

**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 4, 2026

**TO:** SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair  
Honorable Members

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

**RE:** **SB 2679 -- RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH**

**HEARING:** Wednesday, February 4, 2026 @ 1:01 pm; Conference Room 225

**POSITION:** SUPPORT with COMMENTS

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Testimony:

SHPDA supports SB 2679 with comments.

This bill is intended to create an one-year pilot program that enables the Department of Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division to develop and publicly launch an evidence-based, peer-reviewed, confidential digital platform where young people can learn about mental health, practice self-care and healthy coping strategies, and connect to county-specific resources, while also reducing stigma and improving access, especially for youth in underserved areas. The bill also combines the platform with targeted outreach and marketing and requires a findings and recommendations report to the Legislature to inform next steps.

This bill would benefit Hawai'i's youth by creating an evidence-based, confidential digital platform that makes it easier for young people, especially those in remote or underserved areas, to access mental health education, self-care tools, and healthy coping strategies. It also helps reduce stigma by allowing youth to explore resources privately, eases pressure on a limited behavioral health workforce by helping to address concerns earlier, and gathers useful data about community mental health needs to guide future improvements.

In closing, this bill creates a practical, and timely investment in youth well-being by meeting young people where they are at (online) with trusted, evidence-based tools

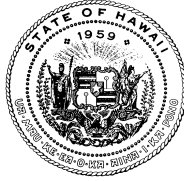
*SB 2679 testimony of SHPDA (2026), continued.*

and clear pathways to local support. By piloting a confidential platform and learning from real-time usage and needs data, the State can identify what works, strengthen prevention efforts, and make smarter decisions about how to expand youth mental health supports statewide. We defer to DOH and other state agencies involved in mental health and youth populations on the specifics, details and costs associated to this bill.

Thank you for hearing SB 2679

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

■ -- Jack Lewin MD, Administrator, SHPDA



STATE OF HAWAI'I  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2679  
RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH.**

SENATOR JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, Chair  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date: February 4, 2026      Time: 1:01PM      Room Number: 225

- 1    **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health (“Department”) requests funding for this
- 2    measure, so long as it does not supplant the priorities and requests outlined in the Governors
- 3    executive budget request.
- 4    **Department Position:** The Department strongly supports this measure.
- 5    **Department Testimony:** The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division (CAMHD) provides
- 6    the following testimony on behalf of the Department.
- 7    The Department supports this measure, which appropriates funds to the Department to
- 8    establish and operate a digital youth mental health platform designed to help young people get
- 9    support for mental health challenges.
- 10   Providing easy access to trusted information and resources empowers youth, reduces stigma,
- 11   and may prevent mental health challenges from worsening in the future.
- 12   This pilot also has the potential to support the youth mental health service system by
- 13   addressing lower-level challenges so the behavioral health workforce (which is scarce) can
- 14   focus on youth who require more intensive support. In addition, it can provide critical data
- 15   about community youth mental health needs.

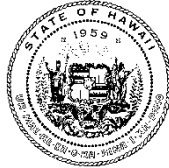
1 A project like this can only be successful if youth are aware of the resource and encouraged to  
2 use it. Therefore, a comprehensive marketing strategy is an essential part of ensuring that  
3 youth have access to these powerful tools and feel comfortable using them.

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

6 **Offered Amendments:** None

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

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



BONNIE KAHAKUI  
ADMINISTRATOR  
  
DAYNA OMIYA  
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

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

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**TESTIMONY  
OF  
BONNIE KAHAKUI, ADMINISTRATOR  
STATE PROCUREMENT OFFICE**

**TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE  
ON  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
February 4, 2026, 1:01 pm

**SENATE BILL 2679  
RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH**

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair McKelvey, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 2679. The State Procurement Office (SPO) appreciates the bill's intent to promote early prevention of youth and adolescent mental health disorders through digital platforms and respectfully provides comments and recommendations.

