

Date of Hearing: March 17, 2008

Committee: Senate Education/Human  
Services and Public Housing

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent

Title: H.B. 2051, H.D. 2, H.S.C.R. 965, Relating to Education for Foster Children

Purpose: To establish guidelines for school placement and transportation for foster children.

Department's Position: The Department of Education (Department) supports H.B. 2051, H.D. 2, H.S.C.R. 965, to allow foster children to remain in their "school of origin" until the end of the school year. However, this provision should be applied equitably to high school students. Under the best circumstances, the decision to remain at the "school of origin" should be a collective agreement among those individuals who are vested in meeting the educational needs of the child. This would include, but not be limited to, social worker, teacher(s), administrator, parent(s) or guardian, and as appropriate the child. It should also be acknowledged that the decision should be made on a case-by-case basis with consideration of the educational, social, emotional, and physical needs of the child. With respect to the provision of transportation for the foster child, there must be recognition that some of the unique circumstances

regarding the placement of foster children will have an impact on the decision to keep a child in the school of origin. Given the geographic expanse of some island communities, it is not inconceivable that a child in Kona might be placed with a foster parent in Hilo. Nonetheless, given an estimation of annual costs related to transportation, an appropriation to cover the increase in transportation costs would be necessary.

Finally, the Department continues a good working relationship with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Family Court. It is felt that many of the issues addressed in the bill may be adequately addressed in our continuous and collective work. Thus, the Department would suggest that the state agencies identified in this bill develop and implement guidelines to ensure that the needs of foster children are addressed, with respect to school placement and transportation. The Department respectfully requests the opportunity to do so.

LINDA LINGLE  
GOVERNOR



LILLIAN B. KOLLER  
DIRECTOR

HENRY OLIVA  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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

March 17, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Norman Sakamoto, Chair  
Senate Committee on Education

Honorable Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair  
Senate Committee on Human Services and Housing

FROM: Lillian B. Koller, Director

SUBJECT: H.B. 2051, H.D. 2 - RELATING TO EDUCATION FOR FOSTER  
CHILDREN

Hearing: March 17, 2008, Monday, 1:15 p.m.  
Conference Room 225, State Capitol

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of H.B. 2051, H.D. 2, is to establish guidelines for school placement and transportation for foster children.

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of this bill and respectfully requests that its passage does not replace nor adversely impact the priorities in the Executive Supplemental Budget. The children's continuation in a familiar school setting can provide some constancy and stability when other aspects of their lives are changing due to placement into foster care.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AGENCY

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF  
HB2051 HD2 - RELATING TO EDUCATION OF FOSTER CHILDREN

March 17, 2008 at 1:15 p.m.

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii hereby provides testimony to the Senate Committee on Human Service and Public Housing and Committee on Education on HB2051 HD2 – Relating to Education of Foster Children, in strong support of the bill.

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii is the largest non-profit provider for direct civil legal services in the State. Further, since 1996, we have assisted over 2,000 children as guardian ad litem on Oahu, Maui, Hawai'i, Moloka'i and Lāna'i, a significant number of whom have aged out in foster custody.

We believe that this bill is important for ensuring foster children and children in the juvenile justice system to receive a meaningful education. When foster children are removed from their homes, they frequently lose all stability in their life. They are removed from the adults that they know and trust and taken out of their community. This Bill reduces that instability in a crucial area for future success: education.

This bill will provide increased stability for foster children and children in the juvenile justice system by maintaining them in their schools. Education is a building process. Teachers build on concepts taught throughout the year and those building blocks are different from classroom to classroom. When a child changes schools, they spend a period being the new kid and adjusting to the new rules and new peers. Then, they must try and catch on to the teacher's style and pick up any new concepts that other children already learned in the new classroom. Studies show that this process causes children to fall approximately four to six (4-6) months behind every time they change schools. U.S. Dept of Education, *Report to the President and Congress On the Implementation of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* at 15 (2006). For foster children who sometimes change placement two or more times in a year, they spend all their time being the new kid and none actually learning.

Further, instability of school placement hurts the schools. Frequent turnover in student body makes it difficult for teachers to follow a curriculum and harder for administrators to set high standards as they are always dealing with an influx of new students.

