



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committees on Education and Health
Wednesday, March 18, 2015 at 1:15 p.m.

By
Robert Bley-Vroman, Chancellor
And
Jerris R. Hedges, MD, Dean
And
May Okihiro, MD, Professor of Pediatrics
John A. Burns School of Medicine
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 578 HD2 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

Chairs Kidani and Green, Vice Chairs Harimoto and Wakai, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for an opportunity to testify *in support of* HB 578 HD2, which requires children to undergo a physical examination prior to attending seventh grade beginning with the 2016-2017 school year.

Almost three-fourth (3/4) of all adolescent mortality is a result of motor vehicle accidents, homicide, suicide, and unintentional injuries (CDC, 2010). Unhealthy lifestyles and risk factors for chronic disease, such as smoking, poor nutrition, and mental health problems, begin in childhood and adolescence and track into adulthood. Youth are also at risk for suicide from underlying depression. In 2011, among youth in Hawai'i:

- 29.5% reported that they felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row
- 15% said they would attempt suicide in the past 12 months
- 1 in 4 are overweight or obese, and in some communities over 50% of adolescents are overweight or obese
- 37% reported that they never had sexual intercourse

Except for routine immunizations and mandated sports physicals, many youth do not receive health screening for depression or chronic health conditions such as obesity. As academic success of Hawaii's youth is intimately linked to their health, annual health screening of school age youth has great promise for strengthening the fabric of society. Research shows that poor health such as mental health disorders, uncontrolled asthma, poor nutrition and sleep disorders are closely linked to poor academic outcomes. On the other hand, research also shows that academic success is a primary predictor of adult health outcomes. For example, in Hawai'i, the prevalence of diabetes among those who

did not graduate from high school is 10.6%, twice that of those who graduated from college (4.8%).

Primary care providers are in a unique position to screen for chronic disease risk factors and behaviors and provide guidance, brief counseling and care coordination for the adolescent and his/her parents. In the ideal world, youth would see their physicians regularly throughout childhood for preventive health care. However, in today's busy world this often does not happen; physicians often only see children and adolescents when they are sick or injured.

Thus mandating annual health screening by a primary care provider as they enter their adolescent years offers great promise for advancing the health of our keiki, ensuring that they are healthy and ready to learn.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.