



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKĀ'I

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
DIRECTOR

DANE K. WICKER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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Statement of
JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
Director
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND TOURISM

Tuesday, March 12, 2024
1:00PM
State Capitol, Conference Room #229

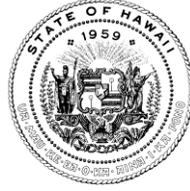
In consideration of
HB2359 HD2
RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE.

Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, and members of the Committee. The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) **strongly supports** HB2359 HD2, an Administration bill, that establishes the Digital Equity Grant Program to award grants to applicants to deploy digital equity projects to covered populations in the State.

To run in parallel with the various broadband infrastructure projects across the State for the next several years, digital equity programs in communities are essential for the social and economic well-being of the residents in the State. Digital access and digital skills for remote work, school, and social services such as unemployment claims, telehealth, and other essential services are critically important particularly in the rural and socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

This measure will enable the Hawaii Broadband and Digital Equity Office (HBDEO) to work with rural and underserved communities to identify and address barriers to digital equity and to establish a digital equity grant program so that individuals and communities in the State have the access and the ability to be full participants in the digital economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
KA 'OIHANA PILI KĀLEPA
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GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
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NADINE Y. ANDO
DIRECTOR | KA LUNA HO'OKELE

DEAN I HAZAMA
DEPUTY DIRECTOR | KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

Testimony of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs

**Before the
Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism
Tuesday, March 12, 2024
1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 229 & Via Videoconference**

**On the following measure:
H.B. 2359 H.D.2, RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND
DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE**

Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Randy Leong, and I am the Cable Television Administrator of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs' Cable Television Division. The Department supports this bill.

The purpose of this bill is to identify and address remaining obstacles to digital equity in the State and to establish the digital equity grant program, to be implemented and administered by the Hawaii Broadband and Digital Equity Office under the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT), to award grants for digital equity projects that will increase digital literacy and broadband and digital access for rural and socio-economically disadvantaged populations across the State.

Digital equity is essential to enable all residents of our State to fully participate in today's economy and society. The Department recognizes the benefit of a state-level grant program focused on closing the digital divide for those most in need by funding

Testimony of DCCA
H.B. 2359 H.D. 2

projects to be conceived and implemented by experienced stakeholders to achieve universal access. These projects could help to bridge the State's digital equity gap and allow all residents to benefit from the services and opportunities afforded by digital access no matter where they live or their circumstances.

The Department thus strongly supports this bill but defers to DBEDT and the Hawaii Broadband and Digital Equity Office on the specific provisions of the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.



LATE

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE COUNCIL
ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
PRINCESS VICTORIA KAMĀMALU BUILDING
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
TELEPHONE: (808) 586-8100 FAX: (808) 586-7543

March 12, 2024

The Honorable Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair
Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism
Thirty-Second Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Senator DeCoite and Committee members:

SUBJECT: HB2359 HD2 RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE.

The Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities **SUPPORTS HB2359 HD2**, which establishes the Digital Equity Grant Program to award grants to applicants to deploy digital equity projects to covered populations in the State. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD2)

The intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) population relies significantly on access to digital technology to remain engaged members of the community. We recognize the importance of this measure in allocating funding and supporting the development of vital broadband infrastructure for underserved communities across the state. Hawaii's I/DD population resides in these communities, and improved broadband equity is essential to enhancing their access to and affordability of digital resources. The I/DD population, being more reliant on telehealth services, stands to benefit greatly from increased access to high-speed internet and improved broadband equity. Telehealth utilization is particularly high within our community, and the improved access provided by this measure will support the health needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support of HB2359 HD2**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daintry Bartoldus".

Daintry Bartoldus
Executive Administrator



HB2359 HD2

RELATING TO RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development and Tourism

March 12, 2024

1:00 p.m.

Conference Room 229

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) will recommend to the Board of Trustees (BOT) that they **SUPPORT HB2359 HD2**, which would establish the Digital Equity Grant Program to award grants to applicants to deploy digital equity projects to covered populations in the State. **This measure is a good step toward providing Hawai‘i’s people with equal access to the resources and opportunities afforded by the digital age.** OHA signed on to the Digital Equity Declaration¹ which declared that digital inequity is one of the most pressing issues facing Hawai‘i.

