



February 13, 2023

To: Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Health & Homelessness

Re: Testimony in Support of HB1448, Related to Asthma

Hrg: 15 Feb 2023, 9:30AM, House Conference room 329 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.

**We strongly support HB1448**, which will authorize the Department of Education to stock short-acting bronchodilators (rescue inhalers) for emergency use during an acute asthma attack and authorize department employees to volunteer to administer bronchodilators. Asthma impacts millions of lives and has a tremendous impact on our nation's healthcare system and economy. In the U.S., over 25 million Americans, including 5.1 million children have asthma.<sup>1</sup> In Hawaii, 21,411 children have asthma<sup>2</sup>, which can be made worse due to our environmental factors, such as cockroaches, vog, and allergies.

Because asthma attacks can occur anytime and often without warning, children with asthma should always have access to medication that can quickly reverse the blockages in their lungs. This life-saving medication, called a short-acting bronchodilator, is easy to administer, inexpensive, and very safe. When children do not have asthma medication, which can occur for a variety of reasons such as forgetting it or not being able to afford it, schools have few options. A delay during the administration of bronchodilators usually results in an asthma attack worsening and, in such cases, the school must call 911.

These adverse events are largely avoidable with a simple low-cost solution: stock medication or inhalers. According to the American Lung Association, one study demonstrated that 84% of students returned to the classroom after an asthma event when provided a stock inhaler. Schools can use a single inhaler containing a short-acting bronchodilator along with inexpensive disposable spacers that can be used for anyone who experiences the sudden onset of cough, shortness-of-breath, and chest tightness that signals an asthma attack.

**Additionally, it is critical as outlined in the proposed legislation that school staff other than school nurses are trained in the signs and symptoms of asthma and when it is appropriate to administer the rescue medications.** Unfortunately, in Hawaii there is not a school nurse present in every school. Because of the safety of bronchodilators and the life-threatening implications of an asthma attack, it is vital that we train other staff to assess, access and administer the required medication that would potentially save a student's life.



**HB1448 also provides important liability protection for the prescriber, the school and the person who administers the medication in good faith.** As previously mentioned, the medication used for treatment of asthma attacks is safe and effective.

We strongly support HB 1448 and respectfully ask that you pass this measure to ensure that our keiki with asthma have access to life saving rescue inhalers and staff who is prepared to provide the required medication.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue affecting youth in our communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Holly Kessler  
Executive Director

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1 CDC. 2019 National Health Interview Survey.  
2 CDC. 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.