

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
HB2770 HD1 - RELATING TO BRIDGE TO HOPE PROGRAM

March 13, 2008 at 1:15 p.m.

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii hereby provides testimony to the Senate Committee on Human Services and Public Housing on HB2770 HD1 – Relating to Bridge to Hope Program, in strong support of this bill.

Founded in 1950, the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii is the oldest provider of legal services in the state. We provided civil legal assistance to those in need through nine offices located in Lihue, Waianae, Honolulu, Kaneohe, Kaunakakai, Lanai City, Wailuku, Kona and Hilo. Over the years we have provided leadership around public benefits issues and on an annual basis update our public benefits manual and provide a two-day training on public benefits. Our staff has also participated in national trainings on TANF and understands the complexity of this program.

The Bridge to Hope program is one of the most successful local models in moving families in poverty to self-sufficiency through higher education. Unfortunately, recent changes to TANF work requirements have significantly limited the higher education activities which may count for a families continued eligibility for public assistance.

Under these recent changes, a single parent must participate in a work activity for 32 hours per week with 20 hours in core activities. A two-parent household must participate in work activities totally 35 hours per week with 30 hours in core activities if they do not have federally funded child care. These hours increase to 55 hours per week, 50 in core activities if they do receive federally funded child care.

The only education allowed as a core activity are “organized educational programs that are directly related to the preparation of individuals for employment in current or emerging occupations requiring training other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. Vocational educational training must be supervised on an ongoing basis no less frequently than daily.” Further, a parent only has 12 months in their lifetime to participate. Other education activities directly related to employment may count as non-core activities.

Because of these changes Bridge to Hope participants will not be able to meet the work requirements set by federal rules and participate in baccalaureate education programs. To ensure the on-going success of the Bridge to Hope program, the law must be amended to allow single and two-parent households eligible for first to work to participate in educational programs that include baccalaureate education.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Nalani Fujimori
Deputy Director
527-8014

Office Management, various Health Sciences, etc. These graduates are now fully employed and no longer receive cash assistance.

The University strongly supports this program and believes that its passage will be a significant help for Hawai'i families seeking to move from welfare to self-reliance. We believe that providing educational opportunities to students on welfare is consistent with the University's Strategic Plan goals of access, service to the State and diversity.

Committee: Senate Committee on Human Services and Public Housing
Hearing Date: March 10, 2008
Hearing Time: 1:15 p.m.
Location: Conference Room 016

RE: HB 2770 Relating to Bridge to Hope

Aloha Members of the Committee,

Seven years ago I appeared here at the Legislature and testified in strong support for the Bridge to Hope program. Passage of that historic legislation was accomplished through the collaborative and collective efforts of members of the Legislature, the University of Hawaii, the Department of Human Services, the Welfare and Employment Rights Coalition (WERC), Hawaii Commission on the Status of Women, college students, community supporters, and welfare recipients. Today, I ask for your support in the passage of House Bill 2770, HD1 expanding Bridge to Hope for all First-to-Work clients.

During the early coalition building efforts for Bridge to Hope I participated in the process as a student of the University of Hawaii, as a member of WERC, and as a recipient of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). I was a single parent raising two teenaged children, a full-time student at UH pursuing my social work degree, struggling to fulfill the work requirements of the TANF program, and trying to find quality time to spend with my children. I was fortunate in that my Americorp service and social work practicum hours counted towards meeting the TANF work requirements.

Bridge to Hope was just a dream at that time. Other students found themselves in situations similar to mine in that we were often on shaky ground trying to find balance as a parent, person, and student, and having to fulfill the work requirements of the TANF program. There was never enough time in the day for all of our responsibilities, and it was often attention to our own selves that suffered as we placed the wellbeing of our children and success in school first. Many found they could not juggle all that was being asked of them, ended their dreams of a college degree, and chose instead to work in entry level jobs in order to meet the TANF work requirements. Where are these families today?

In 1999 I graduated from the University of Hawaii and was awarded my Bachelor of Social Work degree. My children and I continued to receive TANF assistance as I entered the graduate social work program at UH. As an Americorp volunteer in 1999, I was assigned to the Victim Witness Kokua Services program at the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney as a student intern.

My testimony seven years ago in support of the passage of the Bridge to Hope program was an emotional experience for me and for those with whom I had worked together with for Bridge to Hope. I testified that beginning April 2000 I would no longer be a student intern; I had been hired by the Prosecutor's office as a Victim Advocate with a starting salary that immediately took my family off of welfare, and much more significantly, out of poverty.

Bridge to Hope was a means to provide opportunities to single parents to obtain postsecondary education that could help families get off of welfare, out of poverty, and be self-sufficient. In June 2000, Bridge to Hope was enacted and funded. While I was not able to directly participate in the Bridge to Hope program, I am grateful that so many other single parents and their families have had the support available from the University of Hawaii system and the Department of Human Services so that they too could obtain a college education.

