



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1562 HD1
RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH**

REPRESENTATIVE CHRIS TODD, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing Date: February 27, 2026 Time: 10:00 AM Room Number: 308

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health (“Department”) requests funding for this
2 measure, so long as it does not supplant the priorities and requests outlined in the Governor's
3 executive budget request.

4 **Department Position:** The Department strongly supports this measure.

5 **Department Testimony:** The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division (CAMHD) provides
6 the following testimony on behalf of the Department.

7 The Department supports this measure as amended, which appropriates funds to the
8 Department to establish and operate a digital youth mental health platform designed to help
9 young people get support for mental health challenges.

10 Providing easy access to trusted information and resources empowers youth, reduces stigma,
11 and may prevent mental health challenges from worsening in the future, especially for
12 marginalized or vulnerable populations such as LGBTQ+ youth.

13 This pilot also has the potential to support the youth mental health service system by
14 addressing lower-level challenges so the behavioral health workforce can focus on youth who

1 require more intensive support. In addition, it can provide critical data about community youth
2 mental health needs.

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

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

8 **Offered Amendments:** None

9 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

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



BONNIE KAHAKUI
ADMINISTRATOR

DAYNA OMIYA
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

STATE OF HAWAI'I | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
STATE PROCUREMENT OFFICE

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TESTIMONY
OF
BONNIE KAHAKUI, ADMINISTRATOR
STATE PROCUREMENT OFFICE

TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE
ON
FINANCE
February 27, 2026, 10:00 a.m.

House Bill 1562, HD1
RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 1562, HD1. The State Procurement Office (SPO) appreciates the bill's intent to promote early prevention of youth and adolescent mental health disorders through digital platforms and respectfully provides comments and recommendations.

Comments

This bill establishes a one-year pilot project for the implementation and administration of the Digital Youth Mental Health Platform commencing July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027. The bill also requires that the Department of Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division submit a report to the Legislature, including any proposed legislation, regarding the pilot project no later than twenty days prior to the Regular Session of the 2027 Legislature.

SECTION 2, Subsection (c), Page 4, lines 15-18, exempts the procurement of the pilot project from Chapters 103D and 103F, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS). The bill does not provide justification for exempting the one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project from HRS Chapter 103D - Hawaii Public Procurement Code and Chapter 103F - Purchase of Health and Human Services.

The SPO understands that this is a pilot program with a very short implementation and reporting period, which makes conducting a fully competitive procurement challenging. However, there should be parameters around the exemption.

The SPO recommends that the bill include that the exemption from HRS Chapters 103D and 103F is valid only for the pilot project ending on June 30, 2027. If the department elects to

continue the digital youth mental health platform, a competitive solicitation should be conducted pursuant to the procurement code.

RECOMMENDATION

The SPO recommends the following revisions to SECTION 2, Page 4, lines 15-18:

"(c) Procurement for development, management, and hosting services and communication and marketing services for the purposes of this Act shall be exempt from chapters 103D and 103F, Hawaii Revised Statutes, only for the period of the pilot program, not to exceed June 30, 2027."

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



Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus Commission



Advocating for the Hawai'i LGBTQIA+ Community

Mailing Address: LGBTQ+ Commission, c/o The Department of Human Services,
P.O. Box 339, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96809-0339

Email: hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com
Web: <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/lgbtq-commission/>

February 24, 2026

House's Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Friday, February 27, 2026, at 10:00 AM

RE: **Strong Support for House Bill 1562 HD 1**

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and fellow committee members,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 1562 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 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 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus Commission submits this testimony in **strong support of House Bill 1562**, with a **request for an amendment**, relating to the establishment of a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project within the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division.

The Commission strongly supports the intent of HB 1562 to expand access to mental health resources for young people through innovative, digital tools. Hawai'i's keiki are facing unprecedented mental health challenges, and barriers to care, including provider shortages, stigma, cost, and geographic isolation, continue to prevent many from receiving timely and culturally responsive support. A publicly available digital platform has the potential to be a powerful, low-barrier entry point to care and information.

However, the Commission respectfully requests that HB 1562 be **amended to explicitly require that the digital platform include the specific needs of māhū, LGBTQIA+, and gender-diverse keiki** as a core component of the pilot project. Māhū, LGBTQIA+ and gender-diverse keiki youth experience disproportionately high rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, bullying, family rejection, and

Proudly established pursuant to Hawai'i Revised Statutes Chapter 369, as enacted through Act 41, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022

HI State LGBTQ+ Commission Testimony in Support of HB 1562

homelessness. These disparities are not incidental—they are the result of systemic exclusion and a lack of affirming, culturally competent mental health resources. For many of these young people, digital platforms may be the *first* or *only* place they feel safe seeking help. If inclusivity is not intentionally designed from the outset, these keiki will once again be left behind.

