



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of GM 708
Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the
Maui Service Area Board on Mental Health and Substance Abuse
Gubernatorial Nominee, NICOLE HOKOANA,
for a term to expire 06-30-2030**

SENATOR JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR
SENATOR ANGUS L.K. MCKELVEY, VICE CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date and Time: April 2, 2026, 3:20 p.m. Location: Room 225 and Video

1 **Department Position:** The Department of Health ("Department") supports Nicole Hokoana's-
2 nomination and confirmation to the Maui Service Area Board on Mental Health and Substance
3 Abuse ("MSAB").

4 **Department Testimony:** The Hawai'i Revised Statutes §334-11 provides for the establishment
5 of service area boards within the Department for administrative purposes to advise service area
6 administrators about service area needs to prevent and treat mental or emotional disorders,
7 combined mental illness substance abuse disorders, and persons afflicted by these disorders.
8 These Boards also provide advice, guidance, and recommendations to the State Council on
9 Mental Health and the Hawai'i Advisory Commission on Drug Abuse and Controlled Substances
10 as they deem appropriate. Each service area board shall consist of up to nine members who are
11 area residents and consumers or non-providers of mental health services and service area
12 providers, with a majority being non-state employees and non-providers of mental health and
13 other health services.

14 Ms. Hokoana has been nominated to fill a provider's seat on the Maui Service Advisory
15 Board (MSAB). She was born and raised in Maui and has strong community ties, building a

1 respected career focused on improving behavioral health care across the islands. This
2 appointment is especially important as the Maui community continues to recover from the
3 unprecedented wildfire disaster of 2023. Her leadership brings professional expertise and
4 understanding of local realities that are much needed.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this nomination and your consideration of
6 Nicole Hokoana.



GM708 Nicole Hokoana for Mental Health Substance Abuse Service Area Board

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

Senator Angus McKelvey, Vice Chair

Thursday, Apr 2 2026: 3:20 : Room 225 Videoconference

The Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition strongly recommends Nicole Hokoana for Mental Health Substance Abuse Service Area Board:

ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Alan Johnson. I am the ad hoc leader with the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition, providing support for services for substance use disorder and mental health disorders for adolescents and adults as well as recovery oriented services, harm reduction, and transitional housing including case management, and withdrawal management. HSAC services help all people from all islands.

We have worked more closely with Ms. Nicole Hokoana since she became CEO for Maui Behavioral Health Services (MBH) and have known her since 2018 when she was COO for MBH.

We see by her resume, that Nicole started as a teacher and then shifted to behavioral health with a Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy. She has years of multi-service experience and consequently, knows her community well.

Ms. Hokoana is an expert in the field of substance abuse as well as mental health services. Her knowledge and service experience includes both substance use disorder and mental health disorders programs for adults, school-based treatment and prevention, and community adolescent services. Leading a large agency, Nicole also has executive skills for understanding the larger picture of services and needs as well as community relationships, which is also needed for developing a collaborative vision. With her years starting as an intern and working her way to the top, she understands working with individuals and community as well as having firsthand “boots on the ground” experience for the patient’s needs.

Nicole Hokoana has an expansive knowledge for insightful contributions to the service area board.

We highly recommend Dr. Preston-Pita for the Mental Health Substance Abuse Service Area Board.

GM-708

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 8:05:13 PM

Testimony for HHS on 4/2/2026 3:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brian Baker	Testifying for Hina Mauka	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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.

I hereby gladly support Nicole Hokoana as a Gubernatorial Nominee for the Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Maui Service Area Board.

Nicole's intellect, heart, and clinical skills will be a tremendous asset to the Board.

Mahalo for allowing us to testify.

GM-708

Submitted on: 4/2/2026 7:01:30 AM

Testimony for HHS on 4/2/2026 3:20:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dr. Lisa Ponichtera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi, President

and Members of the Senate

Thirty-Third Legislature

Hawaii State Capitol, Room 409

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear President Kouchi and Members of the Senate:

I am writing in strong support of the nomination of **Nicole Hokoana** to the **Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Maui Service Area Board**, for a term to expire June 30, 2030.

As the Chief Clinical Officer at Maui Behavioral Health Resources, I have had the privilege of working closely with Ms. Hokoana and witnessing firsthand her unwavering commitment to the individuals, families, and communities we serve through Aloha House, Maui Youth & Family Services, and Malama Family Recovery Center.

Ms. Hokoana is an exceptional leader who brings a rare combination of strength, patience, and creativity to her work. She has demonstrated a deep and sustained dedication to behavioral health services across the lifespan, from keiki to kupuna, consistently advocating for accessible, culturally responsive, and high-quality care. Her leadership reflects both strategic vision and a grounded understanding of the complex needs within our community.

She is a courageous advocate who is not afraid to speak up for those whose voices are often unheard. Her work consistently centers on vulnerable and underserved populations, ensuring that systems of care remain responsive, inclusive, and compassionate.

In times of crisis, her leadership has been especially impactful. Following the Lahaina fires, Ms. Hokoana stood firmly in support of expanding and strengthening mental health services for affected individuals and families. She continues to navigate ongoing challenges with resilience, thoughtfulness, and an unwavering commitment to recovery and long-term community wellbeing.

Ms. Hokoana's experience, integrity, and dedication make her exceptionally well qualified to serve on the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Maui Service Area Board. Her presence will strengthen the Board's ability to address the evolving needs of our community.

I respectfully urge your support and confirmation of this nomination.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Dr. Lisa Ponichtera, PhD, LMFT, CSAC
Chief Clinical Officer
Maui Behavioral Health Resources