



**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

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February 4, 2026

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

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS
Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, 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 1973 -- RELATING TO HEALTH (KupunAloha)**

HEARING: Friday, February 6, 2026 @ 9:00 am; Conference Room 329

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

Testimony:

SHPDA strongly supports HB 1973, RELATING TO HEALTH with comments.

This Bill establishes within the Department of Health the KupunAloha program to provide in-home health care and support services for eligible individuals who do not otherwise qualify for government assistance (Medicaid).

Hawai'i has approximately 25,000 kupuna who fall into this gap—unable to access Medicaid and financially unable to pay for private care. These individuals are among our most vulnerable, and without intervention, they face isolation, declining health, and premature institutionalization.

This measure is cost effective. It is estimated that In-home care in Hawai'i averages \$5,720 per month (\$68,640 annually). Nursing home care averages \$12,167–\$12,197 per month (\$146,004 annually). This means in-home care costs less than half of nursing home care, saving over \$77,000 per person per year.

HB1973: testimony of SHPDA (2026), continued.

With an appropriation of \$2 million, the program can fund care for dozens of seniors full-time or hundreds with partial support—while avoiding far higher costs associated with institutional care.

We note that the Governor approved including some funding for this program for rural residents in Rural Health Transformation Program. However, the majority of eligible kupuna who would greatly benefit live in urban Honolulu, which is why this appropriation is needed.

Every dollar spent on in-home care reduces the likelihood of costly nursing home placement, which often falls on Medicaid and state resources. By investing in KupunAloha, we save the state dollars, reduce strain on our healthcare system, and honor cultural values of aging in place

KupunAloha allows seniors to remain in their homes, close to family and community, preserving dignity and mental well-being. This approach aligns with Hawai'i's commitment to 'ohana and cultural respect.

The bill requires the Department of Health to report back to the Legislature by January 2027 on program effectiveness and recommendations for permanency, ensuring transparency and data-driven decisions.

HB 1973 is fiscally responsible, compassionate, and respectful of our Kupuna—hence the name KupuaAloha. It addresses a critical gap in elder care and provides a sustainable, cost-effective solution. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 1973.

Thank you for hearing HB1973.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA



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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1973
RELATING TO HEALTH.

REPRESENTATIVE GREGG TAKAYAMA, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

REPRESENTATIVE LISA MARTEN, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS

February 6, 2026
Room 329

- 1 **Fiscal Implications:** \$2,000,000 general fund appropriation to the Department of Health (DOH).
- 2 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health supports the intent of this measure and
- 3 notes that KupunAloha was part of the proposal from the State of Hawaii's recently announced
- 4 Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) award from the U.S. Centers for Medicare and
- 5 Medicaid Services (CMS). The Executive Branch continues to implement the administrative and
- 6 financial infrastructure for RHTP and looks forward to line-item approval for KupunAloha from
- 7 CMS in the near future.
- 8 As progress is made on RHTP, the general fund appropriation in this measure may complement
- 9 future federal funds to benefit urban areas, since by design RHTP is intended for rural
- 10 communities.
- 11 Furthermore, the involvement of the Executive Office on Aging is critical given their statutory
- 12 responsibility to coordinate comprehensive programs which include a full range of health,

- 1 education, and social services to kupuna, and to assure alignment with the State master plan
- 2 for elders, pursuant to section 349-6, Hawaii Revised Statutes.
- 3 Should this measure advance, DOH will apprise the Legislature of progress in receiving final
- 4 CMS approval to implement a rural-focused KupunAloha program.
- 5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



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

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Testimony COMMENTING on HB1973
RELATING TO HEALTH

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

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS
Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair
Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

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

Hearing: Friday, February 6, 2026, 9:00 A.M.