While the Commission understands that HB 1562 establishes a pilot project, we emphasize that **equity cannot be an afterthought**. Inclusion must be woven into the DNA of the project from its very beginning—in platform design, content development, user interface, data collection, and evaluation metrics. Building inclusivity at the start will strengthen the pilot, improve outcomes, and ensure that the Legislature receives a report that accurately reflects the needs of all youth in Hawai'i.

An explicit requirement to address mähū, LGBTQIA+ and gender-diverse youth will also align this project with the State's broader commitments to health equity, suicide prevention, and the well-being of historically marginalized communities.

For these reasons, the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission urges the Committee to pass HB 1562 **with amendments** to ensure that mähū, LGBTQIA+, and gender-diverse keiki are meaningfully and intentionally included in the Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your commitment to the mental health and well-being of Hawai'i's keiki.

If you or any member of your staff has any questions regarding my testimony you can reach me at hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,

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

[Inclusive LGBTQIA+ Glossary](#)

The [Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission](#) has this webpage and that is dedicated to understanding and being able to use the correct terms when talking about the rainbow community from mähū to LGBTQIA+ to QTPI+ to MVPFAFF+ and beyond. The list found on this page is not an exhaustive list and will be updated as appropriate.

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



KATHERINE AUMER, PhD
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON
LUNA HO'OMALU O KA PAPA

STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
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STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
Testimony to the House Committee on Finance
in SUPPORT of H.B. 1562 HD1
RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH
February 27, 2026 10:00 a.m., Room 308 and Video

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee members:

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

The Council supports the intent of this measure to expand mental health education and strengthen prevention efforts. Early engagement and awareness are important components of a responsive behavioral health system.

The Council respectfully urges the Legislature to ensure that the proposed pilot program is strategically aligned with, and clearly integrated into, the existing continuum of care involving the Departments of Health, Education, and Human Services, as well as other relevant agencies. New initiatives should reinforce and build upon existing infrastructure rather than fragment services or operate in parallel, particularly for children and youth with the most complex needs.

The Council appreciates the number of measures introduced this session to support child and adolescent mental health. This reflects growing awareness of the challenges facing young people. At the same time, careful coordination and responsible stewardship of limited resources will be essential to ensure these efforts meaningfully improve access, system capacity, and measurable outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.



HIPHI Board

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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 25, 2026

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

RE: Support for HB 1562 HD1, Relating to Youth Mental Health

Hrg: February 27, 2026, at 10:00 AM, Conference Room 308

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ **supports HB 1562 HD1**, which establishes a one-year digital youth mental health platform pilot project to develop 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 the child and family mental health data tracker hosted by 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.²

Youth Mental Health Data

According to the Hawai'i Health Matters tracker, 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.

The tracker also found that 26.3% of students in grades 6-8 have seriously considered attempting suicide. 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. This disparity between the number of students reporting 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

¹ 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.

² [Child & Family Mental Health Tracker](#), Hawai'i Health Matters, 2023.



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.”³

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.⁴ Additionally, some state Medicaid programs, such as those in Washington and Louisiana, are developing coverage determination processes to accommodate digital mental health tools.⁵

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 urge your committee to pass this measure to support the emotional wellness of our keiki.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kris Coffield'.

Kris Coffield
Policy and Advocacy Associate

³ [Using Digital Technology to Respond to the Youth Mental Health Crisis](#), The Commonwealth Fund, July 2023.

⁴ [Accelerating Science-Driven Reimbursement For Digital Therapeutics In State Medicaid Programs](#), Health Affairs, October 2020.

⁵ [Transforming Medicare Coverage: A New Medicare Coverage Pathway for Emerging Technologies and Revamped Evidence Development Framework](#), Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, June 2023.



Hawaii Medical Association

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Date: February 27, 2026
From: Hawaii Medical Association (HMA)
Elizabeth Ann Ignacio MD - Chair, HMA Public Policy Committee
Christina Marzo MD and Robert Carlisle MD, Vice Chairs, HMA Public Policy Committee

RE HB 1562 HD1 RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH: Keiki Caucus; DOH; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division; Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project; Report; Appropriation
Position: Support

This measure would establish and appropriate funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project that will enable the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Health to develop and make publicly available a digital platform designed to help young people address and manage mental health challenges, and require a report to the Legislature. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

HMA applauds the Legislature's direction to strengthen early prevention and education on mental health. By increasing access to tailored education and coping resources across our islands, especially in rural and underserved areas, the measure will support equitable behavioral health access for diverse communities. The pilot provides a platform to tailor resources sensitive to cultural and geographic needs across Hawaii, which can strengthen statewide resilience and reduce disparities in mental health and substance use outcomes.

HMA greatly appreciates the House Health Committee's thoughtful recommendation to ensure that the digital youth mental health platform have language and content specifically addressing the unique needs and experiences of Hawai'i's LGBTQ+ youth. This important inclusion will help make the platform more equitable, culturally responsive, and supportive of all young people seeking mental health resources in our communities.

HMA strongly supports this measure, and respectfully provides this additional comment:

HMA recommends health care literacy as a core platform component. Introducing young people to the roles and value of their health care teams — including physicians, nurse practitioners, psychologists, family therapists, and even emerging tools such as AI health and well-being trackers — will:

2026 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

Elizabeth A Ignacio, MD, Chair • Robert Carlisle, MD, Vice Chair • Christina Marzo, MD, Vice Chair
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

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- Improve young people’s understanding of *when* and *how* to seek professional support.
- Normalize seeking care and strengthen their long-term patient-provider relationships.
- Foster engagement with evidence-based care pathways early in life.

Healthcare literacy is foundational to effective prevention and navigation of behavioral health challenges. Introducing youth to the *scope of provider roles*, culturally responsive care options, and supportive technologies can reduce barriers to care and improve outcomes across mental health and substance use disorders.

By strengthening mental health education and outreach, this platform pilot can help surround our keiki and young adults with a connected circle of care that includes families, schools, community supports, and trusted health care teams. HMA lauds this shared approach, reinforcing that no young person navigates mental health or substance use challenges alone, and that Hawaii is committed to meeting them with understanding, guidance, and accessible resources at every step of their journey.

Thank you for allowing Hawaii Medical Association to submit comments on this measure.

REFERENCES AND QUICK LINKS

Madrid-Cagigal A, Kealy C, Potts C, Mulvenna MD, Byrne M, Barry MM, Donohoe G. Digital Mental Health Interventions for University Students With Mental Health Difficulties: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Early Interv Psychiatry*. 2025 Mar;19(3):e70017. doi: 10.1111/eip.70017. PMID: 40033658; PMCID: PMC11876723.

Potts C, Kealy C, McNulty JM, Madrid-Cagigal A, Wilson T, Mulvenna MD, O’Neill S, Donohoe G, Barry MM. Digital Mental Health Interventions for Young People Aged 16-25 Years: Scoping Review. *J Med Internet Res*. 2025 May 9;27:e72892. doi: 10.2196/72892. PMID: 40344661; PMCID: PMC12102633.

Stifjell K, Sandanger T, Wien C. Exploring Online Health Information–Seeking Behavior Among Young Adults: Scoping Review. *J Med Internet Res* 2025;27:e70379. URL: <https://www.jmir.org/2025/1/e70379> DOI: 10.2196/70379.

University of Hawai’i at Mānoa John A. Burns School of Medicine Area Health Education Center. Annual Report on Findings from the Hawai’i Physician Workforce Assessment Project. Dec. 2025. University of Hawai’i Government Relations. https://www.hawaii.edu/govrel/docs/reports/2026/act18-sslh2009_2026_physician-workforce_annual-report_508.pdf Accessed Jan 25 2026.

Hay, Jeremy. "Need A Doctor? Hawai’i’s Physician Shortage Keeps Getting Worse." *Honolulu Civil Beat*, 8 Jan. 2026, www.civilbeat.org/2026/01/hawaii-physician-shortage-getting-worse/. Accessed Jan 25 2026.

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Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director



HB1562 HD1 Digital Platform for CAMHD

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Chris Tood, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Friday, Feb 27, 2026: 10:00: Room 308 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Comments to Support HB1562 HD1:

ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Alan Johnson. I am the ad hoc leader of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition (HSAC), a statewide organization for substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorder prevention and treatment agencies and recovery-oriented services.

COMMENTS for SUPPORT:

Digital Platforms, according to all evidence, **do not replace therapy or clinical care nor evidence-based prevention.**

However, **they are useful to support clinical care or formalized evidenced-based treatment, especially for early support, education, monitoring and accessibility.** What digital platforms can do is help kids practice skills, track moods, learn coping strategies, or deliver evidence-based exercises (e.g., CBT-based tools).

