

March 1, 2024

House Committee on Ways and Means

Hearing Time: 9:55 AM

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 211

Re: SB3094 SD1, Relating to Peer Support Specialists

Aloha e Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi hui, we are writing in **strong support** of SB3094 SD1, relating to peer support specialists. This bill establishes a working group to create a statewide framework for peer support specialists. It appropriates funds for hiring an administrative facilitator to provide necessary support for the peer support specialist working group in carrying out its duties and compensation for peer support specialists on the working group for time spent on working group meetings and related work and travel expenses. The bill declares that the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded, and takes effect on 7/1/2112.

The inclusion of peer support specialists in mental health care has been show to be immensely beneficial. These individuals bring unique perspectives and experiences that traditional mental health professionals may not possess. By establishing a statewide framework for peer support specialists, we are acknowledging the importance of lived experience in mental health recovery and fostering a system that is more holistic and inclusive. These experiences introduce a wealth of empathy and understanding into a system that often feels deeply isolating. Further, peer support specialists can foster deeper relatability and trust by offering the ear of someone who has walked a similar path, and can then help break down barriers and build trust more quickly than with traditional mental health professionals.

The appropriation of funds for hiring an administrative facilitator to support the peer working group is essential, as this individual will play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth functioning of the group and in providing necessary support for its members. Compensation is also vital to recognize the valuable time and expertise the team members will contribute to this important initiative.

Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi is a collaboration of organizations and individuals committed to reducing the harmful effects of a punitive incarceration system for youth; promoting equity in the justice system; and improving and increasing resources to address adolescent and young adult mental health needs. We seek to improve the continuity of programs and services for youth and young adults transitioning from minor to adult status; eliminate youth houselessness and housing market discrimination against young adults; and promote and fund more holistic and culturally informed approaches among public/private agencies serving youth.

**Please support SB3094 SD1.**

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