



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 2280 S.D. 2  
RELATING TO DENTAL ASSISTANTS.**

REPRESENTATIVE RYAN I. YAMANE, CHAIR  
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES, & HOMELESSNESS  
Hearing Date: 3/15/2022 Room Number: CR 329 & Via  
Videoconference

1 **Fiscal Implications:** None

2 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health supports S.B. 2280, S.D. 2, which allows  
3 dental assistants to perform limited, essential duties under the general supervision of a dentist in  
4 public health settings.

5 The Department agrees with allowing dental assistants to provide limited, but essential dental  
6 auxiliary support for dental hygienists under the general supervision of a dentist in a public  
7 health setting. This would contribute to the development and sustainability of community-based  
8 oral health programs in our State such as the virtual dental home (teledentistry) and school-based  
9 dental sealant programs. These programs help to reduce barriers and increase access to dental  
10 services for the most vulnerable and underserved populations by providing services in the  
11 communities where people live, learn, and socialize.

12 This measure will increase the overall capacity and number of dentists permitted to provide  
13 dental services via the community-based oral health models that require general supervision. The  
14 collaborative efforts of private sector and public health dentists will help meet the oral health  
15 needs in our communities and to improve access to dental care for Hawaii residents.

16 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



Hawai'i  
**Children's Action Network Speaks!**  
Building a unified voice for Hawai'i's children

To: Representative Yamane, Chair  
Representative Tam, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Health, Human Services, & Homelessness

Re: **SB 2280 SD2, relating to dental assistants**  
9:00 AM, March 15, 2022

Chair Yamane, Vice Chair Tam, and committee members,

On behalf of HCAN Speaks!, thank you for the opportunity to support the intention of the bill and provide suggested amendments. As a member of the Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition, we support increasing access to oral care and understand that increasing capacity of licensed dental hygienist would assist providers working in public health settings. We suggest making the following changes to ensure the intent of the impact is met.

Increasing the workforce in public health settings by allowing dental assistants to provide limited duties will expand care to vulnerable communities.

**For these reasons, HCAN Speaks! respectfully requests the Committee to support the measure.**

Thank you,

Kathleen Algire  
Director of Early Learning and Health Policy

**Testimony of the Board of Dentistry**

**Before the  
House Committee on Health, Human Services & Homelessness  
Tuesday, March 15, 2022  
9:00 a.m.  
Via Videoconference**

**On the following measure:  
S.B. 2280, S.D. 2, RELATING TO DENTAL ASSISTANTS**

Chair Yamane and Members of the Committee:

My name is Earl Hasegawa, and I am the Chairperson of the Board of Dentistry (Board). The Board supports this bill.

The purpose of this bill is to allow dental assistants to perform limited duties under the general supervision of a dentist in public health settings.

The Board supports this measure as passage of this bill will increase access to dental care for the most vulnerable and underserved populations in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.



## HAWAI'I ORAL HEALTH COALITION

Date: March 15, 2022

To: The Honorable Representative Ryan I. Yamane, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Adrian K. Tam, Vice Chair

Re: Support for SB 2280 SD 2, Relating to Dental Assistants

Hrg: Tuesday, March 15, 2022, at 9:00 am, Conference Room 329 & via Videoconference

---

The Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition<sup>1</sup>, convened by the Hawai'i Public Health Institute, is in **strong support of SB2280 SD 2** which revises the Dental Practice Act to allow dental assistants to perform limited, essential duties in public health settings under general supervision of a dentist.

Oral health is essential to overall physical, psychological, social, and economic wellbeing. The oral health in our state is a public health crisis, with Hawaii having the highest prevalence of dental caries in children and adults nationally. Almost one quarter of Hawaii's children have untreated tooth decay. More than 60% of children in Hawai'i do not have protective dental sealants and about 71% Hawaii third graders are affected by tooth decay, which is substantially higher than the national average of 51%.<sup>2</sup>

Oral health disparities are more pronounced among uninsured and low-income families, intellectually and developmentally disabled residents, the elderly, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations and those on the Neighbor Islands. Hawai'i is one of only 16 states in which adults on Medicaid are not covered for diagnostic, preventive and restorative care.<sup>3</sup> Additional unique factors that contribute to oral health disparities in Hawai'i are geographic isolation, lack of community water fluoridation, low percentage of dentists actively accepting Medicaid patients, ethnically diverse populations, and a lack of a dental school in the state.

There are community-based care delivery programs across the state that are making an attempt to address the overwhelming disparities in oral health, such as school-based dental sealant programs and virtual dental home initiatives, or teledentistry. However, the limited oral health workforce allowed in public health settings has hindered the sustainability and viability of these community-based programs. While the Hawai'i Dental Practice Act allows dental hygienists to practice under general supervision of dentist in a public health setting, no dental auxiliary support can be provided by dental assistants because direct supervision is required. This affects the efficiency and production of the dental hygienists when practicing in a public health setting leading to fewer dental services provided to vulnerable communities. Currently, 17 states allow some tasks to be performed by dental assistants under indirect or general supervision and eight states allow performance of some tasks under indirect or general supervision and do not require licensure, registration, or representation on the Board of Dentistry.<sup>4</sup>

As Hawai'i continues to see poor oral health outcomes among our vulnerable populations, we must continue to enhance our approach to increase access to care and improve delivery of services in our communities. The 2015 Hawai'i Oral Health Key Findings report, by the State Department of Health, provides several recommendations<sup>5</sup> for consideration and to address oral health disparities and outcomes, including:

- Develop effective, evidence-based community and school-based dental disease prevention programs for all age groups, particularly those who are experiencing oral health disparities.
- Continue to support and expand affordable and accessible preventive dental care services to Hawaii's low-income population.
- Develop strategies to reduce barriers to finding and receiving preventive dental care services for children enrolled in the Medicaid program.
- Explore innovative, evidenced-based strategies to expand access to underserved, high-risk populations, including tele-dentistry.

