

**LATE**

To:

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair  
Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC HOUSING  
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair  
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice Chair

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

Re: Support for Bill SB 2005 Relating to Education for Foster Children

Date: January 28, 2008

I support bill SB 2005 with my whole heart and soul. This bill creates stability of school placement and includes transportation services for foster children and youth. I believe this bill will have a major positive impact on foster children.

Here are a few common stories repeated again and again in the lives of foster youth.

Youth in therapeutic foster care seem most vulnerable. A high school senior youth who moved into a therapeutic group home attended a meeting at her new school in late September 2007, which was the third school she had been in during the year of 2007. She learned they considered her a sophomore because the school had not received nor requested records from her other schools that could verify her credits. Their reason for not having these records was that they were too busy. The teachers and counselors expressed concern about her poor attendance and academic performance. She wanted to be a cheerleader and was told that if she improved, she could try out for the team. She made it and competed with her team in November. Two weeks before her eighteenth birthday, she was discharged from DHS and placed with DOH without knowing why; that meant she lost all higher education benefits through DHS. She planned to go live with her biological mother after graduation. Then, her mother suddenly died in late November. Devastated, she began missing school and her academic performance quickly declined. Two days before Christmas Eve, she was given one day to move out of the therapeutic home. They evicted her because she was not doing well in school. She was told to go to the homeless shelter. Fortunately, she called her sister, a single parent young mother on welfare, who invited her to live in her home. She had to change schools again and drop out of cheerleading.

A high school senior in a wheel chair was moved from a long term placement against his wishes and placed in a therapeutic group home that was not handicap accessible. He had to crawl up the stairs. He turned eighteen a few months before his graduation. Two months from graduation, the staff of the home confiscated all of his belongings, locking them away because he had not done his laundry promptly. Infuriated, the youth discharged himself, dropped out of school, and moved to Hana where he had family.

A brother and a sister were attending the same high school. They were moved to a different home out of that school's district. They asked if they could continue at the same school. The sister was allowed to continue because she made good grades. The brother was denied because he had a low academic record. That was the schools decision.

A young man was one month away from graduating. He had been at this foster home and school for nearly three years, had excellent grades, and close friendships. In the last month, he had to move to a

different foster home and change schools. After this move, he rebelled and was arrested for stealing. He ended up in the detention home and did not graduate, finishing high school later with a GED while on probation.

These are common stories. Youth repeatedly talk about having been in nine schools, twelve schools, five schools in two years, and so on. It is easy to see why foster youth drop out, fail, and rebel. So much is taken from them. This bill would not allow schools to discriminate against foster youth. It would protect youth with therapeutic needs, keeping their support systems intact so there are more people to advocate for their. It would encourage foster home stability, which is one of the main areas needing improvement. Most importantly SB 2005 would dramatically improve the academic performance and quality of life for foster youth. It would be an act of mercy to let them keep their schools, giving them something consistent to hold on to that will shape the course of their futures in a positive way. I implore you to vote in favor of SB 2005.

Mahalo,  
Cynthia White, M.A.Ed.  
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**COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S COUNCIL OFFICE**

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January 28, 2008

Community Children's Councils of Hawaii  
Community Children's Council Office

The Honorable Norman Sakamoto  
Chair of Senate Education Committee

RE: SB 2005 – Relating to Education for Foster Children

Senator Sakamoto and the members of the committee,

The Seventeen Community Children's Councils (CCCs) of Hawaii are a volunteering community based entities across the State organized around school complexes, chaired by a parent and professional Co-chairs who are elected by the broad stakeholder groups, community members, private providers and state child serving agencies.

The Seventeen Community Children's Councils (CCCs) of Hawaii supports the intent of SB 2005 to provide greater stability of educational placements for foster children and transportation services for those students who move out of district but continue enrollment at their school of origin.

We understand that state and federal laws require transportation as related services for all students receiving special education and related services. Based on our understanding of the rules and regulations we believe that Individualized Education Plan (IEP) has the responsibility and opportunity to maintain a stable educational environment for eligible students. Unless, in a home that they might be harmful or abusive to them.

We are aware of accesses changes in placements exasperate and alter the progress the students make when this occurs. We have no data regarding the frequency of this occurring but support maximum stability and educational settings.

If there are any questions please call the Community Children's Council Office so that we may be responsible any concerns.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Kamauoha, Parent Co-Chair

Tom Smith, Professional Co-Chair