

Honolulu, Hawaii

FEB 11 2025

RE: S.B. No. 1494
S.D. 1

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
Regular Session of 2025
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Health and Human Services, to which was referred S.B. No. 1494 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, 2026, 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.

Your Committee received testimony in support of this measure from the Deaf and Blind Task Force and three individuals.

Your Committee received comments on this measure from the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Office of the Insurance Division of the Auditor, and Hawaii Medical Service Association.

Your Committee finds that approximately three to four out of every one thousand children born in Hawaii are identified as having permanent hearing loss. Your Committee further finds that the cost for digital hearing aids can be exorbitantly high for many patients, resulting in patients opting to delay or forgo the purchase of hearing aids because they are unable to pay for them. This measure expands health care access to hearing aids for



Hawaii's deaf community by subsidizing the costs to purchase hearing aids with health insurance coverage.

Your Committee acknowledges the concerns raised in the Office of the Auditor's testimony that in November 2022, the Office had ceased their sunrise analysis of S.B. No. 2439, S.D. 2 (2022) a measure identical to this measure, after instruction by the Legislature's Kupuna Caucus that the assessment was unnecessary. Accordingly, the Office of the Auditor has not conducted a sunrise analysis applicable to this measure's proposed mandatory health insurance coverage for the cost of hearing aids. Therefore, your Committee finds that at this point, the coverage cannot be made mandatory, but optional.

Accordingly, your Committee has amended this measure by:

- (1) Requiring health insurance policies, contracts, plans, or agreements issued or renewed after January 1, 2026, to provide optional, rather than mandatory, coverage for the cost of hearing aids;
- (2) Amending section 1 to reflect its amended purpose; and
- (3) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity and consistency.

Your Committee intends to request the Auditor to conduct an assessment of the social and financial impacts (sunrise analysis) of mandatory health insurance coverage for the cost of hearing aids. Your Committee requests that the Office of the Auditor adhere to any sunrise analysis request pursuant to the passage of a Concurrent Resolution and disregard requests to cease a sunrise analysis by any individual or entity other than the Legislature acting as the whole.

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. 1494, as amended herein, and recommends that it pass Second Reading in the form attached hereto as S.B. No. 1494, S.D. 1, and be referred to your Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection.



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



JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, Chair



