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STATE OF HAWAII
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February 10, 2026

TO: The Honorable Senator San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 2275 – RELATING TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.**

Hearing: February 11, 2025, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the bill's intent and offers comments. DHS is pleased to report that the Med-QUEST Division (MQD) has already submitted State Plan Amendment (SPA) 25-0016 to CMS for approval. SPA 25-0016 amends the current Ticket to Work Program, which was implemented through SPA 21-004, Ticket to Work Basic, in May 2021. The amendment removes both income and asset limits for individuals who meet the program's requirements. CMS has given preliminary approval of this amendment, with an effective date of January 1, 2026. This [amendment](#) was also posted on December 4, 2025, via public notice.

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



STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
STATE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
'A'UNIKE MOKU'ĀPUNI NO KA NĀ KĀWAI KULA

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February 11, 2026

The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of SB2275, Relating to Persons with Disabilities

The Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities is in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB2275**, which requires the Department of Human Services to establish a Medicaid buy-in program for workers with disabilities and requires the Department to adopt rules.

SB2275 represents the continuation of a policy commitment the Legislature made with the passage of Kal's Law. Kal's Law affirmed a core principle: people with disabilities should be able to work, earn income, and build a future without losing access to the Medicaid-funded services and supports that make work possible. From the outset, a Medicaid buy-in option was understood as the next step needed to fully realize that promise.

The Council strongly supports approaches that remove the benefits cliff created when increased earnings threaten Medicaid eligibility. While broader reforms to income treatment remain an important goal, a Medicaid buy-in program provides a clear, structured pathway for workers with disabilities to maintain coverage as their income grows. It recognizes that employment does not eliminate the need for long-term services and supports and that continued access to those supports is essential to stability, independence, and community participation.

By allowing people with disabilities to retain Medicaid coverage by paying reasonable premiums, SB2275 aligns Medicaid policy with employment, self-determination, and economic participation. It reflects the Legislature's stated intent following Kal's Law and provides a practical mechanism to ensure that people with disabilities are not forced to choose between working and maintaining access to essential care.

For these reasons, the Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities **supports** SB2275.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,
Daintry Bartoldus, Executive Administrator



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

Ka 'Oihana Ho'oka'a'ike no ka Po'e Kīnānā

1010 Richards Street, Rm. 118 • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
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February 11, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senate Bill 2275 – Relating to Persons with Disabilities

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 2275 – Relating to Persons with Disabilities. This bill requires the Department of Human Services to establish a Medicaid buy-in program for workers with disabilities. And it requires the Department to adopt rules.

This program will allow individuals with disabilities to maintain Medicaid coverage while working and earning above the federal poverty level. By expanding access to Medicaid, this bill will help individuals with disabilities achieve greater financial independence and access essential healthcare services, without the fear of losing coverage as they increase their earnings. It is a vital step toward ensuring that people with disabilities have the support they need to work and thrive in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO
Acting Executive Director

SB-2275

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 6:31:19 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	In Person

Comments:

We are in strong support of this Bill. One of the main goals of the disability movement is to integrate individuals with disabilities into competitive employment. While there are many barriers and challenges, one that has stood out is the potential loss of Medicaid waiver benefits that many of these individuals need in order to function properly in their day to day life.

We were very involved with the passage of Kal's Law and we appreciate that that was a good step at the time. However, time has also shown that the law has limitations as it does not address what happens when the person with the disability achieves a higher level of success in their employment. At the time it was passed, capping the allowable earnings at a rate tied to the Federal Poverty Level may have seemed like a reasonable compromise. However, experience has demonstrated that the cap has created artificial limitations that prevent individuals from maximizing their potential. We know of cases where individuals operating under the current Income Disregard have opportunities to earn higher salaries or receive promotions or otherwise advance their career. The goal and policy of the law should be to encourage that. Instead, the current law forces them into a difficult choice as they cannot afford to lose their valuable Medicaid benefits. They should be incentivized to be as successful as they can be- not penalized.

We would like to see a lifting of the cap on the Earned Income Disregard as reflected in House Bill 1668. A Medicaid Buy In Program as set forth herein also will go a long way towards fulfilling the promise of community integration for people with disabilities



The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of SB2275, Relating to Persons with Disabilities

The Hawai'i Self-Advocacy Advisory Council(SAAC) strongly supports SB2275. This bill requires the Department of Human Services to create a Medicaid buy-in program for workers with disabilities and to set the rules for how it will work.

Right now, many people with disabilities face a “benefits cliff,” where earning more money can cause them to lose Medicaid—even though they still need the long-term services and supports Medicaid provides. A buy-in program fixes this by allowing people to keep their Medicaid coverage while working, as long as they pay an affordable premium. This supports independence, stability, and full participation in the community.

