



DATE: 13 Feb 2022

TO: Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Chair  
Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Health

RE: **Testimony in Strong Support of SB 2645, RELATING TO ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES**

HRG: 14 Feb 2022, 1:15 PM via Videoconference

Dear Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Baker, and Members of the Committees,

The Hawai'i Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 450 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawai'i through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy. Additionally, HPHA aims to call attention to issues around social justice and equity in areas that extend beyond the traditional context of health (e.g., education, digital equity, cultural sensitivity), which can have profound impacts on health equity and well-being. Therefore, as stewards of public health, HPHA is also advocating for equity in all policies.

We are providing this testimony in **strong support of SB 2645**, which seeks to allow for standard telephone contacts for telehealth purposes related to behavior health services. This bill will ensure that our community has long-term access to patient-centered behavioral health services that meet patients where they are at. The evidence is clear that the COVID pandemic has caused undue emotional burden and distress on many in our community, and there has been an increase in mental health concerns. With talk therapy being a main component of behavioral health services, the ability to connect to compassionate behavioral health in the least restrictive and least burdensome way, via telephone, can have a significant impact on behavioral health outcomes in our community.

The people of Hawai'i deserve safe, timely, and easy to access behavioral health services. The ability to bill insurance for telephone visits for behavioral health services will benefit vulnerable population and help to reduce disparities in behavior health outcomes. Example of vulnerable population include kūpuna and those living in remote communities where technology needed for video telehealth may be limited. Additionally, for adolescents, who may be reluctant to engage in face to face communication, telephone communication creates a safe place to discuss sensitive topics. HPHA is a strong advocate for policies that work to ensure equity, and providing safe and easy access to behavioral health care contributes to this goal.

**We support SB 2645 and respectfully ask that you pass this measure.** Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue affecting members of our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Leocadia Conlon".

J. Leocadia Conlon, PhD, MPH, PA-C  
Legislative Committee Chair  
Hawai'i Public Health Association