



February 22, 2022

To: Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair
Representative Kyle T. Tamashita, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

Re: Testimony in Strong Support of HB 1754 HD1

Hrg: February 24, 2022 at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Luke, Vice Chair Yamashita, 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to **testify in support** of HB 1754 HD1 which appropriates funds to restore diagnostic, preventive, and restorative dental benefits to adult Medicaid enrollees for FY 2022-2023, requiring DHS to obtain the maximum federal matching funds available and pursue all funding sources, including private grants, prior to expanding any general fund appropriations.

Adult medicaid enrollees have not been able to receive basic dental care since 2009, causing avoidable illness, increased emergency room utilization and exacerbating health disparities in Hawai'i. In our state, more than one in three low-income adults indicate that the condition of their mouth and teeth affects their ability to interview for a job. Furthermore, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations and those on Neighbor Islands are at greater risk for poor oral health and limited access to oral health care.

Please support reinstating adult dental medicaid benefits. Oral health is essential to overall health. Reinstating these benefits is a cost-effective, person-centered approach to making our communities healthier.

We support HB1754 HD1 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