



March 18, 2022

To: COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES, & HOMELESSNESS
Rep. Ryan I. Yamane, Chair
Rep. Adrian K. Tam, Vice Chair

Re: Testimony in Support of SB 2634 SD1 RELATING TO HEALTH

Hrg: March 18, 2022, 9:30 AM conference room 329

Dear Chair Yamane, Vice Chair Tam, and Members of the Committee,

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. As stewards of public health, HPHA is also advocating for equity in all policies.

HPHA strongly supports SB 2634 SD1, relating to health. This bill provides the needed support to improve health care for pregnant people by appropriating moneys to extend Medicaid postpartum coverage to 12 months following the end of pregnancy. Adequate postpartum coverage will allow individuals the opportunity to optimize their health and take care of their families.

According to the *Advancing Maternal Health Equity and Reducing Maternal Morbidity and Mortality* report from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine the United States faces an alarmingly high rate of maternal morbidity and mortality.¹ This report, along with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), and many state Maternal Mortality Review Committees, have specifically recommended 12 months of postpartum coverage to decrease maternal morbidity and mortality.² Nationally, reducing maternal mortality is a priority with two bills introduced in Congress (Build Back Better Act and Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act) that include extending Medicaid coverage to 12 months postpartum.

Fifty (50) percent of the maternal deaths in Hawai'i in 2015 and 2016 were in the late postpartum period (43 days – 1years after pregnancy).³ The Hawai'i Maternal Mortality Review Committee determined over half of Hawai'i's maternal deaths were preventable.³ In addition, addressing morbidity is important as there are over 100 life-threatening complications related to pregnancy for every 1 maternal death.⁴ The postpartum period then is an essential time for the management of chronic conditions, especially for individuals who experience complications of mental health, high



blood pressure and diabetes. The postpartum period is also an optimal time to address preventive health and family planning.

This bill also has significant impact on promoting health equity as maternal mortality and severe morbidity exhibits racial, ethnic and geographical disparities.¹ Migrant and immigrant populations, and low-income individuals are at the highest risk for lapses in care and inadequate postpartum coverage. Extending Medicaid coverage for pregnant people for a full year after the end of pregnancy is a first step to eliminating health care disparities and improving health outcomes.

The American Rescue Plan Act, signed into law in March 2021, makes available a new pathway that states can use to extend Medicaid coverage for pregnant people to 12 months postpartum, signaling a commitment by the Biden Administration for this issue. This pathway – called a state plan amendment (SPA) – becomes effective April 2022. This is an opportunity to get federal dollars to improve healthcare in Hawai'i.

We strongly support SB 2634 SD1. Providing extended, uninterrupted health care coverage into the postpartum period so that pregnant and birthing people can access screening, counseling and treatment will improve the health of the most vulnerable of the families and children of Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Holly Kessler
Executive Director
Hawai'i Public Health Association

1. *Advancing Maternal Health Equity and Reducing Maternal Morbidity and Mortality: Proceedings of a Workshop 2021.* The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. <http://nap.edu/26307>
2. *Extend Postpartum Pregnancy Coverage*, Policy Priority, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist. <https://www.acog.org/advocacy/policy-priorities/extend-postpartum-medicaid-coverage>
3. Hawaii Department of Health. Report to the 30th Legislature, State of Hawaii, 2019.
4. *Pregnancy-Related Deaths.* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Published May 7, 2019. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/maternal-deaths/index.html>