THE SENATE
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026
STATE OF HAWAII

S.B. NO. 2287

JAN 21 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that mental health issues among adolescents in Hawaii are on the rise, with many facing a combination of mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and the effects of recent traumatic events. Adolescence, a specific biological stage between ages ten and nineteen, is a period marked by rapid brain development and identity formation and therefore, a critical time for intervention. Research shows that half of all mental health conditions begin by age fourteen, but many remain undiagnosed and untreated. Early awareness and intervention can prevent mental health conditions from escalating, preventing lifelong impacts on individuals and their families. The effectiveness of substance abuse prevention programs in Hawaii has demonstrated the potential of statewide initiatives to address complex social issues. By establishing a similar framework for mental health prevention amongst adolescents, the State can address the rising needs of its adolescents and promote healthier futures.

The legislature further finds that Hawaii's adolescents have experienced significant trauma in recent years, including the effects of COVID-19, the Maui wildfires, and rising family instability caused by housing shortages and loss of essential services. These crises have led to increases in depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and behavioral issues among adolescents. Continuous stress, compounded by family and cultural trauma, contributes to toxic stress, which increases the risk of mental health disorders and substance abuse. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable during this time of transition, and without intervention, many turn to substances such as cannabis, alcohol, and tobacco as coping mechanisms. These behaviors not only exacerbate mental health issues but also interfere with the normal development of the adolescent brain, leading to lasting emotional and cognitive challenges.

The legislature finds that there is a substantial gap in mental health services for adolescents in Hawaii. As of 2024, approximately 34.8 per cent of high school students in Hawaii report signs of depression, and 26.3 per cent of middle school students have considered suicide. Despite these alarming statistics, a significant number of youth do not receive the

mental health support they need. Recent reports show that approximately seventeen thousand adolescents experience a major depressive episode annually, and many youth engage in substance use as a means of self-medication for their mental health conditions. Preventive mental health services, including early screening, education, and intervention, are critical in addressing these issues before they escalate into more severe conditions. Comprehensive mental health prevention programs can help to reduce the incidence of substance abuse and promote healthy coping strategies that prevent long-term emotional distress. By integrating mental health prevention with existing substance abuse programs, Hawaii can build a more holistic approach to adolescent well-being. Such programs will not only reduce the long-term social and economic burden of untreated mental illness but will also foster resilience, emotional intelligence, and positive life skills in Hawaii's adolescents, creating healthier, more resilient communities for future generations.

The purpose of this Act is to promote a comprehensive, statewide mental health prevention initiative focused on early intervention, education, and support for adolescents by

appropriating funds for the department of health to contract with community-based organizations to provide preventive and early intervention mental health services to adolescents within the community.

SECTION 2. (a) The department of health may contract with community-based organizations to provide preventive and early intervention mental health services to adolescents within the community, including services within schools, to help adolescents develop healthy coping mechanisms, prevent substance abuse, and address mental health concerns early on.

(b) The department of health shall submit a report to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2027. The report shall include but not be limited to:

(1) The manner in which funds appropriated pursuant to this Act have been expended;

(2) The service providers that have received funding pursuant to this Act;

(3) The number of persons served and a description of the services provided;

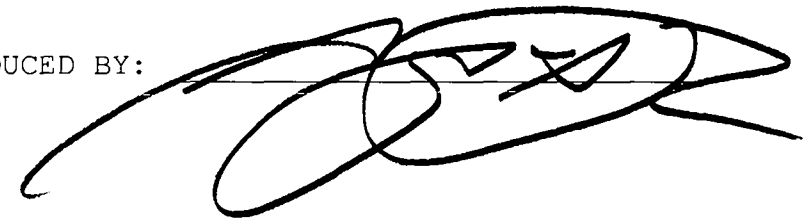
(4) Any measurable outcomes; and

(5) Any proposed legislation.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of $3,000,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the department of health to contract with community-based organizations to provide preventive and early intervention mental health services to adolescents within the community.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of health for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

INTRODUCED BY: 

S.B. NO. 2287

Report Title:
DOH; Adolescent Mental Health Services; Community-Based Organizations; Prevention; Early Intervention; Report; Appropriation

Description:
Appropriates funds to the Department of Health to contract with community-based organizations to provide preventive and early intervention mental health services to adolescents within the community. Requires a report to the Legislature.

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