**Comments**

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

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

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

The SPO recommends that the bill include that the exemption from HRS Chapters 103D and 103F is valid only for the pilot project ending on June 30, 2027. If the department elects to continue the digital youth mental health platform, a competitive solicitation should be conducted pursuant to the procurement code.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

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

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

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



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

*Advocating for the Hawai'i LGBTQIA+ Community*



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

Email: [hawaiiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com](mailto:hawaiiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com)  
Web: <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/lgbtq-commission/>

February 2, 2026

Senate's Committee on Health and Human Services  
Hawai'i State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 1:01 PM

RE: **Strong Support for Senate Bill 2679**

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair McKelvey and fellow committee members,

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 2679 on behalf of the Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus (LGBTQ+) Commission, which was established by the 2022 Hawai'i State Legislature to

"improve the State's interface with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus community; identify the short- and long-range needs of its members; and ensure that there is an effective means of researching, planning, and advocating for the equity of this population in all aspects of state government."

The Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus Commission submits this testimony in **strong support of Senate Bill 2679**, with a **request for amendment**, relating to the establishment of a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project within the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division.

The Commission strongly supports the intent of SB 2679 to expand access to mental health resources for young people through innovative, digital tools. Hawai'i's keiki are facing unprecedented mental health challenges, and barriers to care, including provider shortages, stigma, cost, and geographic isolation, continue to prevent many from receiving timely and culturally responsive support. A publicly available digital platform has the potential to be a powerful, low-barrier entry point to care and information.

However, the Commission respectfully requests that SB 2679 be **amended to explicitly require that the digital platform include the specific needs of māhū, LGBTQIA+, and gender-diverse keiki** as a core component of the pilot project. Māhū and LGBTQIA+ youth experience disproportionately high rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, bullying, family rejection, and homelessness. These

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

## HI State LGBTQ+ Commission Testimony in Support of SB 2679

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

While the Commission understands that SB 2679 establishes a pilot project, we emphasize that **equity cannot be an afterthought**. Inclusion must be woven into the DNA of the project from its very beginning—in platform design, content development, user interface, data collection, and evaluation metrics. Building inclusivity at the start will strengthen the pilot, improve outcomes, and ensure that the Legislature receives a report that accurately reflects the needs of all youth in Hawai'i.

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

For these reasons, the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission urges the Committee to pass SB2679 **with amendments** to ensure that mähū, LGBTQIA+, and gender-diverse keiki are meaningfully and intentionally included in the Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project.

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

If you or any member of your staff has any questions regarding my testimony you can reach me at [hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com](mailto:hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com).

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)

Vice Chair

[Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission](#)





## **SB2679 Digital Platforms for Adolescent Mental Health**

Committee on Health and Human Services

Sen. Joy San Buenaventura, Chair

Sen. Angus McKelvey, Vice Chair

Wednesday, Feb 4, 2026: 1:01: Room 225 Videoconference

### **Hina Mauka Supports SB2679:**

*ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Brian Baker. I am the President and CEO for Hina Mauka, a mental health and substance use disorder treatment and prevention agency for thousands of adults and adolescents on Oahu and Kauai, including recovery-oriented services and housing transitional living programs.*

Digital platforms can be highly useful to allow users to access support at the times, locations, and in the manner in which they prefer. This helps with engagement and at times when a human therapist is not available. The importance of the manner of involvement is especially important for youth and adolescents.

But **it is not a replacement** for formal and evidence-based human-centered therapy.

**Human connection matters.** Licensed mental health professionals provide clinical assessment, diagnosis, tailored treatment planning, and crisis support — things current digital platforms cannot fully replicate. Empathy, nuanced judgment, and safety monitoring (especially for younger users) are best delivered by trained clinicians.

Evidence, depending on the study, shows very different results. That combined with inappropriate responses from Artificial Intelligence-driven

programs which are just now coming to light as **not only unhelpful, but downright dangerous** for children and adolescents, makes it clear. The clear and safe choice is that Digital Platforms for Adolescent Mental Health is one of the tools that should be in our tool belt; but not the only one.



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Digital Platforms are very useful to supplement evidence-based clinical care, and can improve outcomes....but only when they truly are supplemental to traditional clinical interventions.

**THEY ARE NOT A REPLACEMENT.**



We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony.

To: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Re: SB 2679 – Relating to Youth Mental Health  
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference Wednesday, February 4, 2026,  
1:01 PM

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair McKelvey, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of SB 2679**, which would establish and appropriate funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot.

HCAN is dedicated to advancing the well-being of Hawai'i's children through advocacy and education, with particular focus on health, safety, and access to essential services. This bill's proposal to establish a Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project is directly aligned with our mission, as it seeks to address the growing mental health needs of keiki and adolescents in our state.