SB2275 gives workers with disabilities a clear and fair way to stay employed without risking the care they need. It follows the Legislature’s intent in Kal’s Law and ensures people are not forced to choose between working and keeping essential services.

For these reasons, the Hawaii Self-Advocacy Advisory Council strongly supports SB2275.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Renken". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "T" and a stylized "R".

Timothy Renken,

President, Hawaii Self-Advocacy Advisory Council

09 February 2026

Dear Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story as a Hawai‘i resident living with a disability and to explain how SB 2275, which would establish a Medicaid Buy-In program in Hawai‘i, would be life-changing for myself and others with disabilities. My name is Janelle Fiesta, and I am writing in strong support of SB 2275.

SB 2275 would require the Department of Human Services to establish a Medicaid Buy-In program for workers with disabilities. The bill would also require the Department to adopt rules to implement the program.

I was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, and I was diagnosed with a rare neuromuscular disease called Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type II at one year old. I am now 30 years old, and I have a lot more life to live.

As a result of SMA, I have lost most of my motor function and cannot perform many physical tasks independently. Activities such as getting out of bed, using the bathroom, bathing, dressing, and getting to work all require assistance. I use a power wheelchair to navigate the world and rely on caregivers every day to help me with activities of daily living. Because of this, Medicaid is essential to my survival. Through Medicaid, I receive caregiving attendant services that make it possible for me to live and work in the community. I am deeply grateful for this support. However, significant barriers remain for people with disabilities who want to work while maintaining access to Medicaid.

No one should have to choose between keeping lifesaving health care and maintaining meaningful employment. Unfortunately, this is the reality for many working people with disabilities in Hawai‘i today.

People with disabilities rely on Medicaid for services such as home-based care, caregiving attendant services, medication, and durable medical equipment. Employer-based insurance does not cover many of these essential supports and often fails to cover the high cost of medications and equipment. At the same time, earning a modest income is not enough to offset the added costs of living with a disability. Outdated policies effectively punish people with disabilities for wanting to work, earn their own money, and save for their futures.

Current Medicaid eligibility rules prevent many of us from working full-time, accepting promotions, earning raises, or even receiving bonuses, because any increase in income can jeopardize our Medicaid coverage. Each increase in income triggers strict eligibility reviews to

ensure we do not exceed outdated limits. As a result, many of us make personal sacrifices and limit our potential out of fear of losing lifesaving Medicaid services due to eligibility requirements enacted in the past. I personally find this reality dehumanizing and unjust.

I strongly support a full earned income disregard, but my greatest hope is that Kal's Law is fully realized. People with disabilities should be able to work, build modest savings, and plan for the future without the constant fear of losing Medicaid. Saving for housing, emergencies, and long-term stability is a shared human experience, and people with disabilities should not be excluded from it.

Kal's Law recognized that if income changes alone did not remove employment barriers, Hawai'i should continue exploring a Medicaid Buy-In program. I am truly grateful to Senator San Buenaventura for honoring that commitment year after year by introducing legislation to move a Medicaid Buy-In program in our state forward. Her leadership has kept this issue focused on the original promise of Kal's Law: that people with disabilities should be able to work without losing the support that makes employment possible.

If a full earned income disregard cannot be fully implemented, a Medicaid Buy-In program becomes essential. It would allow people like me to continue working, growing professionally, and contributing to our communities while paying a reasonable premium to retain the Medicaid services we rely on every day.

I urgently and respectfully ask for your support in passing SB 2275.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very Respectfully,

Janelle Fiesta

LATE

Iris SB2275 Testimony

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Iris Xiao.

Thank you for letting me share my testimony.

I am writing in support of SB2275.

I live in Oahu.

I am a self-advocate with the Self-Advocacy Advisory Council.

This bill is important to me because:

Without the Medicaid buy-in program, right now, working and making money makes me feel uncertain, and it feels unfair. I really would like to work a job so that I could be more a part of the community and can earn my own money. As someone with disabilities, I often need more support to help me work. If I were to work, it would matter how much money I make. If the Medicaid buy-in were passed, I would feel more secure, and I would be determined to earn money to support myself and have a more positive perspective on life.

I am in support of SB2275.

Thank you for listening and for your time,

Iris Xiao

LATE

SB-2275

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 5:07:01 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Safranski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in full support!

LATE

SB-2275

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 7:50:22 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Buenaventura and Committee Members

My name is Leilani Kailiawa. I am a parent of child with multiple disabilities and a community leader.

I am in strong support of this bill, which requires the Department of Human Services to establish a Medicaid buy-in program for workers with disabilities and required the Department to adopt rules.

Mahalo nui loa for your time

With gratitude

Leilani Kailiawa