

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF**  
**HB3400 HD2 - RELATING TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

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 HB3400 HD2 – Relating to Public Assistance in 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.

This bill would make available public benefits for non-related guardians of children. Currently, a family that takes a non-relative child into their family who faces a financial cannot seek public assistance for that child. This bill would allow non-related guardians of children to receive public assistance on behalf of the child.

We believe that the availability of public assistance should not be limited to only related guardians to children. Many children are sometimes taken in by family friends and others who keep these children out of the child welfare system. To not allow these guardians to be eligible for public assistance when relative guardians regardless of income are seems incongruous to the states interest in maintaining homes for children outside of the foster care system. As guardianship does not require the guardian to take financial responsibility for that child – the parent still has that responsibility – eligibility for financial assistance should be available if the guardian qualifies.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Nalani Fujimori  
Deputy Director  
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