Federal legislation has changed work requirements for TANF recipients. Pursuit of a four-year or post-baccalaureate degree is no longer an option in fulfilling the mandated work requirements. The path has been extremely narrowed to the pursuit of only a two-year technical or vocational degree. If that were the only choice available to me seven years ago, I am sure my children and I would not be enjoying the same successes that we have today. My route out of poverty was my BSW – a four year degree. I recently left the Prosecutors office and am now employed with the state as a Social Worker. I received my Masters of Science in Criminal Justice Administration from Chaminade University in May 2007.

Having achieved a college education has been a positive impact not only for me but for my all of my children as well. Where are my children who were teenagers seven years ago? They are both thriving and successful in their separate endeavors: one in the honors program at a highly ranked university in the continental U.S. where college costs are covered mostly through hard-earned academic scholarships and grants; the other is gainfully self-employed and has traveled around the world. My two older children are happily married, have college educations, are loving and caring parents, homeowners, and are good people.

In my profession I see the adverse effects that poverty related factors have on families and children. Just as poverty can affect generations of families, so does success. Providing a single parent receiving TANF assistance the opportunity and support to pursue a college education is sound public policy. The positive effects ripple throughout the family and into the community. The impact is significant, far-reaching, and long-lasting. Together we can change that path of poverty into one of success and self-sufficiency. I ask for your support today in passing House Bill 2770, HD1 and ask that you do so as an investment in the future and well-being of our families and our community.

Mahalo.

Nora Schubert
1722 Makiki St. Apt. 504
Honolulu, HI 96822

Date: March 10, 2008

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice-Chair

From: Kory Onaga, BTH graduate

Re: HB2770, HD1 relating to Bridge to Hope
Thursday March 13, 2008 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016

I am Kory Leinani Onaga and I support HB 2770,HD1 allowing educational opportunities for all First-to-Work clients. I am a former Bridge-to-Hope (BTH) participant who graduated in December with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. I will work fulltime as a nurse at Queens once I pass my licensing exam. I am successfully transitioning off First-to-Work as soon as I receive my first fulltime paycheck.

Attending school while being a single mom raising an 8 month old daughter seemed like a huge risk. I would have to discontinue my full-time job, my only source of income and health insurance to attend school for one year to satisfy my prerequisites without any guarantee that I would be accepted into the competitive Nursing Program. However, I believed that had I not taken those risks, I would be stuck in dead end, unfulfilling jobs for the rest of my life.

When I went to the Department of Human Services for assistance, they required students to fulfill a 20 hour week; 12 credit hours and 8 working hours. I felt like this was reasonable but finding a part time job is not always easy, especially considering the time used to get from place to place. So my first plan was to find an on-campus job to eliminate some of these obstacles. That is when I contacted Bridge to Hope. The great thing about my BTH job is that they are flexible of when I can accomplish my 8 hours of work. I feel like I am contributing to the office with my assistance. On-campus employment has helped me to succeed in school.

For me, receiving an education goes beyond a degree or a title. It gives me **self-esteem**, it enables me to **hope**, and it grants me **opportunities** that would otherwise not be available. Two years ago, I never imagined that I could be a Nurse. Now I can see myself being a part of improving the health care system for generations to come. School has helped me to go from nothing, to something, to envisioning GREAT things. I feel lucky to be able to continue pursuing my dreams because I am grandfathered into the original program.

Many of my fellow BTH students and I have broken a vicious cycle and will be the start to a productive cycle. It seems to me that an ideal candidate for temporary assistance is a single parent going to school. I am appreciative of the support from DHS and from Bridge to Hope. I have been able to succeed in school, achieve personal and professional goals, and most importantly be a good mom. All First-to-Work clients should have this option available to them.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.
Kory L. Onaga
2820 Park Street Honolulu HI 96817

Date: March 10, 2008

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice-Chair

From: Angela Washington, former TANF client & UH Manoa Student

Re: HB2770, HD1 relating to Bridge to Hope
Thursday March 13, 2008 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk room 226

My name is Angela Washington and I am a former Bridge to Hope student at the University of Hawaii - Manoa testifying in support of HB 2770,HD1 to allow educational activities for all First-to-Work recipients.

Last year as a new single parent participant in the TANF First-to-Work program, I was at a disadvantage because the new rules prohibited me from participating in the Bridge to Hope program with reduced work requirements while I attended U.H. The change in DHS policy was very helpful and allowed me to focus on my academics. This policy allowing baccalaureate degrees and reduced work requirements for students should be continued.

