



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

January 29 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Maile S.L. Shimabukuro, Chair  
House Committee on Human Services and Housing

FROM: Lillian B. Koller, Director

SUBJECT: H.B. 2273 - RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing: January 29, 2008, Monday, 8:50 A.m.  
Conference Room 329, State Capitol

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of H. B. 2273 is to appropriate funds to the Department of Human Services for independent living skills training for foster children and children being released from foster care. The bill proposes to authorize general obligation bonds for transitional housing for foster children and children being released from foster care.

**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 Department currently provides the services to support our foster youth's transition to self-sufficiency. The Department's Child Welfare Service Branch (CWSB) procedures require the identification of all youth age twelve and older who

are likely to remain in foster care until they attain the age of eighteen years, the referral of these youth to an appropriate independent living services program, an individualized assessment of the youth's independent living knowledge base, skills and needs, and the creation of a developmentally appropriate, strengths based, individualized independent living transition plan that is based on an assessment of the youth's needs.

DHS has purchase of services contracts throughout the State for the provision of independent living program (ILP) services to current and former foster youth. Services on behalf of youth age twelve through fourteen are focused on the development of life skills, such as self-identity, interaction with peers, emotional, psychological, spiritual well-being, decision-making, problem-solving, planning, goal setting and communication.

For youth age 15 through 18, services in addition to the above include counseling and supportive services related to: educational support and assistance in completing high school; health, hygiene, and medical insurance; money management, household budgeting, and banking services; building knowledge of community resources and how to access them, such as clinics, housing assistance and transitional living arrangements; development of job readiness in accordance with the individualized living plan; assessment of vocational and employment choices and community referrals, including linkage with services provided in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of

1998; liaison with community resources and public agencies such as the Department of Labor, the Department of Health, and other State and Federal programs providing services designed to assist the youth's transition to self-sufficiency.

For youth interested in post-secondary education and training, services include assistance with accessing scholarship and financial aid resources, supportive and directive services to facilitate the youth's attainment of academic, career, and vocational goals. Support and guidance are also provided to youth participating in the Department's higher education board allowance program through at least monthly contact between the youth and the provider.

The Department's CWSB procedures already require that an individualized independent living transition plan (ILTP) be developed with each foster youth age fifteen and older. The ILTP is to focus on the programs and services needed for a youth to make a successful transition to self-sufficient including plans for the completion of high school, higher education and vocational training, as appropriate. This plan is to be reviewed and updated at least every six months and is to be provided to Family Court as part of the case plan.

DHS currently has a higher education board allowance program that can provide continued financial support to a former foster youth attending an accredited institution of higher education. We have 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 (FY) 1998 to approximately 210 in FY 2007. This is due to aggressive outreach efforts by DHS and its partners, including the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition, purchase of service contracted independent living service providers, and the Hawaii Foster Parent Association, Family Court and the ILP information on the Department's website.

However, we are also finding that the program's upper age limit of twenty-one years often requires terminating the benefit before the youth has completed higher education. Without this support, many are forced to withdraw and cannot complete their education.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you also favorably consider passing out of Conference Committee, H.B. 1356, H.D. 2, S.D. 2, the administration-sponsored bill from the previous session which will improve access that former foster youth have to subsidized higher education. That bill proposes changes to the amount of benefits the youth can receive as well as to the upper age limit that will enable more youth to take advantage of this benefit and complete their course of study. The anticipated results include an increase in a youth's employability and ability to be a self-sufficient, contributing member of our community with a decrease in the likelihood of the former foster

youth becoming dependant on the system's financial or medical assistance programs. There is no need for an appropriation for H.B. 1356, H.D. 2, S.B. 2, but the statutory changes in that bill are necessary to greatly improve our higher education program for foster youth to improve their chances for self-sufficiency.

DHS also provides other activities and services to support the youth's transition to self-sufficiency.

The Department funds Youth Circles, facilitated Ohana conferencing (family mediation services), which began in April 2004, to give the youth a voice in planning for their future, to bring together important people and services to support the youth and to reconnect youth with their family and community to develop a transitional plan for the youth.

After leaving foster care, the youth are also eligible to receive individual medical coverage in accordance with the Med-QUEST Division (MQD) administrative rules. CWSB staff and ILP providers assist the youth in completing a new application for continued medical coverage prior to the youth leaving foster care.

DHS also funds the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition (HFYC) which is a youth led and run organization providing a voice for youth currently and formerly in foster care. This organization is the youth advisory board for the Department's CWSB. Their active components include youth helping youth (networking and

support), developing youth leadership, youth advocacy, testifying at Legislature, and youth advisors to "the system." DHS provides funding for an Executive Director as well as funds and programmatic support for Coalition activities, including board meetings, conferences and other activities designed to facilitate the development of the youth.

These programs and services represent a significant contribution from the State for an investment in our most precious resource - our youth. Through this investment, we have the opportunity to improve the future outcomes for our keiki and our communities.

Finally, in lieu of making an appropriation for the construction of transitional housing for current and former foster youth, the Department would like to suggest that vouchers or other financial support might be more effective in that the alternatives would allow the youth to choose the residence, be located in the community rather than in a special facility, and encourage the youth's independent living skills by having the responsibility for managing the vouchers or grants.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2273**  
**RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES**

January 29, 2008

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii hereby provides testimony to the Committee on Human Services and Housing on HB2273 - Relating to Human Services, in 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.

This bill would provide an appropriation for independent living programs and transitional housing for foster youth. At age 18, many foster youth exit their foster home with a trash bag containing all their worldly possessions and no particular destination. They do not know how to get a job or an apartment; they do not know of the existence of, nor how to access, general public benefits or special public benefits to which they are entitled. Many are unaware of money available to enable them to attend college and the existence of numerous programs that provide housing, education, services, and guidance to former foster youth. Independent Living Programs will help, at an early age, prepare foster youth for the decisions of their future and provide them with appropriate resources to enter into educational and work programs and to maintain safe and healthy lifestyles. Transitional housing will assist in providing a space as well as time for former foster youth to make the transition to adulthood.

For these reasons, we support HB2273. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

M. Nalani Fujimori  
Deputy Director  
527-8014