



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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April 1, 2014

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Senate Concurrent Resolution 34, SD1 – Requesting the Auditor to Assess the Social and Financial Impacts of Requiring Health Insurers to Offer Coverage for Hearing Aids

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Concurrent Resolution 34, SD1 - Requesting the Auditor to Assess the Social and Financial Impacts of Requiring Health Insurers to Offer Coverage for Hearing Aids. We are aware that it is a requirement for a study to be conducted related to the social and financial effects of requiring health insurers to offer coverage for hearing aids per sections 21-51 and 23-52, Hawaii Revised Statutes. DCAB supports this study in order to obtain necessary information to amend the statute in an informed and appropriate manner to mandate increased coverage for hearing aids.

Hearing is essential to most individuals in their daily lives (waking up to an alarm clock, listening for our family members, watching television, or talking on the phone). It allows us to be connected to others in our environment. A hearing aid enhances the person's ability to interact independently in the community, but the cost is prohibitive to the average adult and it may be multiplied when several members in one family need hearing aids. Being able to have more of the cost covered by a health plan would enable some individuals to be able to obtain a hearing aid without feeling guilty that the money is better spent on some other necessity. An individual should not have to choose between hearing or not hearing when a hearing aid is available as a viable option.

DCAB also acknowledges and appreciates the Senate's use of "people-first language" in the "Whereas" clause on page 2, line 35 in this concurrent resolution.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

BARBARA FISCHLOWITZ-LEONG
Chairperson

FRANCINE WAI
Executive Director



NEIL ABERCROMBIE
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TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE
Regular Session of 2014

Tuesday, April 1, 2014
9:00 a.m.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

**TESTIMONY ON SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 34, S.D. 1 –
REQUESTING THE AUDITOR TO ASSESS THE SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL IMPACTS
OF REQUIRING HEALTH INSURERS TO OFFER COVERAGE FOR HEARING AIDS.**

TO THE HONORABLE DAVID Y. IGE, CHAIR, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

My name is Gordon Ito, State Insurance Commissioner, testifying on behalf of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs ("Department"). The Department supports this resolution, and submits the following comments.

The purpose of Senate Bill No. 309, S.D. 1, is to add a new mandated health insurance benefit requiring individual and group accident and health or sickness insurance policies, contracts, plans, or agreements (with some exceptions) to provide coverage for hearing aids.

Any proposed mandated health insurance coverage requires the passage of a concurrent resolution requesting the State Auditor to prepare and submit a report assessing the social and financial impacts of the proposed mandate, pursuant to Hawaii Revised Statutes § 23-51. Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 34, S.D. 1, fulfills this requirement.

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Additionally, the addition of a new mandated coverage may trigger section 1311(d)(3) of federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which requires states to defray the additional cost of any benefits in excess of the essential health benefits of the state's qualified health plan. Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 34, S.D. 1, incorporates this possibility.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to present testimony on this matter.