

SB-2589

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Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
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Comments:

Testimony on SB2589**RELATING TO ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE**

Wednesday, February 4, 1:01 PM

Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

State Capitol - 415 South Beretania Street

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair McKelvey, and members of the committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify. My name is Girard “Jerry” Perone, and I live in Kaka‘ako. I am an Alzheimer’s Association Ambassador in Hawai‘i, and I’m here in strong support of SB2589.

Alzheimer’s is not a statistic in my life. It is the slowest kind of loss — watching someone you love disappear inch by inch while their body is still sitting right in front of you.

I have already lost my mother-in-law, Gladys, to Alzheimer’s dementia. I also lost a close friend, Rich, to Parkinson’s dementia. And right now I’m watching another family endure it as my friend John cares for his wife, Myrna.

In every one of those stories, the beginning looked “small.” A forgotten word. A missed appointment. A strange detour. A question repeated. But that early stage is where families either get help early — or fall into months of confusion, delay, and crisis.

Gladys was strong, independent, and the heart of our family. Then the slips began quietly. She started calling us for directions to our home — a place she had visited countless times. She began eating the same meal every night because she could no longer remember how to cook anything else. She got lost just a mile from her house.

And then came a moment my family will carry forever: her husband — her partner of 60 years — walked into the room, and she looked at him like he was a stranger. Not angry. Not confused. Just blank. A lifetime suddenly unrecognized. We lost her long before she died.

During those early months we needed one thing above all: a clear, compassionate, step-by-step path. What does this symptom mean? What assessments should we ask for? Who can evaluate her? How do we plan for safety, medications, driving, and the home? What resources exist right now — not “eventually” — and who will help us connect to them? We did not have that. We pieced it together with late nights, fear, and second-guessing.

That’s why SB2589 is so important. Hawai‘i is facing a growing dementia crisis. Today, more than 31,000 Hawai‘i residents are living with Alzheimer’s disease, and this number is expected to double by 2050 as our population ages. Many families, especially on neighbor islands and in rural communities, struggle to access timely diagnosis, care planning, or memory care services. This leads to delayed or missing treatment windows, avoidable emergencies, and significant emotional and financial strain.

SB2589 offers a practical, statewide solution: the HANAI Memory Network. It creates Dementia Care Specialists in every county and builds a coordinated navigation system so families can get to early, accurate diagnosis and to the right supports sooner. It brings memory care closer to home by strengthening statewide capacity and enabling partnerships that expand access — rather than forcing each family to reinvent the wheel.

To be clear: HANAI is not just a program name. It is the difference between “We think something is wrong” and “Here is what to do next.” It is the difference between a caregiver breaking down alone at midnight and a caregiver who has a number to call — a trained guide who knows the system, the services, and the next step.

For neighbor island families, that difference is even more urgent. A family on Maui, Hawai‘i Island, Kaua‘i, Moloka‘i, or Lāna‘i may have to fly for specialty care, take time off work, coordinate child care, and pay out of pocket just to get an evaluation. Delay isn’t only painful here; it is logistical and financial. And every month of delay is a month of progression.

Early detection and coordinated support can change the trajectory. It can reduce crisis-driven ER visits, help families plan for safety before something happens, connect people to specialists and treatments sooner, and keep kūpuna safer at home longer with dignity.

I respectfully urge you to PASS SB2589 and keep the program and funding intact. Please ensure the Dementia Care Specialists are empowered to serve neighbor islands equitably, coordinate with primary care, and connect families to culturally responsive resources. Measure success by outcomes families can feel: fewer months of waiting, fewer avoidable emergencies, fewer dangerous wandering incidents, and more time living safely — together.

Alzheimer’s steals time — first from the person, then from the whole family. SB2589 gives Hawai‘i families something precious back: a guide, a plan, and a fighting chance before the worst day arrives.

Mahalo for your time and for your leadership.

Girard “Jerry” Perone

Kaka‘ako, Honolulu

Alzheimer’s Association Ambassador (Hawai‘i)