



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

‘Ōlelo Hō‘ike ‘Aha Kau Kānāwai

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2261 SD1**

RELATING TO HEALTH

Ke Kōmike Hale o ke Olakino

(House Committee on Health)

Ke Kapitala ‘o Hawai‘i

(Hawai‘i State Capitol)

Malaki 20, 2026

9:30 AM

Lumi 329

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Aloha e Chair Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the House Committee on Health:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS SB2087 SD1**, which requires Huli Au Ola to conduct a study on the recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists to serve the island of Moloka‘i.

Moloka‘i faces longstanding and complex health care access challenges. Native Hawaiians on Moloka‘i have historically experienced structural barriers to care, including geographic isolation, limited provider availability, and the broader historical legacy of health-related displacement associated with Kalaupapa.<sup>1</sup> While circumstances today are different, the island continues to experience persistent workforce shortages and transportation constraints that make consistent, on-island physician and dental access essential. Strengthening recruitment and retention is therefore not only a workforce issue, but a health equity priority.

Native Hawaiians comprise a significant portion of Moloka‘i’s population and experience disproportionately high rates of chronic disease, dental disease, and other preventable health conditions. Stable access to physicians and dentists is critical to improving continuity of care, preventing avoidable complications, and advancing long-term community well-being. This bill takes a thoughtful and data-driven approach by directing Huli Au Ola to examine recruitment and retention barriers, including housing availability, transportation access, airline limitations, partnerships, communication, and evaluation processes. Workforce challenges in rural communities are multifaceted, and a comprehensive assessment is necessary to develop sustainable, community-informed solutions. For these reasons, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs respectfully urges this Committee to **PASS SB2261 SD1**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important measure.

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<sup>1</sup> State of Hawai‘i Department of Health, *Kalaupapa Updates: Brief History and Current Roles*, <https://health.hawaii.gov/kalaupapaupdates/>



## Hawaii Dental Association

Time/Date: 9:30 a.m., March 20, 2026  
Location: State Capitol Room 329  
Committee: House Committee on Health  
Re: SB 2261, SD1, Relating to Health

Aloha Chair Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and members of the committee,

The Hawaii Dental Association is submitting testimony in support of SB 2261, SD1.

Geographic isolation, a small and dispersed population, limited housing availability, workforce shortages, and financial sustainability are recognized challenges in recruiting and retaining physicians and the healthcare workforce, including dentists and dental team members on a long-term basis.

A focused study led by Huli Au Ola is an appropriate approach. The study can help assess factors such as compensation structures, loan repayment opportunities, housing support, professional development pathways, telehealth integration, and community-based training pipelines. Most importantly, it can provide data-driven recommendations tailored specifically to Molokai's needs rather than relying on one-size-fits-all statewide strategies.

HDA is a statewide membership organization representing dentists practicing in Hawai'i and licensed by the State of Hawaii's Board of Dentistry. HDA members are committed to protecting the oral health and well-being of the people of Hawai'i, from keiki to kupuna and everyone in between. Our organization is a key stakeholder, representing providers of oral health services on every island. HDA's top priority is the care of our patients and the health of Hawai'i residents. We wish to contribute positively to the dialog on this measure as it advances.



## Hawaii Medical Association

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
Representative Gregg Takayama, Chair  
Representative Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair

Date: March 20, 2026  
From: Hawaii Medical Association (HMA)  
Elizabeth Ann Ignacio MD - Chair, HMA Public Policy Committee  
Christina Marzo MD and Robert Carlisle MD, Vice Chairs, HMA Public Policy Committee

**RE SB 2261 SD1** RELATING TO HEALTH. Huli Au Ola; Physician and Dentist Retention; Molokai; Study; Grant; Appropriation.

**Position: Support**

This measure would require Huli Au Ola to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Molokai, appropriate funds, effective 7/1/2026.

HMA supports this measure. Molokai's limited transportation options and high cost of travel compound patient access challenges, leading to delayed care and poorer health outcomes for Molokai families. A structured assessment of the barriers to recruiting and keeping physicians and dentists on Molokai covering workforce, housing, transportation, and support systems will equip policymakers with the information needed to design effective incentives, partnerships, and long-term strategies to improve access to continuous medical care for Molokai.

