

STAND. COM. REP. NO. 451

Honolulu, Hawaii

FEB 17 2023

RE: S.B. No. 609  
S.D. 1

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi  
President of the Senate  
Thirty-Second State Legislature  
Regular Session of 2023  
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Health and Human Services, to which was referred S.B. No. 609 entitled:

"A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO HEARING AIDS,"

begs leave to report as follows:

The purpose and intent of this measure is to require health insurance policies and contracts issued on or after January 1, 2024, to provide coverage for the cost of hearing aids at a minimum of \$1,500 per hearing aid for each hearing-impaired ear every thirty-six months in their base plans.

Your Committee received testimony in support of this measure from the Disability and Communication Access Board, Democratic Party of Hawai'i Kūpuna Caucus, and five individuals. Your Committee received comments on this measure from the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Hawaii Employer-Union Health Benefits Trust Fund, and Hawaii Medical Service Association.

Your Committee finds that hearing is one of the most important senses upon which an individual depends for communication. However, many health insurance companies have inconsistent coverage for hearing aids and federal Medicare coverage is very limited, resulting in large out-of-pocket costs. As a result, it is not unusual for people with hearing loss to choose to delay or forgo purchasing hearing aids and ultimately lose their ability to attend work or school, earn income, and



engage with their communities. Your Committee additionally finds that the Auditor has already conducted an assessment of the impact of mandates for hearing aid insurance coverage, and reported the need to have limits on coverage, such as minimum or maximum costs covered by insurers or frequency of placement. This measure addresses those concerns by requiring a minimum coverage benefit of \$1,500 per hearing aid for each ear every thirty-six months.

Your Committee notes that the \$1,500 minimum coverage amount was originally requested by the Deaf and Blind Task Force as appropriate. However, your Committee also acknowledges the concern raised by the Hawaii Employer-Union Health Benefits Trust Fund (EUTF) that the application of such coverage across all EUTF medical plans will add \$2,500,000 annually in claims to the EUTF plans and increase the unfunded liability by \$37,100,000. Your Committee also notes concerns raised by the Hawaii Medical Service Association that this measure may not cover its intended population, since Medicare plans are preempted by federal law from any state mandated coverage. Your Committee finds that these issues raise concerns that merit further consideration and requests that your Committees on Commerce and Consumer Protection and Ways and Means further examine them.

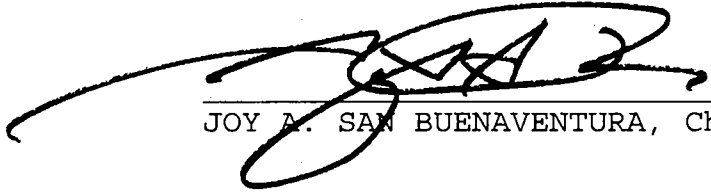
Accordingly, your Committee has amended this measure by:

- (1) Replacing the minimum insurance benefit amount of \$1,500 per hearing aid with a blank amount;
- (2) Inserting an effective date of December 31, 2050, to encourage further discussion; and
- (3) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity and consistency.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Health and Human Services that is attached to this report, your Committee is in accord with the intent and purpose of S.B. No. 609, as amended herein, and recommends that it pass Second Reading in the form attached hereto as S.B. No. 609, S.D. 1, and be referred to your Committees on Commerce and Consumer Protection and Ways and Means.



Respectfully submitted on  
behalf of the members of the  
Committee on Health and Human  
Services,



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JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, Chair



