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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.

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

1 PART I

2 PURPOSE

3 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that Hawaii's children,  
4 starting at birth, need support and guidance from parents,  
5 caregivers, and teachers to reach their full potential as  
6 citizens. As a report released in 2007 by the National  
7 Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *The Science of Early*  
8 *Childhood Development, Closing the Gap Between What We Know and*  
9 *What We Do*, so aptly states:

10 *"The future of any society depends on its ability to*  
11 *foster the health and well-being of the next*  
12 *generation. Stated simply, today's children will*  
13 *become tomorrow's citizens, workers, and parents.*  
14 *When we invest wisely in children and families, the*  
15 *next generation will pay that back through a lifetime*  
16 *of productivity and responsible citizenship. When we*  
17 *fail to provide our children with what they need to*  
18 *build a strong foundation for healthy and productive*



1        *lives, we put our future prosperity and security at*  
2        *risk."*

3        Yet, many of Hawaii's children lack the fundamental skills  
4 they should have when they enter kindergarten, a problem for  
5 which our state, let alone society as a whole, cannot afford a  
6 delayed response. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, a report  
7 developed by a committee of seventeen national experts in the  
8 fields of education, psychiatry, neuroscience, economics, and  
9 public policy, found that

10        *"striking disparities in what children know and can do*  
11        *are evident well before they enter kindergarten.*

12        *These differences are strongly associated with social*  
13        *and economic circumstances, and they are predictive of*  
14        *subsequent academic performance".*

15        *Research has confirmed that a large gap exists between*  
16        *the academic abilities of high- and low-income*  
17        *children by age six: the latter "lag further behind*  
18        *in acquiring more sophisticated reading and math*  
19        *knowledge and skills such as recognizing words by*  
20        *sight or solving simple addition and subtraction*  
21        *problems" (National Child Care Association, 2002).*



1           The gap can be closed by building an early learning system  
2 for Hawaii. Decades of research have determined that  
3 investments in high-quality early learning systems, grounded on  
4 the collective involvement of parents, caregivers, and teachers,  
5 produce significant, long-term benefits for all children. These  
6 benefits include improved school success, reduced dropout rates,  
7 reduced crime, and increased workforce preparedness and  
8 productivity.

9           Thirty-six states now offer some type of publicly-funded  
10 preschool program. Two states, Oklahoma and Georgia, offer  
11 universal preschool programs for all four-year-olds statewide,  
12 and New York, Florida, and Illinois are in the process of  
13 establishing similar systems.

14           Hawaii is now one of the only states in the nation that  
15 lacks an early learning program, despite the fact that it was  
16 one of the leaders in providing universal access for  
17 kindergarten and providing in 2001 a definition for "school  
18 readiness", which acknowledged the joint responsibility of  
19 families, schools, and communities in preparing children for  
20 lifelong learning. However, it is not too late for Hawaii to  
21 move forward, and Hawaii can benefit from the lessons learned  
22 and best practices developed across the rest of the country.





1           SECTION 2. (a) There is established an early learning  
2 council within the department of education for administrative  
3 purposes only. The council shall work toward fulfilling the  
4 vision of a universally-accessible, comprehensive, and high-  
5 quality early learning system that is sensitive to family choice  
6 and cultural elements, to benefit all children from birth to age  
7 five throughout the state, including:

- 8           (1) Establishing policies and procedures governing its  
9           operations;
- 10          (2) Developing a plan, with goals and objectives, for the  
11           early learning system, including the development,  
12           execution, and monitoring of a phased implementation  
13           plan;
- 14          (2) Coordinating, improving, and expanding upon existing  
15           programs and services for children from birth to five  
16           years of age;
- 17          (3) Establishing policies and procedures governing the  
18           inclusion and establishment of additional programs and  
19           services;
- 20          (4) Developing and implementing methods of maximizing the  
21           involvement of parents, caregivers, and teachers in  
22           the early learning system;



1 (5) Providing for accountability within the early learning  
2 system to ensure improvement of programs and services  
3 and high-quality results;

4 (6) Providing for the most effective and efficient  
5 allocation of fiscal resources within the early  
6 learning system;

7 (7) Collecting, interpreting, and releasing data relating  
8 to early learning in the state; and

9 (8) Promoting awareness of early learning opportunities to  
10 families and the general public.

11 (b) The early learning council shall include  
12 representation from both public and private organizations, and  
13 its membership shall reflect regional and cultural and ethnic  
14 diversity to ensure representation of the needs of all children  
15 in the state. The members of the early learning council shall  
16 consist of 15 members as follows:

17 (1) One representative of the office of the governor;

18 (2) The superintendent of education or the  
19 superintendent's designee;

20 (3) The director of human services or the director's  
21 designee;

22 (4) The director of health or the director's designee;



- 1           (5) The president of the University of Hawaii or the  
2           president's designee;
- 3           (6) One representative from a government agency to  
4           represent federal children's programs and services;
- 5           (7) One member appointed by the president of the senate;
- 6           (8) One member appointed by the speaker of the house of  
7           representatives; and
- 8           (9) Seven members appointed by the governor who represent  
9           interests in the early learning community, including:
- 10           (A) Child development, including maternal and child  
11           health;
- 12           (B) Child care and early learning programs and  
13           services;
- 14           (C) Children with special needs;
- 15           (D) Child advocacy, including parenting support;
- 16           (E) Business; and
- 17           (F) Labor.
- 18           (c) The early learning council shall select a chairperson  
19 by a majority vote of its members. A majority of the council  
20 shall constitute quorum to do business. The concurrence of a  
21 majority of all the members to which the council is entitled  
22 shall be necessary to make any action of the council valid.



