



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Human Services  
Thursday, March 17, 2022 at 3:00 p.m.

By

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And

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HB 1754 HD1 – RELATING TO ADULT DENTAL MEDICAID BENEFITS

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. The John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) **supports HB 1754 HD1** which appropriates funds to restore diagnostic, preventive, and restorative dental benefits to adult Medicaid enrollees.

Oral disease is a significant health problem for many Hawai'i residents, affecting their overall health and well-being. 223,438 adult Medicaid recipients have no diagnostic, preventive, or restorative dental coverage. In 2009, the State terminated all preventive and restorative dental care services for adult Medicaid recipients and reduced coverage to emergency-only care that is limited to pain relief, injuries, trauma, and tooth removal and extraction. The lack of preventive and restorative dentistry services for adult Medicaid beneficiaries increases potential health care complications for persons with co-existing chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease. Poor oral health, combined with co-existing conditions like these, have been shown to lead to increased disability and death.

In Hawai'i, a disproportionate number of adult Medicaid enrollees ages twenty-one to forty-four use the emergency department for emergency dental services. Between 2016-2020, 29,536 adults aged 21 and older visited the emergency department with a dental-related diagnosis, and forty-nine percent (49%) of emergency department visits with a principal dental-related diagnosis were Medicaid recipients. On average during 2016-2020, Medicaid enrollees made two thousand seven hundred emergency department visits per year for acute oral health conditions, totaling \$21,700,000 in charges for outpatient emergency department services only. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders were disproportionately represented in emergency departments visits for dental-related diagnoses.

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