Each of these recommendations require adequate workforce in order to provide effective oral health care. Allowing dental assistants to perform limited, essential duties in public health settings under the general supervision of a dentist is a meaningful and supported approach to addressing the oral health disparities in Hawai'i.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask you to pass SB2280 SD 2. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,



Patrick Donnelly  
Statewide Oral Health Coalition Manager  
Hawai'i Public Health Institute

---

<sup>1</sup> The Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition (HOHC) is community driven and led with fiscal sponsorship from the Hawaii Public Health Institute. Its members represent all Hawai'i islands and diverse sectors across the State. The mission of the Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition is to improve the overall health and wellbeing of all Hawai'i residents by increasing access and equity in oral health care through collaborative partnerships, advocacy, and education.

<sup>2</sup> Hawaii State Department of Health. Hawaii Smiles 2015. August 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits Coverage by State. Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc. September 2019.

<sup>4</sup> The Dental Assistant Workforce in the United States 2015. Oral Health Workforce Research Center. October 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Hawai'i Oral Health: Key Findings, Hawai'i Department of Health. August 2015.



To: The Honorable Ryan I. Yamane, Chair  
The Honorable Adrian K. Tam, Vice-Chair  
House Committee on Health, Human Services & Homelessness

From: Peggy Mierzwa, Community and Government Relations

HRG: Tuesday, March 15, 2022

RE: **SB2280 SD2 Relating to Dental Assistants**

---

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to support **SB2280 SD2** Relating to Dental Assistants. This measure would allow dental assistants to operate under the supervision of a dentist in public health settings.

Founded in 1994 by Hawai'i's community health centers, AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan serving 80,000 Medicaid and dual-eligible health plan members on all islands. We are the only health plan in Hawai'i that exclusively serves Medicaid beneficiaries. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for access to quality health care for all. We believe that health is about supporting whole-person care.

In Hawai'i there are still disparities to overcome in order for all residents to receive oral health care. In particular, children and adults who rely on Medicaid health insurance are not receiving the oral health care they need. According to "Hawaii Oral Health: Key Findings" vulnerable Hawai'i residents are not receiving preventative oral care, instead treatments are reactive such as tooth extractions and fillings.

Hawai'i has been making great strides in addressing disparities in oral care through community-based care delivered in public settings statewide. These programs include school-based dental sealant programs and virtual dental home initiatives or teledentistry. Even with these great successes, Hawai'i residents, especially on neighbor islands and the rural areas of Oahu, face challenges because of the limits placed on providers in public health settings.

SB2280 SD1 helps to address these limitations by allowing dental assistants to perform limited, essential duties in public health settings.

Mahalo for this opportunity to provide testimony in **support of SB2280 SD2**.



## Hawaii Dental Association

To: House Committee on Health, Human Services, and Homelessness  
Time/Date: 9:00 a.m., March 15, 2022  
Location: State Capitol via Video Conference  
Re: SB 2280, SD2, Relating to Dental Assistants

Aloha Chair Yamane, Vice-Chair Tam, and members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Dental Association (HDA) is in support of SB 2280, SD2, Relating to Dental Assistants. This bill allows dental assistants to perform limited duties in public health settings under general supervision of a licensed dentist. **For clarity, we suggest specifying that the supervising dentist must be licensed in Hawaii.**

HDA is committed to ensuring patient safety and promoting oral health for our community. Among many initiatives, we have been working collaboratively with stakeholder participants in the Hawaii Oral Health Coalition. At the request of advocates from the public health setting, HOHC crafted a preliminary version of this bill. We support and will continue to actively participate in the coalition's public policy efforts.

Oral health is essential for overall health and wellness. One cannot be healthy without a healthy mouth. It can show signs of nutritional deficiencies or general infection. Systemic diseases, those that affect the entire body, may first become apparent because of mouth lesions or other oral problems. This bill seeks to increase access to sufficient dental care, especially those in native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. The high rate of tooth decay among Hawaii's children, which can lead to pain that interferes with daily activities, is of the highest degree of importance to the Hawaii Dental Association and its members. Untreated cavities also increase the risk of more serious infection in the mouth and body. We welcome an opportunity to engage in dialog on this measure and to serve as a resource to policy makers on oral health.

HDA is a statewide membership organization representing dentists practicing in Hawaii and licensed by the State of Hawaii's Board of Dentistry. HDA members are committed to protecting the oral health and well-being of the people of Hawaii, from keiki to kupuna and everyone in between.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2280, SD2.