Data provided from the 2019 American Community Survey highlighted the significant disparities in digital access across Hawai‘i, particularly among underserved populations such as Native Hawaiians,² individuals with lower incomes, and seniors. With approximately 55,000 households lacking internet subscriptions and over 44,000 households having no internet access at all, it is evident that digital inequity remains a pervasive challenge in our state. The data underscores the disproportionate impact of digital inequity on Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities, with higher percentages of households lacking internet subscriptions and computer access compared to the overall population. These disparities perpetuate existing socio-economic inequalities and hinder opportunities for educational advancement, economic prosperity, health care access, cultural access and civic engagement among Hawaiians.

The establishment of the Digital Equity Grant Program represents a crucial step towards addressing these disparities and empowering Native Hawaiian communities to overcome barriers to digital access and participation. By awarding grants to eligible

¹ Broadband Hui, Digital Equity Declaration, at <https://www.broadbandhui.org/> (Last accessed 022124)

² 8.7% of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders (NHPIs) are without an internet subscription compared to 4.6% for Hawai‘i’s total population and 8.2% of NHPIs have no computer in their household compared to 4% for Hawai‘i’s total population. US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2019), at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs> last accessed 022124



HB2359 HD2

RELATING TO RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development and Tourism

projects that promote digital literacy, broadband affordability, access to digital devices, and other innovative digital inclusion initiatives, this program will help bridge the digital divide and ensure that Native Hawaiians have equal opportunities by facilitating the expansion of broadband infrastructure, increasing access to internet-capable devices, and providing essential digital skills training to underserved communities across the state. Furthermore, the inclusion of specific criteria for covered populations, such as individuals living in rural areas, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and homeless individuals, demonstrates a commitment to addressing the diverse needs of Hawai'i's communities. By prioritizing projects that serve these populations, the Digital Equity Grant Program will help reduce disparities and promote equity in digital access and participation.

OHA urges the committee to **PASS HB2359 HD2**, establishing the Digital Equity Grant Program thereby taking decisive action to address digital inequity in Hawaii. By investing in digital inclusion initiatives, we can create a more equitable and inclusive society where all Native Hawaiians have the resources and support they need to thrive in the digital age.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • TTY (808) 586-8162 • Fax (808) 586-8129

March 12, 2024

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND TOURISM

House Bill 2359 HD2 – Relating to the Hawaii Broadband and Digital Equity Office

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 2359 HD2 – Relating to the Hawaii Broadband and Digital Equity Office.

This bill would establish the digital equity grant program to award grants to applicants to deploy digital equity projects to covered populations in the State.

Digital equity provides persons with disabilities equal access to digital technology, including broadband. Broadband access for all should be affordable, especially for underserved communities to foster their economic development, increase job opportunities, enhance health care, and broaden educational opportunities. Digital equity will not only ensure that people with disabilities have access to broadband, but it will promote a better quality of life for them as well.

Thank you for considering our position.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

COUNTY COUNCIL

Mel Rapozo, Chair
KipuKai Kualii, Vice Chair
Addison Bulosan
Bernard P. Carvalho, Jr.
Felicia Cowden
Bill DeCosta
Ross Kagawa



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK

Jade K. Fountain-Tanigawa, County Clerk
Lyndon M. Yoshioka, Deputy County Clerk

Telephone: (808) 241-4188
Facsimile: (808) 241-6349
Email: cokcouncil@kauai.gov

Council Services Division
4396 Rice Street, Suite 209
Lihu'e, Kaua'i, Hawai'i 96766

March 11, 2024

**TESTIMONY OF ADDISON BULOSAN
COUNCILMEMBER, KAUAI COUNTY COUNCIL**

ON

**HB 2359, HD 2, RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND
DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE**

**Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism
Tuesday, March 12, 2024**

1:00 p.m.

**Conference Room 229
Via Videoconference**

Dear Chair DeCoite and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT of HB 2359, HD 2, Relating to the Hawai'i Broadband and Digital Equity Office. My testimony is submitted in my individual capacity as a member of the Kaua'i County Council.

I wholeheartedly support the intent of HB 2359, HD 2, which would greatly affect the Kaua'i community.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2359, HD 2. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Council Services Staff at (808) 241-4188 or via email to cokcouncil@kauai.gov.

Sincerely,

ADDISON BULOSAN
Councilmember, Kaua'i County Council

AAO:slr

Written Statement of

Jeannine Souki, Senior Manager – Government & Regulatory Affairs

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**

March 12, 2024, 1:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 229 & Videoconference

SUPPORT FOR:

**H.B. 2359 HD2 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL
EQUITY OFFICE**

To: Chair DeCoite Vice-Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee

Re: Testimony providing support for HB 2359 HD2

Aloha Honorable Chair, Vice-Chair, and Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit support for HB 2359 HD2, which would establish a Digital Equity Grant Program within the Hawaii Broadband and Digital Equity Office. This proposed fund would endeavor to leverage the work of community and non-profit groups to provide digital literacy training for individuals to participate in the fast-growing digital world.