Enacting this bill will reduce stress to foster children from moves, keep them from being cut-off from their community, and provide a modicum of stability in an otherwise unstable life.

The estimated cost of this bills varies, but we are committed to working with the Department of Human Services, the Department of Education and the Judiciary to project realistic figures for the cost of transportation and to work out any necessary amendments to ensure the practicality of this bill (i.e. it is not our intent that DOE provide transportation for a student who is moved to Hilo to live with relatives to provide transportation to Kona on a daily basis).

For these reasons, we support HB2051 HD2. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Nalani Fujimori  
Deputy Director  
527-8014



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair  
Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair

March 14, 2008

To: Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair, Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair and the Committee members on Education

From: Cynthia White

Date: Hearing held on March 17, 2008

Re: Support of H.B. 2051

I support bill HB 2051 with my whole heart and soul. This bill creates stability of school placement and includes transportation services for foster children and youth. I believe this bill will have a major positive impact on foster children.

Here are a few common stories repeated again and again in the lives of foster youth.

Youth in therapeutic foster care seem most vulnerable. A high school senior youth who moved into a therapeutic group home attended a meeting at her new school in late September 2007, which was the third school she had been in during the year of 2007. She learned they considered her a sophomore because the school had not received nor requested records from her other schools that could verify her credits. Their reason for not having these records was that they were too busy. The teachers and counselors expressed concern about her poor attendance and academic performance. She wanted to be a cheerleader and was told that if she improved, she could try out for the team. She made it and competed with her team in November. Two weeks before her eighteenth birthday, she was discharged from DHS and placed with DOH without knowing why; that meant she lost all higher education benefits through DHS. She planned to go live with her biological mother after graduation. Then, her mother suddenly died in late November. Devastated, she began missing school and her academic performance quickly declined. Two days before Christmas Eve, she was given one day to move out of the therapeutic home. They evicted her because she was not doing well in school. She was told to go to the homeless shelter. Fortunately, she called her sister,

a single parent young mother on welfare, who invited her to live in her home. She had to change schools again and drop out of cheerleading.

A high school senior in a wheel chair was moved from a long term placement against his wishes and placed in a therapeutic group home that was not handicap accessible. He had to crawl up the stairs. He turned eighteen a few months before his graduation. Two months from graduation, the staff of the home confiscated all of his belongings, locking them away because he had not done his laundry promptly. Infuriated, the youth discharged himself, dropped out of school, and moved to Hana where he had family.

A brother and a sister were attending the same high school. They were moved to a different home out of that school's district. They asked if they could continue at the same school. The sister was allowed to continue because she made good grades. The brother was denied because he had a low academic record. That was the schools decision.

A young man was one month away from graduating. He had been at this foster home and school for nearly three years, had excellent grades, and close friendships. In the last month, he had to move to a different foster home and change schools. After this move, he rebelled and was arrested for stealing. He ended up in the detention home and did not graduate, finishing high school later with a GED while on probation.

These are common stories. Youth repeatedly talk about having been in nine schools, twelve schools, five schools in two years, and so on. It is easy to see why foster youth drop out, fail, and rebel. So much is taken from them. This bill would not allow schools to discriminate against foster youth. It would protect youth with therapeutic needs, keeping their support systems intact so there are more people to advocate for their. It would encourage foster home stability, which is one of the main areas needing improvement. Most importantly, HB 2051 would dramatically improve the academic performance and quality of life for foster youth. It would be an act of mercy to let them keep their schools, giving them something consistent to hold on to that will shape the course of their futures in a positive way. I implore you to vote in favor of HB 2051.

Mahalo,  
Cynthia White, M.A.Ed.



