

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB2259 HD1

Relating to the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism

Committee: House Committee on Finance

Hearing: Thursday, April 2, 2026 | 2:00 p.m. | Conference Room 308

Position: Strong Support

Submitted by: Girard Perone

*Ambassador for the Alzheimer's Association of Hawai'i
Kaka'ako resident*

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

I strongly support SB2259 HD1 because it gives Hawai'i a practical, business-friendly way to respond to a fast-growing dementia challenge. Hawai'i's frequently quoted 31,200 figure is a 2020 estimate. A more current planning figure is about 35,100 older Hawai'i residents living with Alzheimer's, while the Department of Health is publicly using a simpler statewide figure of about 35,000 residents affected. Using Hawai'i's recent age structure and national age-specific incidence rates, a reasonable planning estimate is roughly 585 new Alzheimer's cases - and at least 725 new dementia cases overall - emerging every month or about 7,000 to 8500 new cases per year. This is no longer a narrow issue; it affects local families, employers, frontline workers, and communities across our state.

For Finance, SB2259 is a smart, low-burden investment. The program is straightforward: businesses complete a one-hour dementia-friendly training from approved organizations and can then receive public recognition through badges, decals, and state website listings. That simple structure makes the program visible, measurable, and easy to join while leveraging existing community expertise instead of building a large new bureaucracy. It gives employees practical tools to respond calmly and appropriately when a customer is confused, disoriented, struggling with communication, or overwhelmed, helping prevent misunderstandings and avoidable crises.

The business benefits are real. Dementia affects not only households, but also Hawai'i's workforce, retail sector, service sector, and visitor industry. A dementia-capable business environment improves customer service, strengthens public trust, reduces stress in frontline interactions, and helps Hawai'i remain a welcoming place for residents and visitors alike. It also gives caregivers more confidence to shop, dine, travel, and participate in community life when they know businesses are prepared to respond with patience, respect, and aloha.

The public benefits are just as important. More dementia-capable communities mean greater dignity for kūpuna, better support for caregivers, and a better quality of life for families throughout the islands. Hawai'i's broader dementia-planning efforts emphasize earlier support, stronger caregiver and provider support, more equal access, and fewer avoidable ER visits and hospitalizations. SB2259 advances those goals in a visible, practical, community-based way.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass SB2259 HD1. Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Girard "Jerry" Perone