Having a high-speed fiber internet connection and services to address the digital equity needs of all households opens up a world of opportunity. Broadband is essential for business and government operations, delivering telemedicine, education, remote work, staying in touch with family and friends, and so much more. Fiber-optic cables carry 10,000 times more bandwidth than traditional copper cables, enabling fast upload speeds and a superior experience with services such as video calls and security cameras. Fiber technology is also more energy-efficient, more durable, and less susceptible to elements such as water and electromagnetic interference. Hawaiian Telcom is the only Hawai'i internet service provider that has invested more than \$1 billion over the last ten years to expand and support its fiber optic network and serve its customers.

In 2023, Hawaiian Telcom awarded \$140,000 to community organizations working to address digital equity and empower communities across the state. In addition, Hawaiian Telcom expanded its fiber-optics network to 65,000 new locations and is on track to build 60,000 new locations in 2024.

Hawaiian Telcom bridges the digital divide as a participating service provider in the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) is winding down. Hawaiian Telcom continues to offer federal Lifeline discounts for internet or telephone services to qualified residents in areas where Fiioptics service is available.

Since the FCC launched ACP on December 31, 2021, the depletion of \$14 billion Congress appropriated for this federal program has been swifter than initially anticipated. This has resulted in the FCC's recent order to all participating service providers to hasten a wind-down of their programs because federal funding is running out in April/May 2024. This wrinkle should give us pause to consider that while the State will see a temporary infusion of approximately \$14 million toward digital equity services, ostensibly no additional federal funding may be available for continued operations or services beyond the initial investment. Therefore, it is important to invest and leverage the state's digital equity award to support the work of community and non-profit organizations in delivering digital literacy and access services to those in need.

Hawaiian Telcom appreciates the opportunity to testify and offer support for HB 2359 HD2.



Chamber of Commerce HAWAII
The Voice of Business

LATE

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism
Tuesday, March 12, 2024, at 1PM
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference**

RE: HB2359 HD2 Relating to the Hawaii Broadband and Digital Equity Office

Aloha Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee:

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber") supports **HB2359 HD2**, which establishes the Digital Equity Office and grant program to award and deploy digital equity projects to covered populations in the State.

Addressing digital equity through broadband access and digital literacy tools is one of the most important steps to modernizing Hawaii's economy and bringing all our industries into the 21st century. By having digital equity throughout the state, this will allow Hawaii to attract new industries and continue to diversify the economy. Given the economic importance of achieving both broadband and digital equity, the Chamber supports this bill.

This bill aims to increase digital equity throughout our state and provides assurances for all individuals and communities in the state to have the information capacity needed to participate in society and contribute to our economy. This is especially important considering Hawaii's rapidly growing tech industry. There is a need for our state to have a highly skilled workforce ready to match the workforce demands provided by tech companies looking to invest in our state. With the passage of this bill, our current and future workforce can be equipped with the skills to fulfill these jobs and contribute to the state's success.

As members of the Broadband Hui, the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii supports broadband infrastructure development in rural communities, equitable digital devices and internet connectivity for students and families, increasing access to telehealth, low-cost internet options, and a more equitable digital future overall.

The Chamber is Hawaii's leading statewide business advocacy organization, representing about 2,000+ businesses. Approximately 80% of our members are small businesses with less than 20 employees. As the "Voice of Business" in Hawaii, the organization works on behalf of members and the entire business community to improve the state's economic climate and to foster positive action on issues of common concern.

On behalf of The Chamber, thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism Hearing

Date: March 12, 2024
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Where: State Capitol, Conference Room 329 & Videoconference
RE: **SUPPORT of HB2359 HD2 - Relating to the Hawai'i Broadband and Digital Equity Office**

Aloha mai e Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee,

As members of the Broadband Hui, the listed organizations and individuals **strongly support HB2359 HD2** which would establish a Digital Equity Grant Program to award grants to applicants to deploy digital equity projects in the State.

Over the past four years during and since COVID, our organizations have collaborated, each within their own ability, to increase Hawai'i's digital capacity, thereby supporting the continuity of social connections, education, employment, healthcare and access to other essential services.