**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**  
**Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair**  
**Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair**

**March 14, 2008**

**To: Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair, Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair and the Committee members on Education**

**From: Tiffany Lynch Ma'e**

**Date: Hearing held on March 17, 2008**

**Re: Support of H.B. 2051**

**Kia Ora my name is Tiffany Lynch Ma'e and I am a former foster youth from the island of Molokai.**

**My biological mother and step father we're both alcoholic drug-addicts put two and two together and all you have room left for is, verbal, physical, sexual abuse and neglect.**

**Being in such an unhealthy environment I made a decision to be placed in foster care, with hopes that the "system" would give me more room to excel in life. Not knowing that I would be continuously fighting to beat the statistics of typical foster children (i.e. Homelessness, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, school dropout and career criminals.)**

**Through my experience in foster care I've learned that in one way or another there is always some kind of catch 22, to prevent you from reaching your goals.**

**Thus I made the decision, to dedicate my life, to help improve Hawaii's foster system.**

**During my 4 year stay in foster care, I was placed in 8 different**

**foster homes. I was placed in every single district on Molokai, East, West, North, South, you name it, I was there.**

**Fortunately enough Molokai has only one High School, which allowed me to excel academically. I graduated twice with honors, in Hawaiian language and regular Ed. In my opinion being able to continue my education and the same school has helped me not only academically and characteristically, but it also improved my social skills and self esteem. I know of a few former foster youth that, unfortunately, didn't have the opportunity to continue their education at the same school, but rather, because of foster placements, they we're forced to change schools on regular basis, leading to as mentioned above school drop outs, homelessness, drug addiction, suicide or or becoming career criminals. I think that Bill H.B. 2051, will improve current foster youths self esteem and social connections, later enabling them not only to excel academically but in life as well, which in return will gradually decrease the negative statistics stereotyped to foster children.**

**I urge you to help and pass bill H.B. 2051, because I truly believe it can ensure a stable environment for Hawaii foster children. Please help us, help them.**

**Thank you for your time,  
Tiffany**





COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair  
Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair

March 14, 2008

To: Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair, Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair and the Committee members on Education

From: Blake Lanoza

Date: Hearing held on March 17, 2008

Re: Support of H.B. 2051

Aloha my name is Blake Lanoza and I am a former foster youth. I grew up with a drug-addicted mother who couldn't hold on to a house or a job. My mother was constantly getting evicted from the apartments and houses that we rented out, so I always had to switch school. When I went to foster care, it was the same thing because I was never in the same school for more than a year. I got used to this lifestyle, but being in the state's custody was supposed to bring stability to my life. I was losing the connections that I had. I had to work hard to make it in school. I am not only talking about friends, but teachers, counselors, and anyone else in my support system.

When I was in my second year of high school, I was taken out of my high school and sent to another school because of my placement. I was taken from the people that I had known for five whole years. Friends, counselors, and teachers were taken out of my life and they were replaced with people that I didn't know and I didn't want to know. I was traumatized because the family I was with didn't care about me and I was separated from my support system. I think that Bill HB 2051 would help foster youth to keep and preserve their permanent connections and come out of care with friends that they can talk to and lean on like everyone else does.

I urge you to help and pass this Bill, HB 2051, because I believe that it can ensure the survival of lifelong relationships for the people that need it most, the ones without families.

Thank You,

Blake Lanoza



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair  
Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair

March 14, 2008

To: Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair, Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair and the Committee members on Education

From: Ryan Baptiste

Date: Hearing held on March 17, 2008

Re: Support of H.B. 2051

My name is Ryan and I am in foster care. I was lucky enough to get to stay in the same school when I was placed in foster care, but I know not all kids are not that lucky. That's why I am writing to you in hopes that you might support H.B 2051. My sister had to change schools and it made her fall behind in many subjects. Also it was very hard on her to try to find a new support group in peers. I have experienced a lot of loneliness from being a foster kid, and think that when all else is taken from us the thing that foster kids lean on is friends made at school.

It is hard to start a new school and stayed tuned in, get used to new teachers, and make new friends, only to know that it is a strong possibility to get moved all over again. Perhaps there would be more success in school if there were more steadiness's in our lives. I know it hard to accommodate all the needs of people but I think it would send us foster kids out in the world a little more successfully if we had more stabile live styles. I would like to thank you ahead of time in supporting H.B. 2051.

