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**Date:** October 15, 2021

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**New Pilot Program: Hawaii Dental Service Donates 10,000 Mouthguards to Hawaii's High School Athletes Statewide to Keep Them Safe and Smiling**

Honolulu, Hawaii – Without the proper equipment, contact sports pose potential injuries to the health and wellbeing of student athletes. Hawaii Dental Service (HDS), the state's leading dental benefits provider, is making sure public, private and charter high school athletes throughout the state have access to quality, custom-fit mouthguards to protect their mouth, teeth and jaw, their overall health, and their future.

Hawaii Dental Service is working closely with the State of Hawaii Department of Education, Oahu Interscholastic Association, Interscholastic League of Honolulu, Maui Interscholastic League, Kauai Interscholastic Federation, and the Big Island Interscholastic Federation to distribute nearly 10,000 mouthguards, valued at \$250,000, as a pilot program. These organizations have distributed them to 90 Hawaii high schools for their football and other select sports' student athletes.

"The safety of our students is always a top priority and this donation of fitted mouth guards will provide additional protection for our student athletes," said Keith Hayashi, Interim Superintendent, Hawaii State Department of Education. "We greatly appreciate the generosity of Hawaii Dental Service."

The custom-fit mouthguards are produced by Game On mouthguards. The Game On mouthguard is the only product of its kind that has earned a prestigious Seal of Acceptance from the American Dental Association (ADA) because of the patented material used to manufacture the mouthguards.

The mouthguards are made of a unique and highly durable material that helps absorb shock and limit movement caused by an impact to the jaw. The donated mouthguards can last for years, are perpetually re-moldable, and aquaphobic – they do not retain moisture or bacteria and are unlike standard mouthguards that are aquaphilic and break down gradually with use.

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Studies have also shown that high school football players wearing poorly fit mouthguards were more than twice as likely to suffer concussions or other head injuries than those wearing custom-made, properly fit mouthguards.

“We saw a great need for custom-fit mouthguards among Hawaii’s young athletes and realized we could take preemptive measures to protect their oral health,” said Mark Yamakawa, Hawaii Dental Service President and CEO. “We not only help put a smile on the faces of Hawaii residents; we also make sure they can maintain strong teeth, gums and good overall health.”

“A mouthguard helps to absorb a lot of the impact, especially in the upper region area. It protects their teeth, their mouth, their tongue. It’s an extra safety precaution, especially since concussions are pretty common in football. Mouthguards help to lessen the impact,” said Kekoa Kaluhiokalani, a 1990 graduate of Waianae High School, who returned to his alma mater six years ago to serve as athletic director.

Matt Murakawa, a 1980 Seariders alumnus who played linebacker when he was at Waianae High School, who now serves as interim varsity football head coach, head wrestling coach and math teacher at his alma mater, knows the value of mouthguards firsthand.

“I’ve seen tooth loss from not wearing a mouthguard, but even more importantly, mouthguards can prevent head injuries, concussions in particular,” he said, noting that the athletic department assigned a coach to the football players to make sure each student knew how to properly shape their mouthguards to receive its full protective benefits.

Alvin Kolu Sabagala, a Seariders running back, who is now a senior and has been on the football team since his freshman year, knows that football can be rough.

“I take a lot of hits here and there because I’m going to be running the ball and the mouthpiece protects the inside of my mouth, so I don’t bite my lip or my tongue or lose a tooth,” he said.

Fellow senior, Emmanuel Carter, who is a receiver on the Seariders team, has been using his mouthguard from Hawaii Dental Service to prevent “biting his tongue or messing up his jaw.”

Kaluhiokalani noted that not every student at Waianae High School can afford a mouthguard, and that the school provides one for them.

“It’s definitely an issue for some families, for sure. The school and our administration always want to help out when we can and buy protective gear, whatever sport it is,” he said. “We’ve got to make sure keeping our student athletes safe is our top priority.”

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We make sure that when they step on the field, they're properly equipped and protected.”

“We're happy that we received this donation to share with all of our students so that they can stay protected throughout the season,” Kaluhiokalani added, noting that the Hawaii Dental Service donation will help the school save on the mouthguards so that funds can be used for other programs to support the students.

Murakawa agreed: “We come from an area where people are stretching their dollars every day. So for a donation like this, the impact is huge for our community. We're really grateful for what HDS has provided us and I can't say thank you enough.”

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### **About Hawaii Dental Service**

Hawaii Dental Service (HDS) is the leading dental benefits provider in the state, serving nearly one million residents throughout Hawaii, Guam, and Saipan. It has the largest network of dentists, with more than 95 percent of Hawaii's licensed, practicing dentists participating with HDS.

As a nonprofit founded in Hawaii in 1962, HDS is committed to making quality oral health care affordable and accessible. Employers who offer HDS dental plans to their employees represent Hawaii's diverse industries, companies, unions, associations, and nonprofit organizations. HDS also offers dental plans for individuals and families.

HDS has been a part of Delta Dental, the nation's largest and most experienced dental insurance benefits provider, since 1966. This affiliation gives members access to a nationwide network of participating dentists.

For more information, please visit [HawaiiDentalService.com](http://HawaiiDentalService.com).

### **About the Hawai'i State Department of Education**

Hawai'i's public school system was founded on Oct. 15, 1840, by King Kamehameha III. It is the oldest public school system west of the Mississippi and one of the largest in the country - 294 unique schools on seven islands, with more than 22,000 full-time and 20,000 part-time/casual employees serving over 170,000 students, their families, and the community. Our vision: Hawai'i's students are educated, healthy and joyful lifelong learners who contribute positively to our community and global society. Learn more at [hawaiipublicschools.org](http://hawaiipublicschools.org).