

Support SB 2482 to foster a healthy, stable community



SB2482 is a transformative bill that would establish an **Office of Wellness and Resilience**. This new coordinating entity will unify public agencies and community organizations, leveraging resources and expertise to address early adversity, trauma, and toxic stress for whomever needs it—from keiki to kūpuna. It is a major step in building an inclusive mental health system.

In December 2021, US Surgeon General Murthy issued a call to action to address the mental health challenges—intensified by the pandemic—confronting youth nationally. Research shows 52% of children in families with financial hardship are facing emotional distress. SB2482 can help address this growing crisis in Hawai‘i.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has added stress to Hawai‘i’s families, nonprofit social service, health, and early childhood providers have shouldered much of the burden to assist them. This segmented scenario can make the path to securing help complicated for already struggling families.

It is time to increase collaboration to ensure all families have access to the support they need. The Office of Wellness and Resilience would support the missions of the many existing programs and the families they serve in an organized, strategic manner.

Why we need SB 2482:

- Since the pandemic started, State of Hawai‘i Early Intervention Services has seen a dramatic decline in infant and toddler social and emotional development.
- Children under age six have a similar rate of mental illness as older children and youth.
- 75% of adults with serious mental illness are parents.
- Hawai‘i has the nation’s largest percentage (41%) of self-reported suicide thoughts among people who took an online depression screening during the pandemic.
- Half of providers work with families and children that have experienced exposure to domestic violence and emotional abuse.
- In early childhood settings—child care, home visiting, early intervention, early Head Start—there is a shortage of practitioners trained or specializing in trauma-informed care.
- Practitioners believe an increase in trained, trauma-informed care professionals would ensure that children and families do not get lost when navigating systems.

What SB 2482 will do:

- Focus on solutions identified by the Department of Health’s Trauma-Informed Care Task Force, created by the Legislature in 2021 to make recommendations on trauma-informed care.
- Encourage major departments working with families and individuals within the state to become trauma informed.
- Create a dynamic, coordinated effort across public agencies and community organizations to address early adversity, trauma, and toxic stress.
- Facilitate training of practitioners such as therapists and other mental health professionals.
- Increase capability to respond to early intervention needs on all islands.
- Open up funding opportunities for which Hawai‘i currently does not qualify by fostering collaboration between state, city, and community agencies.

Why focus on trauma?

Trauma is any event or series of events that is experienced or witnessed by an individual and has long-lasting social, physical, spiritual, or psychological effects. Research shows that experiences in the first few years of life build changes into the biology of the human body that, in turn, influence a person’s lifelong physical, mental, and spiritual health. Traumatic childhood experiences such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; untreated mental illness; incarceration of a household member; domestic violence; and separation or divorce involving household members can have a profound effect on a child’s developing brain and body. Trauma is pervasive and if not treated properly, can lead to incalculable human costs and enormous economic costs. Lifelong impacts include increased risks for poor physical and mental health and alcoholism and drug abuse, as well as increased state spending across multiple programs, linked to lifetime costs of approximately \$200,000 per child. The good news is that trauma can be addressed through individual, family, and community healing, and that in turn contributes to overall health and wellness.