Thank you for your consideration

Ryan Baptiste



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair  
Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair

March 14, 2008

To: Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair, Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair and the Committee members on Education

From: Sara Baptiste

Date: Hearing held on March 17, 2008

Re: Support of H.B. 2051

As a foster youth, I would like to say that it is very difficult and disruptive to get moved from home to home and even harder to have to start all over at new schools. I think that if there is any way to help allow a foster youth to stay at the same school it will help to stabilize the life of a foster kid. That's why I was hoping you would support the passing of H.B. 2051.

Many of us foster kids have mostly our friends to support us and when our lives keep getting turned upside down, the one thing that could help is to stay with the same school. Also it is hard to change gears with different classes and teachers. When I had to change schools there were some subjects that I already did that I now have to redo, and some subjects that I will miss all together because of changing schools. It has been hard on me with all the changes in my life, if you would support H.B. 2051 I think it could help foster kids from having to go through what I have been through.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sara Baptiste

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF  
HB2051 HD2 - RELATING TO EDUCATION OF FOSTER CHILDREN

March 17, 2008 at 1:15 p.m.

I'm an attorney, a teacher, and a doctoral candidate in educational administration. For the past seven months I've been conducting research on the educational experiences and challenges of foster youth as part of a fellowship with the family court. I respectfully submit the following testimony in support of HB2051.

Youth in foster care face enormous challenges to their educational success. Nationally the statistics are stark. Students in foster care have significantly higher drop out rates, retention rates, rates of qualification for special education services, and instances of behavior problems than their non-foster peers. Only 54% of youth in foster care earn a high school diploma by the time they age out of the system. Students in foster care average 16-20 percentile points lower on statewide standardized tests than the school population as a whole.

If enacted, HB2051 would create a measure of educational placement stability for students in foster care. Providing educational stability, especially for high school students in foster care, is one of the most important legislature actions that can be taken to support the educational pursuits these students.

Foster youth who experience school placement changes due to foster placement changes face numerous hardships. There may be delays in registering at the new school while records and transcripts are transferred. Credits, and even whole grade levels, can be lost due to a move to one another school. Students in special education can experience disruptions of services. There can also be less tangible, but no less damaging consequences. Students in foster care are uprooted from their school-based support systems when they are moved from one school to another. The students may be cut off from teachers, coaches, counselors, and peers who know and understand their particular situation. Transitioning to a new school culture and social environment can take an enormous toll on students in foster care who have already had to adjust to various dislocations in their family lives.

Studies show that school placement changes lead to negative educational outcomes for youth in foster care. A student who has changed school placement four or more times by sixth grade has lost on average one year of educational growth. Students with more than one placement change per year were found to be only half as likely to graduate high school before aging out of foster care as students with greater educational stability.

If HB2051 is enacted, Hawaii will join the ranks of states; including California, Oregon, Washington, Arkansas, and New Hampshire, that have recognized the importance of educational placement stability for students in foster care. I thank you for the opportunity to state my strongest support for this bill

Sincerely,

«GreetingLine», esq.  
Adjunct Professor of Law,  
William S. Richardson School of Law

March 15, 2008

EDU/HSP Committee

Re: HB2051, Foster Children; Stability of School Placement; Transportation

Hearing Date: March 17, 2008

Chairs Norman Sakamoto and Suzanne Chun Oakland

Hawaii State Senate

Chairs Sakamoto and Oakland and Members of the EDU/HSP Committee:

My name is Lee Ann O. Shimabuku and I am currently a BSW student at the University Of Hawaii- School Of Social Work and a Practicum Student at Foster Family Programs of Hawaii. This bill is important to me because I feel that with the amount of trauma a foster child goes through, they need some sort of stability in their lives. If a child can count on receiving their education in one institution rather than in multiple schools, they will have a greater chance of making lasting relationships with their peers and gain a better education than they would in multiple schools. With children coping with the difficulties of moving from one foster home to another, they experience a change in their home environment and need to know that there is a constant place that they're able to turn to.

This bill provides educational stability for foster children, regardless of what is happening within their biological or foster families. It establishes guidelines for school placement and appropriating funds for transportation services for foster children. With this amendment, the children are able to attend a school, even if it is out of their current district, and receive benefits such as transportation, tutoring and counseling.

Please support this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony.

Lee Ann Okido Shimabuku

625 Hoehoe Place Honolulu, HI 96821

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