



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Legislative Testimony

HB 2198 RELATING TO CAREGIVING

House Committee on Human Services & Housing

January 24, 2008

8:30 a.m.

Room 329

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs is providing testimony in strong support of HB 2198. Our interest in this issue is primarily based on our concerns that 52% of the children placed in foster care in Hawai'i are of Native Hawaiian ancestry, and that Hawaiian grandparents are assuming more responsibility as the primary caregivers for their grandchildren.

In Hawaii, more than fourteen thousand Hawaiian grandparents have assumed this caregiving role. It is a cultural practice of Native Hawaiians to care for their family members, especially when it involves minor children. It is an endearing custom in Hawaii for grandparents or "Kupuna" to raise or "hanai" their grandchildren or "mo'opuna." Such a practice can start as early as the birth of the child and may continue well through young adulthood. Stability, security, nurturing, and cultural identity all occur within the context of an extended family by blood or marriage that knows and is connected to the child. This practice is accepted as responsibility or "kuleana" by the grandparent and is undertaken with genuine love and commitment to the child's well-being.

Native Hawaiian grandparents will provide protection and guidance. In addition, they will pour their knowledge and wisdom of life into the hanai process with their grandchildren. As such, the basic necessities of the child are met but deeper qualities of living are passed on and preserved for generations. These intrinsic Hawaiian values make for stronger Native Hawaiian families and by extension, stronger communities.

However, in today's society, these new responsibilities place great emotional and financial stresses on many grandparents. Yet, these grandparents go unacknowledged and worse, unsupported by government policies and services that are conducive to maintaining these familial relationships. For example, the Hawaii Statutes currently relating to elderly housing penalize grandparents who choose to raise their minor grandchildren. These adults are usually on a fixed income and may have one or more health conditions. They live in elderly housing in order to survive and make ends meet. Elderly relative caregivers to minor children need assurance of knowing their housing is secure so that they can focus on tending to the needs of children entrusted to their care.

Because of these concerns, OHA has addressed these issues in several ways. Over the past three years, OHA has participated on the Governor's Advisory Board on Native Hawaiian Foster Parents as a means to advocate for policy changes that will support the efforts of these grandparents to keep their families intact.

We also provide community grants to the following: Kokua Ohana, a program of the non-profit organization, Partners in Development (PID), that is actively recruiting and providing support services to Native Hawaiian foster parents; Hawai'i Family Services, Inc., an organization that provides support services to Native Hawaiian grandparents who are caring for grandchildren on the Leeward Coast of O'ahu; ALU LIKE, Inc.'s E Ola Pono No Na Kupuna Program that provides transportation, social/cultural activities, and meals to kupuna statewide; and PID's Tutu and Me Program, which also provides transportation and support services to kupuna.

OHA has also been in contact with Native Hawaiian families of incarcerated individuals or "Pa'ahao." When a parent is incarcerated, it often impacts families with minor children. These families experience a wide range of stresses that include

emotional, financial, mental and medical challenges. We are aware that many of these families move in with grandparents or bring them into their homes to assist with the care of the children. In extreme cases where the biological parent or adoptive parents are unwilling or unable to serve as the primary caregiver for the child, grandparents become the next, and sometimes only, option for care-giving.

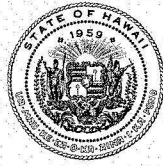
From our experiences, we believe stable housing, financial support, and respite services are the greatest needs of the grandparents, with affordable, stable housing being of the utmost priority. Several years ago, OHA addressed the housing problem of elderly Hawaiians by contributing \$3.75 million towards the development of the Kulanakauhale Maluhia O Na Kupuna, also known as Waimanalo Kupuna Housing, a project developed by the Department of Hawaiian Homelands. Unfortunately, in 2005, OHA's Human Services staff had to provide advocacy support to an elderly household with a minor child that was confronted with an eviction from the housing because of the child's presence in the apartment. Response to unmet family needs brought this grandchild and grandparent together into the grandmother's home. Sadly, though we were able to stave off the eviction of the grandparent, she had to be separated from her grandchild. This kind of outcome only inflicts unnecessary suffering for all involved and may eliminate viable options for kinship foster placement.

OHA considers solutions to these problems faced by grandparents to be of utmost importance and would welcome the opportunity to participate and work closely with a task force that would be established by this bill.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to present testimony.

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII

CHIYOME L. FUKINO, M.D.
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH



STATE OF HAWAII
EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON AGING
NO. 1 CAPITOL DISTRICT
250 SOUTH HOTEL STREET, SUITE 406
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2831

NOEMI PENDLETON
DIRECTOR

Telephone
(808) 586-0100

Fax
(808) 586-0185

Committee on Human Services and Housing

HB 2198, RELATING TO CAREGIVING

**Testimony of Noemi Pendleton
Director of Executive Office on Aging
Attached Agency to Department of Health**

Thursday, January 24, 2008

8:30 a.m.

1 **Department's Position:** The Executive Office on Aging (EOA) supports this measure to
2 establish a task force to focus on the needs of and issues facing grandparents raising
3 grandchildren.

