

IHS explained that they could work to identify serious candidates for the program, connect to their support networks, and help return people home expeditiously. Again, this would save our state much more in benefits and healthcare dollars. According to IHS as well as Queen's Medical Center the cost to our community to support a homeless individual is estimated on the low end at around \$35,000. For high utilizer, chronically homeless individuals, that can reach over \$1M. The cost to return a person home - including airfare, staffing, ground transport, etc.. averages just over \$1000 per person.

For the foregoing reasons, I support this bill.

**HB-1366-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/13/2023 9:33:03 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jasmine Ramos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In strong support of HB1366, HD1

Today homelessness continues to be one of the State's most significant and challenging social problems. In fact, Hawaii and New York have the highest per capita rate of homeless in the nation.

Because Hawaii is not part of the contiguous United States, many homeless individuals who are currently stranded in the State may be able to thrive and break the cycle of homelessness if they are repatriated to their families and loved ones in their home state on the mainland.

Between 2014 and 2019, the Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association working with IHS operated a program similar to the one proposed by this measure. Over the five years that it operated, the program helped coordinate the return of seven hundred forty-four homeless individuals, with only sixteen individuals, or less than two percent of program participants, returning to Hawaii.

Although DHS had reservations about this excellent program, the data is true and DHS can simply contract this out to IHS, with the Hawaii Lodging & Tourism Association also helping in a public - private partnership to reduce homelessness in Hawaii, helping to reunite families with their loved ones, helping these homeless regain their self-sufficiency and saving the taxpayers millions of dollars as well as protecting the finite amount of funding for Hawaii's local homeless.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill.