



**STATE HEALTH PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO

JOSH GREEN, MD
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

JOHN C. (JACK) LEWIN, MD
ADMINISTRATOR

February 24, 2026

TO: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Honorable Members

FROM: John C. (Jack) Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA, and Sr. Advisor to
Governor Josh Green, MD on Healthcare Innovation

RE: **HB 1974-HD1 -- RELATING TO HEALTH (Hearing loss state planning
needs)**

HEARING: Friday, February 27, 2026 @ 10:00 am; Conference Room 308

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

Testimony:

SHPDA strongly supports HB 1974-HD1, with comments.

SHPDA agrees that a comprehensive state plan on hearing loss focused on improving access, affordability, awareness, and early detection of hearing loss in collaboration with community stakeholders would help address the serious issues related to and attributed to hearing loss.

Hawaii faces a growing number of hard of hearing residents amid its aging population with tens of thousands already affected statewide. Hearing loss significantly impacts health outcomes and quality of life, often exacerbating isolation and chronic conditions.

State data indicate tens of thousands of Hawaii residents experience some degree of hearing loss, including many with serious difficulties. This aligns with demographic projections showing Hawaii's population aged 65 + rising from 200,712 in 2020 to 215,570 by 2030 (24.4% of total population), driving higher prevalence as hearing impairment increases sharply with age. Untreated hearing loss raises risks of cognitive decline, dementia (up to 5x higher) falls, and hospitalizations as it limits communication and early detection of health issues. It correlates with depression, anxiety, and poorer management of comorbidities like diabetes or heart disease in

seniors. In Hawaii's island context, access barriers amplify these effects for rural populations.

Hawaii also has one of the highest rates of newborn hearing loss in the US, with about 55 infants born annually with permanent hearing loss, based on around 18,000 births per year. Data from 2015-17 shows 60-74 confirmed cases yearly among newborns screened, with 34-40 enrolling into early intervention programs. Among school age children, about 1.5 - 2% of special education students have hearing related issues.

Hearing difficulties lead to social isolation, reduced independence and lower life satisfaction, straining family caregivers and increasing long term care demands. Daily challenges include misunderstandings in conversations, missing safety cues or exclusion from community events, and worsening mental health. Early interventions like hearing aids can mitigate up to 90% of these impacts, yet affordability remains a hurdle.

These patients also have extreme difficulty navigating our complicated insurance prior authorization processes and in seeking appropriate diagnostic and therapeutic options.

A state plan would provide direction, identify current resources and identify gaps. This will lead to better allocation of limited resources. There is a Senate measure SB 1865, which identifies the Department of Health as the lead. SHPDA is open to either being the lead for development of a plan or a participant under the lead of the DOH. In either case, resources and funding are needed to get this done.
Thank you for hearing HB 1974-HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

- -- Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA



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

KENNETH FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

CAROLINE CADIRAO
DIRECTOR
Executive Office on Aging

Telephone
(808) 586-0100

Fax
(808) 586-0185

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON AGING
NO. 1 CAPITOL DISTRICT
250 SOUTH HOTEL STREET, SUITE 406
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2831

Testimony COMMENTING on HB1974HD1
RELATING TO Health

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
REP. CHRIS TODD, CHAIR
REP. JENNA TAKENOUCI, VICE CHAIR

Testimony of Caroline Cadirao
Director, Executive Office on Aging
Attached Agency to the Department of Health

Hearing: Friday, February 27, 2026, 10:00 A.M.

Conference Room: 308

- 1 **EOA Position:** The Executive Office on Aging (EOA), an attached agency to the Department of
2 Health (DOH), supports the intent of this measure and offers comments. EOA requests that this
3 program and appropriation not conflict with, reduce, or replace priorities identified in the
4 executive budget.
- 5 **Fiscal Implications:** Funding would be needed for SHPDA to implement the comprehensive
6 state plan for hearing loss.
- 7 **Purpose:** This measure requires SHPDA to develop a comprehensive state plan for hearing loss.
8 Untreated hearing loss can lead to social isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. For older
9 adults, it may increase the risk of cognitive decline, dementia, and falls. Hearing loss also
10 impacts emotional well-being and quality of life. A statewide approach to hearing screenings and

- 1 treatment can improve public health and reduce the long-term social, emotional, and economic
- 2 burdens of untreated hearing loss.
- 3 **Recommendations:** EOA supports the intent of this measure and defers to the SHPDA on its
- 4 implementation.
- 5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 12:50:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rick Tabor	PABEA (Policy Advisory Board for Elderly Affairs)	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for your committee hearing on HB1974; State Health Planning and Development Agency; State Plan on Hearing Loss; Requiring and appropriating funds for the State Health Planning and Development Agency to develop and publish a state plan on hearing loss.

I am Rick Tabor, from Honolulu, Hawaii, in my retirement, I humbly serve in a few leadership roles.

For the record, I strongly support HB1974.

Today I testify on behalf if PABEA (Policy Advisory Board gor Elderly Affairs) as their Legislative Committee Chairman.

For the record, I'm a retired mental health clinician, past in-home care operation manager, and veteran field medical Navy hospital corpsman.

As a member of the Hear 4 Hope hearing taskforce, I am passionate about HB1974's taskforce plans to explore Hawaii's hearing issue needs. Awareness, accessibility and affordability are three of the immediate concerns that need to be addressed. Thank you for your support of those living with hearing issues. We know they appreciate anything we can do to help.

As some of you know, fir the past eight years I have advocated for hearing issue improvements. This includes chairing the Rotary Gift of Sound free hearing aid program. In my hearing issues advocacy, my lessons of awareness increased every day. Lesson number one; I've learned, there's huge disparity in the hearing loss issues in Hawaii.

Hawaii's hearing issue disparity is characterized by; a higher prevalence of congenital hearing loss than the national average, a severe shortage of hearing health professionals, and high costs of care.

Key Disparities in Hearing Loss in Hawaii;

- Highest Newborn Hearing Loss Rates.
- Workforce and Access Shortage.
- Service Gaps for Children.
- High Costs and Lack of Insurance.

- **Geographic and Demographic Factors:** While specific data on ethnic disparities in Hawaii for hearing loss is limited in the provided text, national trends indicate that hearing loss is more prevalent among white, male, and lower-income populations. However, broader health studies in Hawaii indicate that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders face widening health care access disparities.
- **School Screening Limitations:** While screenings exist, they reach only a few schools in the state, meaning not all school-aged children with potential hearing issues are identified.
- **Undertreated Conditions:** Untreated hearing loss is linked to social isolation, lower quality of life, cognitive impairment, increase cost of comorbid conditions, and increase various life threatening issues.

Although Hawaii's situation needs improvement, it is not unique to the rest of our nation. On a personal note, my sister was recently diagnosed with 60% hearing loss from Cholesteatoma and they recommend surgery. Hopefully the surgery will help her recover her hearing. She lives in a rural part of Oregon. She said, finding help was not an easy task. She had to drive 163 miles (3 hours) in winter Cascade Mountain conditions to Portland for her hearing care. This is much like rural Hawaii, where our relatives fly to Honolulu for their medical needs.

Another family situation involved our mother. She resided in a small midwest farm town and had to travel an hour, to a larger city for her care. She passed-on, two winters ago, after an arduous end of life journey. We became aware of her struggles when we noticed our mother avoiding social gatherings and deliberately isolating. Her cognitive and mental health issues escalated from her Alzheimer's diagnosis, leading to a rapid decline. Regarding her hearing, we were told she waited too long to correct her hearing issues. Her doctor said it was too late, for hearing recovery. The best they could offer was hearing aids for sound amplification. She was never happy with her hearing aids.

Like many of our 32,000+ Hawaii Kūpuna diagnosed with Alzheimer's, my mother's Alzheimer's symptoms escalated to the point of her needing 24/7 nursing care. A month before she passed, she fell, broke her neck and clavicle and passed away a short time after that incident. While cleaning her nursing home room, my family found her hearing aids hidden under her fish aquarium.

Statistics show only 14% needing hearing aids wear them. Why? This mystery is one of several we hope to better understand, through a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss; taskforce.

After eight years of supporting a bill that asks for adequate coverage for hearing aids, listening to answers to questions of why the hearing aid bill failed to pass, at Kokua Council Legislative Good Bad and Ugly debriefings, I kept hearing our legislatures say; we need more specific Hawaii needs data before hearing aids will be accessible.

I respectfully respond with support of HB1974; State Health Planning and Development Agency; State Plan on Hearing Loss; Requiring and appropriating funds for the State Health Planning and Development Agency to develop and publish a state plan on hearing loss. This Hearing Taskforce hopes to explore Hawaii's hearing issue needs, promoting; Hearing awareness,

accessibility and affordability in Hawaii. What we know to be true is, Hawaii's hearing loss issues are higher than the rest of our nation.

Hopefully, together, we can do better. Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate all you do for Hawaii.

Mahalo Nui Loa,

-Rick Tabor

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:36:03 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ava Eskaran	Aiea High School	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Members of the Committee:

My name is Ava Eskaran, and I am a resident of Ewa Beach, Hawaii. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

[Briefly share your personal story here — how hearing loss has affected you or a loved one, challenges accessing care, delays, costs, confusion about where to go, or impacts on daily life, safety, work, or connection.]

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Sincerely,
Ava Eskaran**



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

SUPPORT HB 1974, HD1: RELATING TO HEALTH

TO: House Committee on Finance
FROM: Betty Lou Larson, Legislative Liaison, Catholic Charities Hawai'i
Hearing: Friday, 02/27/26; 10:00 am; CR 308 & Videoconference

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

Catholic Charities Hawai'i **supports HB 1537 HD1**, which requires and appropriates funds for the State Health Planning and Development Agency (SHPDA) to develop and publish a state plan on hearing loss.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH) is a tax-exempt, community-based organization that has been providing social services in Hawai'i for 78 years, now serving over 40,000 individuals statewide. Catholic Charities Hawai'i serves individuals and families who are experiencing poverty, housing instability, trauma, and crisis. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy for Hawai'i's most vulnerable including people facing the loss of their hearing who often do not know where to turn for help.

HB 1974 HD1 recognizes the growing problem of hearing loss. Nearly **216,000** Hawai'i residents are affected by hearing loss. For our kupuna, this is especially devastating. One in three adults in their 60s, two-thirds of those in their 70s, and more than 80% in their 80s experience some hearing loss. When unrecognized and untreated, hearing loss can lead to isolation, cognitive decline, dementia, depression and falls. **As Hawaii's elderly population rapidly increases, the State must proactively address these needs.** Hearing loss not only affects a kupuna's quality of life, but it can lead to costly social and healthcare impacts.

This bill would address hearing loss not only among our kupuna but also for youths and adults who face a very fragmented system of services. They are often left to navigate this system on their own. Hawai'i needs a comprehensive statewide framework for hearing health services. The bill directs SHPDA to coordinate the plan and engage stakeholders including state agencies, providers, educators, individuals with lived experience, and experts in hearing health to assess current services, identify gaps, etc. The development of this extensive Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide a much-needed long-term strategy for hearing health across the lifespan.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i respectfully urges your Committee to pass this bill. The strategies for better hearing will reduce social isolation and bring safety and dignity to residents of all ages. It will ensure that every resident, from keiki to kupuna, can hear, participate and thrive!

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. If you have any questions, please contact our Legislative Liaison, Betty Lou Larson, at (808) 527-4813.



2026 Hawaii Leadership Board

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LJ R. Duenas,
Executive Director
Alzheimer's Association

Testimony to the House Committee on Finance Friday, February 27, 10:00 AM Hawaii State Capitol Conference Room 308, and Videoconference

RE: House Bill No. 1974 HD1 – RELATING TO HEALTH

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Coby Chock, and I am testifying on behalf of the Alzheimer's Association Hawaii Chapter. The Alzheimer's Association strongly supports HB1974 HD1 and appreciates the Legislature's focus on hearing loss as a critical public health issue with direct implications for brain health and dementia prevention.

Hearing loss is a significant and modifiable risk factors for dementia. Research consistently shows that untreated hearing loss is associated with increased risk of cognitive decline, social isolation, depression, falls, and earlier loss of independence. Hawai'i is home to more than 31,200 people living with Alzheimer's disease, and the number is expected to grow substantially as our population ages. Prevention and risk-reduction efforts are essential to addressing this growing crisis.

HB1974 HD1 takes an important, evidence-based approach by requiring a comprehensive statewide plan that emphasizes early detection, access to hearing care, workforce training, and public awareness. We especially appreciate that the bill explicitly recognizes the connection between hearing loss, cognitive decline, and dementia, ensuring that hearing health is addressed as part of a broader strategy to support healthy aging.

A coordinated state plan on hearing loss will help reduce dementia risk, support kupuna and caregivers, and improve long-term health outcomes for Hawai'i residents. The Alzheimer's Association respectfully urges your support for HB1974 HD1.

If you have questions, please contact me at 808-451-3410 or ckchock@alz.org



Coby Chock
Director of Public Policy and Advocacy
Alzheimer's Association - Hawaii



February 24, 2026

**Testimony in Support of HB 1974
Relating to a State Plan on Hearing Loss**

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

My name is Tori Carapelho. I am the founder of Hear 4 Hope, a Hawaii-based nonprofit organization supporting individuals and families living with hearing loss. I am submitting testimony in strong support of Bill 1974 to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

I come before you as a community advocate and as someone with lived experience.

In 2021, I experienced sudden hearing loss. I remember sitting in a doctor's office and being told there was nothing more that could be done – that this was something I would have to learn to live with. In that moment, my world felt like it collapsed. I was not just losing my hearing; I was losing my sense of independence, my confidence, and my ability to communicate in ways I always had.

What made the experience even harder was the absence of a clear path forward. The medical system addressed the diagnosis, but there was no guidance on what came next – no roadmap for support, no coordination between providers, and no clear place to turn for practical tools, emotional support, or community connection. I quickly learned that hearing devices alone are not enough. Access to assistive tools, education, and ongoing support made the difference between isolation and participation. Yet finding those resources required time, persistence, and financial means that many people do not have.

I was fortunate. Many are not.

After regaining some stability, I founded Hear 4 Hope because I never wanted anyone else to have to navigate hearing loss alone in such a fragmented system. Through our work, we hear the same story over and over again from individuals: people do not know

where to go for help, care pathways are confusing, wait times are long, providers are overstretched, and support services are often disconnected from one another. Even well-intentioned professionals are frequently working in silos, without the ability to guide people beyond their specific role.

Hearing loss affects more than hearing. It impacts communication, connection, employment, independence, and participation in daily life. When left unaddressed, it can place growing strain on families, caregivers, workplaces, and public systems. As Hawaii's population continues to age, these challenges will only increase.

This bill represents an important opportunity to take a proactive, coordinated approach. A statewide plan on hearing loss would allow Hawaii to better understand current gaps, strengthen education and early identification, improve coordination across systems, support workforce development, and ensure that community voices are part of the solution. Most importantly, it would move us away from reactive, crisis-driven responses and toward a more thoughtful, equitable, and sustainable approach to hearing health.

From both my personal experience and my work with Hear 4 Hope, I can say clearly: the need is real, the gaps are significant, and the cost of inaction is high – not just financially, but in quality of life for individuals and families across our state.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my experience for your consideration of this important measure. I respectfully urge your support.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tori Carapelho', written in a cursive style.

Tori Carapelho
CEO, Founder
Hear 4 Hope

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1974

To: House Finance Committee

Date: February 25, 2026

Re: HB 1974 — Establishing a Statewide Plan on Hearing Loss

My name is Kevin S. Hadley, MD, and I am an Otolaryngology-Head and Neck surgeon who is sub-specialized in Otology, Neurotology, and Skull Base Surgery. I am an expert on the medical and surgical treatment of ear disorders, and I am the only specialist of this type for the civilian population of Hawai'i. I have practiced in Hawai'i for almost 20 years and provide advanced care for hearing loss, balance disorders, and skull base tumors. I treat patients of all ages and do surgeries to treat hearing loss including cochlear implants.

During my nearly two decades of practice involving hearing loss, I have encountered numerous hurdles and roadblocks that prevent patients from getting the care they need and prevent them from achieving the highest level of success after treatment.

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 1974, which would require the State Health Planning and Development Agency (SHPDA) to develop and publish a comprehensive statewide plan on hearing loss.

Hearing loss is a highly prevalent and profoundly impactful condition affecting thousands of Hawai'i residents, including keiki, working adults, and kupuna. Despite its prevalence, our state currently lacks a coordinated framework for hearing screening, timely diagnosis, seamless referral pathways, follow-up care, and equitable access to treatment. This fragmentation results in delayed care, unmet needs, and preventable long-term consequences for individuals and families.

Without a statewide strategy:

- Children may experience delayed language and academic development when hearing concerns are not identified and addressed early.
- Adults and older adults often face unnecessary social isolation, cognitive decline, and reduced quality of life due to untreated hearing loss.
- Our current system lacks coordinated infrastructure and standardized pathways, which places unnecessary strain on providers and contributes to delays in care.

A well-designed statewide plan on hearing loss would set clear goals, evidence-based screening and referral standards, workforce planning measures, and strategies for improving access to affordable hearing technologies. Such a framework would align Hawai'i's efforts with national best practices and ensure that residents at every life stage can achieve optimal hearing health.

HB 1974 represents a fiscally responsible and humane approach to an issue that touches families across our islands. I respectfully urge the committee to pass this bill and help move Hawai'i toward a more coordinated, effective approach to hearing care.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Kevin S. Hadley, MD

Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery

Neurotology & Otology Specialist

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 3:56:29 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jaana Ponzio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I became deaf Nov 2021 . To figure out what I needed to do was scary unknown territory for me .

i became cochlear implant recipient in 2022 and bilateral 2024.

the road I have traveled and has very interesting and realized how many other people have hearingloss and lack of support and resources to make the best possible decision for them . I have meet so many young people who needs help to navigate their whole future ahead , elderly people who is in their golden years need assistance to navigate the last part of their journey .

i am hoping you see this an important part of helping hard of hearing and deaf to hopefully return back in to the hearing society.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 5:23:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LON IBARAKI	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Ladies and Gentlemen,

I stronglu urge the legislators to please vote Yes for bill HB1974 My wife is a kupuna 73 years old and in the last few years she has just about lost all of her hearing. It took a long time to determine her problem, We need a comprehensive state wide plan to help kupunas, babies, keikis, and adults with hearing loss.She needs any help that is avaiable to move forward in life.Living in silence is a very lonely life even though I am with her at all times to help. Mahalo for this consideration.

Lon Ibaraki

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 5:45:12 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raude Nagaishi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for accepting my testimony in support of HB1974. This is the first time in my 61 years of living in Hawaii that I am submitting testimony for a Bill before the Legislature. This is how important I believe this Bill is to the residents of Hawaii.

My dad, who has since passed away, suffered from hearing loss for most of his adult life. I have witnessed first-hand how his hearing loss caused him to avoid conversations and withdraw into himself rather than asking people to speak louder or to repeat themselves. Being of Asian ancestry may have had something to do with it, with pride, privacy, and not wanting to burden others being a part of our cultural make-up.

Hearing loss is more than a nuisance or even a medical issue, it affects communication, relationships, mental well-being, and quality of life for the one suffering from it, as well as for everyone around them.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify. If I can be of further assistance in support of this Bill, please let me know. My email and phone number has been registered with this testimony submittal.

Testimony on HB 1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Feb 27, 2026

Conference Room 308 via Videoconference

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Thomas Simon, and I am a resident of Honolulu. I am submitting testimony in support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss. I am sharing this information based on my own experience living and working with hearing loss.

I have lived with hearing loss for over 27 years, starting in August of 1998, when I had sudden hearing loss in my right ear. My doctor immediately sent me to an ear specialist, an ENT. The ENT ran a number of tests and treated me with steroids, which he said helps restore hearing about 50% of the time. In my case, the medication did not help. Four years later, I had a follow up appointment with a different ENT, who ran tests and came to the same conclusion. I simply had to live with only one functioning ear. I do not recall either of these ENTs recommending a hearing aid for my right ear, so I assume my hearing was beyond the limits of the hearing aid technology at that time.

The first person I recall recommending a hearing aid was an Audiologist in 2008 when I began to struggle with hearing loss in my left ear. I have used hearing aids for my left ear from that time until today. As a state employee and later a state retiree, I have had excellent health insurance, but I still paid significant out-of-pocket costs for hearing aids and hearing aid related services.

Several years after my initial ENT visit, I recalled an incident that occurred before my sudden hearing loss, which may have been an early sign that I was losing my hearing. I have thought back to that time and wondered if I should have been getting regular hearing tests. I schedule annual doctor visits, dental checkups, and eye exams. Perhaps if I had annual hearing tests, my hearing may have been treated earlier and the outcome may have been different.

I first heard about a cochlear implant around 2002, but my understanding was that it was very expensive and my insurance would not cover it. The first time I spoke to a healthcare professional about a cochlear implant was in 2020. I feared that I was going to lose the remaining hearing in my left ear, and my Audiologist suggested that I look into a cochlear implant. In 2022, Medicare expanded its criteria, allowing me to become a candidate for a cochlear implant. In 2024, I received a cochlear implant in my right ear, restoring hearing that I had lost 26 years earlier.

Testimony on HB 1974

At the time of my initial hearing loss, I worked in the Telecom Branch of State Civil Defense and often struggled with hearing in meetings, interacting with colleagues while simultaneously speaking on a telephone, and numerous other situations. In addition to problems at work, I have struggled with hearing in everyday life, such as speaking with family, friends, or doctors, shopping, and making phone calls. The cochlear implant has returned my hearing to nearly normal, but I still struggle in certain situations, such as large gatherings, noisy environments, and in rooms with poor acoustics.

From my perspective, a statewide plan could make a significant difference by improving education for teachers, healthcare providers, employers, and the public, making it clearer when and how people should be screened. In addition, the plan could address cost and other barriers that cause people to delay care. Most importantly, a plan could give people a clear path to address their hearing loss instead of leaving them to figure it out on their own.

I believe this effort could help others avoid the lack of information and delays that I experienced and allow people with hearing loss to stay engaged in their work, families, and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience and for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

Thomas Simon

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:47:52 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Wesley Nakamura, BC-HIS	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of HB1974. As a hearing aid specialist, I see firsthand the profound medical, social, and economic impacts of untreated hearing loss. Left unaddressed, hearing loss can lead to social isolation, cognitive decline, and reduced quality of life for our kupuna and other residents.

HB1974's requirement for SHPDA to create a plan involving community stakeholders is essential. Improved screening, public awareness, and access to treatment can make a real difference in people's lives. I want to emphasize that while hearing aids are a highly effective treatment, obtaining a prescription device can be challenging due to cost, which often prevents people from getting the help they need.

This bill's appropriation of \$100,000 to develop a comprehensive plan is an important investment. It will help identify ways to reduce barriers and improve access to hearing care, ensuring that more residents can maintain their independence, health, and social connections.

I urge the Committee on Finance to support HB1974 and take meaningful action on this important public health issue.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Wesley T Nakamura, BC-HIS
Hearing Aid Specialist

February 24, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Kyle Osaki, and I am writing in support of House Bill 1974 based on my personal experience.

Through my role as a parent, caregiver to my parents and a special needs daughter, I have seen how gaps in our current system impact real people at critical moments in their lives. When timely support is unavailable, families are left struggling, and those challenges often grow more complex and costly over time.

House Bill 1974 offers a thoughtful, practical solution. By addressing these gaps, it helps people access the support they need earlier—strengthening outcomes for individuals while reducing long-term strain on our health and human services systems.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of House Bill 1974 and allow it to move forward. Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kyle M. Osaki". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Kyle M. Osaki

In Support of Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss

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

My name is Lucy Farinas, and I am submitting testimony in strong support of establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

My hearing loss has affected me deeply, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally. It took me years to stabilize myself and accept what had happened. During that time, I struggled to understand my condition and how to live with it, often feeling isolated and unsure of where to turn for help.

In Hawai'i, I faced many challenges trying to get support. I could not find a support group for people who are deaf or hard of hearing where I could talk openly about my situation and the changes I was experiencing in my life. I became heavily dependent on my ENT just to cope with my hearing loss, but there was no broader system of guidance or follow-up to help me navigate next steps or long-term care.

These challenges had a serious impact on my daily life. My hearing loss affected my work and my social life, and I became reclusive. I avoided going out or being around people. For years, I relied on therapy and medication for my mental health just to find stability. The emotional toll of hearing loss is real, and without proper support, it can be overwhelming.

I believe a clear, statewide plan would help prevent others from going through the same struggles I did. Hearing loss affects mental health, social interaction, and overall well-being. A coordinated assistance program would provide guidance, education, and connection to others who are on the same journey of being deaf or hard of hearing. Knowing where to go, what resources exist, and how to access support can make a life-changing difference.

A Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would help people feel less alone, improve access to care, and support both mental and social health. I urge you to support this effort so that others do not have to struggle in isolation as I did.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my experience and for considering this important issue.

Respectfully,

Lucy Farinas

Hawaii Resident living with hearing loss

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:00:09 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bradley Shin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

H.B. 1974 – Testimony in Support

I strongly support H.B. 1974 to develop a State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Untreated hearing loss is not just an inconvenience — it is a serious public health issue. Research shows that people with untreated hearing loss are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, loneliness, and social withdrawal. Many of us have seen this firsthand: a once-talkative kupuna who slowly stops participating in family gatherings because conversations become too difficult and exhausting. Over time, this leads to isolation and a reduced quality of life.

According to the CDC National Health Interview Survey, approximately 14% of adults in Hawaii report some level of hearing difficulty — that represents more than 160,000 adults in our state. Hearing loss is common, especially as people age, yet it remains underdiagnosed and undertreated.

Untreated hearing loss is also associated with higher risk of falls, increased emergency room visits, and significantly greater risk of cognitive decline and dementia. These outcomes affect not only individuals, but also families, caregivers, and our healthcare system. Early detection and treatment of hearing loss is a smart investment that can reduce long-term healthcare costs, help people remain independent longer, and improve overall well-being.

H.B. 1974 takes an important and practical step by creating a coordinated statewide plan to improve awareness, access, affordability, and early detection. This modest investment in planning can lead to meaningful improvements in health outcomes and cost savings for our state.

I respectfully urge you to pass H.B. 1974.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

— Bradley Shin, Lifelong Hawai‘i resident

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 8:24:46 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caroline Kolb	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1974

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Caroline Kolb, and I am a physician specializing in Pediatric Otolaryngology here in Hawai‘i. I am submitting testimony in strong support of HB 1974, which requires the State Health Planning and Development Agency (SHPDA) to develop and publish a comprehensive statewide plan on hearing loss.

Thousand of Hawai‘i residents are affected by hearing loss including many keiki and kupuna with serious difficulty or deafness. Despite these realities, hearing loss remains widely underdiagnosed and undertreated. Hawai‘i does not have a coordinated statewide approach for screening and follow up for school age children and adults. Primary care providers receive limited training and reimbursement incentives to perform screening, and many families cannot afford hearing aids or assistive devices, which remain prohibitively expensive and are often not covered by insurance.

Untreated hearing loss is directly associated with increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia, depression, social isolation, reduced workforce participation and increased caregiver burden, as well as higher healthcare costs for the community.

As a cochlear implant surgeon, I regularly care for patients whose quality of life is diminished by systemic barriers that HB 1974 seeks to address. A coordinated statewide strategy is long overdue and will ensure that our keiki can succeed in school, adults can remain engaged and productive, and elderly can maintain independence and cognitive health. Additionally, the bill is a fiscally responsible measure that will support healthier communities and reduce long term healthcare costs by addressing hearing loss early and comprehensively.

I strongly urge the committee to pass this bill. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Caroline Kolb, MD
Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery

Testimony on HB1974

Re: Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss

My name is Marilyn Naito, I live in Honolulu, HI and I am writing in support of this very important bill to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

My mother had profound hearing loss and early signs of dementia, and I watched our family struggle with her declining condition. I'm not proud to say, she'd often be shouted at, made fun of, even ignored by all of us who dearly loved her. As my own hearing began to decline, I started noticing the same things happening to me. My children and grandson would raise their voices. "Mom! Mom! Gramma! Can't you hear me?" they would shout. I could not recognize the direction of someone calling out my name. I avoided social interactions making excuses to not attend a luncheon or meeting. My desire to NOT become helpless like my mother, took me on my journey to having cochlear implant surgery.

Since my late fifties I have seen audiologists and ENTs for hearing difficulties. I am now 73 years old and thru the years have digressed from a "slight" hearing loss to 0% hearing in my right ear. I have worn hearing aids (spending thousands of dollars) until they no longer helped and in October of 2025 had a cochlear implant done (covered by medical insurance) which has turned my world around in the most positive way. But the journey itself was long, frustrating, confusing, and unnecessary. At no point was there a clear pathway or guidance on what steps came next, or who could help me navigate them. I was lucky that I already had an ENT who did cochlear implants, but scheduling each appointment took months of waiting due to lack of qualified doctors. Again, I waited over a year to get an appointment with a certified cochlear audiologist to be deemed "qualified" for an implant, and then my ENT had to fight to get surgery time at the hospital. I was lucky again, that I was able to have my surgery done a month before my doctor closed practice and moved to the mainland. Even with a referral, I have been on the waiting list for 5 months to be accepted by another ENT on Oahu and am still waiting.

Passing of this bill is important. My experience showed me that hearing care in Hawaii is fragmented, with no clear coordination between providers, referrals, and support. I struggled to find the right resources to make a life changing decision to have surgery vs accepting being disabled. I stumbled upon a support group which has brought me encouragement, knowledge, motivation and feeling of family. No one should have to rely on luck or personal persistence to find these resources. There needs to be a coordinated plan and effort to let keiki to kupuna know who, what, where, and when opportunities are available. Please support HB1974.

Amanda Tolen, AuD

**Clinical Audiologist, Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children
In Support of Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss**

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

My name is Amanda Tolen, and I am an audiologist at Kapiolani. I am submitting testimony in strong support of establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss from a provider perspective.

From my professional experience, one of the most significant challenges related to hearing loss in Hawaii is low insurance reimbursement rates for services (particularly for Medicare and Medicaid), which leads to a lack of resources, provider shortages, and long wait times. In addition, hearing health education and inconsistent screening protocols across the lifespan are other challenges that we face. These challenges affect both children and adults. Low reimbursement rates for many audiology services limit the ability of providers to offer comprehensive care, including routine hearing evaluations, cochlear implant services, and necessary diagnostic testing. Recently, we have found it especially difficult to properly and efficiently serve our cochlear implant patients due to manufacturers' resistance to work with Hawai'i Medicare and Medicaid plans as a result of the low reimbursement rates.

For children, delays in identification and treatment can have lifelong consequences. Without early and consistent hearing screening and follow-up, children with hearing loss may experience delays in speech and language development, academic challenges, and social-emotional difficulties. Families are often left to navigate complex systems on their own, without clear guidance on referrals, services, or ongoing support.

For adults, delayed care is associated with increased risk of cognitive decline, dementia, social withdrawal, and reduced quality of life. Across all ages, hearing loss affects communication, safety, mental health, and family relationships.

There are also significant gaps in coordination and referral pathways. Many patients and families are unaware of how often hearing should be evaluated, and primary care providers do not consistently refer patients, particularly older adults, for hearing testing in the appropriate timeframe. At the same time, there is no standardized, statewide protocol to guide screening, referral, and follow-up, leading to inconsistencies in recommendations that vary widely from provider to provider.

Provider shortages, long wait times, and geographic barriers further limit access to care. Wait times for audiology services can be extremely long, and travel presents a major obstacle for families, older adults, and neighbor island residents. Many patients who do

not live on O'ahu are required to fly for appointments in order to receive specialized care. While some insurance plans reimburse for travel, many do not, allowing only those who can afford the trip to receive the care they need. While telehealth could support certain aspects of care, it is currently limited, and workforce shortages remain a significant barrier to timely access.

A coordinated, statewide planning approach would help address these challenges by creating standardized pathways for education, screening, referral, and follow-up across the lifespan. A Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss could support early identification for children, clearer referral pathways for providers, and more efficient access to care for adults and seniors. Providing both providers and patients with a clear path forward would improve outcomes, reduce long-term costs, and ensure more equitable hearing health care throughout Hawaii. Furthermore, increasing reimbursement rates for Medicare and Medicaid plans will promote improved funding for audiology clinics, which is essential to expanding access to care by allowing for more providers to be hired to address the long wait times for services.

I have personally worked with patients across the lifespan, ranging from infants only a few days old to older adults in their 90's. I have seen first-hand the significant impact that proper intervention and counseling can have on those with hearing loss. It can allow children the opportunity to develop spoken language and communication skills and can allow adults the ability to continue working, socializing, and interacting with the world around them. In turn, I have seen the negative effects of delayed intervention and the long-term, irreversible consequences. These can be remediated by legislative changes and standardized recommendations.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my perspective and for your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully,

Amanda Tolen, AuD

Clinical Audiologist, Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 9:32:38 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Jung	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I represent a captioned telephone provider here in Hawaii and have been involved in the senior community for nearly 12 years. I have seen the frustration on many seniors faces because they cannot hear and/or understand the conversations they have, especially with their family members and physicians offices. There needs to be a better solution to assist those with hearing loss. Those of us who can still hear take it for granted that we will always be able to hear, and unfortunately, that is not the norm. One day it may be me, or you. I support this bill because it is needed.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 10:34:47 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raelene Tenno	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT HB1975 HD1

As a caregiver for my aunty ...

She had hearing loss at an adult age and at formally diagnosed with dementia in her 80's.

Had we know then what we know now, our family would have been better prepared to plan and handle her care. A family needs a plan to include the "what ifs" and the signals related to or associated dementia.

My twin sister now wears a hearing aid. Knowing what I know today from participation in EOA and PABEA and as the caregiver for our Aunty, I am at least better prepared to at least let my twin sister's family know and be prepared.

Thank you for allowing this testimony in support of HB1974.

Raelene Tenno

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 10:44:07 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caroline Witherspoon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this measure. I serve on the advisory committee of Hear 4 Hope, a local nonprofit focused on improving access to hearing health services, and offer this testimony in my personal capacity.

Hearing loss affects residents across Hawai‘i, from keiki in classrooms to working adults and our growing population of kupuna. It becomes increasingly common with age and is often underdiagnosed and undertreated. While newborn screenings are in place, Hawai‘i lacks a coordinated statewide strategy for school-age children, adults, and seniors.

Untreated hearing loss is linked to cognitive decline and dementia, falls, social isolation, depression, reduced workforce participation, and increased long-term care costs. Addressing hearing health early is a public health and cost-containment strategy.

This bill does not create a costly new program. Instead, it requires the development of a comprehensive, data-driven State Plan to assess current efforts, identify gaps, engage stakeholders and recommend practical, fiscally responsible policy solutions.

With Hawai‘i’s aging population, now is the right time to create a coordinated roadmap to improve access, affordability and early detection.

I respectfully urge your support. Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 2:41:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lila Mower	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strongly support.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 2:52:43 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Craig Furuya	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have seen firsthand how hearing loss affects family members, friends, and neighbors, often in quiet but life-changing ways. What starts as difficulty hearing conversations can lead to frustration, social withdrawal, safety concerns, and loss of independence. Many people delay or avoid care because they are never screened, do not know where to turn, or cannot afford hearing services or devices.

HB1974 recognizes that hearing loss is a serious public health issue that requires a coordinated statewide response. By developing a comprehensive state plan focused on awareness, early detection, access, and affordability, this bill will help ensure that people do not fall through the cracks. I believe this effort will strengthen families, reduce long-term health impacts, and improve quality of life for many Hawai'i residents. I respectfully urge your support of HB1974.

Dear Chair Chris Todd and Members of the Committee,

My name is Debbie Tsui and I am writing in support of HB 1974.

I do not personally have hearing loss, but I have seen how it affects people around me, and it is clear that it is a much bigger issue than many realize.

I have watched friends and family members struggle to follow conversations, smile and nod when they cannot fully hear, or slowly withdraw from social situations because it becomes exhausting to constantly ask others to repeat themselves. What may seem minor from the outside can quietly affect someone's confidence, independence, and overall quality of life.

What concerns me even more is learning about the connection between untreated hearing loss and dementia. Many people do not realize that hearing health is closely tied to brain health. When hearing loss goes unaddressed, it can increase cognitive strain and social isolation — both of which are associated with a higher risk of cognitive decline.

This is not just about hearing better. It is about protecting long-term health and supporting healthy aging in our communities. Greater awareness, earlier intervention, and better coordination around hearing care can make a meaningful difference.

HB 1974 moves us toward treating hearing health as a real public health issue, not just a minor inconvenience. I respectfully urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Debbie Tsui

Dear Chair Chris Todd and Members of the Committee,

My name is Pam Kutaka, and I am writing in strong support of HB 1974 as a daughter.

My father has lived with severe hearing loss for many years. At first, it seemed like something manageable — turning the television up louder, asking us to repeat ourselves, smiling and pretending he caught the joke when he hadn't. We adjusted. He adjusted. Or at least we thought he did.

But over time, I watched my strong, outgoing father grow quieter. Family dinners became harder for him. He stopped participating in conversations because it was exhausting to constantly try to piece together what everyone was saying. He withdrew little by little. What looked like aging was, in many ways, isolation.

We tried to get help, but navigating the system was overwhelming. Appointments were scattered. Information was unclear. Follow-up was inconsistent. There was no clear path, no coordinated guidance — just a series of disconnected steps that we were expected to figure out on our own. Somewhere along the way, he simply got lost in it.

Years later, he was diagnosed with dementia.

I cannot say hearing loss caused it. But I cannot ignore what I now know — that untreated or poorly managed hearing loss is associated with cognitive decline. I cannot help but wonder whether earlier intervention, clearer guidance, or a more coordinated approach could have made a difference. Could we have slowed it? Could we have preserved more time? More memories? More of him?

Now I sit across from my father and repeat myself not because he cannot hear me — but because he no longer understands. The silence feels heavier than it ever did before.

No family should have to look back and question whether gaps in awareness, coordination, or access contributed to the loss of someone they love.

HB 1974 matters because it acknowledges that hearing health is not a small issue. It is connected to dignity, connection, and long-term brain health. It calls for people and systems to work together so families are not left navigating this alone — and so fewer loved ones slip through the cracks.

If there is even a chance that better coordination and attention to hearing health can protect other families from this kind of heartbreak, then it is worth it.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 1974.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Pam Kutaka

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 4:39:11 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

MANDATORY SCREEN FOR EARLY ED/ELEMENTARY AGE STUDENTS

1974 HB RELATING TO HEALTH.

Testimony on HB 1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

February 27, 2026

308 VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

My name is **Creighton Liu**, a resident of Mililani, and I am submitting testimony in **strong support of Bill 1974** to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna throughout our state. This condition can meaningfully affect communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, it is not widely known that tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an essential framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Creighton Liu

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 5:13:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
J Iwamoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1974

House Committee on Finance

Friday, February 27, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

Dear Chair Todd and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joy Iwamoto and I am a teacher with the Department of Education. Every day in my classroom, I see how critical communication is to a student’s ability to learn, participate, and feel confident.

When a student struggles to hear clearly, the impact is not always obvious at first. It can look like inattention, incomplete work, or hesitation to participate. Over time, however, those small gaps can grow into academic struggles, frustration, and withdrawal. Hearing challenges do not just affect one moment — they affect a student’s overall experience in school.

What I have also observed is that when concerns arise, families are often navigating multiple systems on their own — education, healthcare providers, specialists — without a clear, coordinated pathway. As educators, we do our best to support students, but we are only one piece of a much larger puzzle.

HB 1974 is important because it moves beyond simple awareness and toward a more unified approach. Addressing hearing health requires collaboration and shared solutions. When agencies, providers, and communities are aligned, we can identify concerns earlier, reduce confusion for families, and create more consistent support for students and individuals across the lifespan.

As someone who sees firsthand how communication affects learning and long-term opportunity, I believe a coordinated effort to address hearing health is both necessary and responsible.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB 1974.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
J Iwamoto

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 5:33:35 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Krista Schoppy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Dr. Krista Schoppy, and I am a practicing otolaryngologist (ENT) in Hawaii. I strongly support this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Hearing loss is one of the most common and impactful conditions affecting both children and adults in our state, yet Hawaii lacks a coordinated framework to guide screening, referral, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning. As a result, patients experience fragmented care, long wait times, and delays that negatively affect health, development, and quality of life.

A statewide plan would also relieve pressure on primary care providers by offering clear, updated standards of care and referral guidance. This would improve efficiency, reduce delays, and help ensure patients receive care aligned with national best practices.

One urgent example is pediatric hearing care. Current law requires children under 10 to be seen by an ENT to receive recommendations or prescriptions for hearing aids. In practice, due to severe workforce shortages, children may wait over a year, sometimes up to 2 years, just to begin a hearing aid trial. These delays occur during critical periods of speech and language development and are not feasible under our current system. A coordinated state plan would help address these bottlenecks while maintaining patient safety and quality standards.

Hawaii is also facing a growing hearing health workforce crisis affecting ENT care, audiology, and related specialties. Recruitment and retention challenges continue to limit access statewide, particularly for families, kupuna, and neighbor island residents.

A Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an essential roadmap to address these systemic challenges, align providers and agencies, and improve access and outcomes for patients across the state. I respectfully urge your support of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Krista Schoppy, MD

Jelene Wong, AuD
Lead Audiologist, Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children
In Support of Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss

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

My name is Jelene Wong, and I am an audiologist at Kapiolani. I am submitting testimony in strong support of establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss from a provider perspective.

From my professional experience, some of the most significant challenges related to hearing loss in Hawaii include low insurance reimbursement rates for services (Medicare/Medicaid), which leads to a lack of resources, provider shortages, and long wait times. In addition, hearing health education and inconsistent screening protocols across the lifespan are other challenges that we face. These challenges affect both children and adults. Low reimbursement rates for many audiology services limit the ability of providers to offer comprehensive care, including routine hearing evaluations, cochlear implant services, and necessary diagnostic testing.

For children, delays in identification and treatment can have lifelong consequences. Without early and consistent hearing screening and follow-up, children with hearing loss may experience delays in speech and language development, academic challenges, and social-emotional difficulties. Families are often left to navigate complex systems on their own, without clear guidance on referrals, services, or ongoing support.

For adults and older adults, delayed care is associated with increased risk of cognitive decline, dementia, social withdrawal, and reduced quality of life. Across all ages, hearing loss affects communication, safety, mental health, and family relationships.

There are also significant gaps in coordination and referral pathways. Many patients and families are unaware of how often hearing should be evaluated, and primary care providers are not consistently referring patients, particularly older adults, for hearing testing. At the same time, there is no standardized, statewide protocol to guide screening, referral, and follow-up.

Provider shortages, long wait times, and geographic barriers further limit access to care. Wait times for audiology services can be extremely long, and travel presents a major obstacle for families, older adults, and neighbor island residents. While telehealth could support certain aspects of care, it is currently limited, and workforce shortages remain a significant barrier to timely access.

A coordinated, statewide planning approach would help address these challenges by creating standardized pathways for education, screening, referral, and follow-up across the lifespan. A Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss could support early identification for children, clearer referral pathways for providers, and more efficient access to care for adults and seniors. Providing both providers and patients with a clear path forward would improve outcomes, reduce long-term costs, and ensure more equitable hearing health care throughout Hawaii.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my perspective and for your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully,

Jelene Wong, AuD

Audiologist, Kapiolani

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 3:51:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kori Nishida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony on HB1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Hearing Date: February 27, 2026 at 10:00am

Members of the Committee:

My name is Kori Nishida. I am submitting testimony in support of this measure to establish a Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss.

I do not have hearing loss, but I am affected by hearing loss every day, both professionally as an Audiologist and personally as I have multiple family members with hearing loss.

I have worked with a multitude of patients who are affected by hearing loss, unable to communicate well with their friends, family, and community. This can be a source of frustration for both the individual with hearing loss and their communication partners, especially as communication breakdowns occur repeatedly and frequently. At worst, it causes their partners to just give up trying to communicate with the patient and this can leave the patient to feel isolated, shameful that they are not able to hear better, and they may miss out on important information. This can further lead to patients withdrawing from situations that they know they will not be able to hear well, which can have ripple effects on their social, emotional, mental, and cognitive health.

Because hearing loss is “invisible” meaning there are no physical signs or indicators that someone has hearing loss and there typically is no pain involved, it is not something that is checked unless a concern is mentioned at an appointment with their primary care provider or other medical provider. Presbycusis, or age-related hearing loss, is a gradual process over time and our brains are very good at just adapting to our situation, especially if the changes are very minimal. Many of my patients are certain they do not have any problems hearing and are surprised when their results indicate hearing loss. Hearing loss, even losses in the mild range, can have negative effects on communication and it is easier to manage hearing losses when they are detected and managed earlier.

On a personal level, my father has a significant hearing loss, enough that if he did not wear his hearing aids, he would not be able to have everyday conversations with my mother. At our weekly family dinners or when he comes to support my children at their sporting events it would be nearly impossible for him to hear without his aids. His ability to hear with his aids, not perfectly but better, enables him to stay connected with his family and enables him to continue to engage in the activities he chooses.

One of my mother's uncles also has a significant hearing loss but is not compliant with wearing his hearing aid. During family gatherings, he is often sitting on the side, unable to participate in the conversations around him. He can only engage if someone makes deliberate effort to go up to him and talk to him. He misses out on so much social connection and auditory stimulation to keep his brain working optimally.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. Establishing a Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of individuals in Hawai'i who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Dear Chair Chris Todd and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lisa Nakano, and I am a caregiver living in Honolulu. I am writing in strong support of HB 1974.

