



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

**KENNETH FINK, MD, MGA, MPH**  
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH  
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**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
**KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO**  
**EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON AGING**  
NO. 1 CAPITOL DISTRICT  
250 SOUTH HOTEL STREET, SUITE 406  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2831

**Testimony COMMENTING on HB1974**  
**RELATING TO Health**

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
Rep. Gregg Takayama, Chair  
Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, 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 this measure 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:** Appropriates \$100,000 to State Health Planning and Development Agency
- 6 (SHPDA) for FY2026-2027 to develop and publish a state plan on hearing loss.
- 7 **Purpose:** This measure requires SHPDA to develop a comprehensive state plan for hearing loss.
- 8 Untreated hearing loss can lead to social isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. For older
- 9 adults, it may increase the risk of cognitive decline, dementia, and falls. Hearing loss also
- 10 impacts emotional well-being and quality of life. A statewide approach to hearing screenings and

- 1 treatment can improve public health and reduce the long-term social, emotional, and economic
- 2 burdens of untreated hearing loss.
- 3 **Recommendations:** EOA supports the intent of this measure and defers to the SHPDA on its
- 4 implementation.
- 5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**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:** 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 1974 -- RELATING TO HEALTH (Hearing loss state planning  
needs)**

**HEARING:** Friday, February 6, 2026 @ 09:00 am; Conference Room 329

**POSITION:** SUPPORT with COMMENTS

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Testimony:

SHPDA strongly supports HB 1974, with comments.

SHPDA agrees that a comprehensive state plan on hearing loss focused on improving access, affordability, awareness, and early detection of hearing loss in collaboration with community stakeholders would help address the serious issues related to and attributed to hearing loss.

Hawaii faces a growing number of hard of hearing residents amid its aging population with tens of thousands already affected statewide. Hearing loss significantly impacts health outcomes and quality of life, often exacerbating isolation and chronic conditions.

State data indicate tens of thousands of Hawaii residents experience some degree of hearing loss, including many with serious difficulties. This aligns with demographic projections showing Hawaii's population aged 65 + rising from 200,712 in 2020 to 215,570 by 2030 (24.4% of total population), driving higher prevalence as hearing impairment increases sharply with age. Untreated hearing loss raises risks of cognitive decline, dementia (up to 5x higher) falls, and hospitalizations as it limits communication and early detection of health issues. It correlates with depression, anxiety, and poorer management of comorbidities like diabetes or heart disease in

seniors. In Hawaii's island context, access barriers amplify these effects for rural populations.

Hawaii also has one of the highest rates of newborn hearing loss in the US, with about 55 infants born annually with permanent hearing loss, based on around 18,000 births per year. Data from 2015-17 shows 60-74 confirmed cases yearly among newborns screened, with 34-40 enrolling into early intervention programs. Among school age children, about 1.5 - 2% of special education students have hearing related issues.

Hearing difficulties lead to social isolation, reduced independence and lower life satisfaction, straining family caregivers and increasing long term care demands. Daily challenges include misunderstandings in conversations, missing safety cues or exclusion from community events, and worsening mental health. Early interventions like hearing aids can mitigate up to 90% of these impacts, yet affordability remains a hurdle.

These patients also have extreme difficulty navigating our complicated insurance prior authorization processes and in seeking appropriate diagnostic and therapeutic options.

A state plan would provide direction, identify current resources and identify gaps. This will lead to better allocation of limited resources. There is a Senate measure SB 1865, which identifies the Department of Health as the lead. SHPDA is open to either being the lead for development of a plan or a participant under the lead of the DOH. In either case, resources and funding are needed to get this done.

Thank you for hearing HB 1974.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

- -- Jack Lewin MD, Administrator, SHPDA



February 4, 2026

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

My name is Tori Carapelho. I am the founder of Hear 4 Hope, a Hawaii-based nonprofit organization supporting individuals and families living with hearing loss. I am submitting testimony in **strong support of Bill 1974** to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

I come before you as a community advocate and as someone with lived experience.

In 2021, I experienced sudden hearing loss. I remember sitting in a doctor's office and being told there was nothing more that could be done – that this was something I would have to learn to live with. In that moment, my world felt like it collapsed. I was not just losing my hearing; I was losing my sense of independence, my confidence, and my ability to communicate in ways I always had.

What made the experience even harder was the absence of a clear path forward. The medical system addressed the diagnosis, but there was no guidance on what came next – no roadmap for support, no coordination between providers, and no clear place to turn for practical tools, emotional support, or community connection. I quickly learned that hearing devices alone are not enough. Access to assistive tools, education, and ongoing support made the difference between isolation and participation. Yet finding those resources required time, persistence, and financial means that many people do not have.

I was fortunate. Many are not.

