



HAWAII COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

**The Senate**

STATE CAPITOL  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**HAWAII'S SB 2482 SIGNED INTO LAW, CREATING NATION'S FIRST  
STATEWIDE-LEGISLATED OFFICE OF WELLNESS & RESILIENCE**

*Office to prioritize wellness and resilience within state departments and create a trauma-informed state to better serve local families and improve community health.*

**Honolulu, Hawai'i** – Senator Donovan Dela Cruz (Senate District 22 - Mililani Mauka, Waipi'o Acres, Wheeler, Wahiawa, and Whitmore Village) joined Kamehameha Schools, the Hawai'i Community Foundation, and numerous community organizations to announce that [Senate Bill 2482](#), now [Act 291](#), was signed into law, creating the first statewide-legislated Office of Wellness & Resilience (OWR) in the nation.

Senator Dela Cruz issued the following statement:

“Trauma is often referenced as the ‘Hidden Epidemic’ and has directly contributed to the suicide, addiction, domestic abuse, mental illness, and chronic health conditions. Trauma does not discriminate; it affects individuals, families, and communities of all ethnicities and socio-economic statuses across our state. Here at home, 34.7% of Hawai'i women and 24.1% of Hawai'i men experience intimate partner physical or sexual violence and intimate partner stalking in their lifetimes. Every day, 5,973 people across our islands are experiencing homelessness. In a recent survey of identified sex trafficking survivors here in Hawai'i, 23% reported that they were children when they were first sex trafficked. Furthermore, 25% reported that their first sex trafficker was a family member (parent, guardian, sibling, grandfather, or uncle). By sponsoring legislation for the Statewide Trauma Informed Task Force (ACT209) in 2021 and introducing SB2482 (ACT291) to establish the Office of Wellness & Resilience, we are committing to create a trauma-informed state that will better serve our families and improve community health and wellness outcomes. This office will ensure that every keiki, kūpuna, and resident of this state has access to safe, caring individuals and vital resources to live a healthy and thriving life here in Hawai'i.”

Trauma-informed care is an approach based on the growing knowledge of the impact of psychological trauma and how common it is in our communities. It aims to ensure a welcoming and engaging environment and services for service recipients and staff. Examples of trauma include experiencing or observing physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; neglect; having a family member with a mental health or substance use disorder; experiencing or witnessing violence, and poverty and systemic discrimination.

Research shows that experiences in the first few years of life build change into the biology of the human body that, in turn, influence a person's lifelong physical, mental and spiritual health. Trauma can lead to incalculable human and economic costs if not appropriately treated. Lifelong impacts include increased risks for poor physical and mental health and alcoholism and drug abuse and increased state spending across multiple programs linked to lifetime costs of approximately \$200,000 per person.

"We've known the suffering many of us struggle with, including historical and cultural traumas, has very real effects on our health status individually and as a whole," said Tia Roberts Hartsock, chair of the Act 209 Trauma Informed Care Task Force. "We better understand how long-existing traumas, as well as newer community traumas like COVID-19, impact how we respond to stress, and we are striving to map out ways we can connect our state's workforce and the families we serve to practices that promote wellness and build resilience."

This new Office of Wellness & Resilience will:

- Identify unmet needs and challenges encountered by the departments, and those they serve, related to health disparities and trauma-informed care implementation and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Seek federal funding solutions and evaluate state funding priorities relating to trauma and trauma-informed care;
- Establish a procurement team to streamline existing department grants and funding management related to social determinants of health and trauma-informed care initiatives;
- Create a "social determinants of health" electronic dashboard to identify baseline needs that impede quality-of-life outcomes;
- Interact with community agencies, organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure the needs and wellness requirements of communities are met throughout the state;
- Address and implement solutions recommended by the Act 209 Trauma Informed Care Task Force

This bill, establishing the Office of Wellness & Resilience, was supported by the Departments of Health and Human Services and more than 30 Hawai'i child and family-serving organizations who provided testimony around the need for a statewide response to prioritize wellness and build resilience for all communities in Hawai'i.

"Prioritizing the well-being and resilience of our kids and families signified by the establishment of this office is something for Hawai'i to be very proud of," said Lauren Nahme, vice president of Strategy & Transformation at Kamehameha Schools. "When the hearts and minds of our keiki

are well-supported, healthy, and whole, it places them in the best position to thrive in school, their community, and their home.”

“Establishing the Office of Wellness & Resilience is a transformative act that will help to unify public agencies and community organizations and leverage governmental and community resources and expertise to address adversity, trauma, and toxic stress for all that need it—from keiki to kūpuna,” shared Michelle Ka‘uhane, senior vice president and chief impact officer at the Hawai‘i Community Foundation. “Since the pandemic started, there has been added stress to Hawai‘i’s families, nonprofits, and social services. The Office of Wellness & Resilience catalyzes a third way of working to alleviate that stress through increased collaboration to ensure all individuals and families have access to the trauma-informed support they need. Undoubtedly this type of public-private solution will benefit the overall health and wellness of the people of Hawai‘i.”

[Click here to view photos from the press conference.](#)

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