Through the work of the Broadband Hui members, we have supported broadband infrastructure development in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged communities, provided digital devices for students and families and digital literacy programs for kūpuna, supported the accessibility of telehealth, provided information on low-cost internet options, and adopted a Digital Equity Declaration to set a vision and goals for a more equitable digital future.

This measure will enable the Hawai'i Broadband and Digital Equity Office (HBDEO) to work with our communities to identify, plan and fund projects to address barriers to digital equity. The digital equity grant program will be set up so there will be rules ready to deploy digital equity projects supported by HBDEO whether funded by the Federal government or other entities.

Efforts are ongoing including, and not limited to, through the Digital Equity Coalitions in each County to position groups and communities to respond to federal and other funding sources like these.

For these reasons, we kindly request you support **HB2359 HD2**.
Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

(Please see the organizations and names of individuals on the following pages.)

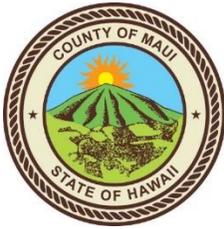


Hawaii Broadband Hui Members & Organizations Supporting HB2359 HD2

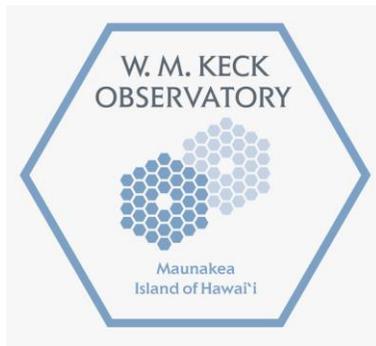
Logos of Supporting Organizations



Hawaii Broadband Hui Members & Organizations Supporting HB2359 HD2



Hawaii Broadband Hui Members & Organizations Supporting HB2359 HD2



Hawaii Broadband Hui Members & Organizations Supporting HB2359 HD2



Name	Organization	Email	Zip code
Lynn Otaguro	O'ahu County Democrats Digital Equity Committee	lmotaguro@yahoo.com	96821
Douglass S Adams	County of Hawaii Dept of Research & Development	douglass.adams@hawaiicounty.gov	96720
Jill Takasaki Canfield	Hawaii Literacy	jill.takasaki.canfield@hawaiiliteracy.org	96817
Nicholas Winfrey	Maui United Way	nicholas@mauiunitedway.org	96708
David Sun-Miyashiro	HawaiiKidsCAN	david.miyashiro@hawaiikidscan.org	96814
Alexis Ching	Ewalu Industries	alexis@ewaluindustries.org	96740
Deborah Bond-Upson	LearningBond	deborah@learningbond.org	96734
Ka'ala Souza	Digital Ready Hawaii	kaala@digitalreadyhawaii.org	96734
Jeanne Skog	Skog Rasmussen LLC	jskog@skograsmussen.com	96793

Hawaii Broadband Hui Members & Organizations Supporting HB2359 HD2

Name	Organization	Email	Zip code
Joseph Passantino	Ke'elikolani Middle School	Joseph.passantino@k12.hi.us	96813
Kiran Polk	Kapolei Chamber of Commerce	kiranpolk@gmail.com	96707
Sean Taketa McLaughlin		seantaketa@gmail.com	96817
Kuulei Arce	MOLOKAI RURAL HEALTH COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION	22kuulei@gmail.com	96729
Linda Clark		clarkl004@gmail.com	96713
Jenny Miller	EducationSuperHighway	jenny.miller@educationsuperhighway.org	80303
Todd Robertson	Hyperspective Studios, Inc.	todd@hyperspective.com	96813 96789
Daniel C. Smith, PhD		dancsmith@rocketmail.com	96782
Crystal Yamasaki	Crystal Clear Communications	crystalclearcomms@gmail.com	96817
Jacqui Hoover	Hawaii Economic Development Board, Inc. Hawaii Leeward Planning Conference	jhoover@hiedb.org	96743
Daron Nishimoto	EO Solutions, LLC	Daron.nishimoto@e-osolutions.com	89119
Lisa Seikai Darcy	Share Your Mana	lisa@shareyourmana.org	96768
Alex Fielding	Privateer Space	af@privateer.com	96753
Michael K. Peacock	Hawaii Vet 2 Vet Inc.	mikepeacock@hawaiivet2vet.com	96813
Marc Sanders	Hana Business Council	marc@hanamaui.com	96713
Edward Sun	Sun Global Broadband	esun1@hawaiiantel.net	96822
Rebecca J. 'I. Soon	Solutions Pacific	rebecca@sphawaii.com	96817
Doug Simons	Institute for Astronomy, Univ. of Hawaii	dsimons@hawaii.edu	96720
Christine Matsuda	Pa'akai Communications	christine@paakaicomunications.com	96817
Jolie A. Jenkins	County of Maui, Office of the Mayor	Jolie.Jenkins@co.maui.hi.us	96793
Mark Iha	Tangent Inc.	mark@tangent-inc.com	96813
Connie Mitchell	Institute for Human Services	conniem@ihshawaii.org	96817
Ilima Ho-Lastimoso	Ke Kula Nui O Waimānalo	ilima888@gmail.com	96795
Lori Okuda		wcpgirl@gmail.com	96782
Jerry Isdale	Maui Institute of Art and Technology LLC	jerry@mioat.com	96708
Jenifer Sunrise Winter		jwinter@hawaii.edu	96821