I care for my mother, who has been living with hearing loss for several years. Like many families, we thought hearing loss was simply about not being able to hear clearly. What we did not understand was how deeply it can affect every part of a person's life.

I have watched my mom slowly pull back from conversations because it is exhausting to constantly ask people to repeat themselves. I have seen her choose to stay home instead of attending family gatherings because it feels isolating when you cannot follow what is being said. The emotional toll is real, and it does not just affect the person with hearing loss — it affects the entire family.

Recently, I attended a hearing loss support group and learned something that surprised me: hearing loss can impact balance. That stopped me in my tracks. I had already been worried about my mom's increasing instability and the possibility of her falling.

Because of that information, I scheduled an appointment to have her hearing aids checked. We found out that one of them was clogged and not working properly. After it was cleaned and restored, the improvement in her balance was noticeable. It was such a simple fix, yet it made a meaningful difference.

What struck me most was this: if I had not happened to attend that support group, I would not have known to check her hearing aids. We might have continued worrying about falls, scheduling additional appointments, and living with unnecessary stress — all without realizing the root of the issue.

There are so many hidden consequences of untreated or poorly managed hearing loss that people simply do not know about. Without clear education and coordinated support, families are left to figure it out on their own. That is overwhelming and, at times, frightening.

HB 1974 matters because it helps create a clearer pathway for awareness, access, and coordinated support so families are not left guessing or learning critical information by accident. My experience showed me how much difference the right information — at the right time — can make. When providers, caregivers, and support systems are better connected and working together, it can prevent unnecessary stress, reduce health risks, and improve quality of life for families like mine.

I respectfully ask that you support HB 1974.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa Nakano

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 8:38:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonathan Foster	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Jonathan Foster. I was born hard of hearing (in both ears). **I am writing in support of HB 1974 because the state of Hawaii must take proactive steps to better care for our deaf and hard-of-hearing community. However, I strongly urge this committee to revise § 323D(b) to require the State to consult and engage with my community.** To meaningfully address this problem, community-based organizations and those experiencing hearing loss must be part of this plan's development.

Growing up severely hearing impaired has made me live in fear of not being able to hear sound or have access to critical information or warnings during life-or-death situations, such as imminent air raids, missile alerts, fires, tsunamis, etc. To ensure the safety of all of Hawai'i's citizens, not just hearing ones, a comprehensive, coordinated state effort to identify the gaps in its public benefit programs is necessary. HB 1974 is a good first step, and I hope it leads to concrete state action.

Mahalo,

Jonathan Foster

February 25, 2026

House Bill 1974: 'Relating to Health'

Dear Committee Members,

I fully support House Bill 1974 without reservation.

My name is Dr. Brian Chen, and I am a double board-certified Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgeon and Neurotologist. I am one of only two board-certified Neurotologists in the state of Hawai'i, and I treat patients with hearing loss of all ages, from newborns to kūpuna. Among Otolaryngologists on O'ahu, I care for the broadest range of patients, including Tricare and VA beneficiaries as well as Kaiser and non-Kaiser civilian patients. I also serve on the Hawai'i State Board of Speech Language Pathology and Audiology.

In these capacities, I see significant gaps in our state's hearing health across all patient populations and age groups. House Bill 1974 will help identify the specific needs in hearing health in Hawai'i and provide the information necessary to guide future improvements in care.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in strong support of House Bill 1974.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B Chen' followed by a horizontal line and the letters 'MD'.

Brian S. Chen, MD
Otology, Neurotology, and Skull Base Surgery
Tripler Army Medical Center
Hawaii Ear Center
Hawaii Permanente Medical Group
Queens University Medical Group
Board Member, Hawaii State Board of Speech Language Pathology and Audiology

Testimony on HB 1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Friday, February 27, 2026

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ann Narimasu-Phomenone, and I am a practicing DO in Hawai'i. I am submitting testimony in strong support of HB 1974, which seeks to establish a Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss.

As an audiologist, I witness every day the profound impact that untreated or late-identified hearing loss has on individuals across the lifespan. Hearing loss is not simply an ear problem; it is a communication disorder that affects safety, cognitive health, social connection, academic performance, and economic opportunity. When hearing loss goes unrecognized or unmanaged, the consequences can include social withdrawal, increased risk of falls, delayed language development in children, reduced workplace productivity, and even accelerated cognitive decline in older adults.

Despite these well-documented impacts, Hawai'i currently lacks a coordinated, statewide strategy to address hearing loss across prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning. Tens of thousands of Hawai'i residents live with hearing loss, yet many face long delays in diagnosis, difficulty navigating fragmented systems, or financial barriers that prevent them from receiving appropriate care. These gaps disproportionately affect our keiki, kūpuna, and underserved communities.

A comprehensive state plan would help ensure that hearing health is recognized as a public-health priority. Such a plan would:

- Improve early identification and timely intervention for infants, children, adults, and kūpuna.
- Strengthen referral pathways between physicians, audiologists, educators, and community programs.
- Increase public and provider awareness of the health, cognitive, and social impacts of untreated hearing loss.
- Support workforce development to meet the growing needs of our aging population.
- Promote equitable access to hearing care, including hearing aids, assistive technology, and rehabilitative services.

When hearing loss is identified and treated early, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their families, workplaces, and communities. A statewide plan would provide the structure needed to reduce preventable delays, improve outcomes, and support the long-term well-being of Hawai'i residents.

I respectfully urge your support of HB 1974 for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kūpuna who are affected by hearing loss today and for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Ann Narimasu-Phomenone, Au.D.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:34:13 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carl Joseph Daniels	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill because hearing loss has affected me/my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.

Testimony on HB1974 / SB2865

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Feb 6th, 2026

329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair Rep. Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Divine, and I am a resident of Waipahu. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss. I couldn't imagine what it's like for those who struggle with some sort of hearing loss, and I think this is a great bill to have here in Hawai'i.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Divine Martin

Testimony on HB1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Feb 6, 2026

329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair Rep. Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lucas Luo, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

I personally can't imagine what a deaf person has to go through because as a student, school is constantly challenging and it never ends. I know for people that suffer a bad hearing loss, they need to work extra hard with sign language. It's important for people, even the non deafed ones, to realize how much pain it takes up for a person not having the ability to understand other's voices and feelings.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawaii's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Lucas Luo

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:37:43 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nia Gallegos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Nia, and I support stronger hearing loss plans in Hawai'i. Hearing loss can be isolating, especially when hearing aids and services are too expensive or not covered by insurance. No one should have to struggle to communicate or stay connected with their 'ohana because of cost.

By improving coverage and access to hearing care, we can help keiki and kupuna stay engaged, independent, and included in our communities. Supporting hearing loss plans means supporting connection, dignity, and equal opportunity for all in Hawai'i. Mahalo.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:39:19 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kriselle Bull	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kriselle, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawai'i state plan on hearing loss. Challenges that are involved for accessing hearing loss care involve high costs, limited insurance coverage, shortages of specialists, long waiting times, communication barriers, etc. Having access to hearing loss care is very important because it helps improve communication by helping people hear sounds through early diagnosis, hearing aids, etc, which reduces issues with misunderstandings, makes conversating with others easier, supports learning, and strengthens relationships. I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
-Kriselle

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:39:48 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charlene Kaapana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Friday, February 27, 2026

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Charlene Kaapana, and I work at the front desk of an audiology clinic here in Hawai‘i. I am writing in support of HB 1974 because I see every day how much hearing loss affects the people who walk through our doors.

Many patients tell me they waited years before getting help because they didn’t know where to start or didn’t realize how serious hearing loss can be. By the time they come in, they often feel disconnected from their families, unsure at work, or nervous about their safety because they can’t hear alarms, traffic, or conversations clearly. It’s heartbreaking to see how much they’ve been struggling on their own.

