

**Testimony on HB1976 HD1
RELATING TO DEMENTIA
Wednesday, March 4, 10:00 AM
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
State Capitol - 415 South Beretania Street**

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the committee,

My name is Barbara Black and I live in Ninole on the Big Island. My spouse, Peter, is living with Alzheimer's and I am his caretaker. I strongly support HB1976 which would require annual dementia training for first responders across the state to ensure the safety of those living with Alzheimer's. And I note that this training is provided by the Alzheimer's Association at no cost to the State.

It breaks my heart to think of Peter wandering somewhere, confused and possibly frightened, being treated harshly and without compassion. I remember a neighbor, out walking and clearly unaware of who we were but who took our hands with a smile as we walked her to her home. And while most people are kind and caring when they see an uncertain and possibly lost person, and I am always grateful to be living on this wonderful island, that may not always be the case.

Hawai'i has more than 31,000 residents living with Alzheimer's disease, and many remain in their homes and communities. As dementia progresses, people may become confused, disoriented, frightened, or unable to communicate clearly. Six in ten people living with dementia will wander, often repeatedly, and may get lost even in familiar places. When first responders encounter someone with dementia who is scared or unable to understand commands, situations can escalate quickly.

At the same time, Hawai'i's first responders are dealing with increasing medical emergencies, natural disasters, and more frequent wildfires, all of which require rapid action and clear communication. A person with dementia may not respond in expected ways during an evacuation, a traffic stop, or a medical call, placing both the individual and responders at risk.

This bill simply requires one hour of dementia-specific training each year for first responders. The Alzheimer's Association already provides this training at no cost, and it covers communication techniques, de-escalation strategies, recognizing signs of dementia, and how to safely assist a person who is lost or distressed. This short training can prevent injuries, reduce unnecessary hospitalization, and help responders bring people home safely.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill so that Hawai'i's first responders have the tools they need to interact safely and effectively with people living with dementia, and so families can feel more confident that their loved ones will be treated with understanding and care during an emergency.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,

Barbara Black