Hawaii Broadband Hui Members & Organizations Supporting HB2359 HD2

Name	Organization	Email	Zip code
Lei Fountain	The Arc in Hawaii	Leif@thearcinhawaii.org	96782
Micah Chao		sungyanc@hawaii.edu	96814
Curtis Kropar	Hawaiian Hope Org	Curtis@hawaiianhope.org	96817
John Desfor,	Hawai'i State Rural Health Association	johnd6@hawaii.edu	96737
Carson Block	Carson Block Consulting	librarylandtech@gmail.com	
Rich Matsuda	W. M. Keck Observatory	rmatsuda@keck.hawaii.edu	96743
Michele Mitsumori,	IT Reuse HI	itreusehi@gmail.com	96720
Debbie Cabebe	Maui Economic Opportunity	debbie.cabebe@meoinc.org	96793
Tony Velasco	City and County of Honolulu IT	tvelasco@honolulu.gov	96813
Pamela Tumpap	Maui Chamber of Business	pamela@mauichamber.com	96793
Kelly Withy, MD, PhD		withy@hawaii.edu	96734
Herb Lee, Jr.	Pacific America Foundation	herblee@thepaf.org	96734
Paola Vidulich	Hawai'i's Volcano Circus	paola@hawaiisvolcanocircus.org	96778
Alex Sene, Jr.		alex.sene.jr@gmail.com	96799
Nainoa Mau	Friends of the Library of Hawai'i	nainoa@flhhawaii.org	97817
Leslie Wilkins	Maui Economic Development Board, Inc.	leslie@medb.org	96753
Nam Vu	Hub Coworking Hawaii	nam@hubcoworkinghi.com	96814
Jaclyn Kaina	Kau'i Economic Development Board	jkaina@kedb.com	96766
Jean-Gabriel Cuby	Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope	cuby@cfht.hawaii.edu	96743
Wendy Awai-Dakroub	Ohia Technology Group LLC	wendy@ohiatechnology.com	96822
Nicole Brodie	Purple Mai'a	nicole@purplemaia.org	96701
Brad Kaleo Bennett	`Auamo Collaborative	kaleobennett@gmail.com	96720
Lisa Rantz	Hilo Medical Center Foundation	lrantz@hhsc.org	96720
Cary Miyashiro	Quad D Solutions LLC	csmiyashiro@gmail.com	96816
Kendrick Farm	Hawaiian Affairs Caucus of Democratic Party of Hawaii	Farmk@hawaii.edu	96817

Hawaii Broadband Hui Members & Organizations Supporting HB2359 HD2

Name	Organization	Email	Zip code
Dotty Kelly-Paddock	Hui O Hau`ula	dotty.kellypaddock@gmail.com	96717
Rufino Magliba	Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement	rufino@hawaiiancouncil.org	96707



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development and Tourism
Tuesday, March 12, 2024; 1:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 308
Via Videoconference**

RE: HOUSE BILL NO. 2359, HOUSE DRAFT 2, RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE.

Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, 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. 2359, House Draft 2, RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE.

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.

The bill, as received by your Committee, would:

- (1) Identify and address remaining obstacles to digital equity in all areas of the State; and
- (2) Establish the Digital Equity Grant Program to award grants (not related to the deployment of infrastructure) and create an environment in which all individuals and communities in the state have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in society, democracy, and the economy.

This bill would also take effect on July 1, 3000.

Hawaii has long been at the forefront of integrating newer technologies into daily life. One example of this is Hawaii's Telehealth Law which has served as a model across the United States. Yet, it was only after COVID struck our islands that this law became fully integrated into daily life.