After regaining some stability, I founded Hear 4 Hope because I never wanted anyone else to have to navigate hearing loss alone in such a fragmented system. Through our work, we hear the same story over and over again from individuals: people do not know where to go for help, care pathways are confusing, wait times are long, providers are overstretched, and support services are often disconnected from one another. Even well-intentioned professionals are frequently working in silos, without the ability to guide people beyond their specific role.

Hearing loss affects more than hearing. It impacts communication, connection, employment, independence, and participation in daily life. When left unaddressed, it can place growing strain on families, caregivers, workplaces, and public systems. As Hawaii's population continues to age, these challenges will only increase.

This bill represents an important opportunity to take a proactive, coordinated approach. A statewide plan on hearing loss would allow Hawaii to better understand current gaps, strengthen education and early identification, improve coordination across systems, support workforce development, and ensure that community voices are part of the solution. Most importantly, it would move us away from reactive, crisis-driven responses and toward a more thoughtful, equitable, and sustainable approach to hearing health.

From both my personal experience and my work with Hear 4 Hope, I can say clearly: the need is real, the gaps are significant, and the cost of inaction is high – not just financially, but in quality of life for individuals and families across our state.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my experience for your consideration of this important measure. I respectfully urge your support.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tori Carapelho', written in a cursive style.

Tori Carapelho  
CEO, Founder  
Hear 4 Hope

2025 Hawaii  
Leadership Board

**Testimony to the House Committees on Health and Human Services and Homelessness  
Friday, February 6, 9:00 AM Hawaii State Capitol  
Conference Room 329, and Videoconference**

**RE: House Bill No. 1974 – RELATING TO HEALTH**

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Travis Kikuchi, *Chair*  
*Senior Vice President*  
*Central Pacific Bank*

Lori McCarney, *Immediate*  
*Past Chair Community*  
*Advocate*

Tricia Medeiros, *Past Chair*  
*Chief Operating Officer*  
*The Plaza Assisted Living*

Gina Fujikami, *MD*  
*The Queen's Medical*  
*Center*

Kai Ohashi,  
*Financial Advisor Edward*  
*Jones*

Michael Robinson,  
*Vice President Hawaii Pacific*  
*Health*

Kimberly Soares, *Vice*  
*President Atlas Insurance*

Gino Soquena,  
*Executive Director*  
*Hawaii Building and*  
*Construction Trade Council*

Gordon Takaki, *Past*  
*President Hawaii Island*  
*Chamber of Commerce*

Cary Tanaka,  
*Past President*  
*Island Insurance*  
*Companies*

Caroline Witherspoon,  
*President Becker*  
*Communications*

LJ R. Duenas,  
*Executive Director*  
*Alzheimer's Association*

Chair Takayama, Chair Marten, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Coby Chock, and I am testifying on behalf of the Alzheimer's Association Hawaii Chapter. The Alzheimer's Association strongly supports HB1974 and appreciates the Legislature's focus on hearing loss as a critical public health issue with direct implications for brain health and dementia prevention.

Hearing loss is a significant and modifiable risk factors for dementia. Research consistently shows that untreated hearing loss is associated with increased risk of cognitive decline, social isolation, depression, falls, and earlier loss of independence. Hawai'i is home to more than 31,200 people living with Alzheimer's disease, and the number is expected to grow substantially as our population ages. Prevention and risk-reduction efforts are essential to addressing this growing crisis.

HB1974 takes an important, evidence-based approach by requiring a comprehensive statewide plan that emphasizes early detection, access to hearing care, workforce training, and public awareness. We especially appreciate that the bill explicitly recognizes the connection between hearing loss, cognitive decline, and dementia, ensuring that hearing health is addressed as part of a broader strategy to support healthy aging.

A coordinated state plan on hearing loss will help reduce dementia risk, support kupuna and caregivers, and improve long-term health outcomes for Hawai'i residents. The Alzheimer's Association respectfully urges your support for HB1974.

If you have questions, please contact me at 808-451-3410 or [ckchock@alz.org](mailto:ckchock@alz.org)



Coby Chock

Director of Public Policy and Advocacy  
Alzheimer's Association - Hawaii

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 7:46:15 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chanelle Tolentino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chanelle “Loke” Tolentino, and I am testifying today as a sister.

Hearing access is deeply personal to my family. My brother was born deaf, and when he was young our family did not have clear access to early screening or coordinated follow-up services. We often didn’t know where to turn for support.

We grew up on Maui, and because specialized services were only available on O‘ahu, he had to become a boarder at the Hawai‘i School for the Deaf and the Blind at a young age. He did well in school — he’s incredibly capable and resilient — but he didn’t have his family with him, and he needed us. Separation and isolation are hard on anyone, and especially hard on someone already navigating communication barriers.

