



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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Senate Committee on Health
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By

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SB 2645 – RELATING TO ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Baker, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. The John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) **supports SB 2645** which permits, but does not require, Medicaid, insurance providers and health maintenance organizations to cover telephonic behavioral health services under certain circumstances.

Since 1999, the use and expansion of telehealth services and technology in Hawai'i has been recognized as a way to increase access and reduce delays to health care, particularly in rural areas of the state. Many of the highest-risk patients reside in Medically Underserved Areas (MUA), are part of Medically Underserved Populations (MUP), or reside in federally-designated health professional shortage areas. Telehealth via telephonic communication benefits many in these communities. Elderly, as well as medically- and socially-complex patients often face transportation barriers and difficulty navigating our collective system of health care. Patients with behavioral health issues are especially vulnerable and frequently require immediate attention. The inability of behavioral health and other patients to access the internet presents an even greater barrier to much needed health care.

One of the realities for Hawai'i is that many of those most in need of telephonic care (limited means to travel, poor or absent internet coverage, residence remote from care providers, infirm with limited mobility, immune compromise in the age of COVID, etc.) suffer the most from a lack of provider reimbursement for telephonic coverage. Without telephonic coverage, these at-risk individuals must travel from their residence to clinics and emergency departments at great personal expense or choose to do without care guidance altogether. SB 2645 is a positive step toward recognizing the value of telephonic health care services.

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