



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
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By

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And

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SB 1281 SD2 HD1 – RELATING TO TELEHEALTH

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT** of SB 1281 SD2 HD1 which extends the sunset date of Act 107, SLH 2023, and allows reimbursement for services provided through telehealth via an interactive telecommunications system until 12/31/2027.

In light of the current uncertainty surrounding Federal government policies and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regulations extending the sunset date of Act 107, SLH 2023, to 12/31/2027 is prudent and gives the State the opportunity to adjust to any new federal policies that may be implemented and/or clarified. This also enables the numerous telehealth initiatives in Hawai'i that are successfully improving access to care in various settings, including libraries, community centers, homeless shelters, churches, and through street medicine, to name a few, to continue providing access to health care.

Since 1999, the use and expansion of telehealth services and technology in Hawai'i have 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 communication in any media form, including 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 or to navigate complicated video platforms 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 or bandwidth, residence remote from care providers, infirm with limited cognition or digital literacy, immune compromise in the age of COVID, etc.) suffer the most from a lack of provider reimbursement for telephonic coverage. We believe a telehealth environment in Hawai'i that allows patients the ability to access behavioral as well as other health services remotely would provide greater access to healthcare.

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