



LATE TESTIMONY 

January 29, 2008

To: Representative Maile S.L. Shimabukuro, Chair, Representative Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair and members of the committee on Human Services & Housing and Representative Josh Green, M.D., Chair, Representative John Mizuno, Vice Chair, and members of the committee on Health

From: Cynthia White, Project Director, Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition

Re: Support for HB 2273, Relating to Human Services

HFYC is a youth-led organization that assists youth in and transitioning out of the foster care system to see the infinite pathways and possibilities of their lives through advising and advocating for opportunities that will allow youth to enjoy a productive present and a successful future. As the Project Director, I am permitted by the Board of Directors, who are current and former foster youths, to represent their needs.

HFYC introduced a bill last year that requires mandatory participation in independent living programs because they are keenly aware of how little prepared they are for adult life and how important independent living training is to foster youth. There was great concern over the cost of independent living skills training for every transitioning foster youth even though the department agreed with the youth. It is our hope that increased funding will give foster youth more opportunities and more resources for gaining independent living skills and being better prepared for an adult life.

Many transitioning foster youth struggle from month to month, year to year, to find and keep a place to live. HFYC provides housing assistance grants for 5-7 youth a year thanks to a generous donor who funds these grants. Our budget is \$7,500 a year, a small amount compared to the needs. There is a huge need for affordable housing and aid to young people exiting the foster care system. Many transitioning youth are reluctant to enter transitioning programs because of the rules and limitations. They say it's not independent living. Many programs have 10 pm curfews, require youth to participate in services, and other restrictions. Youth feel like they are living in a group home and do not feel independent. While this benefits some youth, it is not needed for all youth. There needs to be more opportunities and more support for youth to access affordable housing.

Please support HB 2273 and help the Department of Human Services in giving youth independent living skills and housing assistance.

Thank you,

Cynthia White, M.A.Ed.

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