Testimony on House Bill No. 2359, House Draft 2
Tuesday, March 12, 2024; 1:00 p.m.
Page 2

Today, it is common practice to ZOOM or SKYPE with your health practitioner instead of physically going to the provider's office for a visit. When COVID first hit our islands, many health providers had to limit the number of patients that could be serviced in-person because of a scarcity of Personal Protective Equipment, restrictions in the gatherings of groups, and the need for changes to the physical arrangement of examination rooms and other diagnostic facilities.

For people with adequate broadband access, telehealth was a lifeline for the provision of essential primary health care services. Yet, health care facilities in rural areas experienced the same problems when COVID hit. They too had to limit the number of patients they could see. But because these communities lacked adequate broadband access, they were effectively cut off from primary care. Many were forced to bear their maladies until it became necessary to go to the emergency room.

Because of this, the HPCA views the lack of broadband access in rural areas as an issue of social equity. In this day and age, everyone should have equal access to health care. Telehealth was envisioned as the means of leveling the field between urban and rural areas. The lack of broadband ensures that urban and rural communities remain unequal.

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.



Testimony to the House Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism
Tuesday, Mar 12, 2024 1:00 PM
Conference Room CR 229 & Videoconference
RE: HB2359 HD2 Relating to the Hawaii Broadband Digital Equity Office

Aloha Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee:

As leaders of the Hawai'i Library Association, representing a significant number of members across public, school, and academic libraries, we extend our gratitude for your efforts to support HB2359 HD2 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE. We would like to add our voices in strong support for the bill, recognizing its significance in establishing a system for receiving and allocating federal funds to advance digital literacy.

We are pleased to see that this bill acknowledges the critical role digital literacy plays alongside broadband infrastructure. This understanding underscores the importance of ensuring that citizens of all ages are equipped to navigate the digital landscape safely, guarding against misinformation, phishing scams, and other online threats.

Public, school, and academic libraries serve as crucial resources in addressing the digital divide by offering training and support for informed and responsible internet usage. The passage of this bill holds promise in empowering our members to further address this pressing issue and enhance their efforts in promoting digital literacy throughout our communities. By equipping individuals with the skills to navigate the digital landscape safely, we enable them to catalyze economic growth, enrich education, promote civic engagement, enhance access to essential services, and bolster community resilience, ensuring a more inclusive and prosperous future for all residents of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this bill.



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The State Legislature
Senate Committee On Energy, Economic Development and Tourism
Tuesday, March 12, 2024
Conference Room 229, 1:00 p.m.

TO: The Honorable Lynn DeCoite, Chair
FROM: Keali'i S. López, State Director, AARP Hawaii
RE: Support for HB 2359 HD 2 Relating to Hawaii Broadband and Digital

Aloha Chair DeCoite and Members of the Committee:

My name is Keali'i Lopez and I am the State Director for AARP Hawai'i. AARP is a nonpartisan, social impact organization that advocates for individuals age 50 and older. We have a membership of nearly 38 million nationwide and nearly 140,000 in Hawaii. We advocate at the state and federal level for the issues that matter most to older adults and their families, including telehealth. **AARP supports H.B. 2359 HD2** which establishes the digital equity grant program to award grants to applicants to deploy digital equity projects to covered populations in the State.

The pandemic has underscored vast disparities in high-speed internet access and has also underscored the importance of high-speed internet access to older adults. Achieving digital equity is especially important for older adults: reliable, affordable high-speed internet access is critical to the well-being of adults (e.g., telehealth, connection to family and friends, civic engagement, distance learning, remote work, etc.) AARP recognizes the value and significant benefits of digital technology that can improve the lives of kupuna. While more and more of our members, especially those aged 50-59, are using their mobile devices and tablets to access information about their health, we still need to reach those over the age 65 whose technology adoption rate is only 64%. Achieving digital equity requires addressing disparities in access and adoption. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B 2359, HD2.



MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND TOURISM
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM 229
Tuesday, March 12, 2024, 1:00 PM

To The Honorable Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair
The Honorable Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism

SUPPORT HB2359 HD2 RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE

The Maui Chamber of Commerce **SUPPORTS HB2359 HD2.**

The Maui Chamber of Commerce has participated in the Broadband Hui, when available and greatly appreciates the work they are doing. The Chamber notes that over the past four years during and since COVID, the members of the Broadband Hui have collaborated, each within our own ability, to increase Hawai'i's digital capacity, thereby supporting the continuity of social connections, education, employment, and access to other essential services.