The mental health of children and youth is a critical component of their overall well-being and long-term success. Digital platforms, when thoughtfully designed, can increase access to mental health resources, particularly for youth who may face barriers to traditional in-person services due to stigma, geography, or limited provider availability. By leveraging technology, the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division can reach more young people, offering timely support and early intervention that is essential for positive developmental outcomes.

We recognize that while digital solutions offer significant promise, they must be implemented with careful attention to privacy, accessibility, and cultural relevance. It is important that the platform be designed with input from youth, families, and community stakeholders to ensure it meets the diverse needs of Hawai'i's children. Additionally, integration with existing mental health services and clear pathways for escalation to in-person care are vital to ensure youth receive comprehensive support.

We appreciate the Legislature's commitment to innovative solutions for youth mental health and urge favorable consideration of this measure. HCAN encourages the Department of Health to prioritize youth and family engagement throughout the pilot project's development.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please **SUPPORT SB 2679**.



## CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

### **SUPPORT SB 2679: RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH**

TO: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai'i  
Hearing: Wednesday, 02/04/26; 1:01pm; CR 225 & Videoconference

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair McKelvey and Committee on Health and Human Services:

Catholic Charities Hawai'i **supports SB 2679**, which establishes a Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project within the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH) is a tax-exempt, community-based organization that has been providing social services in Hawai'i for 78 years. Catholic Charities Hawai'i serves individuals and families across the state who are experiencing poverty, housing instability, trauma, and crisis. Increasingly, we are seeing the impact of untreated mental health challenges among children and adolescents, particularly those living in communities affected by disasters, economic hardship, and limited access to care. SB2679 directly responds to this growing and urgent need by investing in prevention, early intervention, and accessible mental health support for youth.

The pilot recognizes that today's youth face unprecedented stressors and that traditional in-person services alone cannot meet the demand due to workforce shortages, geographic barriers, and stigma associated with seeking help. Digital platforms—when evidence-based and properly governed—offer a powerful and effective tool to expand reach, especially for rural, underserved, and disaster-impacted communities. Importantly, this pilot also supports the broader behavioral health system by helping address lower-level needs through prevention and education, allowing scarce licensed professionals to focus on youth with the most acute needs. This thoughtful approach reflects an understanding of Hawai'i's workforce constraints while still advancing access and quality of care.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i strongly supports the bill's emphasis on prevention and early intervention to address youth mental health needs before they escalate into more intensive and costly services, reducing stigma by enabling young people to confidentially access trusted information and coping tools, and promoting equity and access for youth who may not otherwise engage with or have access to traditional behavioral health systems. This measure represents a prudent, forward-looking investment in the well-being of Hawai'i's youth and aligns with our shared commitment to building resilient, healthy communities.

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



CLARENCE T. C. CHING CAMPUS • 1822 Ke'eumoku Street, Honolulu, HI 96822  
Phone (808) 527-4813 •





## **SB2679 Digital Platforms for Adolescent Mental Health**

### COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Sen. Joy San Buenaventura, Chair

Sen. Angus McKelvey, Vice Chair

Wednesday, Feb 4, 2026: 1:01: Room 225 Videoconference

## **Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Provides Comments to Support SB2679:**

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

### **COMMENTS for SUPPORT:**

Digital Platforms, according to all evidence, **do not replace therapy or clinical care.**

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

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

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

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

Digital platforms for youth mental health (including ones connected to support services) are **valuable complements** — they broaden access, support skill development, and can *enhance* traditional care — but **they do not replace professional treatment** when a child has significant or complex mental health needs.

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



**LATE**

**Hawaii Medical Association**

1360 South Beretania Street, Suite 200 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96814  
Phone: 808.536.7702 • Fax: 808.528.2376 • hawaiimedicalassociation.org

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

Date: February 4, 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 2679 RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH:** Keiki Caucus; DOH; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division; Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project; Report; Appropriation  
**Position: Support**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**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  
Laeton Pang, MD, Treasurer • Thomas Kosasa, MD, Secretary • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

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

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

## REFERENCES AND QUICK LINKS

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

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

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

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa John A. Burns School of Medicine Area Health Education Center. Annual Report on Findings from the Hawai'i Physician Workforce Assessment Project. Dec. 2025. University of Hawai'i Government Relations. [https://www.hawaii.edu/govrel/docs/reports/2026/act18-sslh2009\\_2026\\_physician-workforce\\_annual-report\\_508.pdf](https://www.hawaii.edu/govrel/docs/reports/2026/act18-sslh2009_2026_physician-workforce_annual-report_508.pdf) Accessed Jan 25 2026.

