

TESIMONY

To the Committee on Human Services and Public Housing, Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair, and Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice Chair, for Hearing on Thursday, January 31, 2008, in Conference Room 016, at the State Capitol.

From Patricia Urieff, MSW, ACSW, LSW, with twenty-four years of experience providing social work services to children and families.

SB 2210 RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES

Clarifies the eligibility requirements of and expands the bridge to hope program to enable all heads of households who are receiving financial assistance and participating in the first-to-work program to pursue a full range of educational activities as part of their work activities.

I support assessment, testing, and career counseling for all heads of households who want to go through that process on their own time for the purpose of them clarifying their ability and capacity to achieve what it takes to pursue educational activities.

The First-to-work program should have a clear scale of score criteria for interrupting results of testing. The Career Counseling approach would help each participant learn about own capacity and abilities.

The Program should have a clear method for determining (decision) financial assistance and support for participants whose tests show ability, capacity, and potential for success with educational activities.

Those participants should be allowed to pursue an identified educational activity as part of their work activity.

The outcome would be that certain participants in the First-to-work Program get support and financial assistance to achieve specific education(as part of work activity) toward them getting employment with a living wage.

Not all heads of household have what it takes to maintain educational activities, and achieve completion and success.

Date: January 28, 2008

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

From: Teresa Bill, Univ. Hawai'i Bridge to Hope Coordinator

Re: SB2210 relating to Human Services.
Thursday Jan 31, 2008 1:30 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk, room 226

My name is Teresa Bill and. I am the Coordinator of the 10-campus University of Hawai'i Bridge to Hope program which works with the Dept. of Human Services. **I strongly support SB 2210** amending the statute that created the Bridge to Hope program to enable all First-to-Work participants to pursue post-secondary education as part of their work activities. **SB 2210 is the preferred bill** to achieve this change. It includes language that has been agreed to by both the Dept. of Human Services and UH Bridge to Hope to accomplish both agencies' goals of post-secondary access for welfare participants. SB 2214 (next on the agenda) would require some amendments.

The Dept. of Human Services has implemented a temporary policy that allows post-secondary education activities, but the statute needs to be amended to ensure a full range of educational options for all First-to-Work participants, all categories of TANF & TAONF families. That was why we were here last session; to argue for the need to allow post-secondary education activities for welfare participants. While the federal government limits educational activities to vocational programs less than 12 months, the State of Hawai'i has committed to continuing access to college as a means for welfare participants to gain the skills and education necessary for life-long economic self-sufficiency. Last session DHS indicated that additional funding was not needed to expand program eligibility, it could be offered within current budgets. That is how we achieved the current policy to accommodate education activities. However, this statutory change is necessary for DHS to maintain the policy and to fund on-campus student employment for state-funded clients. Currently, TAONF clients are not eligible for subsidized on-campus student employment through First-to Work.

SB 2210 needs to be passed for many reasons, primarily because the current statute limits participation to only federally-funded TANF recipients and the federal government specifically prohibits baccalaureate education activities and limits vocational education to 1 year education directly leading into specific employment. While a certificate in cosmetology is acceptable, a pre-nursing Associate of Arts degree is not. If the State is interested in maximizing clients' use of their TANF benefits, allowing a full range of educational activities as a countable work activity is key.

The testimony of others will offer detailed and personal information about the long-term economic and community benefits of supporting post-secondary education as the most effective means by which women can achieve life-long economic self-sufficiency and leave poverty, not just welfare.

The State of Hawai'i acknowledged the importance of access to post-secondary education as an avenue to economic self-sufficiency when it created the Bridge to Hope program within DHS seven years ago. This bill providing for a state-funded education program within First-to-Work is absolutely necessary.

I urge the legislature to stand behind its decision to include post-secondary education as part of First-to-Work activities as a strategy for self-sufficiency. This decision is a smart long-term investment as these participants gain education, pursue economically viable careers and eventually pay more taxes than were ever spent on their families.

The motto of the U.H. Bridge to Hope program is "Education to leave poverty, not just welfare." It serves us well to remember that many welfare "leavers" nationwide are working fulltime yet remain in poverty unable to fully support their families.

- Post-secondary Education is the most effective means for women to achieve lifelong economic self-sufficiency. Women with BA degrees earn 85% more than female workers with only a High School diploma.
- First-to-Work's Education program has been a success with over 600 participants and 265 students earning degrees just in the program at UH
- Similar participants in Maine report median wages of \$11.70 with full medical and vacation benefits vs. \$7.15 per hour for welfare "leavers" nationally
- The benefits of education are inter-generational as children of student parents are more likely to see the value of education and attend college. Additionally, reduced work requirements for student parents allow parents more time to spend with their children.

Please support SB2210 to give all First-to-Work participants access to education. I know Bridge to Hope students and former students have submitted testimony supporting this bill but could not be here in person. For these parents to take time to learn about the legislative process and submit testimony is a reflection of how strongly they feel.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Committee: Senate Committee on Human Services and Public Housing
Hearing Date: January 31, 2008
Hearing Time: 8:30 a.m.
Location: Conference Room 016

RE: SB 2210 Relating to Human Services

Aloha Members of the Committee,

Eight 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 Senate Bill 2210 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 with distinction 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 eight 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 eight 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 Judiciary as a Social Worker. I received my Masters of Science in Criminal Justice Administration from Chaminade University in May 2007, graduated with a 4.0 grade point average, and was the recipient of the Outstanding Graduate Student in Criminal Justice award. I plan to continue my education in a doctoral program.

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 eight years ago? They are both thriving and successful in their separate endeavors: one in the honors program at a highly ranked university on the east coast 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 upstanding and involved members of our community.

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 Senate Bill 2210 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: January 26, 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: SB 2210 relating to Human Services
Thurs, Jan. 31, 2008 1:30 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk, room 226

I am Aubrey Hillman and I **strongly support SB 2210** 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: January 26, 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: SB 2210 relating to Human Services
Thursday, Jan. 31, 2008 1:30 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk, room 226

Aloha. I am Bonnie Godinez and I strongly support SB 2210 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 SB2210 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: January 27, 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: SB 2210 relating to Human Services
Thursday, Jan. 31, 2008 1:30 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk, room 226

I am Enjoli Rapozo-Hoskins and I **strongly support SB 2210** 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: January 26, 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: SB 2210 relating to Human Services
Thursday, Jan. 31, 2008 1:30 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk, room 226

I am Kory Leinani Onaga and I support SB 2210 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 in February. 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