1 (d) Members of the early learning council shall serve  
2 three-year terms; provided that half of these members, as  
3 determined by the council, shall be appointed to two-year terms  
4 to allow for staggered terms.

5 (e) The early learning council may adopt rules as  
6 necessary to effectuate the purposes of this part.

7 (f) All meetings of the early learning council shall be  
8 exempt from chapter 92, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

9 (g) The early learning council shall submit to the  
10 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of  
11 each regular session, a report regarding:

12 (1) Its progress; and

13 (2) The status of the early learning system in the state.

14 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general  
15 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much  
16 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2008-2009 to support  
17 the operations of the early learning council, including  
18 supplies, personnel, and travel expenses.

19 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of  
20 education for the purposes of this Act.

21 PART III

22 EARLY LEARNING SYSTEM & KEIKI FIRST STEPS PROGRAM





1 SECTION 4. There is established an early learning system  
2 that shall ensure a continuum of quality early learning  
3 opportunities for children from birth to age five throughout the  
4 state, to be developed and administered by the early learning  
5 council. The system:

6 (1) Shall be universally accessible. In its first phases,  
7 the system shall focus on all three- and four-year old  
8 children in the state, giving priority to underserved  
9 or at-risk children. When complete, the system shall  
10 provide a seamless experience for children from birth  
11 to five years of age;

12 (2) Shall be a comprehensive system in which:

13 (a) All existing programs, whether publicly- or  
14 privately-run, which consist of a variety of  
15 early learning approaches, service deliveries,  
16 and settings, are coordinated;

17 (b) Public and private resources are maximized; and

18 (c) The use of public facilities for either publicly-  
19 or privately-run early learning programs is  
20 maximized;

21 (3) Shall provide high-quality education with standards-  
22 based content, curriculum, and instructional



1 approaches for accountability, and an adequate number  
2 of well-qualified educators and administrators who are  
3 fairly compensated and have access to continuing  
4 professional development;

5 and

6 (4) Shall be sensitive to family choice and cultural  
7 elements.

8 SECTION 5. There is established the keiki first steps  
9 program, to be developed and administered by the early learning  
10 council as the first phase in the development of the state's  
11 early learning system. The program shall focus on the  
12 coordination, improvement, and expansion of existing programs  
13 and services within the early learning system for three- and  
14 four-year-old children in the state, with priority for  
15 underserved or at-risk children. The core components of the  
16 program shall be:

17 (1) The identification of research-based and proven  
18 curricula and methods, and implementation of various  
19 means of improving existing curricula and methods,  
20 including:

21 (A) Research-based early learning program models for  
22 three- and four-year-old children;



- 1 (B) Research-based early learning program models for  
2 at-risk children from birth to three years of  
3 age;
- 4 (C) Ensuring that written program standards exist and  
5 are implemented in early learning programs;
- 6 (D) Developing incentives to enhance quality in child  
7 care and early learning programs; and
- 8 (E) Developing an effective, comprehensive, and  
9 integrated system to provide training, technical  
10 assistance, and monitoring to ensure high quality  
11 services are provided in all early learning  
12 programs;
- 13 (2) Low staff-child ratio and group size in early learning  
14 settings;
- 15 (3) Parent and community engagement;
- 16 (4) Health and developmental screenings for children;
- 17 (5) Well-qualified and adequately-compensated staff,  
18 including:
- 19 (A) Ensuring more staff have opportunities to receive  
20 early childhood education degrees;
- 21 (B) Providing access to continuing professional  
22 development for all staff;



1 (C) Establishing a structure for standardized roles  
2 across the early learning system and for  
3 incentives such as awarding credentials to staff  
4 who have received certain levels of achievement;  
5 and

6 (D) Addressing the early learning labor market and  
7 working conditions to build a qualified, diverse,  
8 and stable early learning workforce;

9 and

10 (6) Child assessment and program and service evaluation to  
11 maintain and promote high quality in early learning  
12 programs and services, including:

13 (A) Developing guidelines for developmental screening  
14 and ongoing assessment of individual children  
15 served by early learning programs to facilitate  
16 appropriate instruction and document progress;

17 (B) Developing guidelines for the use of child and  
18 program data for programs to perform self-  
19 assessments to assist continuous efforts to  
20 improve the programs;

21 (C) Developing an evaluation plan for programs and  
22 services; and



1 (D) Sharing of data across programs and services to  
 2 assist evaluation and planning.

3 SECTION 6. For the purposes of this part, "at-risk  
 4 children" shall be defined as children who, because of their  
 5 home and community environment, are subject to language,  
 6 cultural, economic, and like disadvantages that cause them to  
 7 have been determined through screening procedures to be at risk  
 8 for academic failure.

9 SECTION 7. There is appropriated out of the general  
 10 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much  
 11 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2008-2009 for the  
 12 keiki first steps program.

13 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of  
 14 education for the purposes of this Act.

PART IV

16 SECTION 8. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2008.

INTRODUCED BY:

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**Report Title:**

Early Learning Council; Keiki First Steps Program

**Description:**

Creates the Early Learning Council to govern the state's early learning system. Establishes an early learning system. Establishes the Keiki First Steps Program.