Growing up, I saw how quickly isolation can affect someone’s mental health and safety. When communication breaks down, the world gets smaller. There were periods when he became withdrawn and more vulnerable to depression and harm. Some of those experiences still affect him more than twenty years later. Something as simple as better accessibility, earlier support, and stronger systems of care could have made a meaningful difference in his life.

Because of that experience, I have always believed accessibility is not just a medical issue — it is a dignity and safety issue.

Today, many kūpuna and adults with hearing loss face similar isolation. When people cannot fully participate in conversations, appointments, or community life, they often quietly withdraw. Over time, that disconnection can lead to depression, cognitive decline, and loss of independence.

I am grateful that Hawai‘i has made progress in recent years with newborn screenings and community resources. At the same time, we still face gaps, including shortages of sign language interpreters and limited pathways for local residents who want to serve in these roles. As someone who hopes to become an interpreter myself, I see firsthand how few training opportunities are available. We need more accessible ASL classes and interpreter training programs statewide so local families are not left waiting for support.

This bill offers a thoughtful and proactive solution by creating a coordinated statewide plan to improve screening, access, affordability, and support across all islands. Families should not have to navigate these challenges alone or be separated from one another to receive care.

Every person in Hawai‘i deserves the ability to communicate, participate, and stay connected to their community and their ‘ohana.

Mahalo for your care and for advancing this important measure. I strongly urge you to pass this bill.

Respectfully,  
Chanelle “Loke” Tolentino  
Waipahu, Hawai‘i

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 8:18:40 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ivan Tolentino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ivan, and I am submitting testimony in strong support of this bill.

I am testifying as a husband and family member.

I have seen firsthand how hearing loss and lack of access to services have affected our family. My brother-in-law was born deaf and had to leave Maui at a young age to attend school on O‘ahu because there were no local options. Being separated from his family for so long was difficult and had lasting impacts on his mental health and well-being.

No family should have to choose between getting support and staying together.

Over the years, I have also seen how many kūpuna and adults quietly struggle when hearing loss goes untreated. It can lead to isolation, depression, and loss of independence. Better screening, access to care, and communication support would make a real difference for many families like ours.

I also support efforts to grow the workforce, including more sign language classes and interpreter training, so local residents can help meet the needs in our own communities.

Mahalo for your time and for considering this important measure. I respectfully urge you to pass this bill.

Sincerely,  
Ivan Tolentino, Waipahu, Hawai‘i

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 8:33:46 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Patrick O'Donnell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Legislators,

As one of only three pediatric otolaryngologists (Ear, Nose, and Throat specialists) in Hawaii—and the only one operating outside of a closed medical system—I wholeheartedly support HB1974.

My daily practice highlights a critical gap in our healthcare infrastructure. While hearing loss is a significant concern for Hawaii residents, my pediatric patients face immense hurdles due to a lack of coordinated statewide strategy. Currently, the pathways to diagnosis and treatment are fragmented, leaving many of our keiki at risk of falling through the cracks.

Hearing loss doesn't just affect the ears; it affects a child's ability to learn, a grandparent's ability to connect with family, and the overall well-being and productivity of our community. We have the expertise in Hawaii; we simply need the coordinated framework this bill provides to make that expertise accessible to everyone. Please consider supporting this bill.

Very respectfully,

Patrick J. O'Donnell, MD

Otolaryngology -- Head and Neck Surgery

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:09:10 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Margaret A. Perkinson, PhD	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB1974.

Margaret A. Perkinson, PhD

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 10:03:53 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Rick Tabor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for hearing Bill HB1974.

I'm Rick Tabor, a long time hearing aid champion. I strongly support Bill HB1974.

For the record, I'm a retired mental health clinician, past in-home care operation manager, veteran field medical Navy hospital corpsman who was stationed at Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station in the mid to late 1970's. In my retirement I'm active in several kūpuna nonprofits.

My past legislative session testimonies supported adequate coverage for hearing aids. I chair the Gift of Sound Rotary free hearing aid program. This bill hearing hopes to explore Hawaii's hearing aid needs. Awareness, accessibility and affordability are three of the immediate concerns that need to be addressed. Your support would be helpful and much appreciated.

Please allow me to share our family's hearing loss story. Just today, my sister contacted me for help. She sent to ENT Specialist yesterday for a hearing exam. She says they discovered she lost over 60 percent of hearing in left ear. She was diagnosed her with Cholesteatoma and recommend surgery. Hopefully the surgery will help her recover her hearing. She lives in a rural part of Oregon. She reports, finding help was not an easy task.

Another family situation involved our mother. She passed two winters ago, after an arduous end of life journey. My sister, brothers, and loved ones have discussed and tried to understand the difficulties, with no solutions or resolutions, sad about her troubles, knowing she's in a better place dancing with our father, in their after life.