My B.A. degree will allow me to pursue a fruitful career where I can earn enough money to support my family independent of the welfare system. The vicious cycle of poverty will only continue unless we allow parents to receive the skills and education needed to provide for our families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Angela Washington
2591 Dole St. #F404
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

Date: March 10, 2008

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice-Chair

From: Enjoli Rapozo-Hoskins, TANF client & Univ. Hawaii student

Re: HB2770, HD1 relating to Bridge to Hope
Thursday March 13, 2008 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016

I am Enjoli Rapozo-Hoskins and I **strongly support HB 2770, HD1** funding educational opportunities for all First-to-Work clients. I have participated in Bridge-to-Hope (BTH) previously and have recently graduated from the College of Education at UH-Manoa with a dual certification to be an elementary and special education teacher. First to Work has this rule that will only count 2 years of education towards state requirements from a non-vocational program. My 2 years ran up at the beginning of December and I did not graduate until December 16. Those two weeks were not counted towards meeting First to Work requirements. Hence, I had to either find a full time job or volunteer somewhere. This made the last two weeks of school horrible. This needs to change. The State should be supporting our education because education truly is the key to a more successful and happy future.

Without First to Work and the option to pursue a BA in teaching, I would have never stayed in college or graduated. Instead I would be working at a dead end, unhappy job that probably pays minimum wage. With four children, that still wouldn't support my family. In our society, we need some kind of BA degree to have a future and one day secure a job that would support a family.

Teaching in elementary special education is my way of reaching out and giving back to our community through our children. This is a dream of mine that I wouldn't have been able to accomplish without the help of FTW and its education policy.

The teacher certification program is a very intense program and very time consuming. Just one semester of the new rules requiring 20 hours of work in addition to full time school was already really exhausting. Working took my focus away from school and made my life a lot more stressful, but I had to do it. The change in DHS policy allowing reduced work for full-time students needs to be made permanent. If pursuing education for a BA degree did not qualify me for FTW, then I would have had to find a way to work full time and maybe go to school part time, if at all possible.

The only way to secure a successful future is to go to college and get a bachelors degree that would place you in a well-paying job. To me, this is the only guarantee for FTW clients to stay off of assistance. If the goal of the FTW program is to get the clients on the program to be more successful and have a better future, then they need to count the education to attain a BA degree.

Our state programs need to continue to help those of us who are trying to make a difference in our lives and the lives of our children by going to college.

Enjoli Rapozo-Hoskins
410 Magellan Avenue Apt #409 Honolulu, HI 96813

Date: March 10, 2008

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice-Chair

From: Kahealani Wright, former BTH Student at UH Hilo

Re: HB2770, HD1 relating to Bridge to Hope
Thursday March 13, 2008 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk room 226

Aloha, my name is Kahealani Wright and I strongly support HB 2770,HD1 funding educational opportunities for all First-to-Work clients. I am a Bridge-to-Hope (BTH) participant who graduated in May 2007 with a BA in Psychology.

I am eternally grateful for the opportunities that I have been given from programs such as BTH and First-to-Work (FTW) which have allowed me to pursue my dream of obtaining a higher education. Without the help or support from these programs it is very likely that my education would have been significantly deterred if not completely obstructed.

Access to higher education opportunities through the FTW and BTH programs has been a crucial factor in allowing me to reach my goal of being able to provide for my children and myself without any outside assistance. The challenges of being a full-time student, while raising two children and working part-time have been well worth the struggle to become financially independent.

Last year's rule changes requiring 20 hours of work in addition to school "burned out" BTH and FTW participants and deterred individuals from obtaining a degree. The change in policy allowing BA degrees for First-to-Work clients was important and needs to be maintained.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my support of HB 2770,HD1. Please support this bill.

Kahealani Wright
858A Kupulau Road
Hilo, Hawaii 96720

Date: March 10, 2008

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice-Chair

From: Aubrey Hillman, TAONF client & BTH student

Re: HB2770, HD1 relating to Bridge to Hope
Thursday March 13, 2008 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk room 226

I am Aubrey Hillman and I **strongly support HB 2770,HD1** funding educational opportunities for all First-to-Work clients. I am a Bridge-to-Hope (BTH) participant in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at UH. Without BTH and First-to-Work (FTW) Education option I would not have been able to get into the Nursing Program at UH Manoa.

Last spring's rule changes re-instating the reduced work requirement for full-time enrolled students made such a difference. Last Fall the rules requiring 20-32 hours of work in addition to school nearly convinced me to quit school. I felt like my world had turned upside down. How was I going to meet the minimum requirements of twenty hours of work per week and go to school full time?

Now that I have been allowed to continue my education, I know that I will achieve my Nursing degree. The purpose of TANF is to help people become financially independent, that cannot happen without school or training. There's no point in offering TANF for five years without the opportunity to go to school.