Through the work of the Broadband Hui, we have supported broadband infrastructure development in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged communities, provided digital devices for students and families and digital literacy programs for kupuna, supported the accessibility of telehealth, provided information on low-cost internet options, and adopted a Digital Equity Declaration to set a vision and goals for a more equitable digital future.

This measure will enable the Hawai'i Broadband and Digital Equity Office (HBDEO) to work with our communities to identify and address barriers to digital equity. The digital equity grant program will be set up so there is a mechanism to deploy digital equity projects within HBDEO.

For these reasons, we **SUPPORT HB2359 HD2.**

Sincerely,

Pamela Tumpap
President

To advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating for a responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.

March 11, 2024

Senate Committee on Energy, Economic Development and Tourism
Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair
Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair



Working together for Kapolei

Tuesday March 12, 2024, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Rm. 415 and via Videoconference

RE: HB 2359 HD2 RELATING TO THE HAWAII BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE

Dear Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai and members of the Committee:

My name is Kiran Polk, and I am the Executive Director of the Kapolei Chamber of Commerce. The Kapolei Chamber of Commerce is an advocate for businesses in the Kapolei region which includes Waipahu to Ka'ena Point. The Chamber works on behalf of its members and the entire business community to improve the regional and State economic climate and help Kapolei businesses thrive. We are a member-driven, member-supported organization representing the interests of all types of business: small, medium or large, for profit or non-profit businesses or sole proprietorship.

The Kapolei Chamber of Commerce is in **support of the intent of HB 2359 with comments regarding the HD2**. This measure establishes the Digital Equity Grant Program to award grants to applicants to deploy digital equity projects to covered populations in the State.

We have concerns that with the added exclusion of 'broadband infrastructure' in the HD2 that there may be funding opportunities that may not be eligible in this grant program, and we respectfully request that HB 2359 HD2 be restored to the HD1 version.

Two specific examples of funding opportunities that would be impacted if 'broadband infrastructure' is excluded:

- 1) **Broadband Infrastructure for Community Response during an Emergency: One of the Strategies of the final Hawai'i Digital Equity Plan published on February 21, 2024 is to "Strengthen community response capabilities and community resilience through broadband."** [Strategy #5]. In the wake of the Maui wildfire tragedy, a priority in West O'ahu is to strengthen our community response, and this includes the needed emergency and secondary communication networks in times of disaster. Because the Hawai'i Digital Equity Plan has outlined this Strategy, there should be an opportunity to fund broadband infrastructure projects aligned with this Strategy.
- 2) **Broadband Infrastructure needs for Digital Equity and Equitable Access:** The Digital Equity Grant Program will help to ensure digital literacy through classes and equitable access to the internet for our underserved communities, our kāpuna, etc. The classes held and equipment provided will collectively help eliminate the "digital divide" and help our underserved communities including those in West O'ahu. We also need to increase digital capacity in West O'ahu for our small businesses to spur on economic growth and bridge some of the gaps existing today including access and capacity issues with online learning, pursuit of employment opportunities, and access to essential services online. Should a broadband infrastructure need arise 'inside the curb' for one of these classes, the absence of 'broadband infrastructure' in this measure could preclude the needed infrastructure projects from being funded.

As mentioned above, we are in support of the intent of this measure. It should be noted that this measure does not have funding appropriations and its primary purpose is to create a Digital Equity Grant Program and framework for future funding opportunities to deploy digital equity projects.

We also recognize that this measure would provide the programming needed for future funding opportunities. These opportunities will support and adopt the goals set forth in the State's Digital Equity Declaration.

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony and comments.

Respectfully,

Kiran Polk
Executive Director



**WAIANAЕ COAST
COMPREHENSIVE
HEALTH CENTER**

Subject: Testimony Regarding HB 2359 HD2 RELATING TO THE HAWAI'I BROADBAND AND DIGITAL EQUITY OFFICE

Aloha Chair Lynn DeCoite, Vice Chair Glenn Wakai, and members of the Committee on Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism,

Mahalo for allowing us to provide this testimony today. The Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center serves the West Oahu community, and we are deeply committed to ensuring all residents have access to the resources they need to thrive. This includes robust digital equity, a crucial lifeline for safety, education, and well-being, especially during times of crisis.

We strongly supported the original version of HB 2359, which aimed to establish a robust Digital Equity Grant Program. However, the recent amendment making "broadband infrastructure deployment" ineligible for grant funding weakens the bill's intent and its potential impact on disaster preparedness. Our preferred outcome would be to revert to the original language to ensure the program can support vital community-driven solutions.