Our mother reported hearing loss issues early in her adult life. No one thought much of it, until many years later, maybe fifteen years later, it became clear, she was avoiding social gatherings, isolating, and developing cognitive and mental health issues. Eventually she asked for help.

My brothers thought hearing loss was the main issue. So, they ordered a set of hearing aids from a Sunday Parade advertisement. She then told us, she was wearing her mailborder hearing aids while in a crosswalk, someone yelled hello, and honked their horn. She said the horn permanently damaged her left ear.

Eventually she stopped wearing those hearing aids. Next she was diagnosed Alzheimers.

From there, my mother and family dealt with several unfortunate incidents. Her Alzheimer's issues rapidly escalated to the point of needing nursing care. A month before she passed away, she fell and broke her neck and clavicle and passed away, a short time after her fall. When they cleaning her room, they found her hearing aids hidden under her fish aquarium.

The Hawaii Hearing Taskforce hopes to explore our Island's hearing needs with plans to recommend help where help is needed. Hopefully together, we can improve what's needed to improve Hawaii's hearing loss issues.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter.

-Rick Tabor

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 10:14:51 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Yvonne J Awai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hearing loss is devastating, not only for the person who experiences it, but also their family and friends.

If a person loses their hearing, they have difficulty processing what is going on around them.

I support the bill and want to see a coordinated effort to address hearing loss in our community and across the state.

**Jelene Wong, AuD**  
**Audiologist, Kapiolani**  
**In Support of Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss**

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

My name is Jelene Wong, and I am an audiologist at Kapiolani. I am submitting testimony in strong support of establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss from a provider perspective.

From my professional experience, some of the most significant challenges related to hearing loss in Hawaii include low insurance reimbursement rates for services (Medicare/Medicaid), which leads to a lack of resources, provider shortages, and long wait times. In addition, hearing health education and inconsistent screening protocols across the lifespan are other challenges that we face. These challenges affect both children and adults. Low reimbursement rates for many audiology services limit the ability of providers to offer comprehensive care, including routine hearing evaluations, cochlear implant services, and necessary diagnostic testing.

For children, delays in identification and treatment can have lifelong consequences. Without early and consistent hearing screening and follow-up, children with hearing loss may experience delays in speech and language development, academic challenges, and social-emotional difficulties. Families are often left to navigate complex systems on their own, without clear guidance on referrals, services, or ongoing support.

For adults and older adults, delayed care is associated with increased risk of cognitive decline, dementia, social withdrawal, and reduced quality of life. Across all ages, hearing loss affects communication, safety, mental health, and family relationships.

There are also significant gaps in coordination and referral pathways. Many patients and families are unaware of how often hearing should be evaluated, and primary care providers are not consistently referring patients, particularly older adults, for hearing testing. At the same time, there is no standardized, statewide protocol to guide screening, referral, and follow-up.

Provider shortages, long wait times, and geographic barriers further limit access to care. Wait times for audiology services can be extremely long, and travel presents a major obstacle for families, older adults, and neighbor island residents. While telehealth could support certain aspects of care, it is currently limited, and workforce shortages remain a significant barrier to timely access.

A coordinated, statewide planning approach would help address these challenges by creating standardized pathways for education, screening, referral, and follow-up across the lifespan. A Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss could support early identification for children, clearer referral pathways for providers, and more efficient access to care for adults and seniors. Providing both providers and patients with a clear path forward would improve outcomes, reduce long-term costs, and ensure more equitable hearing health care throughout Hawaii.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my perspective and for your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully,

**Jelene Wong, AuD**

Audiologist, Kapiolani

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:16:56 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Francisco Vidal	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support this bill because hearing loss has affected my family, especially my grandma. Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.*

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:17:37 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Austin Fish	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill because hearing loss has affected my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:31:44 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aliana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**My name is Aliana, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss. I support this bill because hearing loss has affected me/my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.**

**Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.**

**Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.**

**Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.**

**Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.**

**I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

**Sincerely,  
Aliana**



## Testimony on HB 1974 / SB 2865

### RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS

2/6/26

329 VIA Videoconference

State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street

Chair Rep. Lisa Marten, Vice Chair Rep. Ikaika Olds, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ethaniel Plaza, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

*Hearing loss has affected one of my relatives and everytime we talk to her, she always struggles to know what we are saying. This makes it more difficult for us as we need to speak louder and slower for her to understand it. Sometimes it causes confusion as she hears something else rather than what we are saying and this makes it difficult to communicate with her.* Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,  
**Ethaniel Plaza**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:54:27 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Hyuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony on HB 1974/ SB 2865**

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**Friday, February 6, 2026**

