



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809

January 24, 2008

**LATE TESTIMONY**

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Maile S. L. Shimabukuro, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Lillian B. Koller, Director

SUBJECT: H.B. 2043 - RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD  
ALLOWANCE FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

Hearing: January 24, Thursday, 8:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 329, State Capitol

PURPOSE: The purpose of H. B. 2043 is to expand the opportunity for former foster youth to pursue and complete post-secondary education, by increasing the length of the time to apply for a higher education board allowance and extending the maximum benefit length from 48 months to 60 months.

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department strongly supports the intent of this bill because expanding post-secondary opportunities for former foster youth will enhance the likelihood that former foster youth will obtain an appropriate post-secondary education and make successful transitions to self-sufficiency.

However, in lieu of a new bill, the Department would suggest passing out of Conference Committee, H.B. 1356, H.D. 2, S.D. 2,

the administration-sponsored bill from the previous session, with the following amendments:

1) Revise the dates in section 346-17(a)(2) to substitute July 1, 2008 for each occurrence of July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2009 for June 30, 2008.

2) Deletion of Section 3 requesting an appropriation to fund the increased benefits. The Department believes that cost savings in other areas of the current budget will be sufficient to cover the costs for providing the proposed higher education board allowances for the 60 months proposed in H.B. 1356.

3) Modification of the current Section 5 to change the effective date from July 1, 2007 to July 1, 2008.

H.B. 1356, H.D.2, S.D. 2, contains the language that will allow the Department to provide higher education board allowances to former foster youth with greater flexibility and to the maximum extent. H.B. 2043 would limit the length of benefits to only 66 months following the entry into an institution of higher learning. This means that if the youth enters into higher education at the age of 18, the benefits will expire by the time the youth reaches the age of 23 years and 6 months. Also, H.B. 2043 does not allow breaks in attendance as H.B. 1356 does.

H.B. 2043 proposes that youth shall be eligible "prior to or" after reaching the age of majority [page 1, line 15]. Until the age of majority, the youth is usually living a licensed foster home and is eligible for foster care services which

include foster board maintenance payments and other benefits, including activity fees, special circumstance payments and a clothing allowance. Youth eligible for and receiving higher education board allowance payments are no longer eligible for these benefits and would only receive the higher education board allowance. Department suggests the deletion of the "prior to or" phrase. In H.B. 1356, the higher education board allowance benefits begin at age 18 so the youth would not lose any of the benefits they were eligible for as a minor.

The Department has found that the number of former foster youth participating in the higher education program has dramatically increased over the past several years, from approximately 30 participants in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 1998 to approximately 210 in SFY 2007. This trend in the increasing number of former foster youth pursuing post-secondary education is due to aggressive outreach efforts by the Department and its partners, including the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition, purchase of service contracted independent living service providers, the Hawaii Foster Parent Association, the Family Court's Project Ho'Kahua, and the Heart Gallery Hawaii. In addition, the Department has made information available on the Department's website about our independent living and higher education programs.

Providing higher education board allowances to former foster youth represents a needed investment in our most precious

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resource - our youth, through which we have the opportunity to improve the future outcomes for our keiki and our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important measure. We respectfully request your expeditious and favorable consideration of this proposal.

# LATE TESTIMONY

To: Chair Representative Maile S. L. Shimabukuro, Vice-Chair Representative Karl Rhoads, and all of the members of the committee on Human Services and Housing.

From: Adrian Gilliland, Vice-President, Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition.

Re: Bill HB 2043 relating to higher education board allowance for former foster youth

Date: January 24, 2008 at 8:30 am in conference room 329. Three (3) copies including an original required.

Hello members of the Human Services and Housing committee, my name is Adrian Gilliland and I'm a former foster youth. I believe that this bill is the most important bill relating to foster youth this legislative session. As a foster youth that was in care I had no ideas about what I would want to do after high school. I think that most youth either in foster care or kids living with their families don't have a clear idea as to what they want to do for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately for foster youth, we don't have the luxury of having parents to back us financially in our attempts at a post high school education. This is why I believe that the extended time for eligibility gives us the ample opportunity to take the time we would likely need to decide what area we like to go to school for.

I personally didn't have the chance to take time off after graduating from high school to make a decision as to what area I might want to work in. So instead I went straight into college without a clue as to where I wanted to go. I don't necessarily blame the deadlines for going to college for the many unfortunate events that happened to me after enrolling in Maui Community College. Many bad decisions and lack of proper judgment led to me being arrested and spending the duration of the next four months in the Maui County jail reflecting on where my life was heading.

During the time that I was in college I was receiving the Higher Education Board Payment of \$529. That money was a life saver in so many occasions. It helped me to pay my rent and at the beginning of the semester before my grant monies had come in I was able to purchase my books for college. When real life after high school hit, I quickly realized that I wouldn't be able to live strictly off of scholarships and grants. Because being a full time student is not sufficient enough to actually live off of in this wonderful state. I had to get a part time job in order to just stay afloat.

If there was ever a piece of legislation that was and is as important as this bill I would hope that the trusted leaders of this great state would realize the significance of this bill. Upon entering foster care it is the assumed responsibility of the state to provide the foster youth with all the necessities that a nurturing parent would. Those necessities don't end at the age of 18 when the youth is transitioned into the real world with a handshake and a "good luck." For many of us who want to make something of our lives we have only one of 2 options. Go to school or go to school. There really is no other options that I've found in the 20 years that I've been alive. I humbly ask that you the decision makers of the State of Hawaii take care of your children unlike the many irresponsible parents that have placed us in your care. Please vote in favor of HB 2043.

Mahalo for your time,  
Adrian Gilliland