Our **caution is that digital platforms** are not a substitute for personalized, licensed clinical treatment for children who need it.

1. **Human connection matters.** Licensed mental health professionals provide clinical assessment, diagnosis, tailored treatment planning, and crisis support — things current digital platforms cannot fully replicate. Empathy, nuanced judgment, and safety monitoring (especially for younger users) are best delivered by trained clinicians.
2. Evidence varies. While some tools show positive results for mild to moderate issues in studies, the **quality and long-term effectiveness are still being researched**, and outcomes vary by tool, age group, and condition.
3. **Not all tools are regulated.** Some wellness or chatbot apps aren't clinically validated and should not be treated as therapy. Professional guidance helps families choose appropriate, evidence-based resources.

Digital platform **can improve outcomes when combined with traditional therapy** and help reinforce what's learned in sessions. Some platforms are even designed to work *alongside* a clinician's plan.

Digital platforms for youth mental health (including ones connected to support services) are **valuable complements** — they broaden access, support skill development, and

can *enhance* traditional care — but **they do not replace professional treatment** when a child has significant or complex mental health needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and are available for questions.



Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Patricia "Patty" Chin, and I serve as the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative Manager at EPIC 'Ohana. We partner with youth ages 14 to 26 who have experienced foster care, many of whom face significant mental health challenges rooted in trauma, instability, and the stress of navigating adulthood without consistent support. I am submitting testimony in **strong support** of HB1562, which establishes a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project. -year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project.

Youth mental health needs are rising sharply. According to a 10-year CDC study (2013-2023), nearly all indicators of child and adolescent mental health worsened nationwide. In Hawai'i, these challenges have been intensified by the COVID19 pandemic and the Maui wildfires, which increased rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma exposure among young people. -year CDC study (2013-2023), nearly all indicators of child and adolescent mental health worsened nationwide. In Hawai-19 pandemic and the Maui wildfires, which increased rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma exposure among young people.

For youth with foster care experience, the need is even greater. Nationally, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network reports that 90% of youth in foster care have experienced at least one traumatic event, and many have experienced multiple. Trauma, instability, and disrupted relationships all contribute to long-term mental health struggles.-term mental health struggles.

We see this clearly in Hawai'i's foster youth population. According to the HI H.O.P.E.S. Match Statewide Report (2017-2024), mental health ratings among participants show a persistent need for support:

- Only 28-35% of youth rate their mental health as "excellent" or "very good."-third of youth rate their mental health as "excellent" or "very good."
- 50-60% rated their mental health as "good/fair."
- 8-12% rated their mental health as "poor."

These trends have remained steady over multiple years, underscoring the need for accessible, youth-friendly mental health tools. A digital platform is especially important for foster youth and young adults because it:

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- Reduces stigma by allowing youth to explore mental health resources privately
- Expands access for youth in rural or underserved areas
- Provides immediate, developmentally appropriate coping tools
- Helps youth manage stress before it escalates into crisis
- Supports a population that often struggles to access traditional services due to transportation, scheduling, or trust barriers

To ensure this platform truly meets the needs of Hawai‘i’s youth, the pilot project should include young people with lived experience – including those with foster care experience – in its design, development, and testing. Their insight is essential for creating a tool that is relevant, culturally grounded, and accessible. For these reasons, the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative strongly supports HB1562 and respectfully urges the Committee to pass this bill. Mahalo, for your time and for your commitment to Hawai‘i’s youth.

Patricia “Patty” Chin



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

SUPPORT HB 1562 HD1: RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

TO: House Committee on Finance
FROM: Shellie Niles, VP of Mission, Catholic Charities Hawai'i
Hearing: Friday, 02/27/26; 10:00am; CR 308 & Videoconference

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee on Finance:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i **supports HB 1562 HD1**, which establishes a Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project within the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH) is a tax-exempt, community-based organization that has been providing social services in Hawai'i for 78 years. Catholic Charities Hawai'i serves individuals and families statewide who are facing poverty, housing instability, trauma, and crisis. We are seeing increasing impacts of untreated mental health challenges among children and adolescents, especially in communities affected by disasters, economic hardship, and limited access to care. HB 1562 HD1 responds to this urgent need by investing in prevention, early intervention, and accessible mental health supports for youth.

The pilot acknowledges that youth in Hawai'i are facing significant mental health challenges, while workforce shortages, distance, and stigma limit access to in-person care. Evidence-based digital supports, when properly governed, can safely expand reach—especially for rural, underserved, and disaster-impacted communities.