As a parent my desire to build a future for my daughter and I gave me no choice but to go back to school. Being on welfare without getting an education or some type of training for a career which could support my daughter and I is a total waste of resources. All welfare does is put off the inevitable dependence on someone else. Please support access to post-secondary education for ALL First-to-Work clients.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Aubrey Hillman
537 B Kipuka Pl.
Kailua, HI 96734

Date: March 10, 2008

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice-Chair

From: Bonnie Godinez, BTH student at Kapi'olani Community College

Re: HB2770, HD1 relating to Bridge to Hope
Thursday March 13, 2008 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016

Aloha. I am Bonnie Godinez and I strongly support HB 2770,HD1 funding educational opportunities for all First-to-Work clients. I am currently a Bridge-To-Hope (BTH) participant in the Associate of Science in the Travel and Tourism program at Kapiolani Community College.

In many ways both Bridge-To-Hope along with First-To-Work has helped me and my son. Being a young, single parent of a two year old son is hard enough. When the rules regarding education changed last fall requiring 20-32 hours of work on top of school, I found myself exhausted and my infant son could not get the full attention that he needs from me, especially at this point in time of his life.

It is important that the new DHS policy is available for all First-to-Work students. Now I am no longer limited to a 2-year program, I can now pursue my ultimate educational goal of a Bachelor of Science in the Travel Industry Management (TIM) program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. After receiving my Bachelors of Science I will one day be working in one of Hawaii's finest hotels or restaurant.

Currently most jobs that pay decent wages require at least a Bachelor degree. The entire purpose of receiving assistance from TANF is to one day leave the program and become financially independent. It is said that a person who rushes into something does not produce as great a product as the person who takes their time. Give participants of First-to-Work and BTH enough time to complete their education with a Bachelors and find a decent paying job.

I ask you to Support HB2770 not only for First-To-Work and Bridge-To-Hope but also for the future of Hawaii and its people. For without the people continuing their education after high school there would be no hope for tomorrows' future.

Mahalo for your time.

Bonnie Godinez
1545 Linapuni Street APT# B809
Honolulu, HI 96819

Date: March 10, 2008

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice-Chair

From: Joelene Cruz, BTH Student

Re: HB2770, HD1 relating to Bridge to Hope
Thursday March 13, 2008 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk room 226

I am Joelene Cruz and I **strongly support HB 2770, HD1** allowing educational opportunities for all First-to-Work clients. I am a Bridge-to-Hope (BTH) participant in the Bachelor's of Social Work Program at the University of Hawaii Manoa.

Without BTH and First-to-Work (FTW) Education option I would not have been able to pursue my educational goals, training and skills needed to maintain descent employment and financial security in the near future. In Fall 2003, I applied for school at Honolulu Community College and decided to major in Human Services. I started working on campus at the Student Life & Development Offices as a Student Aide; two years later I graduated from HCC and transferred to the University of Hawaii Manoa.

Today, I'm pursuing a BSW at the school of social work and I would ultimately like to earn a Master's of Social Work someday. I'm a single mother of four children. At this point, I still have my son (14 years old) and my daughter(12 years old) in the home. My 19 year old daughter is still at home and attends Honolulu Community College in Cosmetology. Education has become an important part of our family.

Although the purpose of TANF is to help people become financially independent, that cannot happen without school or training. There's no point in offering TANF for five years without the opportunity for students to pursue our educational goals. Please support access to post-secondary education for ALL First-to-Work clients.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Joelene Cruz
1139-B Hala Dr. Bldg.14
Honolulu, HI 96817

Date: March 10, 2008

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & PUBLIC HOUSING
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr, Vice-Chair

From: Ann Skipper, Bridge to Hope Graduate

Re: HB2770, HD1 relating to Bridge to Hope
Thursday March 13, 2008 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk room 226

My name is Ann Skipper and I **strongly support HB 2770** allowing all First-to-Work participants the ability to participate in Bridge to Hope. I am a recent (December 2007) graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology specializing in Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Biology (EECB).

The BTH and First-to-Work (FTW) Education option has allowed me to pursue a college education in conservation biology to attain my goal of working with Hawaii's environment. Without the benefits provided by these programs, there is no way I would be able to attend school **and** make enough money to provide a home for myself and my son and pay for all of our necessities.

The First-to-Work education policy implemented after last legislative session re-instating fewer hours of paid employment for full-time students allows me to spend more time to do well in school and to spend with my son. The whole purpose of TANF is to help people become financially independent, so they won't need these benefits to take care of their children, but that is not possible without an education.

Please help us support ourselves and get off of welfare by supporting access to post-secondary education for ALL First-to-Work clients.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Ann Skipper
809 Kinau Street Apt 23
Honolulu, HI 96813