4 **Fiscal Implications:** Unkown.

5 **Purpose and Justification:** EOA recognizes that many public and private sector
6 departments and agencies are involved in providing services to the group known as "Grandparents
7 Raising Grandchildren." Some of these entities include the Department of Health, Department of
8 Education, Department of Human Services, Department of Public Safety, Queen Liliuokalani
9 Trust, Na Tutu Coalition, Legal Aid society, Judiciary, Department of Attorney General.

10 The task force will bring together all major stakeholders for information sharing and solution
11 seeking. The bill outlines the various tasks and problem areas to be investigated as well as the
12 report to be presented to the Joint Legislative Committee on Family Caregiving.

13 Pursuant to Act 204, SLH 2007, the Executive Office on Aging had contracted with the University
14 of Hawaii Family and Consumer Sciences Department to conduct an assessment of the issues

1 facing, and the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren in Hawaii. According to the report,
2 which was authored by Dr. Lori Yancura, there are over 14,000 grandparents that are primary
3 caregivers for over 33,000 grandchildren in the state of Hawaii. These grandparents raising
4 grandchildren (GRG) are playing an important part in ensuring the well-being of Hawaii's
5 children. They are also saving the state approximately 17 million dollars per month by caring for
6 their grandchildren outside of the foster care system.

7 The services most needed by GRG are children's programs, financial assistance, respite, and
8 grandparent rights. Many of these services are already in place, but GRG don't know that they are
9 eligible for them and/or they don't know how to access them. There is a need for coordination of
10 services for GRG. The service needs of GRG vary by county and island. GRG are more likely to
11 use services that come from a trusted source, many said that they would use a call-in or walk-in
12 resource center.

13 EOA is pleased to be named as a member of the Task Force, and we will participate to our full
14 extent.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

-----Original Message-----

From: John Tomoso [mailto:John.Tomoso@co.maui.hi.us]
Sent: Wednesday, January 23, 2008 1:23 PM
To: HSHtestimony
Subject: Testimony on H.B. 2198 Relating to Caregiving
Importance: High

** High Priority **

To the Honorable Members of the House Committee on Human Services, who have scheduled a public hearing at 8:30am on Thursday, January 24, 2008 in Room 329 on H.B. 2198

Aloha kakou.

I write to support this bill, which is to establish a task force to specifically focus on the needs of and issues facing grandparents raising grandchildren or GRG. As an Area Agency on Aging, established under the auspices of the Older American Act (OAA) as Reauthorized and Amended in 2006, we are keenly aware of the growing number of GRG in our jurisdiction. The aging network, statewide, is dealing with more and more GRG and their growing numbers on our caseloads are allowing us to know, first-hand, their unique issues and needs. This task force will greatly assist us, and the aging network, to understand these issues and needs, and better serve this population, as mandated by the OAA. More importantly, the task force will assist us in identifying those areas of our aging network that need systemic, fiscal and other resource changes.

Me ka mahalo pono,
John A. H. Tomoso, MSW, ACSW, LSW
Maui County Executive on Aging
808-270-7350
john.tomoso@mauicounty.gov

County of Maui.

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Hawaii Aging Advocates Coalition

Testimony to the House Committee on Human Services and Housing
Thursday, January 24, 2008
Conference Room 329; 8:30am

RE: H.B. No. 2198, RELATING TO CAREGIVING.

Founding
Organizations

City & County
of Honolulu
Elderly Affairs
Karen Miyaki
Craig Yamaguchi

City & County
of Honolulu
Service Providers
Tony Wong

FACE
Stan Bain
Jim Howell

Hawaii Caregiver
Coalition
Tony Lenzer

HARA
Al Hamai
Bruce McCullough

Hawaii County
Office on Aging
Alan Parker
Lito Asuncion

Hawaii County
Service Providers
Debra Nakaji

JACOSA
Lyn McNeff

Kauai Agency on
Elderly Affairs
Kealoha Takahashi

Kokua Council
Larry Geller

Maui County
Office on Aging
John Tomoso

Maui County
Service Providers
Kathy Louis

Maui Long Term
Care Partnership
Rita Barreras

PABEA
Gary Simon
Eldon Wegner

Co-Conveners
Wes Lum
Hawaii Caregiver
Coalition

Harry Mattson
Kokua Council

Chair Shimabukuro, Vice Chair Rhoads, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Wes Lum and I am testifying on behalf of the Hawaii Aging Advocates Coalition (HAAC). **HAAC supports this measure.**

This bill establishes a Task Force to focus on the needs of and issues facing grandparents raising grandchildren.

This measure is a recommendation by the Joint Legislative Committee on Family Caregiving (Committee). During this past legislative interim, the Committee held a public hearing to hear testimony from the various state departments, the University of Hawaii, and the Area Agencies on Aging as to how they address the issues facing grandparents and other relatives caring for children. This bill is necessary to determine how these various government stakeholders can individually and collectively build a support system for grandparents and other relatives who are parenting for a second time.

HAAC supports this measure and asks for your favorable consideration. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.