



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
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By

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HB 2249 HD1 – RELATING TO MEDICAID BENEFITS

Chair Luke, Vice-Chair Cullen, and members of the committee:

HB 2249 HD1 appropriates funds to restore diagnostic, preventive and restorative dental benefits to adult Medicaid enrollees. The John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) and the School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene support HB 2249 HD1.

For over a decade the only covered Medicaid benefit with respect to oral health has been for emergency adult dental procedures. Oral disease is a significant health problem among many Hawai'i residents, which in turn affects their overall health and wellbeing. Since 2010, Hawai'i has received a grade of "F" in three oral health report cards published by the Pew Center of the States.

Lack of access to dental coverage and oral healthcare is a health and social justice issue that disproportionately affects the poor, children, elderly, as well as racial, ethnic and minority groups. Studies have shown that reducing or eliminating Medicaid adult dental benefits leads to significant increases in dental-related emergency room visits and associated costs. Similarly, the lack of preventative and restorative dental coverage for Medicaid beneficiaries increases potential healthcare complications and costs for individuals living with diabetes, including an increased incidence of gum disease, increased difficulty controlling diabetes and an increased likelihood of coronary artery disease. These complications lead to increased disability and death. For diabetic Medicaid beneficiaries, increased access to dental care could result in an annual cost savings between \$118,000 and \$1,700,000 according to estimates by the Healthy Policy Institute of the American Dental Association.

Funding dental benefits for adults enrolled in Medicaid will enable those beneficiaries to access dental healthcare. This in turn enhances the overall health and wellness for many in our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this matter.