**Conference Room 329**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

**Chair Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee:**

**My name is Hyuma Wakafuji, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss. My uncle had a tragic injury in his head that led to him not being able to hear. The amount of struggle he went through is huge. The surgery itself was already expensive but the prescribed hearing aid was also expensive. By providing an opportunity to high schoolers to learn about hearing aids, the patients could be provided with the right hearing aid and with less cost when there are more people in the industry.**

**Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.**

**Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.**

**Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.**

**Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.**

**I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

**Sincerely,  
Hyuma Wakafuji**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:05:53 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicholas Lee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*I support this bill because hearing loss has affected me/my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.*

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:33:35 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ava Eskaran	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I just believe hearing is important, and the importance of studying and educating hearing loss is crucial to the betterment of our community as well.

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:34:21 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
joshua	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

i support

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:35:03 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Carl Joseph Daniels	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support for this bill especially because hearing loss actively affects my family in my father who hasn't been able to hear normally for a few years now. Hawaii should be pushing for a plan to improve access, education, and care for those with hearing loss to ensure they can live the life that they want.

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:43:01 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ara Cely Ver	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Ara Cely, I am from Ewa Beach. I have a family member who suffers from hearing loss at a very young age. I support this bill because hearing loss has affected me/my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:45:35 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Christiane Ernestine Almosara	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony on HB1974 / SB 2865**

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**February 6, 2026 – 9:00 AM**

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

**Chair Rep. Lisa Marten, Vice Chair Rep. Ikaida Olds, and Members of the Committee:**

**My name is Christiane Ernestine Almosara and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.**

**Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.**

**Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.**

**Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.**

**Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.**

**I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

**Sincerely,  
Christiane Almosara**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:46:51 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kellen Salvador	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony on HB1974/ SB2865**

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**February 6, 2026**

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

**Chair Lisa Martin, Vice Chair Ikaika Olds, and Members of the Committee:**

**My name is Kellen Salvador, and I am a resident of Ewa Beach. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawai‘i State Plan on Hearing Loss. Hearing loss has made it really hard to hear conversations and sounds around me. Sometimes I don’t know what’s going on or miss important things, which is frustrating. It’s confusing figuring out where to get help or what kind of treatment I need. The costs can be expensive, and I worry about missing safety alerts or being unable to connect with friends and family like I used to. Overall, it’s a big challenge that affects my daily life.**

**Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawai‘i, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.**

**Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.**

**Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.**

**Establishing a Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.**

**I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

**Sincerely,  
Kellen Salvador**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 9:46:57 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mikayla-Mae Picazo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony on HB 1974 / SB 2865**

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**Feb 6, 2026 9:00 AM**

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

**Chair Lisa Marten, Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Ikaika Olds, and Members of the Committee:**

**My name is Mikayla-Mae Picazo, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.**

**My grandpa has been hard of hearing for years, and it affected many parts of his daily life. Getting care was confusing and delayed because we didn't know where to go, and the high cost of hearing tests and hearing aids made it harder. His hearing loss impacted his safety, work, and ability to connect with others, especially during family gatherings, where he often felt left out. Over time, it made him quieter and more withdrawn, showing how hearing loss affects more than just hearing.**

**Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.**

**Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.**

**Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide**

**plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.**

**Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.**

**I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

**Sincerely,  
Mikayla-Mae Picazo**

## **Testimony on HB1974**

### **RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**Feb 6, 2026**

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

Chair Rep. Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lucas Luo, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

I personally can't imagine what a deaf person has to go through because as a student, school is constantly challenging and it never ends. I know for people that suffer a bad hearing loss, they need to work extra hard with sign language. It's important for people, even the non deafed ones, to realize how much pain it takes up for a person not having the ability to understand other's voices and feelings.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawaii's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,  
Lucas Luo

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 10:03:07 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jazmine Mayo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony on HB 1974**

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**6 February, 2026 @ 9:00 AM**

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

**Chair Rep. Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee:**

**My name is Jazmine Mayo, and I am a resident of Waipahu. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.**

**For my senior capstone project, I chose to help screen almost my entire high school population for their hearing capabilities alongside a volunteer organization. From the anonymous results, we have found that almost 30 students had hearing loss symptoms. Many students wouldn't have recognized their current condition without the screening in the first place.**

**Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.**

**Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.**

**Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide**

**plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.**

**Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.**

**I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

**Sincerely,  
Jazmine Mayo**

## **Testimony on HB1974 / SB2865**

### **RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**Feb 6th, 2026**

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

Chair Rep. Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Divine, and I am a resident of Waipahu. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss. I couldn't imagine what it's like for those who struggle with some sort of hearing loss, and I think this is a great bill to have here in Hawai'i.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,  
Divine Martin

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 10:40:10 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kori Nishida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony on HB1974

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

Hearing Date: February 6, 2026 at 9:00am

Members of the Committee:

My name is Kori Nishida. I am submitting testimony in support of this measure to establish a Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss.

