



DATE: February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022

To: Representative Nakashima, Chair  
Representative Matayoshi, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

Re: HB2293, Prevent Suicide Hawaii Task Force

Hearing: Tuesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, 2:00pm, Via videoconference

The Hawai'i Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 450 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawai'i through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy. Additionally, HPHA aims to call attention to issues around social justice and equity in areas that extend beyond the traditional context of health (e.g., education, digital equity, cultural sensitivity), which can have profound impacts on health equity and well-being. Therefore, as stewards of public health, HPHA is also advocating for equity in all policies.

The passage of this bill, which codifies the Prevent Suicide Hawaii Taskforce, is an investment in not just suicide prevention efforts across the state, but in the lives of those who may be at risk for death by suicide. In Suicide and COVID-19, a report by Mental Health America (MHA), Hawai'i had the highest percentage of individuals reporting suicidal ideation of those who took a depression screening.<sup>1</sup> The report further notes that Hawai'i had the fifth highest percentage of individuals reporting frequent thoughts of suicide or self-harm in comparison to the overall state population. This report, which analyzed more than 700,000 online depression screenings, found that 41% (622 of 1,529) of Hawai'i residents who participated had indications of suicidal ideation more than half or nearly every day. Also, according to the Hawaii Department of Health's EMS & Injury Prevention System Branch, death by suicide is the leading cause of fatal injury for ages 15-29 and 30-44; and the second leading cause for age groups 45-59 and 60-74 statewide. Of the 4,251 causes of fatal injuries between 2016 and 2020, 957 (23%) were the result of suicide, the second leading cause of fatal injury in that period.

Considering the above, and the fact that that someone in Hawaii dies by suicide every other day, a recognized strategic and collaborative effort towards prevention is critical.

**We strongly support HB2293 and respectfully ask that you pass this measure.** Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue affecting members of our community.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Holly Kessler  
Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> Reinert, M & Nguyen, T (May 2021). Suicide and COVID-19: Communities in Need Across the U.S. Mental Health America, Alexandria VA.