The Contradiction

HB 2359 recognizes the value of "community wireless networks", yet excludes "broadband infrastructure" as HD2 blocks funding for the deployment of such networks, contradicting its intent.

Recent Events Highlight Importance of Proactive Preparedness

Recent events like the Lahaina wildfires and the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the critical need for proactive disaster preparedness, particularly regarding reliable communication infrastructure. The devastating consequences of communication blackouts, as seen in Lahaina, demand a proactive approach.

Hawai'i Digital Equity Plan and Disaster Resilience

The Hawai'i Broadband and Digital Equity Plan (page 115, Strategy 5) provides a compelling directive describing Strategy 5 in the DE Plan: "In the aftermath of the Kilauea eruption and recent wildfires in Lahaina, the importance of integrating broadband planning into emergency management has become glaringly evident." The plan calls for prioritizing investments in digital equity to aid in emergency situations. Additionally, Strategy 5 directly aligns with broader state goals outlined in the Hawai'i Broadband Strategic Plan 2020. Specifically, Goal 3: Enable Hawai'i to Thrive through a Digital Economy highlights the need to "Improve delivery of government services through robust broadband capabilities." In the context of disaster preparedness, this plan highlights the issues of access and scale during a statewide disaster event, further supporting the need for community Wi-Fi solutions.

Following these strategies through inclusive grant eligibility criteria can provide and enhance critical lifelines. Such infrastructure is a necessity, as the absence of robust communication could mean the difference between safety and peril during a disaster. We strongly urge you to consider amending the bill to include "broadband infrastructure," specifically for the creation of Community Wi-Fi emergency response networks.

Addressing BEAD Fund Limitations (Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment) and Adaptability

While some may argue that BEAD funds could be used for emergency communications, it is important to note a key limitation. BEAD funds cannot support solutions relying on unlicensed Wi-Fi, which offer



**WAIANAЕ COAST
COMPREHENSIVE
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quick deployment, scalability, mobility, and lower costs. This amendment addresses that limitation and ensures that Hawai'i can leverage all available technologies for maximum adaptability.

Community-Driven Solutions for Resilience

Furthermore, this amendment supports a uniquely resilient approach by fostering community-driven networks. These networks offer additional capacity and capability, with community members involved in developing, monitoring, and maintaining the infrastructure. This ensures that local expertise is readily available during a disaster, reducing dependency on external specialists who may face challenges accessing affected communities like Wai'ānae, with its limited access due to a single road in and out.

Importance from a Preparedness Perspective

This is fundamentally important from a disaster preparedness perspective, as stated by leaders in Hawai'i's disaster management divisions, reflecting lessons learned from the Lahaina tragedy. During a recent 2023 Healthcare Information Management Systems Society (HIMSS) Conference, Frank Pace, Director of the Hawai'i Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Administrator James Barros of HI-EMA emphasized the importance of a resilient communication infrastructure.

Director Pace highlighted the role of communication during disasters, describing the communication blackout experienced in Lahaina's first 72 hours. He stressed the need for proactive crisis response solutions and testing of communication systems to avoid such blackouts in the future. Administrator Barros echoed this concern, emphasizing the need for "redundancy in our communication systems."

These firsthand accounts from our own Hawai'i disaster response leaders clearly illustrate the vital need for proactive investments in communication infrastructure. Excluding "broadband infrastructure" deployment from HB 2359 HD2 undermines this goal and leaves Hawai'i communities vulnerable and ill-prepared to respond to future crises.

Recommendations

- **Reversion:** We respectfully request the Committee consider maintaining the original scope of HB 2359 HD2 as defined in its HD1 form. This would be the most direct way to ensure the bill's full potential for strengthening disaster resilience.
- **Alternative:** We urge you to amend the bill to specifically include the following: "Projects that include the deployment of broadband infrastructure, including but not limited to community wireless networks, shall be eligible under the Digital Equity Grant Program."

Mahalo nui loa for considering our testimony.

Michele Chrissy Kuahine
Director of Clinical and Patient Informatics
MKuahine@wcchc.com

HB-2359-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/11/2024 10:13:23 AM

Testimony for EET on 3/12/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael EKM Olderr	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill. The UN has stated that access to a free and open Internet is a fundamental human right, and we should treat it as such. People, especially in rural areas, deserve to have access to information and means of reaching out to those outside of their community. To learn new skills, to stay informed, and reach out to others if in danger. So, for the protection and freedom of all our people, please pass this bill.