



DATE: 20 Feb 2022

TO: Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair  
Senator Stanley Chang, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection

RE: **Testimony in Strong Support of SB 2645 SD1, RELATING TO ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES**

HRG: 22 Feb 2022, 10:00 AM conference room 229 & via videoconference

Dear Chair Baker, Vice Chair Chang, 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 SD1**, 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. 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 SD1 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,

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