
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. According to the United States Department of
2 Housing and Urban Development's 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment
3 Report, Hawaii ranked first among all states for the number of
4 individuals experiencing homelessness per capita. There are an
5 estimated fifty-one individuals experiencing homelessness for
6 every ten thousand people in Hawaii.

7 The physical toll that homelessness takes on individuals is
8 painfully apparent. The emotional and spiritual burdens of
9 homelessness are less obvious but no less troublesome. In terms
10 of the hierarchy of needs model developed by humanist
11 psychologist Abraham Maslow, because individuals experiencing
12 homelessness are focused on finding shelter to satisfy their
13 physiological and safety needs, such individuals are not able to
14 address their need for belonging, esteem, and achievement. As a
15 result, homelessness is a barrier to individuals' achievement of
16 their full potential.



1 In addition to the harm that homelessness inflicts on
2 individuals, there are hidden costs of homelessness that are
3 borne by the community. The over-utilization of emergency
4 department services for non-emergency conditions by individuals
5 experiencing homelessness puts upward pressure on medical costs
6 for everyone. When hospital bills go unpaid, institutions are
7 usually able to shoulder the costs in the short-term. For
8 example, Queen's Medical Center reported that it absorbed about
9 \$40,000,000 over the past four years in unpaid expenses for
10 emergency department and hospital services rendered to patients
11 experiencing homelessness. Eventually, however, hospitals are
12 forced to recover costs by passing the unpaid costs on to
13 customers who are able to pay.

14 Based on publicly available statistics, the outlook at
15 emergency departments is worsening. Hawaii Health Information
16 Corporation estimated that Hawaii's hospitals statewide had
17 around fifteen thousand nine hundred emergency department visits
18 by patients experiencing homelessness in 2015. By the end of
19 fiscal year 2016, Queen's Medical Center's emergency department
20 alone logged almost eleven thousand visits by individuals
21 experiencing homelessness. Further, between September 1, 2016,



1 and November 30, 2016, at the Queen's Medical Center, thirty-
2 nine individuals experiencing homelessness accounted for
3 approximately seven hundred thirty-four emergency department
4 visits. The situation is so critical that emergency department
5 personnel worry that the surge of unnecessary over-utilization
6 of an emergency department could bankrupt a hospital.

7 The legislature finds that it is in the public's interest
8 to explore methods to mitigate the increasing cost of medical
9 care due to the unnecessary use of emergency department visits
10 by patients experiencing homelessness.

11 Additionally, the legislature finds that identifying
12 patients experiencing and at risk for homelessness in emergency
13 departments and conducting individualized assessments of those
14 patients may increase the likelihood that those patients will
15 receive referrals to services that address their particular
16 situations. The legislature further finds that providing these
17 patients with referrals to appropriate social services and other
18 necessary services, such as preventative medical care and mental
19 health treatment, may decrease the number of unnecessary,
20 repeated emergency department visits by patients experiencing
21 homelessness.



1 The purpose of this Act is to establish a pilot program to
2 place social workers and social worker designees in emergency
3 departments to identify individuals experiencing or at risk for
4 homelessness and provide individualized assessments and
5 referrals for wrap-around social services with a goal of
6 reducing costs associated with chronic use of emergency
7 departments.

8 SECTION 2. Definitions. For purposes of this Act:

9 "Emergency department" means a department in a hospital
10 designated to provide critical care to stabilize and support a
11 patient's condition due to sudden illness or injury.

12 "Governing body" means the policy making authority, whether
13 an individual or a group, that exercises general direction over
14 the affairs of a facility and establishes policies concerning
15 its operation and the welfare of the individuals it serves.

16 "Homeless" means the same as in section 346-361, Hawaii
17 Revised Statutes.

18 "Hospital" means any institution with an organized medical
19 staff which admits patients for inpatient care, diagnosis,
20 observation, and treatment.



1 "License" means a license issued by the relevant department
2 regulating the profession at issue that certifies that an
3 individual practicing the profession is in compliance with all
4 existing state and federal laws and rules.

5 "Medical staff" means physicians and other individuals
6 licensed by the State, who are permitted by law and who have
7 been authorized by the governing body to provide patient care
8 services within a facility.

9 "Physician" means a doctor of medicine or osteopathy
10 licensed by the Hawaii medical board pursuant to chapter 453,
11 Hawaii Revised Statutes.

12 "Social worker" means the same as in section 467E-1, Hawaii
13 Revised Statutes.

14 "Social worker designee" means a staff person other than a
15 social worker but with similar professional qualifications, such
16 as nursing, psychology, psychiatry, counseling, or human
17 development, and two years of social work supervised experience
18 in a health care setting working directly with individuals and
19 who is supervised by means of consultation with a social worker.

20 SECTION 3. (a) There is established within the department
21 of health for administrative purposes a pilot program to be



1 known as the emergency department homelessness assessment pilot
2 program. The department of health, in consultation with Hawaii
3 interagency council on homelessness and any other appropriate
4 agency, shall serve as the administrator of the pilot program.

5 (b) A participating hospital in the pilot program shall
6 place social workers or social worker designees in its emergency
7 departments. The social workers or social worker designees
8 shall identify patients experiencing homelessness or patients at
9 risk of experiencing homelessness, assess the patients' current
10 circumstances, and refer those patients to appropriate and
11 available social services with a goal of reducing costs
12 associated with chronic use of emergency departments.

13 The social workers and social worker designees who provide
14 services as part of this pilot program shall not be employees of
15 the State. The social workers and social worker designees shall
16 be either employees of the participating hospital or individuals
17 who are otherwise permitted by law and the governing body of a
18 hospital to provide social services in the hospital.

19 (c) Each participating hospital shall submit qualitative
20 and quantitative data as determined by the department of health
21 to the department of health to demonstrate whether there is any



1 correlation between interventions by social workers or social
2 worker designees and the repeated use of emergency departments
3 by patients experiencing homelessness.

4 (d) The department of health shall submit a report to the
5 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
6 the regular session of 2019. The report shall contain a summary
7 and explanation of the data submitted by participating hospitals
8 regarding the efficacy of emergency department intervention by
9 social workers and social worker designees in mitigating the
10 number of unnecessary emergency department visits by patients
11 experiencing homelessness or patients at risk of experiencing
12 homelessness. The report shall also contain findings and
13 recommendations, including any proposed legislation, for
14 continuation, modification, or termination of the pilot program.

15 (e) The emergency department homelessness assessment pilot
16 program shall cease to exist on June 30, 2019.

17 SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general
18 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much
19 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2018-2019 to the
20 department of health for implementation of the emergency



1 department homelessness assessment pilot program, including all
2 program costs and hiring of necessary staff.

3 The department of health shall reimburse participating
4 hospitals for expenses directly related to the emergency
5 department homelessness assessment pilot program; provided that
6 no funds shall be disbursed to participating hospitals unless
7 matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis by the participating
8 hospital. All funds designated as matching funds by the
9 participating hospital shall be funds expended by the
10 participating hospital for the pilot program.

11 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
12 health for the purposes of this Act.

13 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect upon its approval;
14 provided that section 4 shall take effect on July 1, 2018.

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H.B. NO. 1761

Report Title:

Emergency Department Homelessness Assessment Pilot Program

Description:

Establishes the Emergency Department Homelessness Assessment Pilot Program to identify a possible correlation between social worker interventions and the use of hospital emergency departments by individuals experiencing homelessness and makes an appropriation.

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