Conference Room: 329

- 1 **EOA Position:** The Executive Office on Aging (EOA), an attached agency to the Department of
- 2 Health (DOH), supports the intent of HB1973 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:** This measure appropriates \$2,000,000 for fiscal year 2026-2027 to the
- 6 Department of Health to establish the KupunAloha program.
- 7 **Purpose:** This measure establishes the KupunAloha Program within the Department of Health
- 8 (DOH) to provide essential in-home care and support services for Hawaii's 25,000 older adults
- 9 who do not qualify for government assistance programs yet cannot afford the high cost of

1 private-pay home care. The proposed model proposed would pair volunteer caregivers with
2 family caregivers, licensed paid caregivers, and professional Navigators. The older adults in need
3 of support would not be beneficiaries of other programs, such as the State Kupuna Care program.

4 Pursuant to the Older Americans Act of 1965 and Hawai'i Revised Statutes §349-6, EOA
5 is responsible for a comprehensive array of long-term services and supports across all settings.
6 EOA looks forward to working with DOH and SHPDA to align for a seamless system of services
7 and supports for the state's older adults. These services are vital for helping older adults age in
8 place and maintain quality of life. They also support family caregivers by reducing physical and
9 emotional strain and enabling them to remain in the workforce. Additionally, investing in this
10 program can save the state significant costs by preventing premature placement in state-
11 subsidized nursing homes.

12 **Recommendation:** The Executive Office on Aging (EOA) supports the intent of this measure
13 and is willing to partner with the Department of Health and the State Health Planning and
14 Development Agency to plan and implement this program.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

HB-1973

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 3:07:45 PM

Testimony for HLT on 2/6/2026 9:00:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Megan Blazak | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Honorable Chairs Takayama and Marten, Vice Chairs Keohokapu-Lee Loy and Olds, and Members of the Committees,

As a constituent of House District 2, I support this measure.

HB-1973

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:13:01 PM

Testimony for HLT on 2/6/2026 9:00:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Margaret A. Perkinson, PhD | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

I support HB1973.

HB-1973

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 1:18:44 PM

Testimony for HLT on 2/6/2026 9:00:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Glen Kagamida | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

SUPPORT

LATE

HB-1973

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 5:09:57 PM

Testimony for HLT on 2/6/2026 9:00:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| michelle cordero-lee | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Testimony of Hawai‘i Meals on Wheels in Strong Support of HB 1973

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

My name is Michelle Cordero-Lee, and I am the CEO of Hawai‘i Meals on Wheels. I write in strong support of HB 1973.

This past year, Hawai‘i Meals on Wheels served 300 Medicaid-funded clients, delivering nearly 60,000 medically tailored meals across O‘ahu. For homebound kūpuna and individuals with disabilities, these meals are not a convenience—they are an essential healthcare intervention. However, new Medicaid work requirements and twice-yearly eligibility redeterminations threaten to disrupt access, even for individuals who remain eligible. Our data indicate that approximately 50% of our Medicaid clients—about 150 individuals—are at risk of losing coverage, placing more than 40,000 medically necessary meals in jeopardy.

These individuals are medically fragile, homebound, and often lack transportation or reliable digital access to navigate complex eligibility systems. When meals are interrupted, the consequences are immediate and severe: increased malnutrition, higher hospitalization rates, and premature placement in institutional care—outcomes that are both harmful to individuals and significantly more costly to the state.

We are already seeing the impact of these gaps. In January, in partnership with Hui O Hau‘ula, Hawai‘i Meals on Wheels began supporting 20 homebound kūpuna between Hā‘ula and Kahuku—an area with limited access to senior services. These kūpuna have fallen through Medicaid and SNAP eligibility gaps, and we are using limited emergency funds to ensure they continue receiving meals. However, this stopgap support is only sustainable through November 30, 2025.

HB 1973 establishes the KupunAloha program to serve exactly this population—individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid yet clearly require in-home care and supportive services. This bill offers a long-term, systemic solution to prevent kūpuna from falling through the cracks and to ensure they can age safely, independently, and with dignity in their own homes.

With a \$2 million appropriation, KupunAloha could support dozens of kūpuna full-time or hundreds with partial assistance, while avoiding far more costly nursing home placements. Based

on our direct experience, we know this investment would yield immediate and meaningful impact for our kūpuna and for the state.

I respectfully urge your support of HB 1973.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Cordero-Lee
CEO
Hawai'i Meals on Wheels