I do not have hearing loss, but I am affected by hearing loss every day, both professionally as an Audiologist and personally as I have multiple family members with hearing loss.

I have worked with a multitude of patients who are affected by hearing loss, unable to communicate well with their friends, family, and community. This can be a source of frustration for both the individual with hearing loss and their communication partners, especially as communication breakdowns occur repeatedly and frequently. At worst, it causes their partners to just give up trying to communicate with the patient and this can leave the patient to feel isolated, shameful that they are not able to hear better, and they may miss out on important information. This can further lead to patients withdrawing from situations that they know they will not be able to hear well, which can have ripple effects on their social, emotional, mental, and cognitive health.

Because hearing loss is “invisible” meaning there are no physical signs or indicators that someone has hearing loss and there typically is no pain involved, it is not something that is checked unless a concern is mentioned at an appointment with their primary care provider or other medical provider. Presbycusis, or age-related hearing loss, is a gradual process over time and our brains are very good at just adapting to our situation, especially if the changes are very minimal. Many of my patients are certain they do not have any problems hearing and are surprised when their results indicate hearing loss. Hearing loss, even losses in the mild range, can have negative effects on communication and it is easier to manage hearing losses when they are detected and managed earlier.

On a personal level, my father has a significant hearing loss, enough that if he did not wear his hearing aids, he would not be able to have everyday conversations with my mother. At our weekly family dinners or when he comes to support my children at their sporting events it would be nearly impossible for him to hear without his aids. His ability to hear with his aids, not perfectly but better, enables him to stay connected with his family and enables him to continue to engage in the activities he chooses.

One of my mother's uncles also has a significant hearing loss but is not compliant with wearing his hearing aid. During family gatherings, he is often sitting on the side, unable to participate in the conversations around him. He can only engage if someone makes deliberate effort to go up to him and talk to him. He misses out on so much social connection and auditory stimulation to keep his brain working optimally.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of individuals in Hawai'i who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 11:18:27 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keola Spruill	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony on HB1974**

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**Feb 6, 2026**

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

**Chair Gregg Takayama Vice Chair Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy and Members of the Committee: HLT/HSB**

**My name is Keola and I am a resident of Waipahu. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss. I support this bill because hearing loss has affected me/my family, and Hawai'i needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.**

**Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawai'i, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.**

**Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.**

**Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.**

**Establishing a Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.**

**I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.**

**Thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

**Sincerely,**

**Keola**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 2:40:49 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Brighson Tolentino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill because I have family members who are affected with hearing loss.

**Testimony on HB 1974 / SB 2865**

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

**Feb 6, 2026 9:00 AM**

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

Chair Lisa Marten, Vice Chair Ikaika Olds, and Members of the Committee:

My name is **Audrey Antonio** and I am a resident of **Aiea**. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I support this bill because hearing loss has affected my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawaii's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

**Audrey Antonio**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 4:54:52 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kriselle	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Kriselle, and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawai'i state plan on hearing loss. Challenges that are involved for accessing hearing loss care involve high costs, limited insurance coverage, shortages of specialists, long waiting times, communication barriers, etc. Having access to hearing loss care is very important because it helps improve communication by helping people hear sounds through early diagnosis, hearing aids, etc, which reduces issues with misunderstandings, makes conversating with others easier, supports learning, and strengthens relationships. I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,  
-Kriselle

In Support of Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss

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

My name is Lucy Farinas, and I am submitting testimony in strong support of establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

My hearing loss has affected me deeply, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally. It took me years to stabilize myself and accept what had happened. During that time, I struggled to understand my condition and how to live with it, often feeling isolated and unsure of where to turn for help.

In Hawai'i, I faced many challenges trying to get support. I could not find a support group for people who are deaf or hard of hearing where I could talk openly about my situation and the changes I was experiencing in my life. I became heavily dependent on my ENT just to cope with my hearing loss, but there was no broader system of guidance or follow-up to help me navigate next steps or long-term care.

These challenges had a serious impact on my daily life. My hearing loss affected my work and my social life, and I became reclusive. I avoided going out or being around people. For years, I relied on therapy and medication for my mental health just to find stability. The emotional toll of hearing loss is real, and without proper support, it can be overwhelming.

I believe a clear, statewide plan would help prevent others from going through the same struggles I did. Hearing loss affects mental health, social interaction, and overall well-being. A coordinated assistance program would provide guidance, education, and connection to others who are on the same journey of being deaf or hard of hearing. Knowing where to go, what resources exist, and how to access support can make a life-changing difference.

A Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would help people feel less alone, improve access to care, and support both mental and social health. I urge you to support this effort so that others do not have to struggle in isolation as I did.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share my experience and for considering this important issue.

Respectfully,

Lucy Farinas

Hawaii Resident living with hearing loss

## Testimony on HB1974

Re: Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss

My name is Marilyn Naito, I live in Honolulu, HI and I am writing in support of this very important bill to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

My mother had profound hearing loss and early signs of dementia, and I watched our family struggle with her declining condition. I'm not proud to say, she'd often be shouted at, made fun of, even ignored by all of us who dearly loved her. As my own hearing began to decline, I started noticing the same things happening to me. My children and grandson would raise their voices. "Mom! Mom! Gramma! Can't you hear me?" they would shout. I could not recognize the direction of someone calling out my name. I avoided social interactions making excuses to not attend a luncheon or meeting. My desire to NOT become helpless like my mother, took me on my journey to having cochlear implant surgery.

Since my late fifties I have seen audiologists and ENTs for hearing difficulties. I am now 73 years old and thru the years have digressed from a "slight" hearing loss to 0% hearing in my right ear. I have worn hearing aids (spending thousands of dollars) until they no longer helped and in October of 2025 had a cochlear implant done (covered by medical insurance) which has turned my world around in the most positive way. But the journey itself was long, frustrating, confusing, and unnecessary. At no point was there a clear pathway or guidance on what steps came next, or who could help me navigate them. I was lucky that I already had an ENT who did cochlear implants, but scheduling each appointment took months of waiting due to lack of qualified doctors. Again, I waited over a year to get an appointment with a certified cochlear audiologist to be deemed "qualified" for an implant, and then my ENT had to fight to get surgery time at the hospital. I was lucky again, that I was able to have my surgery done a month before my doctor closed practice and moved to the mainland. Even with a referral, I have been on the waiting list for 5 months to be accepted by another ENT on Oahu and am still waiting.

Passing of this bill is important. My experience showed me that hearing care in Hawaii is fragmented, with no clear coordination between providers, referrals, and support. I struggled to find the right resources to make a life changing decision to have surgery vs accepting being disabled. I stumbled upon a support group which has brought me encouragement, knowledge, motivation and feeling of family. No one should have to rely on luck or personal persistence to find these resources. There needs to be a coordinated plan and effort to let keiki to kupuna know who, what, where, and when opportunities are available. Please support HB1974.



## **Testimony on HB 1974**

### **RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

Feb 6, 2026

Conference Room 329 via Videoconference

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Thomas Simon, and I am a resident of Honolulu. I am submitting testimony in support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss. I am sharing this information based on my own experience living and working with hearing loss.

I have lived with hearing loss for over 27 years, starting in August of 1998, when I had sudden hearing loss in my right ear. My doctor immediately sent me to an ear specialist, an ENT. The ENT ran a number of tests and treated me with steroids, which he said helps restore hearing about 50% of the time. In my case, the medication did not help. Four years later, I had a follow up appointment with a different ENT, who ran tests and came to the same conclusion. I simply had to live with only one functioning ear. I do not recall either of these ENTs recommending a hearing aid for my right ear, so I assume my hearing was beyond the limits of the hearing aid technology at that time.

The first person I recall recommending a hearing aid was an Audiologist in 2008 when I began to struggle with hearing loss in my left ear. I have used hearing aids for my left ear from that time until today. As a state employee and later a state retiree, I have had excellent health insurance, but I still paid significant out-of-pocket costs for hearing aids and hearing aid related services.

Several years after my initial ENT visit, I recalled an incident that occurred before my sudden hearing loss, which may have been an early sign that I was losing my hearing. I have thought back to that time and wondered if I should have been getting regular hearing tests. I schedule annual doctor visits, dental checkups, and eye exams. Perhaps if I had annual hearing tests, my hearing may have been treated earlier and the outcome may have been different.

I first heard about a cochlear implant around 2002, but my understanding was that it was very expensive and my insurance would not cover it. The first time I spoke to a healthcare professional about a cochlear implant was in 2020. I feared that I was going to lose the remaining hearing in my left ear, and my Audiologist suggested that I look into a cochlear implant. In 2022, Medicare expanded its criteria, allowing me to become a candidate for a cochlear implant. In 2024, I received a cochlear implant in my right ear, restoring hearing that I had lost 26 years earlier.

## **Testimony on HB 1974**

At the time of my initial hearing loss, I worked in the Telecom Branch of State Civil Defense and often struggled with hearing in meetings, interacting with colleagues while simultaneously speaking on a telephone, and numerous other situations. In addition to problems at work, I have struggled with hearing in everyday life, such as speaking with family, friends, or doctors, shopping, and making phone calls. The cochlear implant has returned my hearing to nearly normal, but I still struggle in certain situations, such as large gatherings, noisy environments, and in rooms with poor acoustics.