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

### 2024 Hawaii Medical Association Officers

Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD, President • Nadine Tenn-Salle, MD, President Elect • Angela Pratt, MD, Immediate Past President  
Jerris Hedges, MD, Treasurer • Thomas Kosasa, MD, Secretary • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

### 2024 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

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



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Kaneohe, Hawaii 96744

February 1, 2026

To: Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair,  
And members of the Committee on Health and Human Services

**Testimony in Support of SB 2679 Relating to Youth Mental Health**

As a community advocate and the former Executive Director of Hawaii Youth Services Network who worked for non-profit organizations for 50 years, I strongly support SB 2679 which establishes a digital mental health platform for youth.

This program will increase access to information and services for youth with mental health needs particularly in underserved neighbor island and rural areas. It will use a medium that young people find natural and comfortable. The need to improve mental health services for Hawaii's youth is huge.

35% of middle and high school youth in Hawai'i experience persistent depression; 7% of high school and 11% of middle school students in Hawai'i reported having attempted suicide. 23% of middle school students report that their mental health was most of the time or always "not good" in the prior 30 days.

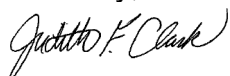
The TeenLink Hawai'i website continues to get 2,000 site visits on average each month. The top topics/pages visited included Suicide; Health and Wellness Toolkit; Sleep; Stress; Mental Health; and Self- Care.

A Hawai'i Department of Health report using 2020 data estimates that 11,000 of Hawai'i's youth experienced at least one major depressive episode in the prior year. Of those who experienced a major depressive episode, approximately 6,000 did not receive mental health services in the prior year.

We need to ensure that mental health services are accessible to Hawaii's students.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Judith F. Clark, MPH

Testimony of Blake Collier  
MSW Student, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
In Support of SB 2679 – Relating to Youth Mental Health  
Hearing Date: February 4th, 2026

Aloha,

I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of SB 2679, which would establish and appropriate funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project for the youth of the islands across Hawai'i.

Within Hawai'i, the stigma around mental health is alive and rampant amongst teenagers and young adults. The state continues to face significant shortages in youth mental health providers, long waitlists for treatment, and limited culturally responsive services, particularly for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander youth. There are limited preventative resources that are easily accessible to youth, leading to a steady increase of depression and anxiety amongst Hawaii's youth.

From my education as a Master of Social Work student specializing in Behavioral Mental Health and my employment for the past year at a residential treatment facility for adolescent girls on O'ahu, I regularly work with youth who have experienced multiple delays to access trauma-informed services due to funding and access. These delays tend to worsen the symptoms these youth are experiencing and increase the likelihood of hospitalization or justice-system involvement. Digital mental health platforms have the potential to serve as a critical bridge by offering youth timely, flexible, and developmentally appropriate support when in-person services are unavailable or insufficient.

This bill aligns with social work values of promoting equity, prevention and the dignity and worth of all people. Investing in programs that create access to mental health resources demonstrates Hawai'i's commitment to prioritizing youth well-being and strengthening families and communities statewide.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support and pass this measure.

Mahalo.

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 1/31/2026 5:15:50 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley de Coligny	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am a Hawaii resident and mother of two writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,  
Ashley de Coligny  
Kaneohe, HI

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 1/31/2026 5:57:06 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
tia pearson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo.

Tia Pearson

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 1/31/2026 6:40:17 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bethany Stetson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need. As someone who has worked in victim services, the overwhelming need for services in our state needs to be addressed. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,

Bethany Stetson

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 1/31/2026 6:45:16 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kealakai Hammond	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai‘i are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,

Kealakai Hammond, LMHC

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 1/31/2026 7:08:34 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ANDREW ISODA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,  
Andrew Isoda  
Lahaina, Mau'i

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 1/31/2026 9:46:22 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michele Mitsumori	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state.

Please support SB2679 and invest in the mental health of our young people.