A statewide plan would make a big difference. It would help people get information earlier, guide them to the right professionals, and make it easier for doctors and families to know what steps to take. When hearing loss is caught early, people stay more involved in daily life and feel more confident and supported.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB 1974 so that more of our community members—keiki, adults, and kūpuna—can get the help they need without unnecessary delays.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Charlene Kaapana

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:40:21 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anita Zoller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Anita Zoller, and I serve as a front desk coordinator at an audiology clinic in Hawai‘i. I am writing to express my support for HB 1974 based on what I witness daily while assisting patients seeking hearing care.

Many individuals who come to our clinic share that they delayed seeking help for years because they were unsure where to begin or did not realize the seriousness of hearing loss. By the time they arrive, they often describe feeling disconnected from family, less confident at work, and concerned about their safety because they cannot clearly hear alarms, traffic, or conversations. It is difficult to see how long many of them have managed these challenges on their own.

Addressing hearing loss early is also important for long-term brain health. Research has shown that untreated hearing loss is associated with a higher risk of cognitive decline and dementia. When hearing loss is identified and treated earlier, patients are better able to stay socially engaged, communicate effectively, and maintain overall cognitive health.

A coordinated statewide plan would make a meaningful difference. It would help people access reliable information earlier, connect them with the appropriate professionals, and provide clearer guidance for healthcare providers and families about the next steps in care. When hearing loss is identified and addressed early, individuals are better able to remain engaged in daily life and feel more confident and supported.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask for your support of HB 1974 so that more members of our community—keiki, adults, and kūpuna—can receive timely care and resources without unnecessary delays.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:40:46 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Owen Mehio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony on HB1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Friday 27th, February

[Conference Room / Videoconference Info]

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Owen Mehio, and I am a resident of ‘Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Hearing loss affected me by taking away my grandpa's hearing. While I didn't know his struggle with hearing loss too well I do know that he faced challenges with his family. At a certain point he couldn't hear us until he had his hearing aids. This impaired his everyday life and greatly inconvenienced him.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Sincerely,
Owen Mehio**

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:40:52 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicholas Lee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill because hearing loss has affected me/my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:41:26 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Austin Fish	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill because hearing loss has affected my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:42:24 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
joshua	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Joshua P, and I am a resident of Aiea,Hawaii. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss. i have had many family suffer from hearing loss so this testimony is very personal

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Sincerely,
Joshua P**

Testimony on **HB 1974 / SB**

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Feb 27, 2026 10:00 AM

308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair [Name], Vice Chair [Name], and Members of the Committee:

My name is **Joshua Mayo**, and I am a resident of **Honolulu, Hawaii**. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

When I was 6 or 7 or so years old, I had a really bad hearing problem in my right ear, I couldn't hear anyone from my right side. We had to get surgery for my ear just to listen again. I'm really thankful that it happened. If I didn't have the surgery I think I wouldn't be able to live a normal life. Which is why I believe we need to support this measure to establish a plan on hearing loss.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Testimony on **HB 1974 / SB**

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Feb 27, 2026 10:00 AM

308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair [Name], Vice Chair [Name], and Members of the Committee:

My name is **Joshua Mayo**, and I am a resident of **Honolulu, Hawaii**. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

When I was 6 or 7 or so years old, I had a really bad hearing problem in my right ear, I couldn't hear anyone from my right side. We had to get surgery for my ear just to listen again. I'm really thankful that it happened. If I didn't have the surgery I think I wouldn't be able to live a normal life. Which is why I believe we need to support this measure to establish a plan on hearing loss.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:43:43 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mikayla-Mae Picazo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony on HB 1974 / SB 2865

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Feb 24, 2026 10:00 AM

VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE Conference Room 308 State Capitol 415 South Beretania Street

Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mikayla-Mae Picazo, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

My grandpa has been hard of hearing for years, and it affected many parts of his daily life. Getting care was confusing and delayed because we didn't know where to go, and the high cost of hearing tests and hearing aids made it harder. His hearing loss impacted his safety, work, and ability to connect with others, especially during family gatherings, where he often felt left out. Over time, it made him quieter and more withdrawn, showing how hearing loss affects more than just hearing.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Mikayla-Mae Picazo

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:44:32 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christiane Ernestine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony on HB1974 / SB 2865

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

February 26, 2026 – 9:00 AM

329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi and Members of the Committee:

My name is Christiane Ernestine Almosara and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Sincerely,
Christiane Almosara**

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:45:20 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Danette Miyasato	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony on HB 1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Friday, February 27, 2026

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Danette Miyasato, and I work with patients here in Hawai‘i. I am writing in support of HB 1974 because I see firsthand how many people in our community are struggling with hearing loss.

Every day, I meet patients who have been having trouble hearing for a long time but didn’t know where to go or didn’t realize how much it was affecting their lives. Many tell me they avoid conversations, miss important sounds, or feel left out with their families. It’s clear that hearing loss affects much more than just hearing—it affects confidence, safety, and connection.

A statewide plan would help people get the right information earlier and make it easier for families and doctors to know what steps to take. It would also help reduce the long wait times and confusion that many patients face before they finally reach our office. When people get help sooner, they stay more engaged, more independent, and more comfortable in their daily lives.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB 1974 so that more people in Hawai‘i—keiki, adults, and kūpuna—can get timely and appropriate hearing care.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Danette Miyasato

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:45:38 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mabel Ho	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Chairs and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mabel Ho, and I see the impact hearing loss has on individuals here in Hawai'i. I'm writing to support HB 1974 because I see every day how hearing loss affects people and their families.

From my seat at the front desk, I meet patients who have been struggling for a long time before they finally come in. Many tell me they didn't realize how serious hearing loss could be, or they didn't know who to talk to about it. By the time they reach us, they're often missing conversations at home, feeling left out socially, or worried about their safety because they can't hear important sounds clearly.

A statewide plan would help people get answers sooner. It would give clearer guidance for families, doctors, and the community, and make it easier for people to find the right care without waiting years. Early help makes a huge difference in keeping people connected, confident, and independent.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask for your support of HB 1974 so that more of our keiki, adults, and kūpuna can receive timely hearing care.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Mabel Ho

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:48:41 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nathaniel Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hi my name is Nathaniel Smith, and I support this bill because improvement is detrimental to society and I want what is best for our Hawai'i community.

Testimony on HB 1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Feb 27, 2026

Conference Room 308

State Capitol

415 South Beretania St

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouci, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ethaniel, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Hearing loss affects one of my grandma's because she struggles hearing us and being able to converse with us. This makes it hard for us to communicate and be able to do certain things because of it.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawaii's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Ethaniel

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:49:33 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aleia A-C	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Hawai'i State Legislature,

My name is Aleia Abiva-Caberto, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Growing up my puna was very able of her hearing and surroundings. It's very challenging talking to her and the constant repetition of words because of her poor hearing. Her hearing is a result of her age, it makes communication difficult and sometimes she will miss hear what I say. We've recently got her hearing aids and for the most part it has improved her hearing. Although, I do understand the lack of access in government support for people with hearing loss and have less access to affordable hearing treatments.

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I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Aleia Abiva-Caberto

HB-1974-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:53:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Seth Aiden Agtarap	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony on HB HB1974

RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

Friday, February 27, 2026

Videoconference

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenuchi and Members of the Committee:

My name is Seth Aiden Agtarap, and I am a resident of Waipahu. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawai‘i State Plan on Hearing Loss.

When I was around 10 years old, an incident happened where a loud firework shot near my ear and caused my hearing to go out for at least a couple days. I never knew how heavy I relied on hearing. I felt so helpless during the time I couldn’t hear. I had to learn what people said by reading their lips which was very difficult.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawai‘i, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

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Establishing a Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Sincerely,
Seth Aiden Agtarap**