From my perspective, a statewide plan could make a significant difference by improving education for teachers, healthcare providers, employers, and the public, making it clearer when and how people should be screened. In addition, the plan could address cost and other barriers that cause people to delay care. Most importantly, a plan could give people a clear path to address their hearing loss instead of leaving them to figure it out on their own.

I believe this effort could help others avoid the lack of information and delays that I experienced and allow people with hearing loss to stay engaged in their work, families, and communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience and for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

Thomas Simon

**LATE**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 9:23:01 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Susan Jung	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Susan Jung and I represent Captel, captioned telephones for those with hearing loss. I have been with the company for over 11 years and have seen the devastating impact in the senior community for those who have hearing loss and this issue needs to be addressed

I am in support of this bill because hearing loss affects everyone, family, friends, businesses and most of all, the individual.

**LATE**

**Testimony on HB1974 or SB 2865**

**RELATING TO A HAWAII STATE PLAN ON HEARING LOSS**

Feb 6, 2026 9:00 AM

**329 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**State Capitol – 415 South Beretania Street**

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Leanne Supapo and I am a resident of Aiea. I am submitting testimony in strong support of this measure to establish a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss.

To start, hearing loss has created a sense of being alone even when surrounded by hundreds of hundreds of people. For them, it can feel like losing the crazy “kitchen table” talks that holds lots of stories. Growing up, my uncle held every life and heart at our dinner parties until the his doctor said he’d slowly lose his hearing. This turned his vibrant hearty laugh into something like a nodding smile as he struggled to catch up on our conversations. We watched the frustrations of having to look for a cheap good hearing care. He said he’d save up for it, yet there were so many things that had to be paid for that he couldn’t get himself to do so, which eventually pulled him away from the dinners he always looked forward to. It wasn’t just about the volume of the world turning down for him but also the connection.

Hearing loss affects people of all ages, from children to kupuna, and is closely linked to communication, safety, education, employment, and overall quality of life. In Hawaii, tens of thousands of residents are living with hearing loss, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated, statewide approach to prevention, early detection, access to care, follow-up, and workforce planning.

Without clear guidance or coordination, many people experience long delays in diagnosis and treatment, struggle to navigate the system, or are unable to afford appropriate hearing care. These gaps can lead to isolation, safety risks, reduced educational and employment opportunities, and increased strain on families and caregivers.

Early identification and coordinated care for hearing loss can make a significant difference. When hearing loss is addressed earlier, individuals are better able to stay connected, maintain independence, and participate fully in their communities. A statewide plan would help improve education, streamline referral pathways, and ensure that hearing health is treated as a public health priority rather than an afterthought.

Establishing a Hawaii State Plan on Hearing Loss would provide an important framework to better align providers, agencies, educators, and community organizations. This coordinated approach would help improve access, reduce preventable delays, and promote better outcomes for individuals and families across our state.

I respectfully urge your support of this measure for the benefit of Hawai'i's children, adults, and kupuna who are affected by hearing loss today and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Leanne Supapo

**LATE**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 11:24:09 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Rosalind Chin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

"I support this bill because hearing loss and having a son who is deaf has affected me and my family, and Hawaii needs a coordinated plan to improve access, education, and care."

Reason this bill is important is because we only have 30 interpreters for the entire state, no clear systems of support for individuals to become licensed. Interpreters in Hawaii, less than a handful of qualified audiologists, and no gov mandated data collection on systems of support to improve support for individuals who experience hearing loss.

**LATE**

February 3, 2026

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB1974 / SB2865, which would require the development of a comprehensive Hawai'i State Plan on Hearing Loss.

Hearing loss affects thousands of Hawai'i residents across all ages, yet our state currently lacks a coordinated approach to screening, treatment, education, and access to care. Untreated hearing loss can lead to serious health and social consequences, including isolation, cognitive decline, and increased healthcare costs.

This measure is an important first step in identifying gaps in services, improving access to affordable care and assistive technology, and ensuring that individuals with hearing loss are not left behind. Developing a statewide plan will help Hawai'i better support our keiki, working adults, and kupuna.

I respectfully urge your support for HB1974 / SB2865.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle M. Osaki". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Kyle Osaki

**LATE**

**HB-1974**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 3:45:21 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Sydney Wiecking	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have experience working in a professional capacity with individuals who are hearing challenged. I also have a family member who has difficulty interacting in social situations and gatherings because his hearing is compromised. I have experienced first hand how isolating and challenging hearing loss can be. We are already seeing the impact loneliness and isolation has on individuals. I believe strongly that it is important for Hawai'i to become proactive in providing education, community and resources to people who are hearing impaired.