

March 27, 2024

House Committee on Finance

Hearing Time: 3:30 PM

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 308

Re: SB3094 SD2 HD1, Relating to Peer Support Specialists

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi hui, we are writing in **strong support** of SB3094 SD2 HD1, 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. The bill takes effect on 7/1/2112.

Importantly, the working group requires the participation of an individual with lived experience as a child or youth in the welfare system, an individual with lived experience in the juvenile justice system or the adult correctional system, two caregivers with lived experience as the caregiver of a child or youth in the relevant systems, an individual with lived experience with recovery from substance abuse and experience with homelessness, and an individual with lived experience navigating the mental health system as a child, youth, or adult.

The inclusion of peer support specialists in mental health care has been shown 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 acknowledge 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 breadth of lived experience of the individuals listed above will ensure a comprehensive address of many aspects of the justice system, and will uplift the voices of those communities in decision-making processes–an essential aspect of a fair and just democracy.

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 SD2 HD1.**

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