By addressing lower-level needs through prevention and early support, this pilot also helps preserve limited clinical capacity for youth with the highest acuity. It is a practical, cost-effective response to current workforce constraints.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i supports this bill's focus on prevention, reducing stigma, and improving equity for youth who may not otherwise connect with traditional behavioral health systems. HB1562 HD1 is a prudent, forward-looking investment in the well-being of Hawai'i's youth and strengthens efforts to build resilient, healthy communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your continued leadership. If you have any questions, please contact our Vice President of Mission, Shellie Niles, at (808) 527-4813.



TO: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair, and
Members of the Committee

FROM: Justina Acevedo-Cross, Senior Director of Community Strategy

RE: Testimony in Support for HB 1562 HD 1, Relating to Youth Mental Health

DATE: Friday, February 27, 2026 at 10:00 am

LOCATION: Hearing Room 308

The Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) **supports** HB 1562 HD 1 to create a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project to expand access to mental health resources for young people in Hawai'i. HCF believes in preventing and addressing the symptoms and impacts of mental health for all ages, that is why it has been identified as a priority area within HCF's CHANGE Framework under the Health and Wellness sector. HCF is investing and activating a mental health and behavioral health strategy to communities to reduce stigma, expand access to care, and champion mental well-being for all. In 2025, HCF awarded \$282,500 to 17 organizations to build organizational capacity for creating and sharing messaging that addresses mental and behavioral health stigma within their communities and to test out communications and outreach strategies. We see the youth mental health platform pilot as a complementary effort that expands access to an important group—our young people.

According to Mental Health America's 2025 "State of Mental Health in America" report, 16 percent of youth (approx. 16,000 young people) in Hawai'i experienced a major depressive episode in the past year, and 57 percent of them did not receive mental health services.¹ Additionally, nearly 13 percent (approx. 13,000 young people) in Hawai'i have had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year.² HB 1562 HD 1 would establish a publicly available digital platform to help youth in Hawai'i access crucial mental health resources and information.

¹ Mental Health America, "State of Mental Health in America" - [2025 report](#), pages 17, 29.

² Mental Health America, "State of Mental Health in America" - [2025 report](#), pages 19.

This legislation would help address the growing mental health needs of keiki and young people in Hawai'i, particularly those in rural and underserved communities. **We urge you to advance HB 1562 HD 1.**

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Committee on Finance

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: February 25, 2026

RE: House Bill 1562 HD1
Measure Title: RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH.
Report Title: Keiki Caucus; DOH; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division;
Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project; Report; Appropriation (\$)

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 1562 HD1. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

Chair Chris Todd
Committee on Finance

House Bill 1562
Friday, February 27, 2026
10:00AM House conference room 308 or via video conference

My name is Erin Atacador, and I am a lifelong resident of Lanai. I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of HB 1562, which would establish a digital youth mental health platform under the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division within the Hawaii Department of Health.

As someone who has grown up on Lānaʻi and continues to raise my family here, I understand firsthand the unique challenges that rural and neighbor island communities face in accessing services. On Lānaʻi, many specialized health and mental health resources are simply not available on island. Families often must travel to Oʻahu or Maui for appointments, which requires time off work, airfare, childcare coordination, and high financial cost. For some families, those barriers mean care is delayed—or never accessed at all.

Digital platforms play an essential role in bridging that gap. When in-person services are limited or unavailable, online access to credible, culturally responsive mental health information and tools becomes more than convenient—it becomes necessary. A statewide digital youth mental health platform would allow keiki and families on Lānaʻi to access evidence-based resources, coping strategies, and guidance without having to leave the island. It would also provide county-specific information so families can better understand what supports are available to them locally and how to navigate the system.

Importantly, today's youth are already comfortable using digital tools to seek information. By meeting them where they are, this bill increases the likelihood that young people will access support early, before challenges escalate into crisis. Early intervention is especially critical in small communities like ours, where stigma and privacy concerns can sometimes prevent youth from openly seeking help.

HB 1562 recognizes that geography should not determine access to mental health support. For neighbor island communities, digital infrastructure is not a luxury—it is an equity issue. This pilot program represents a proactive, forward-thinking approach to strengthening youth mental health statewide while ensuring that rural communities like Lānaʻi are not left behind.

I strongly urge you to pass HB 1562 and invest in innovative, accessible solutions that support the well-being of Hawai'i's keiki.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB1562.

Respectfully,
Erin Atacador
(808) 214-8819