Mahalo,  
Michele Mitsumori  
Hilo



**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 7:31:26 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marissa Ornellas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,  
Marissa Ornellas

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 9:26:21 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shay Chan Hodges	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,

Shay Chan Hodges

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 12:26:44 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ryan Samonte	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 12:30:06 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Younghee Overly	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for hearing this bill to provide youth in Hawaii the mental health services they need.

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 3:23:21 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelby Wilson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,**

I am a Hawai‘i resident writing in strong support of SB2679.

Too many youth in Hawai‘i are struggling to access timely and appropriate mental health support. According to the Department of Health, fewer than half of youth who need mental health services are currently receiving them. Young people themselves have made it clear—most recently at the Hawai‘i Children and Youth Summit—that expanding access to youth mental health support is a top priority.

**As an educator, parent of a neurodiverse teen, mental health survivor, and active community member, I have seen firsthand how unmet mental health needs show up in our classrooms, homes, and communities every day.**

SB2679 takes an important step by meeting youth where they already are and improving access to information and services in ways that feel relevant, approachable, and supportive. This bill reflects both data and lived experience, and it centers the voices of young people in shaping solutions.

Please support SB2679 and make a meaningful investment in the mental health and well-being of Hawai‘i’s youth.

**Mahalo for your time and leadership,**

*Shelby Wilson*

Mother of 6, teacher, and aloha ‘āina advocate

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 3:52:43 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amalia Olter	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,  
Amalia O.

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of SB2679.

Too many youth in Hawai‘i are unable to access the mental health services they need, when they need them. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. SB2679 is a meaningful step toward addressing critical gaps in our mental health system and investing in the well-being of our keiki.

I submit this testimony not only as a concerned community member, but as a parent. My son struggles daily to perform what are considered “normal” activities. Due to his autism diagnosis, he is unable to process large crowds, loud noises, or bright lights—elements that make up a typical school day. Despite having an IEP and receiving dedicated support from caring and committed school staff, he is currently failing 9th grade for the second time.

Accessing mental health services on our island has been extremely difficult. Providers are limited, unavailable, or have waiting lists that stretch for months. During that time, children like my son continue to struggle without the support they desperately need.

I worry constantly about what will happen when my son becomes an adult and I am no longer able to support, protect, and advocate for him in the same ways. He needs help now to build a strong foundation for adulthood. Unfortunately, there are missing components in that foundation, and mental health services are one of the largest and most critical gaps.

SB2679 represents hope for families like mine. By improving access to mental health support for youth, we can help ensure that young people receive timely care, develop coping skills, and have a better chance at long-term success and independence.

Please support SB2679 and make youth mental health a priority in Hawai‘i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your consideration.

Me ka ha‘aha‘a,  
Nicole Moore

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 6:36:07 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beth Anderson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

As a former psychiatric nurse who worked with young adults in hospital and at a community mental health center, I strongly support this bill that would increase access to mental health services for youth.

According to the Department of Health, less than half of youth who need mental health services are receiving help, so there is a critical need to expand and fund mental health care.

National studies have shown 80% of youth are interested in learning coping strategies and skills and tools to deal with stresses and often very serious problems in their lives, but only half know where to access mental health resources. They don't know where to go. 1 in 3 say the resources they need to support their mental health and deal with very serious mental health issues are unavailable to them. About half of youth report that they would not have the resources they needed if they felt suicidal or they felt like harming themselves.

I've seen youth who receive mental health services able to get well and adapt life skills that help them get on a path to leading a successful, happy life. It is critical that these services are available to our youth. We cannot abandon them, and leave them without support, especially when they are in crisis and need urgent care and/or long term services. That is unacceptable.

Please support SB 2679 and support our island youth, especially those who may be facing serious emotional problems and situations and need mental health services. They deserve our care and help.

Thank you.



**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 8:24:37 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aisley Dela Rosa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,  
Aisley Dela Rosa

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 9:01:27 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Kailiawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Leilani Kailiawa. I am a parent and community leader on Hawaii Island. I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawaii are unable to access the mental health services they need. This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

This bill is important to me because a family was faced with mental health challenges as a youth and did not have easily access to the services.