HMA supports this comprehensive study on recruitment and retention of physicians and dentists to serve the island of Molokai. Systematic root cause analyses for our rural and underserved communities are essential to achieving health equity across our islands.

Thank you for allowing the Hawaii Medical Association to testify in support of this measure.

### 2026 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

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

### 2026 Hawaii Medical Association Officers

Nadine Tenn-Salle, MD, President • Jerald Garcia, MD, President Elect • Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD, • Immediate Past President  
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## REFERENCES

MacDougall, H., et al. "Recruitment and Retention of Rural Health Professionals in Underserved Settings." *Health Services Research*, 2025.

Fritsma, T. "Factors Associated With Health Care Professionals' Choice to Serve in Underserved Areas: A Systematic Review." *JAMA Network Open*, 2023.

Arredondo, K., et al. "Addressing the Rural-Urban Imbalance in Health Care: Recruitment and Retention Workforce Development Policies." *JAMA Network Open*, 2024.

Juarez R, Phankitnirundorn K, Ozorio Dutra SV, Bond-Smith D, Lee AG, Maunakea AK. Health and Social Support in the Aftermath of the Maui Wildfires. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2025 Aug 1;8(8):e2525430. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.25430. PMID: 40768146; PMCID: PMC12329611.

Maunakea, Alike, et al. "Invisible Battles: Maui Survivors Struggle With Mental Health Two Years Post-Fire." *Hawaii Public Radio*, 5 Aug. 2025.

*From Crisis to Recovery: Health and Resilience Two Years After the Maui Wildfires*. MauiWES Report, June 2025.

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Beth England, MD, Chair  
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director



ALOHA CARE

**LATE**

To: The Honorable Gregg Takayama, Chair  
The Honorable Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Health

From: Paula Arcena, Senior Vice President of External Affairs  
Mike Nguyen, Senior Director of External Affairs  
Maria Rallojay, Public Policy Specialist

Hearing: Friday, March 20, 2026, 9:30am, Conference Room 329

RE: **SB2261 SD1 Relating to Health**

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AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of **SB2261 SD1**. This measure would require Huli Au Ola to conduct a study on physician and dentist recruitment and retention to serve the island of Molokai.

AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan founded by Hawai'i's Community Health Centers and the Queen Emma Clinics. We serve over 66,000 Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dual-eligible residents on all islands. Since 1994, AlohaCare has partnered with providers, government entities, and community-based organizations to meet the evolving needs of our safety net community as Hawai'i's only health plan focused solely on Medicaid-eligible individuals. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for equitable access to quality, whole-person care for all.

AlohaCare is committed to improving access to care. We serve over 2,200 residents on Molokai, and we continue to be very engaged in bolstering access to care despite provider shortages and travel challenges. We support a multi-faceted approach to improving access to care. This measure to conduct a study toward developing a long-term strategy and plan for services on Molokai would be a good step forward.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support** of **SB2261 SD1**.



March 19, 2026

## Testimony in Support of SB 2261, SD1, Relating to Health

House Committee on Health

March 20, 2026

9:30 AM

Conference Room 329

Aloha Chair Representative Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Representative Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Committee Members:

**Hawaii Dental Service (HDS) strongly supports SB2261, SD1.** Molokai faces persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining dentists, resulting in limited access to essential oral health care for its approximately 7,000 residents. From what we see across Hawaii, these challenges are driven by a combination of factors: a small and isolated patient base, limited professional support networks, and fewer opportunities for clinical collaboration and career growth. On Molokai specifically, housing availability, high cost of living, and reliance on a single airline further complicate a provider's ability to both relocate and remain long-term. These barriers often make it difficult to sustain a stable dental workforce, leading to gaps in care and delayed treatment.

While telehealth can support certain aspects of care, dentistry is inherently hands-on and requires in-person services. For many Molokai residents, traveling off island for dental treatment is not financially or logistically feasible, exacerbating oral health disparities. SB 2261, SD1 takes a critical step toward addressing these issues by directing Huli Au Ola to study the root causes of recruitment and retention challenges and identify actionable, community-informed solutions.

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to support SB 2261, SD1.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane S.L. Paloma".

**Dr. Diane S.L. Paloma**  
President & CEO  
Hawaii Dental Service