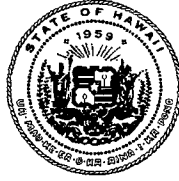


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LATE

March 13, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services and Public Housing

FROM: Lillian B. Koller, Director

SUBJECT: H.B. 523, H.D. 2 - RELATING TO FOSTER CHILDREN

Hearing: Thursday, March 13, 2008, 1:15 p.m.
Conference Room 016, State Capitol

PURPOSE: The purpose of H.B. 523, H.D. 2, is to establish guiding principles for foster children.

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of H.B. 523, H.D. 2, and offers the following comments. DHS already includes protection for the rights of foster children in our Hawaii Administrative Rules regarding foster care and in our Child Welfare Services Branch (CWSB) procedures.

Our Administrative Rules, policies and procedures already specify that services shall be provided without discrimination and in a culturally sensitive manner. They further state that the child shall be provided with appropriate care, supervision, food, clothing and shelter, as well as medical and dental care.

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Our Administrative Rules, policies and procedures also support safe and appropriate contact with family, placement with relatives and kin, services to assist with the development of knowledge and skills necessary for a successful transition to self-sufficiency, participation in case planning activities and court proceedings.

The Department strongly supports the guideline for direct contact with the social worker, guardian ad litem, and probation officer. This type of contact is a critical factor for proper and successful case planning and outcomes.

DHS supports the proposed subsection (7), page 2, line 12, relating to continuation in the same school following placement into foster care or a change in placement.

Subsection (8), page 2, line 16, calls for the provision of independent living skills training and a transition plan. The Department currently provides services to support our foster youth's transition to self-sufficiency. The Department's 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 service 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.

The Department would like to point out that participation in the ILP services is voluntary. Although the services are available, we cannot ensure that they are "provided" to the youth unless the youth chooses to participate.

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. **To this purpose, the Department strongly supports S.B. 2246, S.D. 2, that will expand the availability of the higher education board allowance for former foster youth.**

Our CWSB procedures already require that an individualized independent living transition plan (ILTP) be developed with each foster youth age fifteen and older with a 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 provided to Family Court as part of the case plan. Information about our ILP services are shared with the youth, DHS staff and public in many ways, including the DHS website's independent living program webpage located at http://hawaii.gov/dhs/protection/social_services/child_welfare/ILP, the Hawaii Foster Parent (HFPA) Annual Conference and HFPA newsletters, and outreach by ILP providers.

The DHS also provides support for the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition (HFYC), an organization comprised of current and former foster youth, and its active outreach to youth.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.