Mahalo for listening and allowing me to share my support of bill SB2679

With gratitude,

Leilani Kailiawa

**SB-2679**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 7:51:40 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/4/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anamalia Su'esu'e	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB2679. Too many youth in Hawai'i are unable to access the mental health services they need, even as our state continues to face high rates of youth depression, anxiety, and suicide. Without timely, culturally responsive support, many young people fall through the cracks, leading to long-term impacts on their health, education, and futures. Investing in youth mental health also strengthens Hawai'i's mental health workforce by creating resources and platforms that expand capacity and support providers in meeting the growing needs of our communities.

This bill helps meet young people where they are and reflects priorities raised directly by youth across our state. Please support SB2679 and invest in youth mental health.

Mahalo,  
Anamalia  
Volcano, 96785

**Before the**  
**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**  
**Wednesday, February 4, 2026**  
**1:01 p. m.**  
**Conference Room 225 & Via Video Conference**

**On the following measure:**  
**S.B. 2679, RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH**

Chair San Buenaventura and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kelly Morton, and I am a social work student pursuing my master's degree in Hawaii. The focus of my studies is practice with children and families, and as part of my studies, I am working with youth providing mental health support. I am testifying **in support of Senate Bill No. 2679**, which seeks to expand youth access to mental health prevention and education by establishing a pilot project for a digital mental health platform.

According to data as of 2023, the number of youths in Hawaii experiencing mental health challenges has been trending upward, as has the percentage of youths who did not receive needed mental health treatment. As a social work student, I have seen firsthand and studied the negative impact of these symptoms on youth, as well as the positive impact of prevention activities such as early intervention, mental health education, and coping skills. It is clear from the data and my personal experience that there is a greater need for services, and that providing less-intensive, more inclusive and accessible resources for the state's youth could serve as a stopgap for those unable to obtain treatment and help prevent greater need in the future. There is some evidence that digital platforms with appropriately tailored resources and guaranteed confidentiality and privacy can positively impact adolescent symptoms of anxiety and depression. In addition to making services more accessible, a digital tool could reduce stigma associated with mental health treatment, expanding the reach of treatment to those who would otherwise not pursue these options.

Provided the digital platform is evidence-based, confidential, and communicated youth across the state, S.B. 2679 could address the increasing need for youth mental health services in Hawaii. For this reason, I support the passage of S.B. 2679.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill.

Respectfully, Kelly Morton

## COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

### HEARING:

Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 1:01 PM

Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2679 - RELATING TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

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

My name is Christine Andrews, and I live in Wailuku, Maui. I write to you today in **support of SB 2679, relating to youth mental health**, which establishes and appropriates funds for a one-year Digital Youth Mental Health Platform Pilot Project that will enable the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Health to develop and make publicly available a digital platform designed to help young people address and manage mental health challenges.

I am the parent of two young adult children who each suffered from severe mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, when they were younger. I am fortunate that, as an attorney, a stay-at-home parent and someone with access to health care, I was able to advocate for them. It was a full-time job. I would spend hours each day looking for appointments to get my daughter seen while she was experiencing a mental health crisis. It took weeks of calls and emails to arrange for a 504 plan with my daughters' school. There were hospital visits and intakes with crisis care teams. Constant communication with her teachers to help navigate missed school days and workload. It was a lot.

Even with all the work I did to support my oldest daughter, and to get her the help she needed, she was still the one who managed to self-diagnose with ADHD, right at the end of high school. It took months to get her diagnosis confirmed, because the waitlist for testing was months long. Then, because she turned 18 during that wait, it was another struggle to transition her from a pediatric mental health team to an adult one. It was a struggle to get her the care she needed, work with her high school teachers and administrators, and yet, she was a lucky one. She had me to be there for her and advocate for her. She was able to graduate high school, with honors, and be accepted to a prestigious college. During college she became a mental health advocate, received a prestigious fellowship, and is now in graduate school at a world-renowned institution. She was able to navigate her mental health challenges successfully because she had access to support. Not everyone has that privilege. She had friends with the same challenges that withdrew from college because they could not manage their mental health and their education. They did not have the same resources or support.

I have seen the challenges for youth in trying to access care. The long waitlists for appointments, the scarcity of providers. I have seen the impacts on their opportunities, their education, their futures, and their families caused by lack of access to youth mental health resources. **I strongly support SB 2679** because young people, like my daughters, need platforms to address and manage mental health challenges, so that they can become healthy, productive adults.

Mahalo for supporting the success of Hawaii keiki,

Christine L. Andrews, J.D.

Wailuku, Maui